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Wednesday 26 October 2022

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 26 October 2022

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is Constitution, External Affairs and Culture. Any member who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button or, if they are joining us online, enter the letter R in the chat function during the relevant question.

I again make a plea for short and succinct questions and answers, in order to get in as many members as possible.

United Kingdom Government (Independence Referendum)

1. **Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the reported ongoing political instability within the United Kingdom Government impacts on the timing of its plans to ask the constitutional question of whether Scotland should be an independent country. (S6O-01444)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): UK Government policies are making major economic challenges—such as inflation, inequality and the cost of living crisis—worse. Instability and uncertainty are increasing as financial markets express a lack of confidence in the UK Government's economic management and competence.

Scotland has an abundance of skilled people, innovative businesses and natural resources. We have everything it takes to be just as successful as comparable independent European countries. Independence is essential to building a stronger economy, a more just society and a Scotland that works for everyone, for this and future generations. We are fully committed to holding an independence referendum in October next year, pending the decision of the Supreme Court.

Karen Adam: With Liz Truss having become Prime Minister with the backing of just 80,000 voters and now Rishi Sunak's taking up of the post

being co-ordinated by a cluster of Tory MPs, the Conservative Party's democratic mandate is becoming more and more diluted. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the Tories have no leg to stand on when they question the Scottish Government's cast-iron mandate to hold an independence referendum next year?

Angus Robertson: The Scottish Government will certainly not take any lectures from a party that has not won a national election in Scotland since the 1950s. There was a Scottish Parliament election last year, and a record number of members of this chamber were elected on a manifesto commitment that the people should be able to express their view on Scotland's constitutional future as an independent country. We still live in a democratic state, the people have had their say, the people's decision should be respected and they should have a vote next autumn on Scotland's independent future. My advice to those parties that are pursuing the argument of democracy denial is that they really should give up on it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have requests for three supplementary questions, and I intend to take all of them.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The question mentions political instability. Is it not the truth that the only threat to the political stability of the United Kingdom is the Scottish Government's blinkered commitment to a divisive, polarising referendum that is creating uncertainty for people and businesses across Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I think that Donald Cameron is making the mistake of rereading his election leaflets from last year, when that was the position of the Scottish Conservatives, while the position of the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Green Party was that the people should have their say in a referendum. His party lost the election and the SNP and the Greens won the election. We form a Government in this place, and a majority of MSPs wish the people to have a say in a referendum. So long as we live in a democracy, we should act on the wishes of the electorate. It is a shame that some parties in this chamber do not believe that.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I agree with the cabinet secretary that the Tories have created massive inequalities and divisions, but will he accept that our focus in Scotland now should be on tackling the cost of living crisis, not replicating such division and wasting £20 million on a referendum that people simply do not want?

Angus Robertson: I refer Sarah Boyack to the answer that I gave a moment ago. She was elected to this place opposing a referendum on Scotland's future, but a majority of MSPs were elected to deliver one.

The question is not an either/or one. Yes, we need to deal with the social and economic challenges—in particular, those that are being exacerbated by the UK Tory party—but the idea that we should somehow park democracy while that takes place is misguided and wrong. As democrats, we should deliver on what the public has voted for and not block democratic choice.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): By the Government's admission, an independent Scotland would use the currency of a foreign country, with no influence over its economic policy. For at least 10 years, we would be outside the UK and European Union single markets. Is it not the case that the Scottish Government's plans for independence would repeat the mistakes of Liz Truss's economic plans, rather than learn those lessons?

Angus Robertson: I could answer the question simply by saying, "No", but I will also make the point that I have made in the chamber a number of times before: it is neither a liberal nor a democratic position to block democratic votes on the constitutional future of a country. I understand that the Liberal Democrats in Scotland would prefer power to be exercised over Scotland's future at Westminster. We have a different view on that. When the public elects a Parliament on a manifesto commitment that there should be a referendum, as democrats, we should at least agree that a referendum should take place. After that, we can have the substantive debate and discussion about the different policy questions. Even at this late stage, I appeal to the Liberal Democrats to re-examine their liberalism and their belief in democracy, because, at the present time, not much of that is on show.

Independence (Border between Scotland and England)

2. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has considered all the implications of a border between an independent Scotland and England. (S6O-01445)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The implication of independence is that Scotland will be wealthier and fairer. On average, independent countries comparable to Scotland that are cited in the first paper in the updated independence prospectus have national incomes that are £14,000 greater per head than ours.

As Mr Bibby is aware, the leader of the United Kingdom Labour Party said:

"let me be very clear: with Labour, Britain will not go back into the EU. We will not be joining the single market. We will not be joining a customs union."

That is the bad news, but there is better news. Keir Starmer also pledged that

"Labour would eliminate most border checks created by the Tory Brexit deal".

Neil Bibby: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Under standing orders, ministers are meant to address the question that is put. I do not believe that the minister is addressing the question that I asked, which was about the full implications of a border between an independent Scotland and England. His answer seems to be about national incomes and various other things that were not part of the question.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I suggest that Mr Bibby uses his supplementary question to tease out further information.

Neil Bibby: I thank the minister for his answer, which was not an answer to the question that I put, which was on the order paper.

The Scottish Government has asserted that it will not be required to accept the Schengen agreement, which the European Union has been clear applies to any new state that wishes to enter the bloc. Instead, the Scottish Government has indicated its desire to continue to be part of the British and Irish common travel area. Does that mean that, in order to make that work, the Scottish Government has accepted that an independent Scotland would be required to align its immigration policies with the rest of the United Kingdom?

Angus Robertson: I gently suggest to Neil Bibby that, if he wants to get full answers to questions, making points of order in the middle of ministers' attempts to answer them is probably not the best way to do so.

The best path for Scotland's future is to become independent, to rejoin the European Union, to manage our borders appropriately and to escape the disastrous Brexit-based economy that Labour and the Tories are intent on inflicting on people in Scotland.

I ask Neil Bibby to reflect on Sir Keir Starmer's commitment that

"Labour would eliminate most border checks created by the Tory Brexit deal".

Is that a commitment or is it not?

Neil Bibby: He is asking me questions now.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Portfolio question time is about members putting questions to Government ministers. In that context, I am not entirely sure that it is for Mr Bibby to answer questions.

We move to a supplementary question from Emma Harper.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I have a direct border question. Under the common travel area, Scotland, like Ireland, will retain freedom of movement across the British isles and Ireland. That means that people, such as my constituents who live on one side of the border but work on the other, will continue to be able to do so and will be able to move freely between Scotland and England. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that that will be the case? Can he indicate whether he expects the UK Government to try to mess with the CTA arrangements, which predate the European Union?

Angus Robertson: I agree entirely with what Emma Harper has said. Let us remember that it is Brexit that is creating borders. If the UK Government takes a sensible approach to its relationship with the EU, many of the measures that we talk about in our paper could be extremely minimal. Nobody sensible would argue that Scotland could not remain in the common travel area. Although I cannot speak for the UK Government, that is not only in Scotland's interests but in the interests of everybody in the United Kingdom.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 was not lodged.

Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill

4. **Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any discussions with the United Kingdom Government, in light of the concerns raised with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy regarding the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill. (S6O-01447)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): On 11 October, the secretary of state replied to my letter of 5 October, which outlined the Scottish Government's fundamental opposition to the bill. Our position remains that we would like the bill to be withdrawn or, at the very least, significantly changed in order for Scotland's interests—and devolution generally—to be protected.

Mr Rees-Mogg's response did not alleviate our concerns about the bill, and my officials, along with devolved Government colleagues, have been engaging weekly with the UK Government officials who are in charge of the bill to make clear the necessity of those changes.

Elena Whitham: I know that the cabinet secretary agrees that, with the sunset of retained European Union law by 31 December this year, we risk removing restrictions that currently protect holiday pay, safe limits for working hours

and parental leave, which will become subject to amendment by a UK Government with an open ambition of deregulation.

The bill represents a significant undermining of devolution by allowing a minister of the UK Government of the day to act on policy areas that are devolved—importantly, without the consent of Scottish ministers or this Parliament. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the democratic deficit that Scotland faces is not a new phenomenon and that it is yet more stark evidence that, right now, Scotland's people need the right to choose the people who they trust to navigate us out of this Brexit chaos?

Angus Robertson: I agree with Elena Whitham. Recent events demonstrate more clearly than ever the democratic deficit that Scotland experiences under Westminster control. Using Brexit as a pretext to undermine the fundamental principles of devolution, the UK Government has taken forward legislation without the consent of the Scottish Parliament on seven occasions. Through Westminster regulations that were made by UK ministers unilaterally, it has taken powers to change devolved powers; it has rushed through, without consent, legislation that constrains devolved competences; and it has taken new powers to spend money for devolved purposes in Scotland.

Under current arrangements, the UK House of Commons and the unelected House of Lords could change the powers of the Scottish Parliament or even abolish it, at any time. The opportunities of independence stand in stark contrast to the damage that has been created by Brexit.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Does the minister agree that not only does the so-called Brexit freedoms bill threaten our rights and the environment but its unfettered nature will also act as an unwelcome intervention for Scotland's businesses at a time when they need the economic security of good and stable governance?

Angus Robertson: I agree that the bill threatens to remove the rights and high standards, including standards of environmental protection, that the people of Scotland have become used to. It will allow legislation to be amended or sunsetted without the consultation and parliamentary scrutiny that good and stable governance requires. Added to that, the sunset date of 2023 introduces an entirely unrealistic timeframe that will force businesses to comply with new legislation while struggling with the consequences of Covid, the economic crisis and the consequences of Brexit. That is why we have repeatedly called on the UK Government to abandon its completely unnecessary and ideologically driven bill.

Museum and Gallery Sector (Cost of Living)

5. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to support the museum and gallery sector during the cost of living crisis. (S6O-01448)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): I understand how deeply the sector has been affected by rising energy costs and the cost of living crisis, which have come just as it is beginning to recover from the pandemic.

The Scottish Government is in close communication with Museums Galleries Scotland to fully understand the challenges that museums and galleries face. As a result, we agreed that Museums Galleries Scotland should repurpose the grants that it receives from the Scottish Government into a new resilience fund. The fund will support museums to build their resilience through activity that will reduce costs, increase income and support communities. The new fund was announced on 12 October with a deadline of 17 November for expressions of interest.

Claire Baker: In recent evidence to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, the cabinet secretary spoke of museums and galleries providing warm spaces for communities. They can only do that if they are able to remain open.

I note that, in his response to Sarah Boyack earlier this week, the minister advised that engagement is taking place with Creative Scotland to support organisations in the arts and culture sector that are facing immediate challenges. I recognise that he has spoken about a new resilience fund today, but is he confident that that will meet the needs of the sector? We know that National Galleries of Scotland has announced closures and that the Filmhouse in Edinburgh has recently closed. There are threats of venues being closed across the country. Is he confident that that money will be enough to get the sector through this winter?

Neil Gray: Just to be clear, we think that it is a damning indictment on where we are in the UK that energy-rich Scotland requires public buildings to be used for sharing warmth. People are facing a terrible situation.

We continue to engage with the culture sector about the extreme challenges that it faces. The situation highlights the folly of the UK Government cutting its Covid recovery funding before a meaningful recovery had taken place in the sector. We are seeing the implications of its approach now.

We will work with the museums and galleries sector, as well as others in the culture sector, to do everything that we can to continue that recovery. However, we cannot hide from the fact that we face an incredibly challenging period ahead.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The impact of the cost of living crisis on our culture sector was starkly highlighted when Aberdeen's iconic Belmont Filmhouse closed its doors. The Scottish Government was warned weeks ago what was coming and it did nothing.

This morning, the people of Aberdeen heard accusations that there is a "naivety" about cinemas and the wider arts, and they were stunned to hear the cabinet secretary's bizarre claims in Iceland that all is going swimmingly.

If the minister genuinely wants to engage, will he join me and other local representatives in a formal meeting with the Belmont backers and Aberdeen City Council to thrash out a rescue for the Belmont cinema?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, we are straying into wider culture sector issues with that question, but I presume that you are happy to respond to Mr Kerr's point?

Neil Gray: Yes. I thank Liam Kerr for bringing up that issue. First, his characterisation of Scottish Government action is not true. Secondly, I must be careful about what I say about the Centre for the Moving Image, because there are legal considerations to take account of as a result of the administration process. However, I guarantee to him that colleagues in Government, Creative Scotland and Screen Scotland are working hard to find a solution.

I would be more than happy to meet Liam Kerr—within the confines of the legal parameters that I have mentioned. In all scenarios, we want those important cultural institutions to continue to thrive. We know that the Belmont in Aberdeen is significant not just culturally but economically. The same is true of the Filmhouse in Edinburgh. We will do everything that we can to ensure that we protect those institutions as best as possible.

However, I must say that Liam Kerr's colleagues in London, whom I presume he still supports, would wish to look at the matter from a UK-wide perspective. These issues are not isolated to Scotland; they are UK wide. His UK Government has a responsibility to stop austerity and to ensure that our cultural centres are properly supported.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): During what he has acknowledged to be an anxious time for many in the museums and galleries sector, does the minister agree that the issues are compounded for many smaller

museums and galleries in particular, given the Tories' cruel and reckless austerity policies, which presumably mean that fewer people have the means to visit a gallery in the first place?

Neil Gray: Yes, I agree with that. The scenario that our cultural institutions face is challenging. It includes rising energy costs and inflation, over which the UK Government has clear responsibility. However, its actions have made the problems worse in recent weeks, affecting the money in people's pockets and reducing their spending power in the local economy.

The situation is very challenging. We will do what we can within our resources to respond to that as best as possible. However, there is no doubt that the UK Government has a clear responsibility in this area and to support cultural institutions. That then has a knock-on impact on the finances that we have to respond to the crisis.

International Work (Arctic Circle Assembly)

6. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its international work, following the constitution secretary's attendance at the recent Arctic Circle assembly. (S6O-01449)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government continues to engage with international partners to encourage cultural, economic and policy collaborations that attract investments and create domestic opportunities for people in Scotland.

My visit to Iceland for the Arctic Circle assembly allowed me to promote Scotland's expertise in relation to challenges and ambitions that we share with our Arctic neighbours, including in relation to decarbonisation, energy solutions and rural wellbeing. It was hugely worth while to attend the assembly to present an update on the Scottish Government's Arctic co-operation and to hold bilateral meetings with the Prime Minister and foreign minister of Iceland; ministers from Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Canada and Singapore; and delegates from the United States, Norway and Japan. The assembly hosted the largest-ever contingent from Scotland. I put on the record my appreciation to President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson for organising the Arctic Circle assembly.

Bill Kidd: Given the changing international security threat due to Russia's war in Ukraine, and increases to maritime routes in the Arctic circle because of warming seas, does the cabinet secretary agree that there must be consideration of new maritime security threats in the Norwegian Sea and the North Sea? Will that, alongside our Arctic circle-related climate commitments, be a

matter of focus with our partners in the new Nordic office?

Angus Robertson: The exponential pace at which the Arctic region is warming is a matter of deep concern. As one of the first countries in the world to declare a climate emergency, we recognise the vital importance of taking immediate action domestically and encouraging ambitious measures internationally.

The Scottish Government is fully aware of Scotland's key geostrategic position as the world's most northerly non-Arctic nation. As new shipping routes become viable, we are ideally located, and have clear credentials, to become a subarctic maritime transport and logistics hub.

The receding sea ice in the Arctic creates threats as well, which we must be alert to. At a time when the Arctic is the focus of renewed geopolitical and security considerations, it is crucial that we develop a full understanding of the threats that our communities and critical infrastructure could face.

Dumbarton (Commemoration of 800 Years of Royal Burgh Status)

7. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what activities it plans to hold to commemorate 800 years since Dumbarton became a royal burgh. (S6O-01450)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I hope that Jackie Baillie is pleased when I say that the Scottish Government recognises the significance of the 800th anniversary of Dumbarton becoming a royal burgh. Being able to connect with local history is important for the health and wellbeing of Scotland's communities, as well as for our national identity. I am pleased that this year's rock of ages event, themed for Dumbarton 800, was such a successful part of the official celebrations. Historic Environment Scotland, which worked on that project with the anniversary organisers, are happy to explore future events with West Dunbartonshire Council and the community.

Jackie Baillie: I take it from that response that there is nothing going on now. I have written to the cabinet secretary about this before. Dumbarton castle is closed and covered in scaffolding. The rock of ages event had its second day cancelled due to the weather. The 800-year celebration amounted to a tannoy announcement. This would be a hugely significant event for any town, but the Scottish Government does not appear to want to celebrate it.

I am sure that the cabinet secretary does not wish to imply that there is any snub to the good

people of Dumbarton, so let me give him another chance to say what he will do.

Angus Robertson: I am pleased that the inspection of Dumbarton castle is now complete. I understand that Historic Environment Scotland is preparing a technical report ahead of the November community engagement event, which I understand that Jackie Baillie and the chief executive of Historic Environment Scotland will be attending. That review will result in decisions being made around the opening, or partial opening, of the site, and any repair work that the review identifies will be scheduled into the wider, high-level masonry repair programme.

Scottish Event Campus (Investment)

8. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any discussions it has had with the Scottish Event Campus in Glasgow regarding capital investment in the facility. (S6O-01451)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): Due to emerging budgetary pressures, of which I have already spoken, and the reassessment of budget priorities as set out in the resource spending review, we are unable to commit to support via a capital finance package the expansion of the conference centre.

There have therefore been no specific discussions on capital investment in the SEC since the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture met Peter Duthie on 27 April. We continue to engage with the SEC and others on how the national event strategy review can build on the industry's success and deliver on Government priorities.

Paul Sweeney: I must say that that is a disappointing response from the Government. Investment in SEC expansion is critical for Glasgow's economy, as campus activity seeds footfall in local hospitality venues, increases taxi and transport demand and supports businesses across the region. I previously asked the cabinet secretary whether the Government would support that capital financing, but he indicated that the discussion with the SEC management had been paused.

This is a time for progressing and not pausing investment, lest we see further decline in Glasgow's economy—most recently, it has been marked by the failure to secure the Eurovision contest. Will the cabinet secretary and minister therefore reconsider their decision to pause the discussions, in the interests of stimulating Glasgow's economy, ensuring that we get economic growth and securing the international

competitiveness of the SEC for conferences and major events?

Neil Gray: I absolutely agree with Paul Sweeney on the importance of the SEC not just to the Glasgow economy but to the overall Scottish economy. I had a limited involvement in Glasgow's bid for Eurovision, of which we were very supportive, so I was personally sad to hear that it will not take place there. We absolutely recognise the importance of the SEC. Unfortunately, our budgetary situation means that very difficult decisions have had to be taken. We will continue to have discussions with the SEC and other bodies across the major events sector through the review. I encourage Mr Sweeney to engage in that so that his interest and that of the constituents who he represents can be put forward.

Justice and Veterans

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is justice and veterans. I remind members that questions 2 and 7 are grouped together and that I will take any supplementaries on those questions once they have both been answered. If a member wishes to request a supplementary, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or, if they are online, enter the letter R in the chat function. I again make a plea for succinct questions and answers, so that we can get in as many members as possible.

Release from Custody (Support for Women)

1. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support women being released from custody to reintegrate back into their communities. (S6O-01452)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government and the Scottish Prison Service are committed to ensuring that women who leave custody receive the support that they need to integrate successfully. The new female estate, which includes two innovative community custody units, supports that commitment and is underpinned by a revised strategy for women in custody, which is gender specific and trauma informed. The CCUs support a change to rehabilitation of women in custody by linking them to local services and preparing them for their eventual return to the community. We also provide £1.4 million per year to fund Shine, which is the national third sector partnership that provides support to women leaving custody and remand.

Jackie Dunbar: It is important that we acknowledge that recidivism is a risk among those who have offended and spent time in custody. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to

ensure that women who are released from custody do not end up back in custody again?

Keith Brown: As I am sure the member knows, there is not one specific step on its own that can prevent reoffending or that will allow an individual to reintegrate into the community successfully. There needs to be a holistic approach across justice services and wider public services. It is important to recognise that short custodial sentences are less successful at reducing reoffending, and that the presumption against short sentences and the continued development of bail supervision are helping to prevent women from being taken into custody unless that is absolutely necessary.

As I said, the SPS has established a new strategy for women who are in custody, which will support the development of women's agency through opportunities to make choices. All plans, interventions, approaches and activities will be based on sound evidence and be designed to boost the factors that are known to promote desistance from crime and to improve life chances.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): What discussions have there been with domestic abuse specialists about the engagement with women who are being released from custody?

Keith Brown: There have been substantial discussions with specialists and with the organisations that are most closely involved in that sector—the member will know the organisations to which I am referring. Over and above that, when the SPS established the two units, it took into account international and academic evidence and the best possible advice on how to properly effect rehabilitation. The units are unique—there are the only two in the United Kingdom, and they are both in Scotland. In my view, they represent the way forward and will allow women to reintegrate into society much more effectively and in a way that reduces future crime. I therefore hope that the units have the support of all members.

Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022 (Retailers)

2. **Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps have been taken to ensure that retailers are aware of and comply with the measures in the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022 that came into effect on 10 October. (S6O-01453)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): The measures that commenced this month will enhance community safety over the fireworks season. As part of the implementation of the measures, the Scottish Government has engaged and shared guidance

with the Scottish Retail Consortium, the Scottish Grocers Federation, supermarkets and industry representative bodies. The importance of involving retailers during the roll-out of new measures in the 2022 act is recognised.

In addition, the Scottish Government is funding trading standards to undertake a fireworks enforcement project with retailers. That follows on from a similar project last year to support the implementation of new regulations, and it involves engaging with retailers on the measures that are being introduced through the 2022 act as well as reinforcing existing legislation.

Paul McLennan: I am glad to hear that there is joint working between the Scottish Government and retailers to ensure compliance with the new measures. What steps are the Scottish Government taking to ensure that there is wider public awareness across the country of the impact that fireworks can have on people and animals, and of the new measures that commenced earlier this month?

Keith Brown: I am pleased to advise the member that the Scottish Government, with its partners, has once again launched the three public awareness-raising campaigns to promote the safe and responsible use of fireworks. Key information on the new proxy purchase offence is being integrated into each of the campaigns to ensure that people are aware of the new offence. We have also worked with stakeholders, including Police Scotland, to share messages across our social media channels on the new statutory aggravation for attacks using fireworks against emergency service workers. The campaigns are running in partnership with partners including the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Crimestoppers and trading standards in order to promote the safe and responsible use of fireworks and to cover a wide range of media, including social media and radio, as well as posters and leaflets in retail outlets that sell fireworks.

Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022 (Community Safety)

7. **Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it anticipates that the Fireworks and Pyrotechnic Articles (Scotland) Act 2022 will make this year's bonfire night safer for communities. (S6O-01458)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): I highlight the two key provisions that came into effect this month. One makes it an offence for adults to purchase fireworks on behalf of, or make them available to, under-18s in order to strengthen the protection of young people and communities. The other provision relates to a statutory aggravation for court sentencing when fireworks have been used

to attack emergency service workers. That clearly signals that such vile behaviour will be firmly addressed.

To share the public safety message with communities, our awareness-raising campaigns have been updated, and the Scottish Government is working alongside a range of partners, including Police Scotland and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, to actively engage and prepare ahead of bonfire night.

Gillian Martin: It is great to hear that there is movement in this area, because I get an awful lot of correspondence about the issue from people in my constituency.

I welcome our support for emergency service workers as they face aggravated attacks during this period. Will the cabinet secretary join me in condemning such attacks ahead of bonfire night? Which provisions in the 2022 act will be rolled out in time for next year's bonfire night celebrations?

Keith Brown: We have demonstrated that we are committed to progressing positive change for communities by acting as swiftly as possible. I reassure the member that that approach will continue as we implement the remaining measures in the 2022 act, as she has asked us to do.

It is important that I join the member in condemning, in the strongest possible terms, attacks against our hard-working emergency service workers, on whom we often rely in extreme circumstances. It is unacceptable—in fact, it is incomprehensible—that a minority of people choose to act in such a vile manner towards people who are dedicated to keeping our communities and each and every one of us safe.

The member will know that specific laws are already in place to protect emergency service workers, but I hope that the new statutory aggravation for offences involving attacks using fireworks against those workers provides reassurance that the Government is committed to such cases being dealt with robustly, with penalties that reflect the serious nature of such offending.

I take this opportunity to thank our emergency service workers and all our partners for the vast amount of work that has been undertaken in preparation for bonfire night. I commit to writing to the member with more information about the implementation timetable for the other parts of the 2022 act.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the Government for accepting the amendment in my name that provided for the aggravation in the bill. That was an important message to send to the public.

However, during the passage of the bill, the Government said that there was little evidence to suggest that the bill would lead to an increase in black market activity. Last week, trading standards officers in Glasgow confiscated 250 fireworks from a barber shop in the city. The fireworks were poorly stored and were clearly putting lives in danger. Was the assessment of the black market during the passage of the bill not somewhat naive given that context? What is the Government doing to crack down on the potential growth of the black market in firework sales?

Keith Brown: I have outlined some of the actions that we are taking with our partners through trading standards, Police Scotland and others to ensure that we do so. It is not possible to say now, in the early stages of the implementation of the act, that it has been proved that the assessment of black market activity was wrong. I am aware of the case that Jamie Greene has talked about, which we condemn. However, we have to see how the regulations work out over time.

As I have said, much of the public awareness raising that is going on will continue to be built on, which hopefully will drive out and make more socially unacceptable the kind of black market activity to which Jamie Greene refers.

Armed Forces and Veterans' Families (Support)

3. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it can take to support armed forces and veterans' families in Scotland during the cost of living crisis, in light of recent reports that almost 3,000 serving military personnel in the United Kingdom are reliant on universal credit. (S6O-01454)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government is undertaking an emergency budget review to assess all opportunities to redirect additional resources to those people who are most in need, to reduce the burdens on business and to stimulate the Scottish economy.

Further support is available to the armed forces community—I know that the member will be aware of that, given how instrumental he was in ensuring that it happened—including the £500,000 provided annually through the Scottish veterans fund, which launched earlier this month. This year, the fund prioritises projects that offer support to those veterans who are affected by the cost of living crisis.

We will continue to engage with stakeholders across the community more widely to develop our response.

Graeme Dey: It is not just the fact that nearly 3,000 serving personnel have to turn to universal credit to get by that betrays the Tories' contempt for our armed forces but the standard of accommodation that is provided to them. RM Condor in my constituency has long been the subject of commentary on the quality of accommodation that is available to the Royal Marines there. Contrary to recent media reports, I understand that the Ministry of Defence has no plans to address that matter. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is long past time that we saw proper investment in the accommodation element of military facilities in Scotland to bring them up to an acceptable standard?

Keith Brown: I agree with the member. The Scottish Government recognises the dedication of the men and women who are willing to serve their country. They and their families rightly deserve quality accommodation that meets their needs. The MOD has a budget of £48 billion, and it is failing to meet its responsibility to address the matter.

Around 3,000 service personnel in Scotland accessing universal credit—38,000 is the figure for the rest of the UK—will come as a shock to many people. *[Keith Brown has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* Armed forces having to draw down on universal credit is a scandal. In Scotland, we at least have the 19p tax, which ensures that people in the armed forces in Scotland at that level pay less tax than they do in the rest in the UK, as is the case for most people in Scotland. However, that is a scandal. If the MOD wants to seriously address the issues of recruitment and retention, and respect for our armed forces, it should pay proper wages.

In relation to accommodation, the member will know that I am familiar with the base that he has talked about. The personnel that we have on that base deserve proper, decent accommodation and the MOD should address that as soon as possible.

Community Policing (South Scotland)

4. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the provision of community policing, including community safety patrols, in the South Scotland region. (S6O-01455)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): The member will know that the deployment of police resources, including community patrols, is a matter for Police Scotland, which also works closely with local authorities on preventing and tackling a range of issues, including antisocial behaviour, in their geographical areas.

Supporting Police Scotland to keep our communities safe remains a priority for the Government. Policing services have been maintained and improved, and we have invested more than £10 billion in policing since the creation of the single service, in 2013.

Emma Harper: At my recent surgery in Summerhill, in Dumfries, I heard concerns from local residents about what they believe to be increased levels of antisocial behaviour in that area. We know that engagement and education are the best ways to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour in the first place, so I have called for a multi-agency meeting with the police, the housing authority and the community safety team to address constituents' concerns.

How is the Scottish Government supporting the police and the community safety team? Can the cabinet secretary urge them to engage with me and with the local residents on those matters?

Keith Brown: The Scottish Government recognises that everyone has the right to be, and to feel, safe in their own community, which is why we are committed to tackling all forms of antisocial behaviour. Police Scotland and the local authorities lead on interventions and have a range of options available to them in tackling antisocial behaviour.

We recognise that no single approach will tackle all antisocial behaviour. That is why we support a suite of activities, which includes antisocial behaviour orders and fixed-penalty notices alongside diversionary and early intervention activities. I was heavily involved in that area when I was a council leader, and I know that different approaches can be taken in different local authority areas.

For our part, we are committed to ensuring that all agencies have the powers and resources that they need. We are always willing—as, I am sure, are the police—to discuss any changes that could improve prevention and to respond to antisocial behaviour with all relevant bodies.

Antisocial Behaviour (Bus Network)

5. **Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider additional measures to deal with the reported increase in antisocial behaviour, including on the bus network. (S6O-01456)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): As I mentioned in my previous answer, everyone has the right to be, and to feel, safe in their community or when using public transport. Broadly, reported antisocial behaviour has been in decline over the past decade, but we know that, when issues arise,

those can have a very serious impact for many people in our communities. That is why we continue to support activity to prevent antisocial behaviour wherever it occurs.

As I mentioned, no single approach will tackle all antisocial behaviour. That is why we will continue to ensure that partners can call on a range of measures, including the ones that I mentioned, such as the use of antisocial behaviour orders and fixed-penalty notices, as well as diversionary and preventative activities.

I fully support Police Scotland in its attempts to take appropriate and proportionate action in response to reported incidents, and I fully support its continued work, in partnership with transport operators and local authorities, to continue to make public transport safe for passengers and staff.

Willie Coffey: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the incidents of antisocial behaviour that have occurred recently in Kilmarnock on the bus network and in the bus station, some of which have been extremely serious and have resulted in the bus station being closed. What can the cabinet secretary do to help to tackle the problem and to liaise, where necessary, with other portfolios in Government to ensure that the public can travel in safety?

Keith Brown: I am aware of the incident in Kilmarnock to which Willie Coffey refers and was shocked by it. My thoughts are with the young man and his family at what must be an exceptionally difficult time for them.

Willie Coffey will appreciate that it is not appropriate for me to comment on a live case, but I understand that Police Scotland is treating the incident in question as an isolated incident and is maintaining a strong presence in and around the town centre.

I am also aware of the issues in East Ayrshire that have involved the bus network and the bus station, and I share the concerns that those issues must be causing the member and his constituents.

It is essential that all passengers are able to travel safely. We have been liaising with Police Scotland and the local authority, and I understand that an extensive partnership response is being deployed at a local level, which is being led by a multi-agency resilience group that involves a range of partners including the council, education, the police and transport authorities to address and tackle unacceptable behaviour.

The Scottish Government is, of course, open to considering all options for tackling antisocial behaviour. For example, I will raise the issue with those who are responsible for the bus pass scheme, to gather views on whether the option of

withdrawing bus passes, which has been mentioned elsewhere, might present a solution.

That said, I am clear that the people who have been involved in such antisocial behaviour represent a very small number of individuals. We are absolutely clear that such incidents are not an indictment of the bus pass scheme as a whole and that the scheme has delivered and will continue to deliver many positive outcomes for people across Scotland.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Glasgow Chamber of Commerce has warned that free bus travel for under-22s is “certainly not helping” with antisocial behaviour, and there are reports of youths using buses to engage in violence and other criminality.

In the light of today’s stark and unprecedented budget warnings from Police Scotland, what reassurances can the cabinet secretary give to the public?

Keith Brown: I have mentioned a number of ways in which partnership working, which I think is very important in tackling the issue, will be followed through.

In relation to the budget situation, it is worth remembering a couple of facts. People in Scotland are substantially less likely to experience crime than they were in 2007. There are far more police officers now than there were when we came into office, in 2007. Officers in Scotland are paid £5,000 a year more than their counterparts in England and Wales. Recently, it was reported that crime was at an all-time low since the 1970s, when records first began to be kept. In addition, it was announced yesterday that we had the lowest-ever recorded number of homicides.

It would be nice, on occasion, to hear one or two good things said about the police by Conservative members. Unfortunately, once again, that is not happening today, but the rest of us will give due credit to the police.

Human Trafficking and Exploitation

6. Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its trafficking and exploitation strategy. (S6O-01457)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): Any form of human trafficking or exploitation is completely unacceptable. The Government continues to work closely with partners to tackle this horrific crime.

The fifth annual report on our trafficking and exploitation strategy is due for publication in early 2023. We marked anti-slavery day on 18 October by initiating a review of the strategy, beginning with the launch of a public survey on trafficking

and exploitation in Scotland that is running until mid-December. Responses will shape the review, alongside engagement with partners across the strategy's main action areas of identifying victims, disrupting perpetrators and addressing the underlying causes of exploitation.

Joe FitzPatrick: A recent operation in Dundee has brought modern slavery charges against two men, and investigators have said that that could be just

“the tip of the iceberg”,

as highlighted by Alasdair Clark in *The Courier*. What support is the Scottish Government providing to Police Scotland to deal with this specialised area of criminal investigation and ensure that victims are provided with the necessary support?

Keith Brown: Work has been done on the matter over a number of years, including with, I think, two Lord Advocates, to make sure that as much protection as possible can be provided to the victims.

We are clear that commercial sexual exploitation, of which prostitution is one aspect, is a form of gendered violence, and we support our law enforcement agencies and third sector support agencies in working together to address it. The victim-centred approach fund includes significantly increased funding to support organisations. The Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance and Migrant Help will share more than £6.35 million over the next three years to provide support and assistance to adult victims of trafficking and exploitation, and they are also providing over £900,000 to other organisations that provide support to those who are recovering from this horrific crime.

The Minister for Community Safety met key partners in Aberdeen yesterday to learn more about their approach to supporting individuals who are involved in prostitution, who often have complex underlying issues, in order to reduce their vulnerability.

Violence Against Women

8. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the steps it is taking to tackle violence against women. (S6O-01459)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): In June 2022, a refreshed equally safe delivery plan was published, outlining the joint commitment of the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to preventing and eradicating all forms of violence against women

and girls and to tackling the underpinning attitudes that perpetuate it.

Through the justice portfolio and the victim-centred approach fund, we have invested £18.5 million in specialist advocacy support for survivors of gender-based violence, and the delivering equally safe fund is providing £19 million per year to support projects that are focused on early intervention and support.

It is only through fundamental societal change that women can be fully protected.

Rhoda Grant: Commercial sexual exploitation is recognised by the Scottish Government as violence against women, and it has been for many years. Although we have legislation on almost every other aspect of violence against women, which is very welcome, we have had no legislation to combat the harm that commercial sexual exploitation causes. When will the Scottish Government introduce such legislation?

Keith Brown: As has been referred to previously, the criminal justice reform bill in the programme for government will aim to improve the experience of victims in the justice system and will help to deliver reforms, building on the recent consultation on improving victims' experience of the justice system.

The member will be aware that recommendations from Lady Dorrian's review, on improving the management of sexual offence cases, will be addressed. That will include proposals for the use of, for example, a statutory right to anonymity for complainants in sexual offence cases.

On a related matter, the member will know that we intend to abolish the not proven verdict. That and a number of other workstreams that the minister is involved with will continue. Of course, the possibility of further legislation will also be considered.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

In a debate on booking office closures and staffing levels on the railways, the cabinet secretary for transport committed to a review of women's safety on public transport. Will the cabinet secretary for justice ensure that his department feeds into the review of what measures are needed to deal with antisocial behaviour and violence against women on public transport?

Keith Brown: I have had preliminary discussions with the minister responsible. As Katy Clark will be aware, the link would be with the British Transport Police, which—she is quite right—is a justice function. I am happy to continue

to engage with the minister to see how we can make sure that women and girls, along with everybody, are safe on public transport, which relates back to previous questions as well.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on justice and veterans. I will allow a short pause for front-bench teams to move position.

National Health Service (Winter Support)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06437, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on supporting the national health service in winter. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

I call Jackie Baillie to speak to and move the motion for around six minutes.

14:51

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I received an email at 8 pm last night. It was from a man who had taken his mother to the Queen Elizabeth university hospital with chest pains. He told me that a member of staff had just come into the packed waiting room to announce the following:

“There is an 8-hour wait to be initially reviewed. There are 14 ambulances waiting to be processed. If your issue is not life threatening, go home and call your GP tomorrow.”

He went on to say:

“The SNP and the current, not-fit-for-purpose health minister, are running this country into the ground.”

Those were his words, not mine, but there is no mistaking the anger—and that is not an isolated incident. Thousands of people are waiting more than eight hours every week across Scotland.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Baillie: No.

Those delays have the most serious of consequences. The Royal College of Emergency Medicine tells us that delays in accident and emergency lead to worse outcomes and, ultimately, cost lives.

The NHS stands on the brink of a humanitarian crisis. The hard-working staff are doing their very best, but they are exhausted. They get angry when the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care does not hear what they are saying, and they are in despair at the lack of support for them and for their patients.

Maybe the health secretary will listen to the British Medical Association, which has said that the system

“just doesn’t work properly anymore—staffed by people on their knees and genuinely at the brink of what they can cope with”

and that

“some honesty from our politicians on the scale of the challenge will help with this—and then finally we may start

to address the need to make sure our NHS is sustainable for the future.”

However, the complacency in the Scottish National Party amendment suggests that the health secretary’s fingers are well and truly in his ears.

What about the Royal College of Emergency Medicine? It has said that many of the components of the SNP’s winter resilience plan

“will not be in place to prevent further harm to patients and staff this winter.”

How about the view from the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh? It tells us that the solution lies in properly funding social care in order to tackle delayed discharge and therefore free up hospital beds. Again, the health secretary is deaf to the solutions, because he knows better than the health experts.

His winter resilience plan has no new resources. That is right—not a single penny extra. All of the money has been pre-announced, some of it more than 11 months ago. We know that social care has been underfunded for more than a decade, and the health secretary’s repackaged, reheated and recycled funding announcement is a pathetic excuse for urgent action. In fact, he is currently raiding the budgets of general practitioners and health and social care partnerships at a time when they need the money the most.

But it gets worse. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities tells me that, despite its asking, the health secretary has provided no detailed plan about what needs to be done in social care to help with the impending winter crisis. There has been not one single iota of detail—and winter is here.

I have been in Parliament for 23 years and I can say, without fear of contradiction, that Humza Yousaf is absolutely the worst health secretary since devolution.

Let us prove that—let us look at his predecessors. Under Nicola Sturgeon, in October 2011, 95.9 per cent of people were seen within four hours at accident and emergency. Under Alex Neil, the figure in October 2013 was 93.9 per cent. *[Interruption.]*

No, no—I am praising SNP ministers, so SNP members may want to listen. Under Shona Robison, the figure in October 2015 was 91 per cent. Under Jeane Freeman, the figure in October 2020 was 89.6 per cent—let me remind members that that was eight months into the same pandemic on which the current health secretary blames all his failings. Our missing-in-action health secretary presides over the record low of 64 per cent.

Waits of more than eight hours and 12 hours at A and E are at record highs. Literally thousands of

patients—more than 3,000—have waited more than eight hours and 1,300 have waited more than 12 hours in the past week alone. That means that as many as 37 people could have lost their lives this week because of delays.

Patients wait on trolleys, get intravenous drugs administered in corridors, which is not safe, and sleep in chairs overnight. That is the new normal in accident and emergency. When Jeane Freeman was in charge back in October 2020, no more than 350 people—a fraction of the current figure—in any week during the month waited more than eight hours to be seen. That is the difference.

Finally, I turn to doctors, nurses and other NHS workers who are the backbone of our NHS. The health secretary is fond of telling us that the NHS has record levels of staff, but he fails to tell us that they are coping with record levels of demand and are doing so with record levels of vacancies—there are almost 7,000 nursing vacancies alone. There is a critical shortage of GPs and other allied professionals. Patient safety is being compromised on a regular basis, and there have been successive years of failure to workforce plan.

The latest pay offer helps the lowest paid the most, but for many skilled and experienced nurses the pay offer is less than the 5 per cent that was previously promised. Nurses’ pay has declined by 17 per cent in real terms, and inflation is now at 10 per cent. That is not a fair pay deal, and nurses in Scotland are now being balloted on strike action.

Our NHS is on its knees. The health secretary has a choice, but doing nothing is not a choice. He needs to stop people needlessly dying this winter. His choice is to set out a clear plan to end waiting times of more than eight hours, because this is about saving lives, and if he cannot do that, frankly, he must resign.

I move,

That the Parliament is deeply concerned that record numbers of patients are waiting over eight and 12 hours in A&E on a weekly basis; acknowledges that hospital capacity continues to be constrained by thousands of bed days lost due to delayed discharge; recognises the tireless work of the NHS staff who care for patients in increasingly difficult and safety critical situations; notes that the Scottish Ministers have not yet resolved the nurses’ and NHS staff pay claim risking industrial action during the winter period; considers the Scottish Government’s NHS Recovery Plan and Winter Plan to be inadequate with the new interim targets to reduce waiting times being missed and no additional funding for the impending winter crisis, and calls for the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to either set out a clear plan to end waiting times of more than eight hours ahead of winter, or to resign.

14:58

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): I am eager to respond in

the debate, and to outline the NHS's continuing recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

No one in the Government—not I, nor my colleagues in the seats behind me—denies that the NHS is under significant pressure: of course it is. However, for Labour to lodge a motion about NHS pressures, and not to include one single solitary word about Covid and the pandemic demonstrates that it is Jackie Baillie and her party who have their fingers in their ears, and not the Government.

The pandemic is the biggest shock that our NHS has ever faced in its 74-year existence.

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

Humza Yousaf: I will not; I am sure that the member will have his moment.

I have no doubt that the NHS had challenges pre-pandemic, but for Labour not to recognise that Covid has been the biggest shock that the NHS has faced is frankly burying its head in the sand.

Let us remember: as we speak, more than 800 people in our hospitals are suffering from the effects of the virus. People are still dying and families are grieving due to loss caused by Covid. Any realistic and pragmatic discussion of the NHS in Scotland cannot simply cast aside the impact of the pandemic, because it is central to the challenges that we face. That is why a successful Covid and flu vaccination programme is central to our recovery, and I thank our staff who are involved in that.

The NHS will not recover in weeks—as Jackie Baillie demanded that it should—or even months; it will take years. That is why our £1 billion recovery plan is predicated on five years of substantial investment and dedicated reform. I am committed to that recovery, and taking care of our workforce is central to it.

As Jackie Baillie referred to, during the past week, we offered our NHS staff a record pay rise of £2,205 this year—which is an average uplift of 7 per cent—to help tackle the cost of living crisis and retain staff during the tough winter months. The offer means that the lowest paid would see a rise of more than 11 per cent and qualified nursing staff would receive up to 8.45 per cent. If agreed, the pay uplift will amount to almost half a billion pounds, which is the largest single-year pay offer ever given to agenda for change staff, and if it is accepted, it will mean that NHS staff in Scotland will be better paid than those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Once again, I give my thanks to those staff.

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Humza Yousaf: Of course.

Jackie Baillie: Can the cabinet secretary explain why NHS nurses are balloting for strike action, if he is being so generous?

Humza Yousaf: Unions are still meeting to discuss the latest pay deal. I will let them have those discussions and my door will be open to try to prevent industrial action from taking place. I hope that when NHS members see the detail of the deal they will accept it.

It is untrue to say that there has been no progress on waiting times in the NHS during its recovery, even while we are in the midst of the pandemic. I announced the planned care waiting times targets in the summer, and the latest figures from Public Health Scotland show that 76 per cent—31 of 41—out-patient specialties had no or fewer than 10 patients waiting more than two years, and that 60 per cent of in-patient and day case specialties had fewer than 10 patients waiting more than two years. That is demonstrable progress, and it is all thanks to our brilliant NHS staff.

There is no doubt that delayed discharge rates are too high. They create real challenges in the social care sector, and that is why one of the first things that I did when I came into this role was ensure not just one but two pay uplifts for adult social care staff. We know that there are challenges in the social care sector. Our care homes have been hit by a triple whammy of Brexit, the pandemic and high inflation and energy costs. Two out of three of those factors are, of course, a result of the Conservatives putting ideology above the interests of the country, and it is clear that our social care sector is paying the price.

On Tuesday, I met chief executives of local authorities and health boards and chief officers of health and social care partnerships from across Scotland, and we will do everything that we can to support them.

The pressures on accident and emergency departments are being driven by the pressures that I have already mentioned and by delayed discharges elsewhere in our hospitals, but we have put £50 million towards our urgent and unscheduled care collaborative programme. Although the current level of performance is not where I want it to be—and I agree entirely with the Royal College of Nursing and Jackie Baillie's assessments that long waits harm patients—we will do everything that we can to take a whole-systems approach to reduce the pressures on A and E.

We must be frank that we face a very difficult winter ahead due to the cumulative pressure from the pandemic, flu and slips, trips and falls. Therefore, my focus, and that of the Government,

will be to spend every single waking moment supporting our NHS and the staff who work in it.

In Scotland, we have the best paid NHS staff in the UK and more GPs per head, more dentists per head and more NHS front-line staff per head under this Government. Yes, challenges persist, but there are shoots of recovery.

Let me finish by acknowledging that although this winter will be one of the most difficult ones that our NHS has ever dealt with, I praise our NHS and social care staff for the incredible, compassionate care that they provide to the people of Scotland, day in and day out. I give them a promise that we will not just honour them with words, but through our deeds.

I move amendment S6M-06437.1, to leave out from “that record” to end and insert:

“about the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on the health of the people of Scotland and on the operation of the National Health Service; acknowledges that, as a result, Scotland’s NHS and care services face deep pressures, with 884 patients with COVID-19 currently in hospital; recognises that, as a result of increases in inflation, the health budget is worth around £650 million less than in December 2021; notes that the £600 million Health and Social Care winter plan supports recruitment of 1,000 additional staff, and includes over £120 million to help health and social care partnerships expand care at home capacity; welcomes that, in the face of these challenges, the NHS has been steadily increasing activity levels; recognises the exceptional work of NHS staff through the pandemic and beyond, and that the NHS Agenda for Change pay offer would see the lowest paid staff in NHS Scotland getting an increase of over 11% and qualified nursing staff seeing an increase of up to 8.45%; further recognises that if the offer is accepted, an experienced porter will be paid up to £2,502 more than their counterparts in England and Wales; recognises that, similarly, an experienced paramedic and staff nurse will be paid up to £2,186 more than their counterparts in England and Wales, and understands that the £50 million investment in improving unscheduled care has addressing long waits as a key area of focus.”

15:04

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): People are dying; they are dying avoidable deaths, and it will get worse during winter. Across the country, the Scottish Government continues to fail our Scottish national health service and our patients.

To be clear, that is not the fault of our hard-working clinical and support staff, who have gone beyond the call of duty and always will. However, those heroes really are at breaking point. The cabinet secretary should know that, and he would know it if he bothered to face the front line when he is on one of his well-documented PR drop-ins to one of our hospitals. The cabinet secretary just thanked and praised our staff, but he avoided Dr Moy in A and E when he went.

This debate is about responsibility and accountability, so let us consider the facts. Under the SNP, waiting times for A and E and cancer treatment are at their worst ever levels. In the second quarter of this year, more than one in 10 patients waited longer than 84 days to begin treatment, with one in 20 waiting 116 days. We even have one patient who was left 322 days before treatment began—and we are talking about cancer. As for routine treatments, over 7,000 people are languishing on in-patient waiting lists for more than two years, with the SNP breaking its promise to eradicate waits longer than 24 months by September.

While we are on the subject of broken promises, a near record number of patients are having their discharge from hospital delayed because there is no follow-on social care package in place and no space in residential care, yet the SNP promised to solve the problem of delayed discharge by the end of 2015.

The cabinet secretary is also failing our most vulnerable children. Over a quarter of young people referred to mental health services are not being seen within 18 weeks, yet the Government’s own target is to have 90 per cent of children seen by then.

I could go on, but I would run out of time. It is fair to say that there has been a catalogue of failures on the SNP’s watch. As I underscored in the Scottish Conservatives’ NHS debate last month, we have a record-breaking cabinet secretary; the trouble is that he is breaking the wrong kind of records. The First Minister and the cabinet secretary come to the chamber and make announcements, usually in the form of new spending plans. They are good—no; they are great—at spending taxpayers’ money, but they cannot deliver results or even get a squeaky-clean bill of health from the auditors.

For example, what happened following the September 2021 announcement of £10 million for long Covid support? Come May of this year, we found that the money would be spread over three years, with only £3 million being spent to start with, and we still do not know where that money is being spent. Let us not forget that, during that time, the number of Scots with long Covid rose from around 90,000 to 200,000, which is more than the population of Aberdeen.

It is just about headlines for the cabinet secretary. Winter is now fast approaching and it is plain to see that the SNP-Green Government is ill prepared. Its NHS recovery plan and winter plan are inadequate, and A and E waiting times alone are spiralling out of control.

We call on the cabinet secretary to go back to the drawing board and set out a clear plan to get

our health services and patients through the next six months. We want to see more spending announcements with a clear target that can be audited. Patients—taxpayers—have a right to know how the Government is spending their money.

I should declare an interest—I am a practising NHS doctor.

I move amendment S6M-06437.2, to insert after “weekly basis,”:

“is equally concerned that cancer waiting times are at their worst level on record; expresses its disappointment at the Scottish Government’s failure to meet its target to end inpatient two-year treatment waits in most specialties; reminds the Scottish Government that it has never met its target to treat 90% of children with mental health issues within 18 weeks of referral; notes with concern the long ambulance waits being experienced across Scotland;”

15:08

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful to my friend Jackie Baillie for securing time for this important debate in the chamber. It is a timely debate. I cannot remember a time when our NHS was in such a state or when our valiant doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals were under so much strain. Had the cabinet secretary taken my earlier intervention, I would have reminded him that this is not solely about the impact of the pandemic that we have just been through. In fact, former chief executive of NHS Scotland Paul Gray reminds us that this is a crisis that was years in the making; Covid just hastened its arrival. It is wrong for the cabinet secretary to say otherwise and it is offensive to the people who are bearing the cost of this Government’s negligence day in, day out.

As grateful as I am that we are having the debate, I cannot help but feel a depressing sense of déjà vu. It feels like groundhog day. Each time we have such debates, Opposition parties come to the chamber armed with the latest round of disastrous health and social care statistics and, each time, the Government responds with reference to the pandemic and vague promises to make things better; often, it just tries to blame things on everyone else. It is small wonder that the SNP and Green Government does not make time for such debates in its own parliamentary time.

It is impossible to overstate the crisis that is engulfing our health service. Everybody knows somebody who is on a waiting list or who is suffering, whether it is a partner who arrives home late after another brutal ward shift or an elderly parent who is forced to wait for hours on a hospital gurney or for weeks just to speak to their GP on the phone. The cabinet secretary’s NHS recovery plan and winter plan fall woefully short. The Government is already missing its interim waiting

time targets. The plans contain nothing that will make a material difference ahead of the inevitable strain of winter—and the first frosts have not yet arrived.

The stakes are literally life and death. For more than a year, A and E waiting times have steadily risen, tragically resulting in hundreds of avoidable deaths this year alone, yet, last month, the SNP-Green Government voted down my party’s proposal to hold an inquiry into those avoidable emergency care deaths. That is reprehensible. The more apparent the cost of this Government’s incompetence becomes, the more it will try to detract attention from its failures and instead turn attention towards the mythical vagaries of Scottish independence, which I think is the root cause of ministerial disinterest here.

I remind the chamber that, during her keynote speech at the recent SNP conference, the First Minister mentioned the NHS just 11 times, in comparison with the 58 mentions she gave to breaking up the United Kingdom. She had nothing to say on social care, and do not get me started on long Covid. I associate myself with Dr Gulhane’s remarks. There are now more than 200,000 sufferers of that debilitating condition. It is perhaps the biggest mass disabling event since the first world war, and we are nowhere in dealing with it. We are spending twice as much on an independence referendum as we are on assisting those people. It is the same old story, and it does nothing to help beleaguered nurses and doctors, or the patients who are left abandoned in our A and E departments.

The impact of Government failure is felt right across health and social care. The devastating story that we heard from Jackie Baillie at the top of her remarks is a story told the country over: ambulances cannot get to people in time because they cannot discharge patients into emergency wards when they arrive because A and E is full to the rafters with patients who cannot be admitted into the wider hospital due to the lack of beds. On any given night, more than 1,000 people who are well enough to go home but too frail to do so without a social care package are languishing in Scottish hospitals. Even when the care packages are arranged, too often those in need are still being let down.

The blame does not lie with staff. For years, they have worked tirelessly and diligently under enormous physical and emotional strain, and their reward is unfair pay and unimaginable working conditions. Were the Liberal Democrats in government, we would support staff immediately with a burn-out prevention strategy and an NHS staff assembly to set national standards in order to get rid of the postcode lottery in social care.

This Government loves to talk about a far-off land where everything will be better, but it has neither the desire—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: —nor the competence to make things better today. I say to the Government and to the cabinet secretary: either get it sorted or step out of the way to make room for someone who can.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate. I call Carol Mochan for up to four minutes.

15:13

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): It has been a busy week for bad news across the UK, so, understandably, the Scottish Government was hoping that its own failings would drift under the radar. However, with winter approaching, we need to get serious, and quickly, about the significant problems with the Government's management of our NHS. It is putting lives at risk. There is a crisis in A and E across Scotland and, quite frankly, the cabinet secretary has been missing in action for a great deal of it. He and a number of his predecessors have overseen years of poor workforce planning, cuts to hospital bed numbers in many areas and a consistent failure to recognise the approaching dangers of the underfunding and underresourcing of social care.

The situation beyond A and E is also desperately concerning. I have been helping one constituent who has been waiting for more than 80 weeks for arthroscopy surgery—80 weeks, cabinet secretary, in serious pain. I am advised that things are deteriorating by the day and that she is dependent on medication to get through the day. I have written to the cabinet secretary about that case, and he is unable to give that woman—and that family—any idea of when it might be possible for that vital operation to take place. I will say it again: that constituent has been waiting for 80 weeks.

It is whole families who suffer. While living with considerable pain, that woman struggles to support her child, often relying on her husband to do things that she would love to be involved with. The situation is worse than just the constant pain. Imagine how that family feels, when, for 80 weeks, they cannot do the things that they would wish to do with their daughter. We should all think about the physical pain and the mental distress. The chances of her situation improving seem to be dwindling with every passing day, as she waits for an appointment that seems as though it will never come. As I have said, the cabinet secretary is unable to offer anything to that woman.

These are the human stories behind the statistics—stories that do not even warrant a headline anymore, as they are so common. If the health secretary thinks that that is acceptable and, on top of that, cannot seem to do anything about A and E waiting times of more than eight hours going into winter—with some as high as 12 hours—it is reasonable to ask why he is still in his job.

This week, we have seen lots of politicians in London miraculously regain the jobs that they had lost, but the bar here seems to be so high that, no matter how often a minister fails, they will be kept in post. I dread to think what would happen to ordinary workers in this country if they made as many mistakes as this Administration has.

Waiting times are a massive concern for many of my constituents. Month after month, year after year, people are living with anxiety and concern about how they will get the treatment that they need. We must remember those personal stories.

We must also remember that hard-working hospital staff are under huge pressure every day, which causes them stress and anxiety as well. However, that seems to be one of those things that people in this Government just appear to accept as a force of nature. Nothing serious is ever done to address the problem; no actions are taken, and it just comes back around the next year. People—

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): Actions are—

Carol Mochan: The minister can shout all she likes, but what I am saying is true. These are true stories that members bring to the chamber to enable us to have a serious discussion with the cabinet secretary about how we move things forward.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Ms Mochan.

Carol Mochan: People truly value our NHS, but what is going on is just not good enough. One in seven Scots are now stuck on NHS waiting lists. The cabinet secretary should sort it out or pass the responsibility to someone who can.

15:17

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Despite being the best-performing A and E departments in the UK, Scottish A and E departments are facing capacity issues, and not just in winter. I would like to put forward suggestions and thoughts based on conversations that I have had with clinicians.

Staff vacancies are the north-east's biggest issue, and we have a worrying situation in GP

services, with a number of surgeries in my constituency struggling to treat patients because they have so many unfilled posts. One of the impacts of that is that patients who would otherwise receive GP care resort to turning up at A and E, which puts even more pressure on the service. That is one of the reasons why I would like to see the ScotGEM programme being extended to include Grampian.

I note that the cabinet secretary has made a pay offer to nurses, and I hope that it is accepted, but there are pressures on other groups of our staff, too. A wide range of people in the NHS have advised me that they have concerns that too many GPs and consultants are retiring far too early. Just today I spoke to a consultant in NHS Grampian who is concerned that, because of tax and pensions implications, consultants as young as 40 are reducing their hours. A reduction in consultant capacity obviously impacts on A and E departments; I am concerned that that might also impact on measures that the Government puts in place to offer scheduled urgent appointments in hot clinics that are designed to relieve pressure on A and E departments.

If pensions arrangements are making staying on less attractive to people, that will impact on capacity. Our budgets are stretched and are finite, but we need to address any seemingly illogical contractual disincentives to working full time until retirement age. After all, we have invested in training those consultants.

On training, I recently hosted an event with the Royal College of Emergency Medicine at which I heard from an advanced clinical practitioner who pointed to the roll-out of more ACPs being vital to supporting emergency rooms. I ask the cabinet secretary what we can do, within the work of the urgent and unscheduled care collaborative, to facilitate that. I welcome the £50 million funding that has been used to put in place ways to reduce A and E waiting times, including offering alternatives to hospital-based treatment. However, we need to accept that there will always be a need for hospital-based treatment and that, in addition to getting more ACPs, we need to look at increasing postgraduate training places and targeting them at areas where we have the biggest recruitment challenges. I have been told that those areas are respiratory medicine, acute medicine and geriatrics.

I realise that, so far, my contribution to Labour's debate about winter planning has pointed to long-term strategies. However, the measures that I have outlined would get us through not just this winter but all subsequent winters, and would also aid recovery from the toughest period that our NHS has ever known—not just because of Covid, but because of the tough recruitment environment

that has been caused by Brexit, which is the elephant in the room that cannot be ignored. My Grampian NHS Board colleagues have consistently pointed to the damage that loss of freedom of movement has done to our NHS and social care systems. The Labour motion does not mention that, because it is to the party's endless embarrassment that its leader does not care about taking us back into the EU common travel arrangements. Until that changes, Labour has zero credibility on workforce issues that affect our NHS. *[Interruption.]*

I have spoken before about how Labour always comes to the chamber with a list of demands, but no costed solutions. To date, Labour has made nearly £2.68 billion of social care demands, which I have here, but it does not have the first clue about how to fund them. However, today, Jackie Baillie has not even come forward with ideas for the A and E departments. Uncosted or not, there has not been a single idea from Jackie Baillie or Carol Mochan. *[Interruption.]*

I will make one final point. Frankly, the last two words of the Labour motion and Jackie Baillie's speech are a disgrace. Every health secretary and every Government is dealing with the same issues, so grubby personal attacks like that are the worst thing about this place—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Martin, you need to conclude.

Gillian Martin: They undermine the very idea of politics as a public service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before we proceed, I remind members again that time is tight and that you need to stick to your allocated speaking times. Members—particularly those on the front benches, but also those on the back benches—should not shout across the chamber from sedentary positions.

15:21

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): It feels like groundhog day. In September, Nicola Sturgeon told Parliament that she wanted to see immediate improvement in A and E waiting times, but for the third week in a row more than 3,000 patients waited for longer than eight hours to be seen in A and E, and 1,350 patients waited in pain and distress for more than 12 hours—not in hospital beds, but in waiting rooms and corridors. Those are shocking figures, not least because the Royal College of Emergency Medicine has repeatedly warned that such waits can lead to hundreds of avoidable deaths—each one of which is a tragedy.

The current chaos is just the tip of the iceberg, because the situation will only get worse as winter

arrives. In September, well before the winter months, NHS Grampian in my region asked people to attend emergency departments only in life-threatening situations. Ambulances have been stacked outside Aberdeen royal infirmary and, because paramedics are treating patients in ambulances that are parked outside A and E doors for hours, the ambulances cannot be dispatched elsewhere.

However, the reality is that A and E waiting times are the symptom of a wider malaise that the SNP has presided over for years. Poor workforce planning and a failure to get a grip on delayed discharge mean that there are simply not enough staff and beds to care for patients. An elastic band can be stretched only so far, and we have reached breaking point.

It is abundantly clear that in order to help to prevent bed blocking we need more social care staff now, but the SNP has instead diverted hundreds of millions of pounds—or even billions, because the Scottish Government is not quite sure whether it is millions or billions—into the creation of a national care service that will not be up and running for another four years.

Meanwhile, cancer treatment waiting times are at their worst level on record, and waiting times for routine treatment continue to mount.

More than a quarter of children and young people are still not being seen by mental health services within 18 weeks, and people are having to wait hours—not minutes—for ambulances to arrive. With Humza Yousaf at the helm, our NHS is on its knees. With the resources that they have, NHS staff are working heroically to provide safe patient care. However, staff on the front line are telling us over and over that the system is simply not sustainable.

Just last month, nurses tried to share their concerns with the health secretary about their increasing workloads, their pay situation and patient safety. Shamefully, Humza Yousaf told them not to patronise him. My blood boiled when I heard that. My sister is a nurse, another is a midwife, and I speak to front-line staff every day, and that was just disgraceful. However, for Humza Yousaf, it was just another photo opportunity before retreating to self-congratulation and the platitudes of the SNP conference.

As the crisis that our NHS faces has gone from bad to worse, the Scottish Conservatives have called many times on the health secretary to completely rethink his NHS recovery plan, and we have urged him to go back to the drawing board on his NHS winter resilience plan. Enough distraction and deflection: Humza Yousaf needs to step up, because people's lives are at stake.

15:25

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I have a few points to make in the short time that I have.

First, I welcome the fact that discussions are on-going and that another pay offer is on the table. Whether through that offer or a future one, I hope that we can reach an agreement, because the last thing that we need in our health service is industrial action.

I make the point to the health secretary that I have met front-line workers in health and social care, as well as local and national trade unions, and they have all stressed to me that it is not all about money; it is also about the massive pressure under which all the staff are currently working and are expected to work. We must address that in order to move forward.

I acknowledge the impact of Covid. I acknowledge that for whoever is in power, these are difficult times. I also acknowledge the impact of the disastrous Brexit. There are major difficulties for the NHS that we all face, but it is key that we have confidence that the Government has a grip of the issues and has plans that will operate to tackle the problems. This is the problem that I have: I do not see any evidence that such plans are in place. Indeed, when it comes to social care, I am not convinced that the Government has a handle at all on what needs to happen. That is the problem; I will say more about it.

I say first to the Scottish Tories that the reality is that the crisis in this country has been created in Downing Street. It is an economic crisis that will play out very badly. Last week, the *Daily Record* reported that 216 official heat banks have been opened, in addition to the 244 food banks that we have. If we are to go through this winter with people cold and freezing and unable to feed themselves, that will put massive pressure on our health service. The really difficult thing for me is that the Tories have tanked the economy but they have the nerve—

Tess White: I think you're in the wrong debate.

Alex Rowley: Please dinnae stand there and shout. If you have something to say, say it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms White! I have already told you.

Alex Rowley: The Tories have the nerve to stand up and look into cameras with straight faces and say, "We're gonnae have to cut public services". I hope that this Parliament can unite to say that there should be no austerity when it comes to public services and that we will all join together to fight austerity. [*Applause.*]

I return to the Scottish Government and where it is at. Care homes are in crisis; we saw Robert Kilgour on the news last night talking about the massive pressures that they are under. That issue needs to be addressed, but it cannot be addressed by simply fleecing self-funders—people with more than £18,500 a year who have to pay for their own care. Right now, they are the only income source for the care homes and, sadly, the charges are increasing, against which there is no protection. That must be addressed.

With regard to social care itself, the inequality between those who work in the private sector and those who work in the public sector must be addressed: we cannot continue to ignore it. The Government's national care service proposal is basically a national procurement service. That will not tackle the issues that we face right now. This morning, I looked at the responses to the consultation—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr Rowley.

Alex Rowley: Everyone in that sector—all the professional bodies and people who use the sector—are warning the Government, so it must listen. People do not believe that the Government has a handle on the situation, so it must get a grip of it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Rowley. I call Gillian Mackay. You have up to four minutes, Ms Mackay.

15:30

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): This will, once again, be one of the most difficult winters in the history of our NHS. We have a workforce that is already tired, rising Covid-related admissions and a backlog of delayed and more complex treatment. We also face a battle to reduce A and E waiting times.

As always, some health boards are doing better than others. In my region, NHS Forth Valley is continually at the top of the table for long waiting times. We must understand better why that is the case. We also need to support a sustained incremental improvement in waiting times rather than what we are seeing at the moment: bad statistics one week, a marked improvement the following week, and then the cycle repeating itself. That does not deliver for patients, and I am greatly concerned about the pressure that clinical teams are being put under to achieve lower waiting times when they are already stretched and tired.

Keeping people out of acute settings in the first place should always be the primary goal. At the start of this week, I attended a Marie Curie round-table discussion, in which I heard about the

experiences of unpaid carers and the organisations that support them. We discussed the current issues that face those who care for loved ones at home.

An issue that was raised was access to NHS 24 for people with a terminal diagnosis. Carers and patients often look for guidance on whether the issue that they currently have needs acute care. However, because of the wait to be triaged, they often end up phoning for an ambulance or taking their loved one to A and E.

I believe that some health boards, as part of anticipatory care planning, provide specific pathways for those with a terminal diagnosis to get the information that they need. Given the number of people who want to die at home, I hope that the cabinet secretary will look into that issue as one way to prevent people from ending up at A and E unnecessarily.

I have previously raised the issue of the staffing of out-of-hours GP services. That hugely valuable service diverts people away from A and E and provides timely care. We must make that service an attractive option for GPs to work in.

In its briefing, the Royal College of General Practitioners highlighted its belief that people are unaware of how to effectively navigate health and social care services. Many things have changed over the pandemic. Some services are not delivered in the same way, and pathways might have changed. I hope that, especially over winter, effort can be put into ensuring that patients know where and when they can access the most appropriate care. For example, the pharmacy first model will be able to help with minor ailments over the winter, which will potentially reduce the impact on GPs.

We should acknowledge those in different parts of community care who are working extremely hard to ensure that their patients remain well. District nurses are doing home visits, changing bandages and monitoring people's conditions; school nurses are dealing with a vast range of issues across multiple schools; and health visitors are providing advice and guidance for new parents. They are all contributing to the system, as are the brilliant allied health professionals and support staff, without whom the NHS simply would not work.

We need to ensure that staff can take their breaks, that they have time for peer support, and that they can access wellbeing measures that help to relieve the physical and mental toll that they experience.

Pay is a very important issue. However, having spoken to nurses from the RCN outside the Parliament building before the recess, I know that their working conditions and their terms and

conditions are really important issues, too. I will continue to work with RCN members on that.

This winter, we must reduce waiting times as far as possible without putting more undue pressure on a tired workforce, and we must ensure that all avenues for access to care are well advertised and communicated.

15:34

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): First, I pay tribute to our outstanding health and social care workers across Scotland. The past few years have put an immense strain on our healthcare system and its workers. Despite those stresses, and in the face of unprecedented and unimaginable challenges, those who work in the sector have continued to provide exceptional service.

As we look ahead, no one in the chamber is under any illusions about the challenges and the difficulties that this winter will bring. We all know that extremely tough times lie ahead. This winter, it will take the combined efforts of national and local government, working alongside all our healthcare partners, to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

Make no mistake, however: while Labour members stand here and criticise, healthcare staff and services are under strain not just in Scotland, despite what they would like us to believe. In every part of the United Kingdom, the NHS faces significant pressures. To my mind, the similarities end there. Why? What separates us from other parts of the UK?

We have a Scottish Government that cares, that has a strong and steady leadership and that has plans. We have a health secretary who recognises the challenges that lie ahead and is totally committed to improving performance and delivering positive change. Contrast that with our English counterparts, and I know who I would trust to safeguard the health and wellbeing of my family, friends and loved ones.

Labour has highlighted its concerns about our A and E departments. What we will not hear from it is the knowledge that our accident and emergency departments are performing better than those in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In Scotland, the staffing levels of the NHS have grown for 10 consecutive years. Although the staffing and funding are already at historically high levels, the Scottish Government will continue to look to maximise and enhance wherever possible as we approach the winter period.

Alex Rowley: Will the member give way?

David Torrance: No, thank you. Do you know why I will not take an intervention? When you went into coalition with the Tories in the [*Inaudible*.]—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, Mr Torrance.

David Torrance: It is recognised by the Government that the current level of performance is not acceptable. No one here will deny that. That is why, earlier this month, the health secretary outlined in his winter resilience overview several actions for the coming winter months, backed by more than £600 million of funding. By April this year, more than 1,000 additional healthcare support staff and almost 200 registered nurses had been recruited to help to address our services' challenges.

In the past year, staffing levels have increased by more than 2,800 permanent full-time-equivalent roles. The Scottish Government is investing in further recruitment and taking action through the £50 million urgent and unscheduled care collaborative.

I have listened with interest and some disbelief as my Labour colleagues have spoken of thousands of beds being blocked due to delayed discharge. I get the sense that, in their desire to criticise and condemn the Scottish Government, they lack some self-awareness. There can be no doubt that Brexit and the introduction of new United Kingdom immigration procedures have had a profoundly damaging effect on social care. However, the Labour Party continues to eagerly embrace the Tories' extreme Brexit and all of its overwhelmingly negative impacts.

EU workers have made a hugely positive contribution in the care sector for many years, and they represent a vital component of our country's social care workforce. However, Brexit and the Tory party's yearning to take back control of the UK have created a shortfall in care services, which, in turn, has had severe knock-on effects on emergency and urgent care. The whole system becomes blocked when there are not enough care workers to provide support services for people who are leaving hospital. That leads to gridlock and backlogs through the entire system. If people cannot leave hospital due to a lack of social care, patients are stuck in A and E while they wait for hospital beds. People who have needed an ambulance have been left waiting because the ambulances have been waiting for transfers of patients.

Only this week, we all heard Keir Starmer's determined and short-sighted answer when he was asked about rejoining the EU: "It's a straight no". That shows that Labour and the Tories are increasingly two sides of the same coin. Both are

completely unwilling to stand up and do what is best for the people of Scotland.

Just imagine what our NHS could do with the £770 million a year that is spent on mitigating Tory policies.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr Torrance.

David Torrance: In conclusion, our NHS has suffered the biggest shock of its 74-year existence, and it will not recover overnight, as the Government has acknowledged.

15:38

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I pay tribute to all our front-line staff in the NHS. Whether the treatment is routine or emergency, they never falter.

Last year, my personal contact with the NHS allowed me to see how hard its staff work. However, it is clear to me that our front-line staff do not have the resources that they need. That means that there are too many patients who struggle to be seen, to get diagnosed and, worse still, to get prompt treatment.

Overworked GPs often cannot see patients in person. Carrying out a diagnosis on a computer is a risky business. GPs need to see patients and, although Near Me and other online portals might work, being told that you have cancer on a telephone in your parliamentary office sucks, as does waiting 10 days for a full-hour appointment.

As the NHS comes under increased pressure and faces crisis management, there is a real danger that human care will be the first thing that is sacrificed. It is the personal approach—the bedside manner—which patients need and staff want to deliver, that suffers.

Not providing the resources to allow staff to deliver that care is in itself a dereliction of duty—your duty, cabinet secretary.

We all recognise the pressures of Covid, but the health service was under extreme pressure before Covid. Every winter, we face the inevitable and predictable rise in the number of patients. Every year, the Government guddles around trying to find solutions, and every year it says that it is listening and learning. The trouble is that, although it might have been listening, it certainly has not heard and it certainly has never learned.

Cabinet secretary, you will say that your winter plan will result in the recruitment of 1,000 extra staff and will provide £120 million extra to provide help at home. Where exactly are you going to get the staff from and—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please, Mr Mountain.

Edward Mountain: Sorry.

Where exactly will the cabinet secretary get those staff from, and how will the additional funds provide the care at home that is so desperately needed?

Another perennial problem that the Government has failed to address is that of delayed discharges. The Government promised to eradicate delayed discharges in 2015, but successive health secretaries, including the current one, have failed miserably to address them. The numbers remain at almost a record high. In NHS Highland, there has been a 32 per cent increase in delayed discharges in this year alone.

One word covers that: failure—this Government's failure. Every treated patient in hospital who is waiting for a social care package is preventing another patient on the waiting list from getting treatment. Longer waits and delayed treatment result, without doubt, in outcomes that are less than optimal. The Government's failure on delayed discharges is now very much the cabinet secretary's failure.

Across Scotland, waiting times in A and E are going up, cancer waiting times are going up and nurse vacancies are going up. They are all going in the wrong direction—up. The real question is: when will the health secretary stop dragging our NHS down, which seems to be the only thing that he is capable of doing?

15:42

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Here we are again, with another politically opportunistic motion from the Labour Party that is politicising our health service in Scotland. Contrary to the motion, the health secretary and the team are focused on ensuring that Scotland's NHS is as well equipped as possible to tackle the huge challenges that we face.

I know that there are challenges in taking care of people, the processes and pathways, the prevention of acute admissions and the work in primary care. The work that my former colleagues undertake every day is complex, and the systems are challenging. For 30 years before becoming a member of Parliament, I was in the NHS in Scotland and England and a nurse in the USA, so I think that I know a wee bit about what is going on in our national health service. Sometimes, when I read such motions, I wonder if the Opposition ken diddly qua qua about what is actually going on.

I know that, over the past two years, the NHS has suffered the biggest shock in its 74 years of existence. I thank all the people who work in the

NHS for their work, care, compassion and commitment, and for what they do every day. The Scottish Government's recovery plan, which is backed by more than £1 billion of investment, sets out plans for health and care over the next five years, so it is not just for this winter. The plan will support in-patient, day case and out-patient activity, as well as implementation of sustainable improvements and new models of care through investing in a network of national treatment centres. That will increase capacity for additional specialties, including diagnostics, general surgery, orthopaedics and ophthalmology.

The plan also supports the mental health and wellbeing of the health and care workforce, which we have heard so much about in the past couple of years. We should get right behind looking at ways to support people using digital opportunities such as NHS Near Me.

It is crucial that we help to equip the NHS for the winter pressures, but we need to think beyond the winter as well.

On specific A and E challenges, I hear what is being said. In common with other health services across the UK and globally, Scottish A and E departments are working under significant pressure, and the pandemic continues to affect services. Mind that word "Covid"? We need to remember the impact that the Covid pandemic has had, and is still having, on our national health service.

The Scottish Government is taking action to improve A and E waiting times, and the £50 million urgent and unscheduled care collaborative will help to implement a range of measures to drive down those waiting times. The work includes offering alternatives to hospital, such as the hospital at home service; directing people to urgent care settings; and scheduling urgent appointments to avoid long waits in A and E departments. I know about the long waits in A and E. I hear about them directly from former colleagues and from folk working 12-hour shifts. It is hugely challenging.

In August, Scotland's core A and E departments performed 8.1 percentage points better than England's and 10.3 percentage points better than Wales's. During that period, A and E waiting times in Labour-controlled Wales were worse than they were in Scotland, so I wonder whether Jackie Baillie or any other Labour member, when closing the debate, can clarify whether they are also calling on the Welsh Labour health secretary to resign. Labour's performance in Wales does not inspire confidence that Labour would do any better here in Scotland.

I am conscious of the time, but I note what Gillian Martin said about potential solutions, and I

welcome the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to support our NHS. I want the health secretary to listen to clinicians directly so that he can hear their ideas and suggestions for improving systems. We need to get right behind our NHS workforce and support staff in any way that we can in the future.

15:46

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Scotland's NHS faces its worst winter on record, and it faces that because of the SNP Government. It faces that because of the wrong choices that have been made by the health secretary—choices that have led to the worst cancer waiting times ever, the worst ambulance waiting times ever, a demoralised and unappreciated workforce, and nurses threatening to strike for the first time in history. The Government has chosen the path of poor terms and low pay. Critically ill patients in the most severe category are being forced to wait hours for an ambulance.

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention?

Craig Hoy: No, I will not.

Tens of thousands of people waited more than four hours to be seen at A and E units last month, and hundreds of cancer patients have waited more than two months to begin urgent treatment. According to the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, delays in Scotland's A and E departments last month meant that 40 people died who need not have died. Cumulatively, our NHS is not just facing a crisis this winter; it faces a catastrophe.

Week after week, the SNP and the Greens continue to waste millions of pounds of public money.

Gillian Martin: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Craig Hoy: No.

Millions of pounds have been put at risk on the wrong choice for social care, millions of pounds are being wasted on a campaign for Scottish independence, millions have been wasted on fake foreign embassies and overseas junkets, and millions have been wasted by the SNP on botched ferries that were wrongly contracted against the advice of civil servants.

This situation did not come about by chance; it came about by choice—the SNP's choice. It has made the wrong choices locally and the wrong choices nationally.

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): Will Mr Hoy add to his list by looking at some of the things that have

happened recently south of the border because of the incompetence of the Tory party? For example, £65 billion has had to be spent propping up pension funds because of Trussonomics.

Craig Hoy: Why not focus on the £41 billion that the Government has here in Scotland to make our public services better? Perhaps—

Kevin Stewart: What about the £65 billion?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart! You have had an intervention. Be quiet!

Craig Hoy: The minister is not in an Aberdeen nightclub now, so he should behave.

The wrong choices are being made time and again—wrong choices such as the closure of beds in the minor injuries clinic at Edington cottage hospital in North Berwick. The SNP makes the wrong choices for residents time and again.

The calamity of all calamities is coming in the form of the national care service. The SNP is choosing a national care service over local care, all because it chooses centralisation at every turn. Do not take my word for it. Let us look at what COSLA and Unison say:

“For the sake of those individuals and families who need our support waiting four or five years for the establishment of the NCS is not an option. We cannot and should not break up the Local Government workforce, particularly at this critical time in our recovery from the pandemic.”

Independent researchers from the Scottish Parliament estimate that the SNP’s proposals to create a national care service will cost up to £1.3 billion over the next five years. Even the nodding dogs on the SNP’s back benches conceded that point yesterday in the Finance and Public Administration Committee—

Members: Oh!

Craig Hoy: The minister knows only too well that he is on the wrong path. Scotland needs a well-funded, high-quality health service—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sit down, Mr Hoy.

Gillian Martin: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Is it not incumbent on MSPs to treat other MSPs with respect?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am not sure that that is a point of order, Ms Martin, but it is absolutely the case that members should treat one another with respect. That goes for everyone.

Continue and conclude, Mr Hoy.

Craig Hoy: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Scotland needs a well-funded, high-quality health service in which care is delivered closer to patients, staff feel rewarded and valued, and

patients are treated quickly and safely. In short, we need an NHS in which big choices are driven by patient care and not by the independence obsession of this incompetent SNP Government and its incompetent health secretary.

15:50

Humza Yousaf: I will not respond to the personal attacks, because it is a shame that a debate of such importance and seriousness has seen such pathetic and grubby personal attacks—not just on me, but on members across the chamber. It is a shame, because it does no service whatsoever to our hard-working NHS staff, who are working under incredible pressure.

I will tackle some of the issues that have been raised, which are important to all across the chamber. On cancer, statistics continue to show that, notwithstanding the huge impacts of the pandemic, we continue to meet the 31-day target. We are not meeting the 62-day target, which remains challenging. That is why our focus has been on the detecting cancer early programme, and it is why we have invested—as I announced—£10 million to improve cancer waiting times, on top of the £114.5 million in the national cancer plan. It is also why I announced three rapid cancer diagnostic services and why two more have just been approved. We will continue to focus relentlessly on ensuring that cancer is detected early, because we know that, if it is, that will lead to better outcomes and survivability for people.

On winter funding, I was astonished by what Jackie Baillie had to say. She complained that there was no new money and that I had announced all the money last year. However, it was Jackie Baillie who demanded, last year, that the money be recurring. Winter pressure money for this winter was recurring, and now she complains about that same money being recurring. She cannot have it both ways.

Jackie Baillie: Everybody—including the cabinet secretary himself—has said that this will be the worst winter ever. Surely, this is the point at which to put in additional resource to cope with that, so that patients do not suffer.

Humza Yousaf: That is why we are spending a record £18 billion on the health service in this financial year. I say to Jackie Baillie that you do not just wake up one day and say, “Oh, it’s going to be a bad winter.” You plan for it the year before, which is why we ensured that we had recurring money.

A thousand additional staff will be recruited over the course of this winter. Edward Mountain is on his phone, but he might want to listen, because he asked where those staff will come from. Of those 1,000 staff, 750 will be recruited from overseas—

because boards tell us that they have the capacity to bring people from overseas—and 250 will be recruited domestically.

I will touch on Alex Rowley's contribution, which I thought was fair and showed a willingness from some members of the Labour Party to come forward with ideas and solutions for the social care sector and the national care service. I say to Alex Rowley that there is no silver bullet. I promise him that, if there were, we would have deployed it by now.

Our relentless focus is on workforce, because that is the challenge, and I cannot disassociate that workforce challenge from the folly of Brexit. Kevin Stewart reminded me of the fact that one care home provider told him that 40 per cent of his staff had had to leave—he lost them—largely due to Brexit.

Our focus will be on the social care sector, and pay will be a part of that.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Humza Yousaf: I cannot give way—I have to finish in less than a minute.

We have a relentless focus on pay, terms and conditions, whether in the NHS or in social care.

I will conclude my remarks shortly, Presiding Officer, but I cannot let the Conservatives get away with talking about social care and our public finances. How dare they come to the chamber and utter one syllable about the challenges that our public finances face? Through their incompetence, their economic mismanagement and their economic vandalism, my health budget is worth £650 million less than it was when it was set in December last year. So, why do they not grow a backbone and, instead of waiting for the next number 10 incumbent to tickle their tummy, try standing up for Scotland and for our public services?

I end by thanking our NHS staff for the incredible work that they do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Paul O'Kane to wind up the debate.

15:55

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Our NHS is facing a humanitarian crisis this winter, and—let us be frank—the responsibility lies at the door of this Government and this cabinet secretary.

Today, we have again heard about the scale of the crisis in our NHS. We have heard from Jackie Baillie about the personal cost behind each and every one of the numbers, each of which represents a person with a family and their own

story who is cared for by our amazing NHS staff, who are at breaking point.

The debate has been characterised by the cabinet secretary's thin skin. He complained about being personally attacked, but the reality is that all that Jackie Baillie and Labour members did was point out his failures in comparison with his predecessors in the job of health secretary, including Jeane Freeman, who led the country through the beginning of the pandemic. Alex Cole-Hamilton took a similar approach when he pointed out what Paul Gray has said about the head of steam that has built up, the perfect storm that has been created and the fact that it is not all about Covid.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

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

SNP back benchers accused us of making political attacks, but what we have heard from them is desperate stuff. They accuse us of making political attacks, but all that we have had from them is howls of "red Tory" as Carol Mochan made her speech, nonsense comparisons with Wales and England, and attacks on Keir Starmer, so scared are they of a UK Labour Government. We will not take lectures from a party that has spent this debate indulging in whataboutery and refusing to acknowledge its responsibility for every single person who has to lie on a trolley in A and E this winter.

The cabinet secretary said that he prepares for winter in advance, so can he tell us why Dr John Thomson, the vice-chair of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, has stated that the measures that are outlined in the cabinet secretary's winter resilience plan will

"not be in place in time to prevent further harm to patients and staff this winter"?

Yes, the experts are clear.

Gillian Martin called for solutions that are backed by the experts. That is absolutely right. I went outside and met members of the RCN when they protested in front of the Parliament. They told me that they need more training places to be filled and a fair pay settlement across all bands. They also told me that they need proper breaks and proper rest when they are on shift, because they are not getting those at the moment and the workforce is on its knees.

Perhaps we should subscribe to Emma Harper's attitude and not listen to the hard-working staff and their trade unions. I am quite sure that they will make diddly quack of whatever her contribution was supposed to be about.

Let us be honest. The issue across our NHS is being exacerbated by the Scottish Government's refusal to engage on pay, whether of nurses or of social care workers, and its refusal to back Scottish Labour's pledge to pay social care workers £15 an hour—a wage that they could live on, not just survive on.

The Scottish Government has also failed on social care more widely. It has failed to implement key recommendations of the Feeley report, and there are serious concerns about its approach to the national care service, which have been outlined by trade unions, the third sector and professional bodies. As Alex Rowley and others said, it is clear that the Scottish Government is not listening to what is being said about the serious challenges in social care. All of that begs the question, if the Government is not going to listen to the advice of independent experts in the field, who is it going to listen to?

It is fair to say that Humza Yousaf is a record breaker. Week after week, we learn about record-breaking accident and emergency waiting times. Every time that Scottish Labour is forced to bring debates such as today's to the chamber, we find that another record has been broken by the cabinet secretary. It is quite clear that, in place of meaningful action to address the crises in A and E, in social care and across our NHS, all that the cabinet secretary has to offer is hollow words. It is increasingly obvious that Humza Yousaf is the man with no plan.

I am sure that most of the members in the chamber could have pre-empted the cabinet secretary's response before he got to his feet. If you do not like one of his excuses, he has others. First, it was Covid. Then it was Brexit, the cost of living, winter weather and staffing. It is the same old script, which does a disservice to healthcare staff, patients and the families of patients, who have real concerns about the current crisis in our NHS.

It is not good enough. We need a health secretary who can offer leadership, not one who hides behind tired old scripted excuses. The First Minister is fond of saying that the buck stops with the Government, although she rarely does anything other than look at the buck and watch it float by. So, in the cabinet secretary's own words to hard-working nurses, let us not patronise one another. The buck stops with him, and, if he is not willing to get on and fix the situation in the NHS, he should resign.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on supporting the NHS in winter. It is now time to move on to the next item of business. There will be a brief pause while the front-bench teams change.

Cost of Living

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06438, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on the cost of living. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to please press their request-to-speak buttons.

16:01

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Before recess, we voted to introduce a rent freeze, after the Government accepted Labour's arguments that rents must be frozen and tenants protected from eviction—using the powers that this Parliament has—to help people with the cost of living crisis.

The crisis is a national emergency on the scale of the Covid pandemic, and Scottish Labour has been leading the way throughout it. We called for a windfall tax, a freeze on energy bills, a freeze on rents and protection from eviction for tenants, which were all dismissed and then adopted by the United Kingdom and Scottish Governments.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Can the member explain to me where in the Scotland Act 1998 action on windfall taxes and energy companies is in the gift of the Scottish Government?

Mark Griffin: I did not say that that was in the gift of the Scottish Government. I set out a series of policies that were dismissed and then adopted by the UK and Scottish Governments. However, I should point out that they were also dismissed by, and then supported by, Scottish National Party MPs at Westminster. Perhaps that escaped the member.

For months now, people who were managing have found themselves pushed to the brink with repeated financial shocks. Food costs, heating bills, fuel costs, spiralling rents and now mortgages keep on going in one direction, and that is up.

Our plan detailed interventions that would make a real difference to families in Scotland, so we are returning to the chamber to call on the Scottish Government to take further action.

I want to be clear that the unprecedented chaos that has been unleashed on the UK by the Tories at a time when we need stability the most means that this winter will be longer and harder than any of us expected when we put forward our cost of living plan in August. The Conservatives' disastrous mini-budget crashed the pound and accelerated the rise in costs that families are having to bear.

The Food & Drink Federation put food ingredient inflation at 30 per cent, and because imports are traded in dollars, non-European Union imports have become more expensive.

Even now, the reality of the situation, including vital information about the rate at which pensioners and people on benefits will have their payments uprated, will not be known until 17 November.

The Deputy First Minister—who is not here—recently tweeted that he would not have to recalculate his budget review, because he never expected the mini-budget Barnett consequential to ever materialise. If it is the case that no recalculation is required, the Government could bring forward its own statement.

Our motion returns to the cost of living plan to help those in need. It calls for the cancelling of school meals debt, increased funding for money advice services and a top-up to the welfare fund—all of which, for the interest of those who have a concern about what this Parliament and Government can do, is within this Parliament's gift. Those measures are firmly within the gift of this Government and could have a real and substantial impact on people's lives.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Those are all worthy measures, but can Mark Griffin give us a costing for them and tell us where the funding will come from?

Mark Griffin: We have come to the chamber again and again to give policy suggestions around income that the Government could bring in to fund those measures. Only in June, Labour and SNP members voted in favour of clawing back the £400 energy supplement for second homes, in particular in order to target that money at cost of living measures. The Government agreed to do that and all its back benchers supported it. However, we have seen nothing—there has been no action on that £400 supplement, which is going to second home owners but which could be going into the pockets of those who need it most. There has been no action at all. We have come again and again with suggestions.

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): I am sure that Mr Griffin will want to correct the record. After he wrote to me, I confirmed to him that we had written to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and engaged. As he will appreciate, although the aspiration is venerable and worthy of respect, the capacity to implement it is a lot more complicated than his rhetoric would suggest.

Mark Griffin: When I speak to council leaders, all they say to me is, "We have heard about this and we have heard nothing more from

Government about how we implement it." They are desperate to get on with the job and to take in that extra money, which could be going into the pockets of those who need it most. They are simply waiting for the Government to tell them how to do that.

We have set out areas where we think that the Scottish Government should step up—on cancelling school meals debt, on topping up the welfare fund and on support for advice services. We have come to the Parliament regularly to speak about how those steps could be funded through better income generation and by cutting out the waste that this Government seems to grow more of than it does support for those who need it most.

People are absolutely sick of the chaos that they see going on in the UK Government. They are sick of seeing it push their bills only one way, which is up and up and up. They want to see more action, and there is action that can be taken that is within the gift of this Government. People want that reassurance, and they want it now.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that inflation again reached 10.1% in September 2022, driven by rising food prices and energy bills; condemns the mini-budget set out by the UK Government, and recognises that the cost of living pressures that households are facing will be exacerbated by the economic damage it caused; believes that the priority for every government must be preventing further instability and addressing the cost of living; considers that there is more action that could be taken by the Scottish Government, including the cancellation of school meals debt, increased funding for money advice services and a top up to the welfare fund; remains deeply concerned about households in Scotland that are struggling to make ends meet over the winter, and calls, therefore, in the interests of transparency, for the Deputy First Minister to set out the outcome of the Emergency Budget Review to Parliament as a matter of urgency.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the minister to speak to and move amendment S6M-06438.2. You have up to five minutes, minister.

16:07

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): I thank Mr Johnson and, indeed, Mr Griffin for bringing the motion to Parliament. It is a very timely motion about exactly the issue that our constituents would expect us to be debating—the cost of living crisis that is exacerbated by the continuing fallout from Brexit and by the recent chaos that the UK Government has unleashed on our economy, people, communities and businesses, which means that they are facing soaring inflation, rising costs and spiralling energy bills. The severe economic shock that everyone is facing is leading to cases of hardship and poverty.

The Scottish budget is not immune to the rising costs and budget pressures. As the Deputy First Minister has set out, our budget is now worth around £1.7 billion less than when it was set in December because of increasing inflation. We know that the Welsh Government is in the same position. We recently saw the Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford point that out to the Tory Prime Minister, when he indicated that the Welsh Government's budget is—as I understand it—now worth up to £4 billion less in real terms than it was when the three-year funding settlement was set last year.

The reality is that the decisions facing us are stark. Every additional pound that we spend in one area means a pound less has to be spent in another area. We have already taken action with the £500 million of savings that we announced last month, and which we have been clear were just the beginning of the hard choices that will be required to ensure that we can balance our budget while also supporting those in greatest need and providing fair and affordable public sector pay awards.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

Although I understand the difficulties in providing budget updates given the chaos from the Tory Government in the UK, there are non-fiscal measures that do not require spending that could be brought forward now, such as a review of regulation. Will the minister provide an update on where that review is?

Tom Arthur: Certainly. The member will be aware that that commitment was given when the Deputy First Minister set out the initial savings on 6 or 7 September. It is still our intention to bring forward an emergency budget review. The member will appreciate that we anticipated a fiscal statement on Monday from the UK Government, but that has now been pushed back to 17 November. As a consequence of that, we face even more uncertainty.

We will do all that we can, and we will set out what we will do in relation to considering regulation, but the reality is that on the fiscal matters that pertain to the autumn budget revision, we are in a more uncertain situation because of the decision taken by the UK Government to delay its fiscal statement.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Does the minister have any indication whatsoever of how many millions of pounds will be ripped from the Scottish Parliament's budget following the UK Government's new budget statement on 17 November?

Tom Arthur: The reality is that we do not know. I already highlighted the amount that we have lost

through inflation, and, as members will appreciate, we do not know what our finalised budget picture will be until the end of the year because of supplementary estimates, and there is always the risk of negative consequentials. That makes in-year budget management extremely challenging.

The UK Government's statement must not inflict further austerity on Scotland as a result of the mess that it has caused. The triple lock for pensions must not be removed again. We cannot have benefits not increase in line with inflation, and we cannot have people not being helped with their energy bills as they continue to soar.

As the First Minister made clear to the Prime Minister last night, the UK Government holds levers over energy, the majority of tax, the bulk of benefits and the business support and regulation that could help address the crisis. It also has borrowing powers and the ability to deploy financial instruments that can transform household and business budgets.

For example, a strengthened windfall tax should be an important source of funding for that support, rather than borrowing and spending cuts. That would help meet the costs of providing additional help for households and business, rather than increased borrowing and cuts to public spending, which would exacerbate the existing situation. We estimate that around £9.3 billion could be raised by broadening the energy profits levy and removing the investment allowance.

There must also be an inflationary uplift to the 2022-23 budget to enable the Scottish Government to take further steps to support people with the cost of living, provide fair public sector pay uplifts and support public services, given the fiscal constraints on devolution. That will allow us to continue to take action to support people at this very challenging time and is how we can build on the almost £3 billion of support that the Scottish Government has already provided this year, including £1 billion of support that is available only to households in Scotland.

Daniel Johnson: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is about to conclude.

Tom Arthur: This is an extremely challenging period. I look forward to members' contributions. I hope that they are informed, pragmatic and considered contributions that take cognisance of the limited powers of the Scottish Parliament and the extremely challenging fiscal and economic situation that we face.

I move amendment S6M-06438.2, to leave out from “; believes that” to end and insert:

“alongside the disastrous economic impact of leaving the

European Union, which is being felt by Scotland's economy, businesses and households; recognises that, as a result of increasing inflation, the Scottish budget is worth £1.7 billion less than when it was set in December 2021; welcomes the financial support that the Scottish Government has provided from within its fixed and limited budget to help people facing the impact of the cost of living crisis, including direct cash support, with almost £3 billion allocated to support households, £1 billion of which is support only available in Scotland; recognises that this includes the unique £20 per week per child Scottish Child Payment, which will increase to £25 on 14 November 2022, when it is also extended to under 16s, and £44 million for the Carer's Allowance Supplement; acknowledges further support with the planned doubling of the December Bridging Payment to £260, supporting up to 145,000 school-aged children; notes the additional costs that the Scottish Government has funded in relation to public sector pay; expresses concern at the prospect of a fresh round of UK Government austerity; believes that the priority for every government must be preventing further instability and addressing the cost of living; calls on the UK Government to use its fiscal statement on 31 October to rule out a return to austerity, further help people with soaring energy bills, reinstate the pension triple lock, confirm an inflationary rise in social security benefits in 2022-23 and provide the Scottish Government with an inflationary uplift to the 2022-23 budget to enable the Scottish Government to take further steps to support people with the cost of living; believes that a strengthened windfall tax should be an important source of funding for this support, rather than borrowing and public spending cuts, and understands that the Scottish Government will finalise and publish the outcome of the Emergency Budget Review once consideration has been given to the implications of the UK Government's fiscal statement and updated Office of Budget Responsibility's forecasts."

16:13

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): After a period of historically low inflation, and low interest rates, we find ourselves in the middle of an economic crisis in which rising costs of living have hit this country, as well as many others, across a range of goods and services.

That presents a real challenge to Governments at all levels. As members of the Scottish Parliament, we see the consequences first hand across our constituencies and regions. We will all know, from the correspondence we receive and the people we meet, that families and businesses face tough conditions and are feeling the impact of circumstances that are beyond their control.

In his September letter, the governor of the Bank of England set out the factors at play behind the rise in inflation—in particular, the role of Vladimir Putin's appalling act of aggression against Ukraine and its disastrous consequences, which comes at a key moment in our recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Those are not normal economic forces—in many ways, they are unprecedented—but there is, at least, some cause for optimism. Global

wholesale gas prices have fallen and Europe has moved towards greater energy security and resilience.

Daniel Johnson: In the member's long list of factors, he failed to mention the decisions that were made in the mini-budget in September that sent gilts up in the highest one-day increase since black Wednesday. Does the member acknowledge, as the Prime Minister has, that errors were made?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: As the Prime Minister did, I do.

If prices can be stabilised, the positive impact on the worst medium-term projections for energy costs will be considerable. However, the hard reality is that the underlying problems will not go away in the immediate term, and they will underlie our economic decision making well into next year. At this stage, it is a vital role of Government to use its best efforts to reduce the impact and support people through the winter.

The UK Government acted quickly and decisively to bring about £37 billion of intervention to help people with energy bills. Many parts of that package have been targeted specifically to help those who are most vulnerable, including low-income families and pensioner households that are often on fixed incomes. That is the right approach, and it will be of immense help to people the length and breadth of the UK.

We should not forget that that support comes on the back of the extraordinary assistance that was provided through furlough and other schemes during the worst part of the Covid pandemic. We were able to draw on the resources of Government to keep people in jobs and avoid the mass-scale unemployment and business closures that could very easily have resulted. The UK Government has gone further and faster than many would have expected. Although the costs borne by the Treasury have been eye watering, we can only imagine the costs of not acting.

Absent from Labour's motion is consideration of the impact on businesses, including the additional costs that they face, the disruption to supply chains and the wider questions over their future. I was open in my calls for action to help businesses tackle the hike in energy bills that threatened the survival of so many, so I was delighted when that support was given by the UK Government. That has, undoubtedly, saved jobs and livelihoods in my region and beyond.

We agree with Labour that both Governments should be responsive and working with the common purpose of helping and supporting our constituents through this period. More will undoubtedly need to be done, which is why it is particularly galling to see the Scottish Government

use its time and resources to call for more division, pretend that a Scotland without a proper central bank or control over its own currency is a good—or even viable—idea and try to wrench us away from billions of pounds of fiscal sharing within the United Kingdom. The idea that this is the time for its constitutional obsession to be pursued is ridiculous. That it would plan to take it forward under the calamitous and discredited economic prospectus that the First Minister outlined only weeks ago—proposals that were described as “utter pish” by one leading nationalist and so bad they would make another vote “no” in a referendum—is an insult to Scottish voters.

We cannot underestimate the seriousness of the cost of living crisis. It is hitting hard those who are already some of the most disadvantaged in our country. Scotland’s Governments must step up, work together and ensure that their actions are well targeted and that families and businesses are protected.

I move amendment S6M-06438.1, to leave out from “condemns” to end and insert:

“recognises that an increasing rate of inflation is a challenge faced by many countries around the world; welcomes the cost of living support provided by the UK Government to both businesses and households, including freezing the unit price of energy and giving payments to the most vulnerable in society worth up to £1,650, and calls on the Scottish Government to end its campaign to hold another independence referendum during this cost of living crisis and for both the UK and Scottish governments to work together to tackle the current crisis.”

16:17

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Last week, I visited the food bank in Anstruther. Those who are familiar with Anstruther and the east neuk of Fife may be surprised that there is a food bank in that area, but it is now an essential part of the fabric of that community.

I was informed by food bank organiser, Richard Wemyss, about the real impact of inflation. He told me that the cost of a basket of 16 goods had increased from £7 in the pre-Covid period to £14.10 now. The items in that basket are not luxury items but basic, essential goods or savers options from Lidl. That is the reality for people on the front line who face the cost of living crisis. Nationally, soaring prices for food and drink were the biggest driver of the latest inflation rise of 10.1 per cent. There has been an annual rise of almost 15 per cent in the price of bread, cereals, meat, milk, cheese and eggs. That is the fastest annual jump since April 1980—it is quite staggering.

It is not right to say that the cost of living crisis is solely the responsibility of the Conservative Government. We all know that Putin and the knock-on effects of the pandemic are significant

reasons for the increases, and we also know that United States interest rates are a factor, but it is also wrong to say that the Conservative Government has not made the crisis a whole lot deeper. It chose to make Liz Truss Prime Minister and ignored the warnings from Rishi Sunak about her economic plans and the impact on mortgage costs. The damage that her mini-budget caused cannot simply be reversed.

Those mortgage agreements will not be renegotiated, the increased cost of Government borrowing will not be recouped, and the steps taken to recover the economic reputation of the Government are set to be incredibly harsh.

The failure to act timeously with an energy package earlier on this year when it was announced that the energy prices were to be increased caused immense anxiety for those who were already struggling to pay their energy bills. Refusing to introduce a comprehensive energy package of measures to cover off-grid fuel users in rural areas leaves them in dire straits; £100 for off-grid oil users is simply an insult. By refusing to guarantee that benefits will rise with inflation, this Government is contemplating inflicting an even harsher, darker, colder winter on some of the most vulnerable people in this country.

Bob Doris: Should the UK Government also be guaranteeing that, in its 17 November budget, it does not rip money away from this place’s budget so that we can do all that we can to support those who are most vulnerable in households right across Scotland during the cost of living crisis?

Willie Rennie: I do not think that I would disagree with that, but it is not all about this place. There is so much that needs to be done across the United Kingdom. The safety and security that the United Kingdom provides is essential and that is why the lack of guarantees when the pension triple-lock is coming under threat is incredible.

I want to see action on benefits, on pensions, and on supporting rural energy users. I also want to see action to make sure that we drive down inflation, the cost of borrowing and the cost of mortgages.

There is one specific thing, in addition, that I want to see. It is in relation to the carers allowance. An increase of 3.1 per cent is simply not enough. That increase means only 30p extra a day. With a rise in inflation of 10 per cent, that means that the carers allowance is now 6.4 per cent lower in real terms compared with last year.

We need to take action across the UK to help people who are vulnerable at this incredibly difficult time. We will support Labour’s motion and the measures that are proposed within it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before calling the first speaker in the open debate, I make a plea to all members to ensure that they have pressed their request-to-speak buttons if they are seeking to speak in the debate.

16:22

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The cost of living crisis is having a massive impact on people's lives. Mortgages are rocketing and inflation is massively increasing people's food costs and it is those on the lowest incomes who are hit the hardest.

In Edinburgh, around six in 10 people say they fear that they will not be able to pay their energy bills; four out of 10 are worried that they will not be able to afford their rent or mortgage; up to a quarter fear that they could be made homeless; and up to 30 per cent say that they might have to resort to food banks.

A couple of days ago, Homeless Project Scotland shared a picture that really brought home the shocking reality that many of our constituents will be facing this winter. It is a picture of people standing in the cold waiting to receive a hot soup, sandwiches, and a coffee. Homeless Project Scotland said:

"We need a building to bring people indoors this winter. Glasgow City Council, Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish Government: you have the power to help."

However, the problem is that our Governments are failing people. In Scotland, we have a Government that avoids responsibility and action, driven by its independence obsession—as we have heard today—and in the UK, our third Tory Prime Minister this year is leading the party that caused the chaos that is now hitting people and damaging our economy.

SNP and Green MSPs will say that their hands are tied because Scotland is not independent. However, as we debate the need for action, I am disappointed and angry about the lack of forward thinking and the lack of priority given to insulating our homes and building community heat and power networks. That would have given our communities more investment and more protection from the cost of living crisis that we are now in—15 years in power and none of the political leadership to deliver the warm, energy-efficient, low-carbon homes that we desperately need across Scotland.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, I am very short of time.

We need action now. Labour-led City of Edinburgh Council is proposing to use libraries and community centres this winter as spaces

where people can come together and stay warm during the difficult months ahead. We need out-of-the-box thinking.

Many organisations in our arts and culture sector are now on the brink of collapse, so the Scottish Government must explore creative solutions and utilise our cultural spaces to provide multiple benefits for our communities. I have spoken to many arts and culture organisations, and the general consensus is that there is a gap between what is said about the value of culture and the action required to support the sector now. As a result of Covid, people became isolated and were unable to access culture. As we build Covid recovery this winter, there are still people who are nervous about going to venues and people who cannot afford to access them. Those who work in the culture sector need support now.

Trade union Equity is clear that people are leaving the sector as a result of precarious employment and low salaries. Scotland's Workshops said:

"Many of our staff are finding that they are deeply affected by cost of living increases, with sub average (£26,000) salaries common in the sector and many people working part time hours."

Another quotation is that:

"27% of creative workers aged under 25 left creative occupations after lockdown in 2020, compared with 14% of workers aged 25 and over."

If that continues, it will be catastrophic for Scotland's culture, with the impact cutting across generations to come, affecting our tourism, our incomes, our economy, our communities and who we are. Therefore, we need action—not just in the culture sector but right across the public and private sectors, to give people decent work, decent salaries and an end to precarious and short-term employment.

In the previous debate, Paul O'Kane spoke powerfully about the need for fair pay for our carers. Yesterday, I joined posties in the Communication Workers Union who were protesting against the 2 per cent—2 per cent—pay rise that they are expected to live on. It is not acceptable. We have a cost of living crisis. People need support now, not warm words for our Government. That is why this debate is so important.

16:26

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Seven weeks ago, Liz Truss was ready to become Prime Minister. She was backed, overwhelmingly, by the Tory party membership, and who can forget the Scottish Tory party graphic that was shared by many of the Tory MSPs sitting just over there: "In Liz we Truss." That went well, did it not?

The disastrous impact of the mini-budget cannot be overstated. The pound is at an all-time low, inflation is soaring, pension funds have had to be bailed out, future interest rate projections have trebled and mortgage offers have been withdrawn overnight. Faulty economics and a party that cannot promise an ounce of stability have sent mortgage rates through the roof and hard-working families deeper into poverty. The impact of Brexit on the cost of living crisis also cannot go unnoticed. Soaring prices and labour shortages are consequences of a decision that we in Scotland did not make.

The Resolution Foundation has estimated that there will be an £870 cost of living increase due to the currency fluctuations. Food costs have risen by 6 per cent. Ireland's Economic and Social Research Institute reported that trade from the UK to the EU fell by 16 per cent in 2021. Peter Norris, the Virgin Group chair and co-convenor of the Brexit monitoring group, the UK Trade and Business Commission, said that

"recovering lost trade with Europe should be a top priority"

as the country enters a recession.

This is a Labour debate. Unbelievably, Keir Starmer, in his own words, wants to "make Brexit work". Brexit does not work and it will not work. There are no Brexit opportunities. I will give any Labour MSP who wants to stand up and give me one benefit of Brexit a chance to do so.

I did not think that anybody would stand up. Brexit impacts on the costs and the viability of businesses and, as we enter recession, it is adding to business worries.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I only have four minutes and I am conscious of the time. [*Laughter.*] I only have four minutes.

We need to rejoin the EU at the earliest opportunity. The only way to do that is through independence. People would expect an anti-EU stance from the Tories, but from Labour and the Lib Dems—really? Many times, we have heard Willie Rennie stand up and support the EU, but now he does not do that because he cannot.

Over the past couple of months, up and down East Lothian, I have met businesses that are suffering from rising energy prices and Brexit. My office carried out an extensive survey over the past four months. Of the businesses that I have spoken to, more than a third are considering having to make redundancies, more than half said that the situation has affected their training plans, and three quarters said that rising energy costs are affecting the viability of their business.

A similar picture is being painted by my constituents. Many families were already struggling to get by on stagnant incomes, but a poll that was conducted this month found that 72 per cent of East Lothian residents fear being unable to pay their energy bills. To put that in context, it represents 70,000 people. Some 43 per cent fear being unable to pay their rent or mortgage, and a quarter are worried about homelessness. In August, East Lothian Foodbank reported that the number of people who are using a county charity to help to put food on the table has jumped by 77 per cent compared with last year.

Whether in regard to heating homes or ensuring that people have enough to eat, the UK Government is failing. That is the price of a broken UK financial system. Rishi Sunak called the mini-budget "a mistake", and although he called it out during the Tory leadership campaign, the Liz Truss Cabinet endorsed the moves. Indeed, we heard choruses of Tory MSPs—including Liz Smith, who is in the chamber just now—demand that the Scottish Government follow the Tory party tax cuts. Imagine if John Swinney had listened to those demands.

All of that has been imposed by a Government that we did not vote for. Surely Labour agrees that to take democratic decisions here in Scotland is our only hope—decisions that are made by the people of Scotland for the people of Scotland.

16:30

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)

(Con): This is an important debate as many of our constituents are facing a winter of worry and concern. Bills are going up, food prices are increasing and interest rates are on the rise. I am contacted every day by people who are looking for help and assistance. The UK Government has been quick to offer support, including by helping with energy bills for the most vulnerable, placing a cap on energy prices until April next year and cutting national insurance contributions, and I am sure that more support will be offered as the crisis develops.

The war in Ukraine has pushed up energy prices and also the prices of many everyday commodities, which has pushed inflation to higher levels than we have seen in many years. It was reported just yesterday by the Office for National Statistics that, as Willie Rennie mentioned, many of our everyday food prices are increasing at an eye-watering rate.

Ross Greer: I absolutely acknowledge the impact that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has had on the global economy. I just wonder whether Mr Lumsden has any idea why the UK has the

highest inflation rate of any advanced economy on earth.

Douglas Lumsden: If Mr Greer looks into the matter further, he will see that the inflation rates and interest rates in Germany are just as high as those in the UK. Surely that cannot be blamed on a Conservative Government.

The problems that we are facing are not unique. They are being faced by countries across the globe, and our UK Government will address them in the best interests of us all. That is the difference between our two Governments. We have one Government that is helping people and another that tries to use every opportunity to repeat its nationalist call for separation. It wants to act in its own self-interest, rather than in the people's interest, by constantly talking about independence as the answer to all and any woes. The last thing that our nation needs is further instability, and a hard border with our closest and largest trading partner would give us just that. It is a disgrace that this devolved Government continually bangs that drum rather than focusing on the day job of bringing economic growth to this country.

It is the UK Government that is pushing ahead with free ports that will bring economic growth to our communities; with levelling up, which even SNP councils have welcomed; and with investment zones that will bring benefits for businesses that want to grow, develop and provide employment in our cities. The SNP Government is so full of grievance politics that it is failing to propose any policies that will actually deliver economic growth in this country.

The UK Government is providing a £650 cost of living payment for every household on means-tested benefits, a £300 extra cost of living payment to pensioners who are in receipt of the winter fuel payment, a £300 extra disability cost of living payment, a £400 cash grant to every household for energy via energy suppliers, a national insurance cut that will save 2.3 million Scots an average of £285 a year, and the list goes on. The UK Government is putting money back into the people's pockets when they need it most.

The SNP Government will tell us that it has no money even though it has the biggest core settlement ever. However, setting a budget is, of course, about priorities. The SNP has plenty of money for the things that it really cares about: a couple of hundred thousand pounds for a court case to push a divisive referendum and £20 million in the coffers for the pretend referendum itself.

The people of Scotland need both Governments to work together to tackle the crisis. We need a laser focus on how we help vulnerable families and communities and grow our economy.

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

Douglas Lumsden: What we do not need is the SNP-Green coalition of chaos's constant focus on division—

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

Douglas Lumsden: —or a break-up of the United Kingdom that would cause untold economic harm and SNP austerity like we have never witnessed before.

Bob Doris: Can the member hear me?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is not giving way. He has 10 seconds left.

Douglas Lumsden: The SNP has no plan on the Scottish economy except independence. It has no credibility in this area and no idea how economic stability would be achieved.

In closing, Presiding Officer, I again point to the assistance that has been given by our UK Government to Scots during this crisis, with more promised over the winter. Some £1,650 will be provided to the most vulnerable in our society. That will be delivered because we are part of the United Kingdom, with the resources and economic ability—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden, you need to conclude.

Douglas Lumsden: —to provide that kind of support. We hope that both Governments—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden, please conclude.

Douglas Lumsden: —will work together to tackle the crisis, because—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Paul Sweeney, who will be followed by Ross Greer. You have up to four minutes, Mr Sweeney.

16:35

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): As others have said and as we all know, we are in the midst of a cost of living crisis that affects us all. People and families who would ordinarily class themselves as comfortable or getting by face economic hardship for the first time. In eight out of the 14 years since 2009, real-terms wages have fallen in this country, and next year will almost certainly join that list. That represents an unprecedented long-term decline in living standards. The crisis is now of an equivalent scale to the Covid pandemic and we need a response that is similar to, if not greater than, the response that we saw to that.

Of course, the problems are not helped by the on-going drama at Westminster as the Tory party implodes daily, damaging the economy and the finances of families across the country as it goes.

The impact of bad policy over a decade has been compounded in recent months. The pound is now at its lowest value against the dollar since its exchange rate was freely floated in 1971; the costs of the mortgage deals that we are tied into are increasing due to a Tory incompetence premium; and the certainty that the two-year energy price guarantee once provided has been eroded as the policy was reduced to just six months, because of Tory indecision and incompetence.

That indecision and incompetence was on show again this morning as the delayed fiscal statement, which was due on the 31st of this month, was delayed once again until 17 November. What do the Tories not understand about the impact of their indecision on financial markets and the knock-on impact on people's household finances? Why do they not realise that it is not some parlour game for millionaires? When will they realise that more of the same austerity economics simply does not work?

The richest man ever to sit in the House of Commons has been crowned as Prime Minister. No one apart from Tory MPs voted for him. He has no mandate and, right now, he has no plan. I find it utterly absurd that the Tories believe that someone with such vast personal wealth—whose family uses non-domiciled tax status and who does not know how to pay for his petrol—could identify or sympathise with the challenges that face working families across the country.

The answer is not more of the same. The answer is that we need a change—the kind of change that comes only with a general election and the election of a progressive Labour Government that has compassion and a clear understanding of what is needed to restore our national prosperity. I accept that we are unlikely to see that soon. After all, we all know that turkeys do not vote for an early Christmas. It is for that exact reason that we need to see more action from the Scottish Government.

I accept that there is an uncertain financial position, that the economic situation that faces Scotland is far from perfect and that the uncertainty and Tory dysfunction mean that the Scottish Government's job is made ever harder. However, none of that is an excuse for failing to do more to help Scots today. In this Parliament, we can take tangible measures that will improve people's lives, particularly around targeting support to those who are most in need and addressing our underlying inability to defend against the inflationary effects in our economy that are due to our historically poor productivity.

Indeed, the decline in our trading competitiveness represents a hit to real incomes. Raising real incomes to offset that requires a

productivity increase. It is as simple as that, and that is much more important than growth. Raising nominal incomes without productivity improvements will simply fuel more inflation. Sarah Boyack made the important point that investment and efficiency are key to the solution. We must stop the vicious cycle of disinvestment that arises by justifying cuts, which simply lead to economic stagnation and falling living standards. The Government has done that for a decade and it has not worked.

The Labour motion sets out some potential solutions, and I urge the Government to see the proposals for what they are—constructive ways to improve people's lives and ensure that families can make it through the winter and that no one is left behind. We are in unprecedented times and they require unprecedented action and a sense of urgency. Fundamentally, we need to put fairness at the heart of our response. I have absolutely no faith that the Tories are capable of such fairness, and history proves that they are not. That is why, for the good of our country, we need a general election now.

16:39

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I am grateful to the Labour Party for giving us this opportunity to debate the stunning economic incompetence of the UK's Conservative Government and the damage that it has done to people and businesses across Scotland.

The UK is experiencing a rate of inflation that is higher than that of any other advanced economy, as I said a few moments ago. A range of drivers are behind that, and most of them are entirely self-inflicted by the UK Government. At the very least, they were entirely avoidable.

One of the biggest drivers is the rising cost of food. It is something that most countries are experiencing, but the situation is far worse in the UK than it is elsewhere. The reason for that is simple: Brexit. We import just under half of our food, and most of the imports come from the European Union. Liz Truss might have made the situation dramatically worse in a remarkably short period of time, but much of the problem pre-dates her time, and even Boris Johnson's time, in Downing Street.

The crisis has been caused by the actions of consecutive Conservative Administrations, but we should not for a second minimise the impact of Truss's disastrous mini-budget. The numbers vary, given on-going market instability, but the most recent figure that I have seen for UK annual debt interest payments was £10 billion. That is a huge increase as a result of that self-inflicted reputational damage.

As we have already heard this afternoon, the Tories lean heavily on the instability of the global economy and the effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in order that they can claim that what is now happening is simply outwith their control. I will take energy prices as an example: it is a failure of domestic UK energy policy that the bills that households pay are subject to such poor regulation and are so vulnerable to global market shocks.

Daniel Johnson: Does Ross Greer agree that it is interesting that some economic commentators have pointed out that the rise in gilt yields across the world was precipitated by the UK, rather than the UK just being part of a global trend?

Ross Greer: I absolutely agree. The cost to the UK's reputation in the global financial market will be felt for years to come by exactly the potential trading partners that the Conservatives have been keen to talk up as being the post-Brexit future for global trading Britain.

To return to the example of the price of energy and the failure to regulate the market, I say that decoupling the cost of electricity that is generated by renewables from that which is generated by gas would have significantly protected consumers and would undoubtedly have sped up the transition away from fossil fuels.

A long-term serious effort to decarbonise our heat networks would have been even better. The UK is more than capable of self-sufficiency in electricity—Scotland already is, more or less. If, for the past decade, there had been investment in decarbonisation rather than cutting of capital budgets, that would have been to the benefit of families, our economy as a whole and our national energy security. The Scottish Government is now taking a much more ambitious approach, but it is hugely constrained by the lack of capital borrowing powers and by the 10 per cent cut to the capital budget that it receives from Westminster.

I welcome what I interpret as a shift in tone in the Labour motion. Mr Griffin and his colleagues normally come to the chamber demanding billions of pounds of additional spending—almost all of which I agree with in principle—but they have little by way of a track record when it comes to explaining how it would be funded, either through savings elsewhere or through tax rises.

The proposals that are included in today's motion are considerably more modest. As the MSP who first brought the issue of school meals debt into the public domain, I am happy to see other parties picking it up. However, given the scale of that debt, I am unclear why the Scottish Government, rather than councils themselves, should be responsible for cancelling it. Indeed, following our publication of the debt levels for

every council and further pressure from Aberlour, a number of councils, including Edinburgh, Moray and South Lanarkshire, have already cancelled the debts that are owed by families in their areas.

The expansion of family income maximisation services is another proposal that I strongly agree with, but it is one that the Scottish Government is already committed to and is progressing: the Bute house agreement commits to a £10 million expansion of those services. We all want that to happen as quickly as possible, but as the Deputy First Minister's statement earlier this month demonstrated, any increased spending this winter will mean a consequential cut somewhere else. It is hard to see where that money could come from without serious consequences.

I hope that Labour will take its ideas forward to the budget process and match them with saving or revenue-raising proposals, because I agree absolutely with its statement that tackling the cost of living crisis should be a priority for government at every level.

16:43

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): The Tory amendment tests the definition of "brass neck" by attempting to delete any reference to the economic vandalism of the Liz Truss mini-budget, which crashed the economy and led to the Bank of England having to buy Government bonds to prevent us from losing international borrowing that has been sustaining the UK economy for decades—all to prevent the economy from plummeting into a death spiral. Those are policies that the Tories here urged the Scottish Government to adopt.

As it is, the damage was done—interest rates zoomed to 10 per cent plus, and what was already a bad situation under the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, got worse. He refused to restore the additional £20 per week to universal credit: by the way, 38,000 veterans and 3,000 people who serve in the forces are on universal credit. He failed to commit to the triple lock on pensions and failed to ensure that benefits will rise with inflation. Today at Prime Minister's question time he refused again to do those things, although he claims that he will be compassionate. I am not holding my breath. I ask the Tories to write to the most recent Prime Minister to commit to the state pension triple lock, to upgrade benefits in line with inflation, to restore the £20 a week extra universal credit and, as a grand finale, to cap bankers bonuses. While they are cc-ing in the chancellor, I ask that they copy me in, too.

I turn to the Labour motion, which is, like the curate's egg, good in parts. For example, it

recognises the folly of and fall-out from Trussonomics. However, let us consider the calls in the motion for the Scottish Government to take further action. I asked Mark Griffin to provide costings for those actions, but he sidestepped my question.

The motion refers to many good things, including

“the cancellation of school meals debt”.

What funding would be required to action that? It also refers to

“increased funding for money advice services and a top up to the welfare fund”.

How much would those cost?

To those actions, we can add the legitimate calls for quite understandable wage increases across the public sector, including for staff in the health, police, justice and education sectors, to meet the 10 per cent plus inflation rate. Those calls are a result of the catastrophic rise in interest rates, fuel costs and food price inflation. Has that been costed?

Daniel Johnson rose—

Christine Grahame: No doubt, when Labour delivers its winding-up speech, the figures will be produced and it will state where the funding is to be taken from and whether that will be a recurring cost.

Unless I have missed something, the Scottish Government has a fixed budget—allocated when interest rates were around 5 per cent—extremely limited borrowing powers and limited taxation powers.

Daniel Johnson rose—

Christine Grahame: Labour can respond when it winds up.

The Labour Party simply cannot come here and, in order to mitigate Tory policies, make uncoded demands and mislead the public as to what can and cannot be done by the devolved Government without it plundering the existing and allocated budgets for our public services.

As the minister has already said, this Government has taken unprecedented steps to help the most vulnerable people. Those measures include the rent freeze, the Scottish child payment, free school meals for all children in primaries 1 to 5, free bus travel for under-22s and over-60s, free prescriptions and free personal care.

I am reminded of the wonderful Mark Drakeford’s reply to the Tory leader in the Senedd, in response to his criticisms of the state of the Welsh NHS. Addressing Mr Davies, Mr Drakeford, trembling with anger, said:

“It is shocking. It is absolutely shocking to me that you think that you can turn up here this afternoon, with the mess that your party has made of the budgets of this country, of the reputation of this country around the world, and that you promise those people that there will be more to come ... And you think you can turn up here this afternoon and claim some sort of moral high ground. What sort of world do you belong in?”—[*Record of Proceedings, Senedd Cymru/Welsh Parliament*, 18 October 2022.]

I could not have said it better myself.

I say the same to the Scottish Labour Party: what sort of world does it live in? Stop demanding that the Scottish Government clean up a Tory mess. What is it thinking? Mitigating Tory policies might be good enough for Labour, but it is not good enough for me or for Scotland.

16:47

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this debate in support of the amendment in the name of Jamie Halcro Johnston.

Along with my Conservative colleagues, I have been clear about the difficulties that the increasing cost of living has created for so many people. With the winter months quickly approaching, those difficulties are only becoming clearer.

The Labour motion speaks to the challenges that are a result of high inflation, and there is no doubt that, as is the case in many other countries, rising food and energy prices are taking their toll.

Although fuel prices at the pumps are, thankfully, well down from their summer peak due to the 5p cut in fuel duty, they remain at 15 per cent higher than they were a year ago.

As far as this year is concerned, the UK Government has taken action in response to the rising cost of living. Notably, we have seen a package of financial support that is worth more than £37 billion, which includes support for every household in the United Kingdom. That is worth more than £1,600 to some of the most deprived households.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Alexander Stewart: I have a lot to cover in a short time.

Those households include many older people on pension credit, who will also benefit. Those individuals will be as concerned as anyone is about their heating bills over the coming months, which is why I welcome the energy price guarantee, which will ensure that energy bills will not exceed £2,500 for an average household. The support is guaranteed until April 2023. We know that targeted support is still to be delivered in the

new financial year. That targeted support is crucial.

Going forward, it is important that the most vulnerable people remain protected from significant energy price rises, while it is ensured that value is maintained for the taxpayer as part of a sustainable budget. However, how the UK Government decides to tackle the cost of living crisis will depend on there being a strong economy to support it.

Economic stability is therefore the key to tackling the crisis. I know that the new Prime Minister has set some priorities and made promises today, and I look forward to him continuing to do that. I can assure members that for Conservative members and for me, that will be the priority.

The scale of the current crisis means that both the Scottish and the United Kingdom Governments must tackle it. The Scottish Government has at its disposal levers of power to create approaches and to tackle issues. That can include measures such as increasing the single-person council tax discount to 35 per cent, which we have called for previously.

Among other areas that we have looked at is financial assistance such as the school clothing grant, which is being received by everyone who is eligible. That grant can be a great help and asset to families who are reaching out for support for school, but we have found that only five of the 32 local authorities carry over the funding into the next school year. That support needs to be looked at, so that we do not have the apparent postcode lotteries that have developed across Scotland.

We have already seen urgent action to address the cost of living crisis, but it is clear that further steps will be needed in order to provide long-term sustainability and security for households across the country.

As we have heard, in the winter months the Scottish public will quite rightly expect both their Governments to work together effectively in consultation to produce bold actions to protect the most vulnerable people in this crisis. The cost of living crisis will continue to have a massive impact on our constituents and our communities. It is up to both Governments, and it is up to us in this chamber and in other places, to work together to secure that goal for the communities that we represent.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Stephanie Callaghan will be the last speaker in the open debate.

16:51

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): This debate is a welcome opportunity to speak about the gravity of the cost of living crisis. We have heard about its heartbreaking impact on Scotland's people.

I join colleagues in condemning the disastrous mini-budget. However, there has been no time to celebrate its reversal, with the imminent prospect of austerity 2.0 being forced upon us as the alternative. The very last thing that Scotland needs is another Tory Prime Minister who we did not vote for, let alone one who is an austerity-driven Brexiteer intent on squeezing the wages and benefits of working people while slashing taxes and bonus caps for the wealthy. After a decade of Tory cuts and Brexit damage, the UK already had the biggest and fastest-ever increase in millionaire and billionaire wealth. Yet the UK is still choosing finance over industry, austerity over investment and a closed economy over openness to the world. Over the years, a rentier economy has been established, in which the accumulation of key assets, such as housing and energy ownership, is extracting wealth from ordinary people.

Now we have seen the most basic supermarket items rocketing in price—some by two thirds. The reality for many is that this is escalating to a cost of surviving crisis. As many saw on Channel 4 last night, the struggle to put food on the table seems to be driving a 21 per cent increase in shoplifting; it is mostly down to first-time offenders, such as parents who need essentials for their children. People are desperate. Small businesses are selling essentials on tick. Food banks are reporting a tenfold increase in first-time users. Energy suppliers are reportedly refusing to take on new customers. People are living in freezing temperatures when prepayment meters run out. Where will this end? That is the reality for so many people as we prepare for a winter like no other.

Like others here, I am gobsmacked by the Tory party amendment, which frames the crisis as a global issue and applauds the UK Government for its inadequate support while it takes no responsibility whatsoever.

Even the energy price cap, which is now cut short, leaving households in unimaginable uncertainty from April 2023, is another enormous transfer of money from the public purse, this time to private oil and gas companies, further exacerbating wealth inequality in the name of profit. There is a reason why the crisis is so much worse here in the UK. We are a poor country with some very rich people and a Tory party governing in their interest.

Cutting UK budgets for public services that have been brought to their knees since 2010 will mean

more jobs lost, wages falling, inflation rising further and the loss of the most basic living standards. If cuts to education, healthcare and more are coming down the line, the Barnett consequentials will affect us here.

We in the Scottish Parliament have a duty to come together and oppose those cruel UK policies, as well as to press the Scottish Government to continue to mitigate as much of the damage as possible. Our priority must remain putting money into the pockets of those at the bottom end of the income scale and supporting families who are struggling the most, but that can be done only within our fixed budget. Others have detailed the £3 billion that has been allocated to support households, £1 billion of which is available only in Scotland. Even the harshest critics of the Scottish Government are commending those efforts.

I join colleagues in urging the UK Government to step up and to rule out austerity, create a windfall tax, reinstate the pension triple lock, raise benefits in line with inflation and uplift this year's Scottish budget in line with inflation. Generally, I urge the UK Government to find an ounce of compassion and end its callous threats to our basic rights and freedoms. Scotland did not vote for this crisis, Scotland can do better and Scotland needs independence like never before.

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

16:56

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Two members have reminded us that it is just six weeks since we debated the Parliament's deep-seated concern about the cost of living challenge that faces both Scotland's Governments. That concern is not just about addressing the significant economic problems that we are grappling with as a result of rampant inflation; just as importantly, it is about the resulting social and personal cost in our communities. This afternoon, we have heard that concern amplified and re-emphasised.

We have also been reminded that an awful lot has happened in that time. We have had two Prime Ministers, three Chancellors of the Exchequer and an uncoded mini-budget that has served only to increase the concerns. As Mr Halcro Johnston said, my party has to acknowledge and take responsibility for the fact that those events increased instability and uncertainty, and put at risk the UK's financial credibility on the markets.

That said, we should not forget that the largest and most expensive part of the mini-budget that was announced on 23 September was the package of direct support to help families and

businesses with their energy bills, which was on top of the measures that had previously been put in place. I hope that the other parties in the Parliament, despite their justified criticism, will accept that that part of the mini-budget was warmly welcomed by the public and by businesses across Scotland, many of which have been on the brink, and which matter so much to our economic recovery. The package was also welcomed by all the political parties in this chamber.

Daniel Johnson: I thank Liz Smith for her candour, which is important. Does she acknowledge that the support package to which she is pointing is in doubt? The commentary is that it is under review, and we are yet to see whether it will come through. She is absolutely right that there is a cost of living emergency for people and for businesses.

Liz Smith: It is clear that the already high level of pandemic-style support is not enough. The very new Prime Minister and the new chancellor have said today that they are looking specifically at what has to be done to target support more at those who are most in need. That is a critical difference between the Government that is now in place and Liz Truss's Government. It is important that support is directed at those who are most in need.

People are complaining about the fact that the budget has been put back to 17 November, but it is vital that we get the right data this time. The critical problem with the mini-budget was not the principles behind it—I may say that I fully support those—but the fact that it was uncoded and did not have the credibility of Office for Budget Responsibility statistics or of costings for the borrowing. That is what went wrong and what spooked the markets. Mr Johnson makes a good point, but it is critical that we understand that what did not happen but should have happened, which led to mistakes, has to happen now so that the approach is properly evidenced. I urge all members to accept that circumstance.

It is true that many commentators and economic analysts have said that the central analysis of the mini-budget—namely, that the UK economy has been, for far too long, very reliant on cheap money and not sufficiently focused on improving productivity and economic growth—was not wrong. Mr Johnson and I sit on the Finance and Public Administration Committee, so we know how true that is from the statistics that the Scottish Fiscal Commission sends us in its evidence. At the weekend, Mervyn King was firm in saying that too many countries across the world have endured a very damaging period of interest rates being far too low for too long, with the increase in the supply of money chasing too few goods. That is one of the international problems that Mr Rennie spoke

about, and it has meant that there have been inflationary pressures right across the world.

Paul Sweeney: Will the member take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Smith is about to conclude her remarks.

Liz Smith: We must accept that there is a very important international dimension to the situation. I am very happy to support the amendment in the name of Jamie Halcro Johnston.

17:01

Tom Arthur: I thank colleagues who have made constructive contributions. I recognise at the outset that we face a unique combination of global circumstances: Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine; the energy shock that that created, with inflation feeding through from that; and the end of an era of cheap money, with central banks across the globe beginning to tighten monetary policy.

However, that was all clearly understood when Liz Truss became Prime Minister. It is staggering to think that, in that context, with that set of circumstances and those prevailing economic headwinds, the decision was taken to proceed in such a reckless and uncostered way with what I can describe only as a crackpot libertarian experiment and discredited economics. That decision has had material consequences, because the energy support for households, which had originally been guaranteed for two years, is now to come to an end in April. That has created greater inflationary pressures, has further reduced aggregate demand and has increased the risk of an extended recession.

The reality is that we find ourselves in a situation in which all the mood music that is coming from the UK Government suggests that there will be another round of austerity. That is a failed prescription. We cannot go back and make those mistakes again.

Stephanie Callaghan described the UK as a "poor country" with "very rich people". I think that it is well understood by most mainstream economists that the UK has a fairly average economy overall, with wealth concentrated in a particular part of the country and in a particular sector: financial services. That has been the prevailing model for decades, and we have to get beyond that.

Liz Smith: Will the minister take an intervention?

Tom Arthur: Paul Sweeney touched on the issue of long-term decline. The reality is that we cannot cut our way to increased productivity and increased growth. That requires investment, and it

is heartbreaking to think of the money that was squandered as a result of the mini-budget. Imagine what that resource could have achieved had it been deployed in relation to skills or net zero or, in the here and now, had it been targeted at the most vulnerable to assist them in getting through the winter. There has been a dereliction of duty by the UK Government.

Daniel Johnson: Will the minister take an intervention?

Tom Arthur: I will give way to Liz Smith and then to Daniel Johnson.

Liz Smith: I am not sure that I will take any lessons about squandering money, because, if the minister looks at the SNP Government's record, he might need to think again.

I am interested in whether the minister accepts that a lot of analysts across the world are very much focused on what has happened in lots of countries, including the UK, where we have persistently had a very low-growth and high-tax economy, which has caused lots of problems, including productivity problems. The minister knows exactly the difficulties that the Scottish Government faces in that regard. Does he accept that that analysis applies internationally and not just to the UK?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are now at three minutes 30, minister.

Tom Arthur: I recognise the point that Liz Smith is making. I will take Daniel Johnson's intervention and respond to both members in summing up.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It will have to be a very brief intervention, Mr Johnson.

Daniel Johnson: Does the minister acknowledge that Scotland's productivity has stalled since 2015, reversing the trend for our productivity gap, which had been narrowing for decades until that point? Is that not worth looking at?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to wind up now, minister.

Tom Arthur: Both members recognise that there is a broader trend. The route out of that trend is through investment.

It is paramount that, when we have the autumn statement on 17 November—presuming that it remains on 17 November—it absolutely must not be a return to austerity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Daniel Johnson to wind up on behalf of Scottish Labour for up to five minutes.

17:05

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): “Mistakes were made.” I will return to that phrase in a few moments.

Let us remember the context of the past week. As Tom Arthur has pointed out, the world economy was recovering from a global pandemic the like of which we had not seen for 100 years. We had just withdrawn from a deeply integrated political and economic union, introducing borders that, despite the claims about electronic means to get around them, brought new complexity. On top of that, the invasion of Ukraine has sent grain and oil prices around the world soaring. Against that context, the UK Government decided to embark on a reckless project of what can be described only as discredited Reaganomics: borrowing in order to fund tax cuts; announcing £45 billion for—as Liz Smith graciously and astutely observed—an uncosted budget; prioritising tax cuts for bankers and millionaires; and reducing the top rate of tax.

What were the consequences? We have already heard from Paul McLennan and others about the plummeting pound; it is more fundamental that gilts jumped in a single day by the biggest amount since black Wednesday. That is the historical comparison, but the difference is that black Wednesday happened as a result of other global economic trends, whereas what happened seven weeks ago was a direct result of decisions that the UK Government actively made.

I have to say that I found today’s debate slightly bizarre. In some ways, we have been having three parallel debates. If we were to listen to most speakers from the Conservative benches, bar the last one, we would think that the crisis had nothing to do with them—that it was just global calamity and nothing to do with that uncosted budget.

To say that mistakes were made is one of the biggest understatements that I have heard in politics in my lifetime—almost as big as describing the UK Government’s budget as a “mini-budget”. The truth is that that mini-budget led to a major economic catastrophe.

There is much on which I agree with Mr Arthur. Indeed, he summarised quite well that context, which has placed huge pressure on the Government and its decisions. However, let us be clear that, in the circumstances, we need honesty and straightforwardness. To describe the Scottish Government’s response to the cost of living emergency as a £3 billion package when the Scottish Parliament information centre itself can identify only £490 million-worth of additional spending, apart from anything, detracts from the measures that the Scottish Government introduced, such as the extension of free school meals and the increase in the Scottish child

payment. Using the figure of £3 billion undermines the Scottish Government’s own efforts. Of that £3 billion, the funding for 1,140 hours of free childcare is the biggest single item—and one cannot describe a policy that was first proposed in 2014 as being a response to the cost of living emergency. That is nonsense.

Tom Arthur: Will the member give way?

Daniel Johnson: In a moment.

If there is a lesson to be learned from both the calamities and the mistakes that the Conservatives made in the UK, it is that we need straightforwardness, honesty and clarity of planning. The Scottish Government should think carefully about those lessons when it presents its plans.

Tom Arthur: The point that I am making, and that my colleagues have made, is that that package is support for households. The reality is that £3 billion had to be authorised in the annual budget process—something that the Labour Party did not support. Does the member recognise that it is money from the Scottish Government, in a budget passed by Parliament, that will support households across Scotland?

Daniel Johnson: My point is that using the figure of £3 billion detracts from the good that those pre-existing policies and the new ones might have done. It is a bit like describing the work that the doctors in A and E undertake as an emergency response to a person who has just broken their leg, when what that person actually needs is an ambulance to be sent out. The ambulance is the additional bit—it is the emergency response, not the stuff that is already being done. Frankly, using the £3 billion figure in that way is dishonest politics.

I turn to the speeches of other members. Willie Rennie was absolutely right to frame the issue in the context of the broad range of costs that are going up. A number of people who are not expecting it will find themselves in crisis.

I have noticed the time, so I will rush through this point. The cost of doing business is absolutely part of the cost of living emergency. Earlier today, I spoke to businesses that face a sixfold increase in their energy bills.

In summary, we need an emergency response. I do not have time to go through the detail that I would like to provide for Christine Grahame, but we have published costings for our proposals. In next year’s budget and the one for the year after, the Government is planning to carry forward budget from the previous year into the next one. The proposals that we have outlined today would cost around £20 million; we published others in the summer.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):
Could you conclude, please?

Daniel Johnson: That is well within the envelope of what the Scottish Government could do if it chose to engage and look at what it has in front of it and the flexibilities that it might have in its own budget.

Suicide Prevention

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):
The next item of business is a statement by Kevin Stewart on the suicide prevention strategy and action plan. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

17:12

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): It is important that I start with a simple truth. Every suicide is a tragedy that has profound and lasting effects on people's lives. It is imperative that Governments set a clear course to reduce suicide and to ensure that anyone who is affected by suicide is able to get the help that they need.

Today, I am happy to say that, a few weeks ago, we launched a document that I believe does just that—the new 10-year suicide prevention strategy from the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, “Creating Hope Together: Scotland’s Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022-2032”.

The work around time, space and compassion for people in suicidal crisis has emerged over the past few years, and it now forms a key foundation of our new strategy and action plan. We understand that we also need to embed those principles right across our work to build compassionate communities and services.

I must acknowledge that although we launched the strategy and the associated three-year action plan last month, the impact of the national period of mourning on parliamentary business meant that this statement could not be made until today. However, I am pleased that I am now able to make it, because key to the strategy is an ambition for everyone to work together to prevent suicide.

Members across the chamber know the devastating impact that any death by suicide has on families, on friends and on communities. Although the number of people who take their lives has, thankfully, reduced in each of the past two years, we know that there is still much to do to reduce suicide deaths in Scotland.

Our aim is for any child, young person or adult who has thoughts of taking their own life, or who is affected by suicide, to get the help that they need and to feel a sense of hope.

Our approach needs to be rooted in the three principles of time, space and compassion. That must be the case across Government, across party lines and across all sectors and communities. To put it simply, we all must do

everything that we can to reduce death by suicide in Scotland.

I would like to thank everyone involved in shaping the strategy, including members in the chamber today, for the way in which they have positively engaged and supported the work.

We have called our new strategy “Creating Hope Together”. That is absolutely what we need to do to deliver our vision of reducing suicide deaths in Scotland. We are backing the strategy by doubling annual funding for suicide prevention to £2.8 million by 2025-26.

We know that if we are to deliver our vision, we must build on our successes to date, particularly the way in which our approaches have been shaped by evidence of what works and the views of those with lived experience, including the national suicide prevention leadership group, which has been recognised for its work by the World Health Organization. I would like to take this opportunity to again thank the lived experience panel and all those involved in the leadership group for their work.

Our new strategy continues to drive forward key actions from “Every Life Matters”, our previous action plan. That includes our vital work to reduce stigma and grow public awareness of suicide and its prevention; to embed time, space and compassion into the responses that people receive when they are suicidal, both within services and within their communities; and to support people bereaved by suicide.

Crucially, though, we also plan to step up our approach. The strategy and action plan set out a number of new approaches—again, guided by insights and evidence. I would like to highlight a few of them.

First, the strategy seeks to support anyone affected by suicide, whatever their age or experience. That could be their own experience of suicidal thoughts, caring for someone close to them, or feeling affected by suicide more generally in our society. We know that we will succeed only by supporting everyone affected by suicide.

Secondly, we are taking a whole-of-Government-and-society approach to tackling the inequalities that contribute to suicide. Statistics tell us only too clearly that certain groups are at higher risk of suicide. Deprivation can be a key factor, so it is important that we seek to tackle the social determinants of suicide through policies such as reducing child poverty, tackling homelessness and funding debt advice. That is all the more important at a time when the cost of living crisis is impacting significantly on so many lives.

The third theme in the strategy is a strong focus on reaching and supporting people who are at

higher risk of suicide as early as we can. In this Parliament, we have recently reflected on the value of initiatives such as men’s sheds in promoting good mental health and reducing suicide risk. The strategy highlights our aim of taking a proactive approach to supporting other groups who may have a higher risk, such as people who are LGBTI or neurodivergent. We will work with people with lived and professional experience to understand more about how we can connect and support more marginalised groups. That includes how we can remove barriers and ensure that the responses that people receive are embodied by the principles of time, space and compassion and are culturally appropriate.

We also wish to focus on the different needs of population groups. For example, older adults and children and young people may have different needs and different types of responses that are suited to them.

We are taking a focused approach right across our work so that we have maximum effect in our overall aim to reduce suicide. The strategy prioritises settings such as prisons and locations of concern, particular communities and parts of the workforce where we feel our efforts can make the biggest difference.

We have a very solid baseline of understanding through our work in Scotland over the past two decades and our first-class academic research. Both have been fundamental in shaping the contents of the new strategy and the action plan. That research also reminds us of the importance of sensitive media reporting of suicide, and so that is another priority for action.

Evidence also tells us that it is crucial that people who are suicidal get the support that they need from services. We know that many people who die by suicide have had contact with statutory services—often health and social care services—leading up to their death. Through the strategy, we want to make sure that, whenever someone contacts services, they will be met with compassion and given the support that they need. That support should promote their wellbeing, protect against suicide and have a primary focus on recovery. Our work encompasses primary care, mental health and unscheduled care settings.

The final area that I will highlight is peer support. One of the strongest messages that we heard in developing the strategy was the value of people talking to others who have shared their experience of suicide. I have been fortunate to hear first-hand accounts of the value of peer support, both at the launch of the strategy and in the countless discussions that I have had with those with lived experience. Peer support clearly gives people a deep connection, which not only offers them personal support but can help create a path to

recovery. We will seek to embed peer support and recovery models for suicide prevention, working with key partners such as the Scottish Recovery Network.

In developing the strategy, we have both deepened existing relationships and created new ones. We must continue to nurture those relationships so that we can truly create hope together in our mission to prevent suicide. The strategy and action plan set out the plans of the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to realise our vision, working across sectors and bringing our local and national work together in a meaningful way.

I once again thank everyone who contributed to the development of the strategy and action plan across all our partners and stakeholders as well as members of all parties, including members who are in the chamber today. I thank you all for your efforts.

We all have our part to play in preventing suicide. I very much look forward to seeing the progress that we will make together as we create hope together and make a profound and lasting difference to people's lives.

The Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. I would be grateful if all members who wish to ask a question would press their request-to-speak button now.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I thank the minister for advance sight of the statement. I am sure that everyone in the chamber will be deeply concerned that Scotland has the highest suicide rate in the United Kingdom. Last year, 753 Scots took their own lives; that is 753 people who were not given the support that they needed.

I welcome the new suicide prevention strategy and action plan and, like the minister, thank every organisation, family and individual that contributed to its development. Every suicide is preventable, and we owe it to those who have lost their lives, and to their families, to make sure that Scotland's suicide prevention plan is the very best that it can be.

Although I welcome the doubling of annual funding for suicide prevention to £2.8 million by 2025-26, it does not matter how much money we spend on developing effective suicide prevention interventions when, ultimately, we know that the most significant barrier to improving mental health nationwide is the lack of well-trained clinicians. We may have mental health interventions that work—but we lack the workforce or infrastructure to deliver them.

A strong suicide prevention strategy requires us to intervene early. Samaritans Scotland said that the bar is still far too high for accessing support when facing a crisis. More sustainable investment in crisis support is required to promote and deliver 24-hour, open access, crisis support for those in distress and crisis. Does the minister agree that the prevention strategy needs to ensure that people are supported before they face such a crisis?

Kevin Stewart: First, I put on the record my thanks to Ms Webber for engaging with me and with the Government on the issue and helping us to create the strategy and action plan.

I agree that we need to do more to ensure that people do not reach crisis point. I disagree with Ms Webber on some of her points about the workforce, because we have the largest mental health workforce in these islands. However, we still need to do better—I do not disagree with that point.

We would all agree that some of the interventions that we need to make are not at the clinical or acute stage—they are in communities. That is why the Scottish Government is investing in our children's and adults' communities mental health and wellbeing funds, which are making a difference in communities across the country.

We also need not to rely only on clinical interventions. We must all do better in helping people when they are at crisis point. I know that there is an ambition, from all the parties that I have spoken to, that we get that right. I will continue to listen to the views of members from across the chamber so that we get those interventions right and, most important, I will continue to listen to the voices of people with lived and living experience, and I know that members across the chamber will do that, too.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): In my area of East Ayrshire, which has been highlighted as one of the places most affected by the issue, the key to successful intervention is to work with people early and have properly funded training, so that we can embed the concept of suicide prevention throughout every stage of care and treatment. Many professionals in primary care require further training to recognise those signs, and in doing so, they would bring down the backlog of people who are waiting for treatment, which is, of course, concerningly high. Given that it does not match previous investment in suicide strategies, I will ask the minister directly whether he really thinks that the annual funding of £2.8 million and a rebranding exercise will cover the training requirements and the work that we need to put in to make the strategy successful.

Kevin Stewart: The £2.8 million for suicide prevention is not the only money that we are spending on training and ensuring that we get this right. For example, the trauma training that is being delivered across the country is absolutely beneficial in getting all this right for people. I praise the trauma training champions in South Ayrshire who I met recently. They are making a huge impact, and the impact that some of the champions are making is changing how local authorities create and advance policy. That is important as we move forward.

We all need to get the issue right. We are not spending only that £2.8 million; there are other investments, including, as I said in answer to Ms Webber, the £15 million for the children's communities mental health and wellbeing fund and the £15 million for the adults' communities mental health and wellbeing fund. We must ensure that we do all that we can with the available resource.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I wrote to the minister on the day that the strategy was published to raise concerns about the collection of geographic information system mapping data for suicides. Many mental health organisations warn against publishing how and where suicides are completed, because it acts as a how-to on what the most successful route is to complete suicide, which is dangerous for anyone who is considering it. Can the minister reassure me and others that, if that data is collected, it will not be published or, for example, made available through a freedom of information request, to protect the public?

Kevin Stewart: I know the interest that Emma Roddick has in the topic, and I will respond in more depth in writing on some of those issues. We will continue to approach our work on locations of concern with the utmost care. I give the assurance that our work will always be designed to safeguard and support individuals who are at risk and wider communities.

Any new data collection or intelligence on locations of concern is sensitive, and therefore the sharing of such data will be very limited to key partners and will not be put in the public domain. We will also take action to support responsible media reporting as we are very conscious of the risks that are associated with reporting on suicide.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Early prevention is key to a robust strategy of suicide prevention. As a practising general practitioner, I refer people to mental health services all the time, but patients face a very long wait; many of them wait more than 18 weeks for treatment, which is in part due to staff vacancies. What steps will the minister take to increase staffing levels in mental health services?

Kevin Stewart: As I said in my response to Sue Webber, we have more staff in mental health services in Scotland than in other parts of the UK and we have invested heavily in mental health staffing during our time in office, but we will go further.

At the moment, we are looking at our mental health workforce strategy for the future, which will form an essential part of the mental health and wellbeing strategy that will be published in the spring of next year. However, it is not only about investment in clinical services, although we have to get that right too; we also need to look at more preventative spend. The Government is spending money on community services so that we can reach people at an early stage, before they hit crisis point. I am willing to share information with members on some of the impacts that that investment is making, and I encourage members to go and visit some of the projects that have benefited from community funds, because they are having an impact and are preventing people from reaching crisis point.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The minister is well aware of the on-going and long-term crisis in mental health services in NHS Tayside, which has led to two reports by Dr David Strang—the findings of the second one were described to me as the “worst in Scottish public life.” The conclusions of those reports led to ministers forming the independent oversight and assurance group on Tayside's mental health services. When will the Parliament see the final report of that group, and can the minister assure us that there will be a full debate, in Government time, on the content of that report to ensure that more lives are not needlessly lost to suicide in Tayside?

Kevin Stewart: I am well aware of the situation in Tayside. I have spent more time visiting Tayside than any other health board area, so that I can see for myself some of the difficulties that have been faced. I put the oversight group in place because I was not happy with some of the responses that we received from the Tayside partnership. The oversight group is due to report to me very soon, and after it does I am quite happy to have conversations with members about the findings. Mr Marra will probably ask for such a meeting anyway. Maybe we can provide a briefing for interested members after the report is published.

I assure the chamber that I recognise, without doubt, the seriousness of the Tayside situation and the fact that many patients and families feel that they have been failed. We will do better.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): First, I would like to express my sincerest condolences to any family that has lost a loved one to suicide.

Some great work is being undertaken in my constituency by organisations such as Chris's House and local football teams such as Bonnyrigg Rose that seek to address mental health issues and suicide prevention. Unfortunately, suicide rates in Midlothian—particularly for males—remain high, which is a great worry. What targeted help will be available for areas such as Midlothian? Will the minister join me in visiting those fantastic organisations in my constituency to see their work?

Kevin Stewart: I am always happy to visit organisations that are doing well for their areas and I am more than happy to visit Bonnyrigg Rose with Mr Beattie.

A key element in all this is the peer support element, which I mentioned in my statement. Such folk are often immense in providing that support. I think that men in particular feel more comfortable in certain environments, and football is doing extremely well in helping with these issues. For example, the changing room—extra time project, which is run by football clubs and the Scottish Association for Mental Health, is doing wonders, and I am sure that the same thing is happening at Bonnyrigg Rose.

I was absolutely delighted to attend a day of suicide prevention work at St Mirren last year. The club has been at the forefront of some of this work, and it has been immense to hear how well the work that it has been doing has been received by people.

Also on a football-related theme, the FC United to Prevent Suicide campaign is absolutely top-notch and I urge members to have a look at the work that FC United is doing.

The Presiding Officer: I am keen that we manage to include all members who have requested to ask a question, so I would appreciate short and concise responses and questions.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I very much welcome the strategy, as does my party. I draw members' attention to the last line of the vision that is outlined in the strategy, which references children and young people. That is important, because last month devastating statistics from Public Health Scotland revealed that one in four deaths of five to 24-year-olds was as a direct result of suicide. That is compared to just 1.2 per cent of those aged over 25. Even more shockingly, the report acknowledged that five to 24-year-olds were significantly less likely to have had contact with the healthcare service in the period before their death than people older than them. How will the additional funding in the strategy outlined today specifically give much needed help to our young people?

Kevin Stewart: I think that I outlined in my statement that there will be much more focus on certain areas, including much more focus on young people. We must get better at being able to discuss these issues and we must take cognisance of what young people can tell us. One of the reasons why we have established a young people with lived experience group is to guide not only the Government but others on where we are getting it right and where we are getting it wrong. Those young people will help us to shape what we need to do in order to change our responses and to change services. I am sure that, like me, members in the chamber will want to express their gratitude to those young people for coming forward and helping us with this work.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The Scottish mental illness stigma study commissioned by See Me Scotland found that stigma around mental illness remains pervasive in daily life. Stigma has been identified as a significant factor in suicide. With that in mind, how will the Scottish Government place greater emphasis on the impact of stigma in relation to mental health as part of its new suicide prevention strategy?

Kevin Stewart: The Scottish Government is providing £1 million of annual funding until 2026 for See Me Scotland's national campaign to stop mental health stigma and discrimination. We have given See Me Scotland the comfort of that year-on-year funding so that it can continue to build on the good work that it has already done. See Me Scotland carries out a huge amount of work, including work with employers on mentally healthy workplaces as well as FeelsFM, which is an app to help young people express themselves, and face-to-face work in communities right across Scotland.

Tomorrow, I will be attending See Me's 20th birthday celebrations in Glasgow and I take this opportunity to publicly thank the organisation for its hard work over the past two decades.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): How suicide is reported can make a huge difference to those left behind—not only grieving family members but others who might be impacted—and, on occasion, it can lead to suicide clusters. Does the minister agree that it is important that, when reported in the media, deaths from suicide are reported in a sensitive way without sensationalism? What discussions has the Scottish Government had with the National Union of Journalists and newspaper proprietors regarding their approach to reporting on suicide?

Kevin Stewart: I absolutely agree with Mr Gibson. We need sensitive reporting of suicide by the media in the printed press and across social media. Sensitive reporting is vital to protect bereaved families from further traumatising and

to avoid the increased risk of suicide in the wider community. Our action plan sets out our plans to work with the national and local media sectors to support responsible media coverage, and we will start to engage with everyone in the sector shortly on that important issue.

I am pleased to say that, in Scotland, the Samaritans are already working hard to support responsible media reporting of suicide and to publish guidelines for the sector. We look forward to building on that valuable work.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): Will the minister outline what will be put in place as a result of the strategy for those people who have made multiple attempts to take their lives, many of whom have complex trauma? How can we ensure that each of those crisis periods is taken seriously and treated without stigma?

Kevin Stewart: That is a really important question. In those circumstances, what we need to do for the most vulnerable people is ensure that we listen and then tailor services to meet their needs. When I talk about services, I am not just talking about mental health and wellbeing services. We need to take a completely different approach across services to get it right for individuals. That is the single most important thing that we need to do. It is one of the most complex things, but, by working together in that holistic way and creating a greater understanding of people's needs, we can do it.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Although the strategy makes a passing reference to rural issues, will Mr Stewart commit to a specific suicide prevention plan for farmers and gamekeepers? Will he support the British Association for Shooting and Conservation's proposal for a gamekeepers' task force to better understand the significant mental health challenges that that group of people face?

Kevin Stewart: As I explained earlier, we will look at different sectors. We recognise the fact that suicide is more prevalent in certain work groups, and a fair amount of work has been done on those issues by the likes of Support in Mind Scotland. My mind is not closed to any suggestion on those issues. I say to Mr Hoy and other colleagues that we do not want to fragment our approach too much. At the same time, I am more than willing to look at anything that we need to do to create better protections and safeguards for sectors, whatever they might be. I am happy to speak to Mr Hoy further on that issue, if he wants.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I recently met pupils from a school in Stirling who raised concerns about mental health provision for young people. Can the minister advise how the suicide prevention strategy and action plan will be rolled

out to ensure that young people in my constituency are supported?

Kevin Stewart: The new strategy will go further in supporting children and young people affected by suicide. We know that that group needs different approaches. As I said in my answer to Mr Cole-Hamilton, that is why we have established the youth advisory group—to help us to understand their needs in greater detail, so that we can develop effective responses, building on our existing work, such as the better tomorrow social media campaign, which ran earlier this year. The action plan sets out a range of specific work to support new approaches to prevent suicidal behaviour in children and young people. That work will focus on key settings, such as education, health and social care and youth work. We will work with partners to develop existing and new age-appropriate resources for inclusion in the school curriculum, which will build on the understanding of mental health, self-harm and suicide prevention. All that will be evidence informed.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. That concludes the ministerial statement.

Business Motion

17:45

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-06456, 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 1 November 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scotland's Humanitarian Response to the Ukraine Crisis

followed by Social Justice and Social Security Committee Debate: Robbing Peter to Pay Paul – Low Income and the Debt Trap

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 2 November 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Covid Recovery and Parliamentary Business; Finance and Economy

followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist 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 3 November 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Net Zero, Energy and Transport

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Progress

on the Automation and Take-up of Scottish Social Security Benefits

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Tuesday 8 November 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 9 November 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 10 November 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

followed by Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Debate: Inquiry into Alternative Pathways to Primary Care

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 31 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.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:45

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-06457, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Companies Act 2006 (Scottish public sector companies to be audited by the Auditor General for Scotland) (No. 2) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

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

Decision Time

17:45

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

I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Humza Yousaf is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-06437.1, in the name of Humza Yousaf, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06437, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on supporting the national health service in winter, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:46

Meeting suspended.

17:49

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Humza Yousaf is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane will fall.

The question is, that amendment S6M-06437.1, in the name of Humza Yousaf, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not get the app to connect, and I would have voted yes.

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

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I might or might not have been able to vote—I think that the app connected at the last second. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Gibson. I confirm that you had not voted, so we will ensure that that is recorded.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-06437.1, in the name of Humza Yousaf, is: For 62, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: As amendment S6M-06437.2, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, has fallen, the next question is, that motion S6M-06437, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on supporting the NHS in winter, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

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

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

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

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

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

Tess White: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not work. I would have voted no.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the vote on motion S6M-06437, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on supporting the NHS in winter, as amended, is: For 62, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament is deeply concerned about the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on the health of the people of Scotland and on the operation of the National Health Service; acknowledges that, as a result, Scotland's NHS and care services face deep pressures, with 884 patients with COVID-19 currently in hospital; recognises that, as a result of increases in inflation, the health budget is worth around £650 million less than in December 2021; notes that the £600 million Health and Social Care winter plan supports recruitment of 1,000 additional staff, and includes over £120 million to help health and social care partnerships expand care at home capacity; welcomes that, in the face of these challenges, the NHS has been steadily increasing activity levels; recognises the exceptional work of NHS staff through the pandemic and beyond, and that the NHS Agenda for Change pay offer would see the lowest paid staff in NHS Scotland getting an increase of over 11% and qualified nursing staff seeing an increase of up to 8.45%; further recognises that if the offer is accepted, an experienced porter will be paid up to £2,502 more than their counterparts in England and Wales; recognises that, similarly, an experienced paramedic and staff nurse will be paid up to £2,186 more than their counterparts in England and Wales, and understands that the £50 million investment in improving unscheduled care has addressing long waits as a key area of focus.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-06438.2, in the name of Tom Arthur, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06438, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on the cost of living, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the vote on amendment S6M-06438.2, in the name of Tom Arthur, is: For 62, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-06438.1, in the name of Jamie Halcro Johnston, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06438, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on the cost of living, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Clare Adamson: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had problems with my app. I would have voted no.

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

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)

McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on S6M-06438.1, in the name of Jamie Halcro Johnston, is: For 28, Against 84, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-06438, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on the cost of living, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and

Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)

Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-06438, in the name of Daniel Johnson, on the cost of living, as amended, is: For 60, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament notes that inflation again reached 10.1% in September 2022, driven by rising food prices and energy bills; condemns the mini-budget set out by the UK Government, and recognises that the cost of living pressures that households are facing will be exacerbated by the economic damage it caused alongside the disastrous economic impact of leaving the European Union, which is being felt by Scotland’s economy, businesses and households; recognises that, as a result of increasing inflation, the Scottish budget is worth £1.7 billion less than when it was set in December 2021; welcomes the financial support that the Scottish Government has provided from within its fixed and limited budget to help people facing the impact of the cost of living crisis, including direct cash support, with almost £3 billion allocated to support households, £1 billion of which is support only available in Scotland; recognises that this includes the unique £20 per week per child Scottish Child Payment, which will increase to £25 on 14 November 2022, when it is also extended to under 16s, and £44 million for the Carer’s Allowance Supplement; acknowledges further support with the planned doubling of the December Bridging Payment to £260, supporting up to 145,000 school-aged children; notes the additional costs that the Scottish Government has funded in relation to public sector pay; expresses concern at the prospect of a fresh round of UK Government austerity; believes that the priority for every government must be preventing further instability and addressing the cost of living; calls on the UK Government to use its fiscal statement on 31 October to rule out a return to austerity, further help people with soaring energy bills, reinstate the pension triple lock, confirm an inflationary rise in social security benefits in 2022-23 and provide the Scottish Government with an inflationary uplift to the 2022-23 budget to enable the Scottish Government to take further steps to support people with the cost of living; believes that a strengthened windfall tax should be an important source of funding for this support, rather than borrowing and public spending cuts, and understands that the Scottish Government will finalise and publish the outcome of the Emergency Budget Review once consideration has been given to the implications of the UK Government’s fiscal

statement and updated Office of Budget Responsibility’s forecasts.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-06457, in the name of George Adam, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Companies Act 2006 (Scottish public sector companies to be audited by the Auditor General for Scotland) (No. 2) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Sewage and Scotland's Waters

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06148, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, on sewage and Scotland's waters. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite any members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the view that the natural environment deserves the highest possible protection; further notes the reports in *The Ferret* that untreated human waste was discharged into Scotland's waters more than 10,000 times in 2021, including at beauty spots such as the River Almond, which passes through the Edinburgh Western constituency; considers that the true figure is likely to be much higher due to monitoring only being required, it understands, at 3% of sewage release points; understands that Scottish Environmental Protection Agency figures show that 49 of the 87 designated bathing waters around Scotland recorded levels of the faecal bacteria, *E. coli*, and intestinal enterococci during summer 2022 that represented a danger to the health of swimmers, surfers, paddlers and wildlife; further understands that high concentrations of such bacteria can cause stomach, ear, nose and throat infections, and notes the calls from campaigners for targets to be set to reduce discharges, for enhanced monitoring to be backed up by transparent reporting, and for the acceleration of measures to upgrade sewage systems and tackle overflows.

18:05

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): There is not a member in the chamber who does not have, somewhere in their constituency or region, a beautiful expanse of our most vital natural resource. I am, of course, talking about water. Whether it is a river, loch, reservoir or firth, Scotland is graced with some of the most beautiful waters in the entire world. From the River Almond, which joins the Firth of Forth at the popular Cramond beach in my constituency, to the Cromarty Firth, where you can often spot a pod of dolphins—and sometimes an orca—and the world-famous Loch Lomond and Loch Ness, we are incredibly privileged to have those places on our doorstep and we must cherish them.

I am a scuba diver, an open-water swimmer and an enthusiastic if talentless surfer, so the debate carries a personal resonance for me and for many of us who like to spend time in or at Scotland's waters. However, our waters are also of profound environmental and scientific importance, and they are home to many varieties and species of wildlife. It is more important than ever, therefore, that we take the necessary steps to take care of those environments and to ensure that we follow any regulations in place that are designed to protect them. Sadly, however, we are not doing so.

Every day in Scotland, raw and dilute sewage is being dumped in our rivers. Thanks to investigations by *The Ferret*, we now know that that happened more than 10,000 times last year—that is 30 times a day—and in 2020, it happened 12,000 times. It is certainly happening more than that; Scottish Water currently has the capacity to monitor just 3 per cent of sewage release points. We need to scale up the monitoring system rapidly so that we can assess the full extent of what is going on.

In addition, more investigations by *The Ferret* have revealed that, over the summer, 49 of 87 designated bathing waters recorded levels of faecal bacteria that could endanger public health. Places such as the West Sands in St Andrews, Ettrick Bay on the Isle of Bute and Belhaven beach in Dunbar all recorded high levels of bacteria. At Eyemouth in the Borders, levels reached more than 50 times the legal limit. Those are places where many of us and our constituents spend time; I find it alarming that we may be exposed to such high levels of bacteria in so doing.

What I find even more alarming is the lack of action taken by the Government. I raised concerns about that with the First Minister in May, as members may remember. She informed me that she would

"come back to"

me

"with more detail about what the Government is doing".—
[*Official Report*, 12 May 2022; c 22.]

Last month, I wrote to her, because I had still not received that detail.

This is not the first time that Liberal Democrats have tried to hold the Government to account on this matter. In December last year, my colleague Liam McArthur—yourself, Presiding Officer—asked the Minister for Environment and Land Reform whether the Scottish Government would look to bring in annual reporting on sewage releases and whether there was a plan to eliminate those overflows altogether. The reply was that

"We will not eliminate overflow, because it is a vital part of the system."—[*Official Report*, 22 December 2021; c 43.]

I find that hard to believe—that the Scottish National Party-Green Government believes that it is vital to dump raw sewage into our waters—but that is the response that we received. By that logic, the Government seems to be arguing that it is inevitable that excrement, wet wipes and sanitary towels will be in the same waters where children will play, dogs will swim and fish will live.

What astounds me even more is that, as far as I am aware, this is the first debate on sewage that

we have ever had in this Parliament. Our bodies of water are being polluted while our Government sits on its hands. Shockingly, that is also happening where we have in place what are supposed to be the tightest environmental regulations—specifically, in Loch Leven, just a few miles from the chamber. For context, Loch Leven is a site of special scientific interest, a special protection area, a Ramsar site and a national nature reserve—that is four layers of environmental protection. All those classifications mean that there are strict environmental protections in place that should keep Loch Leven, and the species that inhabit it, safe and clean. Those regulations are being ignored, with raw sewage being dumped into the loch regularly.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): Out of genuine interest, I ask whether the member agrees with the position that was put forward by Ross Finnie, formerly Minister for the Environment and Rural Development for the Lib Dems, who supported the idea that mutualising Scottish Water—which is really like privatising it—is the way forward.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: That is a bit off topic. It is certainly an issue for debate at another time, but it says a lot about this Government's priorities that that is the focus of its response and rebuttal to these points—these realities—when we are desecrating our natural heritage. With raw sewage being dumped into Loch Leven, this Government is allowing the biodiversity that the loch provides and supports to be destroyed, and it is allowing those who use the loch for open-water swimming to be exposed to harmful faecal bacteria.

Even Ian Blackford, at Westminster, sought to tear the United Kingdom Government to shreds for the scale of its sewage releases, but the Scottish Government is certainly not coming up smelling of roses either. When the local Lib Dem councillor Willie Robertson raised his concerns about the impact that raw sewage would have on Loch Leven, he was told by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency that SEPA “understand and sympathise with your frustration at this situation, but the removal of these historic sewers will require multimillion pound investment, and as this is public money, it requires to be planned and spending to be justified.”

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): Will the member take an intervention?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will, from the minister.

Màiri McAllan: Given the member's comments on Loch Leven, perhaps I could get his view on the fact that SEPA inspected the location after the incident on 8 September and

“found no evidence of sewage debris or pollution in the”

water course before it entered Loch Leven. How would he respond to SEPA's finding in that regard?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am fascinated by that, because it flies in the face of fact. There are many witnesses to that happening. If the Government is telling us that it is not happening at all, I would like to hear that stated for the record, and we will provide evidence to the contrary.

It seems that when our national environment agency is told that something is happening that is damaging an important piece of our natural environment, its response is simply to shrug its shoulders and say, “Oh well—not much we can do about it.” That is simply not good enough. When we look at Loch Leven, the River Almond, Eyemouth beach and the West Sands, all being polluted, I do not know what further evidence the SNP-Green Government needs to demonstrate that that investment is sorely needed. Perhaps the minister can illuminate members on that in her closing remarks.

As I have always said, we in this country are incredibly privileged to have the resources that we do. Let us not squander that privilege by allowing them to be ruined in this way.

18:12

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing the debate to the chamber. I welcome the opportunity to participate, not least as chair of the Nigg waste water treatment works stakeholder group in my constituency of Aberdeen South and North Kincardine. The motion for debate focuses on our beaches and bathing waters around Scotland: special places that should be clean, healthy and unspoiled by humans. We are responsible for making that happen.

The north-east coastline is home to many fantastic beaches and bays that host swimmers, paddle boarders, surfers and a treasure trove of marine life. My constituency hosts the fabulous Greyhope bay, which is consistently recorded as the best place to watch bottlenose dolphins from land in the UK. Only this week, I met representatives of VisitAberdeenshire to discuss how to make the north-east a leading visitor destination. The natural environment was a key part of our discussion. I, for one, am very much invested in the work to keep our precious waters clean, safe and pollution free.

Since I became chair of our local stakeholder group, I have had the opportunity to better understand the scale of our waste water infrastructure in Scotland and the significant challenges that our behaviour and climate change, to name but two factors, are placing on it.

In recent years, Scottish Water and SEPA have worked together to upgrade more than 100 waste water treatment works and around 280 overflow points. I welcome the measures that were announced last December by the Scottish Government that will see the investment of a further £0.5 billion to improve Scotland's waste water network.

We know that climate change is a significant pressure on our waste water system, with the increasing frequency and intensity of storms being a significant challenge. I welcome the programme of installation of event monitors by Scottish Water and the development of approaches to create intelligent networks that help to reduce the risk of flooding and pollution incidents. Less than half a mile from my home, a new water retention pond holds back water, but floods during heavy rainfall. The pond enables the slow release of water and has brought an added welcome benefit by creating a natural habitat for flora and fauna. Our stakeholder group recently visited the site at Nigg, giving us an invaluable opportunity to understand the process of managing waste water in an increasingly sustainable and smart way, using the heat produced as an energy source and supplying the end product, or "cake", to the agricultural sector as a form of fertiliser.

I pay tribute to my stakeholder group colleagues from Scottish Water, SEPA and Aberdeen City Council, the ward councillors and, importantly, community members who come together to address a range of issues from odours to reporting processes, freak weather events and public awareness.

I also commend the nature calls campaign, which aims to get us all to think about how our own behaviour is contributing to pollution and how we can prevent it. One issue that the campaign highlights is the use of wet wipes, which contain plastic and pollute our water, costing Scottish Water around £7 million a year to clear and resulting in mountains of wet wipes ending up in landfill. I ask the minister to do all that she can within the legislative constraints that we have in Scotland to support the effort to ban wet wipes containing plastics.

I again thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing forward this important debate and highlighting the opportunities and challenges that we all face as we seek to preserve our precious water for generations to come.

18:17

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Alex Cole-Hamilton on securing this members' business debate, not least because it is not before time, as he rightly pointed out.

When I looked into the subject, I found—as Mr Cole-Hamilton did—what appears to be extraordinary complacency on the part of the Scottish Government. Far from acknowledging the issue and steeling herself to do something about it, I found the minister, in a contribution from December 2021, crowing that

"When it comes to Scotland's water, we have so much to be proud of"—[*Official Report*, 22 December 2021, c 34.]

and trying to divert attention by making spurious comparisons with other countries. That was an answer that she repeated, practically verbatim, in June 2022, having, I presume, pulled the previous script off the shelf.

When, earlier this month, *The Courier* reported that Scottish Water had dumped raw sewage into Loch Leven, in what NatureScot termed a "serious pollution incident", the minister was asked to comment. She declined to do so, perhaps—in the light of her earlier intervention—because her view is that that did not happen. A Scottish Government spokesperson was wheeled out to say simply that investment had been made in the past and that there would be more to come. There was no mention of what would actually change. That is utter complacency.

The various comparisons that have been made by the minister are false equivalences. *The Ferret* report that Alex Cole-Hamilton cites in the motion refers to the Scottish Government's water environment policy manager, David Lister, saying that only 10 per cent of overflows in Scotland are monitored, compared with 80 per cent of those in England. I suspect that Alex Cole-Hamilton is right to say in his motion that the true number of discharges is likely to be much higher.

Actually, I do not suspect that—I know it. Just last week, though a freedom of information request, I got figures from Scottish Water covering the period from 2017 to 2021, which show that a total of 563,500 hours of sewage overflow were recorded in Scotland during that period. That is an increase of around 70 per cent in that time. Yes—members heard that right; the SNP has been allowing thousands of hours' worth of sewage to be pumped into our rivers and lochs for years, and the problem is only getting worse. It should be remembered that that data is from only 10 per cent of the overflows.

The lack of data really worries me. In committee yesterday, I asked NatureScot what impact the overflows were having on its sites, and I was told that it does not have a lot of information on the effects that they have on protected sites and species. In the same session, I twice put the 10 per cent figure to SEPA and asked whether it felt that monitoring is sufficient and whether it should align with England's 80 per cent to ensure that we

can see what is going on, rather than simply denigrating the English and European figures, but no answer was forthcoming. It would be very interesting to hear, in her closing remarks, the minister's view on the 10 per cent figure.

The freedom of information request also found out that the clean-up costs for sewage spills in Scotland had soared by 500 per cent over roughly the same period. That will be for the clean-up of 49 of the 87 designated bathing waters around Scotland in which SEPA recorded unsafe levels of faecal bacteria as a result of sewage contamination, which Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned in his motion.

I congratulate Alex Cole-Hamilton on drawing attention to the problem and giving the minister a chance not to tell us how much investment has been made in the past, which we have heard is not preventing the overflows; not to throw up false equivalences in order to denigrate our UK and European friends and suggest that all is well in Scotland; and not simply to say, as she did in December last year, that

“we are determined and poised to do more”—[*Official Report*, 22 December 2021, c 35.]

but to acknowledge her Government's failure and say that that simply is not good enough, and to set out clearly, concisely and comprehensively what her Government will do to address that shameful record.

18:22

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for securing this important debate. His motion rightly stresses the importance of affording the highest possible protection to our natural environment. However, that is not currently the case for Scotland's waters. As we have already heard, *The Ferret* reported that untreated human waste was discharged into Scotland's waters more than 10,000 times last year. That suggests that current regulation of Scotland's waters is failing: it is failing to ensure that water is clean, that it poses no risk to public health, and that it is protected as part of our natural environment.

That failure can be seen in the case of the River Almond, in which there were 500 occasions in 2019 in which sewage was released through combined sewer overflows, or CSOs. CSOs release not only sewage and floodwater, but sanitary waste that has been flushed down toilets. Campaigners have previously highlighted the risk that that poses to public health, because the River Almond is regularly used for swimming and fishing by the public. They have called for public warnings to be issued when CSOs are in operation. I hope that the minister will reflect on that point.

It is clear that steps must be taken to improve regulation of Scotland's waters. By the admission of the Scottish Government's own water environment policy manager, monitoring of sewage overflows in Scotland is not as comprehensive as that which is undertaken in England. A Scottish Government briefing that was acquired by *The Ferret* highlighted that just 10 per cent of CSOs were monitored in Scotland, compared with 80 per cent in England. An FOI request by *The Ferret* also revealed that more than 12,000 sewage overflows were recorded by Scottish Water in 2020. However, given that the scale of monitoring lags behind that in England, I am concerned that the figures are likely to understate the problem. I hope that, in her response, the minister will outline what steps the Scottish Government is taking to improve monitoring of sewage overflows.

Monitoring of overflows must improve, but there is also a need for Scottish Water to upgrade its network to ensure that that happens. SEPA has previously asked Scottish Water to install, by the end 2024, spill monitors on all the sewer overflows that discharge to designated bathing waters. Scottish Water has confirmed that it has installed monitors at just 354 of its 3,600 overflows, with another 1,000 planned installations by the end of 2024. I expect that the minister will cite Covid for the slow progress that is being made, so I am not going to ask her to explain why so little progress has been made, but I would like to know what she is doing to get things back on track.

Improving monitoring and upgrading the network are both necessary steps, but we have to reflect on what we want regulation of Scotland's waters to achieve. Scottish Labour is clear that Scottish Water should remain in public ownership and that the creeping privatisation of waste water services must be ended.

Regulation of Scotland's waters must be driven by four core principles: keeping Scotland's water in public hands, ensuring access to clean water for local communities, protecting public health and protecting Scotland's natural environment.

18:25

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for securing this crucial debate. As we have heard already, *The Ferret* has identified that the untreated human waste flowing into Scotland's seas and rivers is a huge problem, especially given that more and more people who live in Scotland and who visit Scotland want to get closer to nature and get into the water.

In my region, the Highlands and Islands, we are lucky to have some areas with pristine water,

including four bathing-water sites where pollution was “undetectable” or “very low” last year. That is so important to our local economy, as many coastal communities depend on tourists who want to enjoy beautiful clear seas, lochs and rivers, and the wildlife that they support.

However, we also have some of the most polluted areas: Ettrick Bay in the Isle of Bute, which has already been mentioned, and two beaches in Nairn are all in the top 25 most polluted bathing waters.

Even if we get what Alex Cole-Hamilton has called for—reduced discharges, sewage monitoring and reporting, and upgraded sewage systems—that will not solve the problems with Scotland’s waters. It is not just human waste that pollutes our seas, lochs and rivers. Environmental Standards Scotland found that pollution from agricultural activities, including spreading of slurry on fields, affected the highest number of water bodies in Scotland. According to the National Trust for Scotland, just one moderate-sized salmon farm discharges the same amount of sewage as a town twice the size of Oban does.

A recently approved salmon farm off Papa Westray in Orkney has the potential to produce effluent equivalent to the amount that would be produced by 49,500 people. Waste is already released from five other salmon farms nearby; needless to say, locals do not want to swim there.

In Argyll and Bute, locals face a similar problem. My constituent who runs a holiday business there depends on people wanting to swim in the nearby bay. He and wild swimmers, divers and other local water users are concerned that the pesticides and waste from a proposed salmon farm a short distance away will contaminate the bay.

Although SEPA monitors levels of faecal bacteria in bathing waters, it does not issue guidance on safe levels of pesticides, such as hydrogen peroxide, in other water bodies. People who regularly dip in those waters might be at risk, as is indicated in a toxicology report by the independent consultants WCA Environment Ltd.

It is not just recreational users of the water who are affected. Too much effluent from sewage or fish farms anywhere can damage nursery grounds and can be harmful to species including scallops, shellfish, lobsters and crabs—key commercial species on which sustainable creel fishers and divers depend. Waste, wherever it comes from, is undermining livelihoods, as well as undermining the local food supply that our seas naturally produce.

Just as Alex Cole-Hamilton has called for enhanced monitoring and reporting of sewage discharges, we also need much closer monitoring, inspection, reporting and enforcement of

aquaculture. SEPA and Marine Scotland must be fully resourced and empowered to carry out those duties in order to preserve the health of our waters for all of us to enjoy.

A report by Just Economics found that fish farm waste that is discharged into the marine environment carries a cost of almost £37 million per year. Untreated human waste will also carry a heavy cost. If we are serious about tackling the climate and nature emergencies, we need to seriously improve how we deal with waste from humans, fish farms and agriculture.

18:29

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing the debate to the chamber; I completely agree with him that Scotland’s natural environment deserves the highest standards of protection.

When I was elected to South Ayrshire Council as a councillor back in 2017, I was extremely alarmed to learn that Ayr beach water quality had been classified as poor for several years and that, if it tested poor for five consecutive years, Ayr beach would lose its designated bathing water status. Ayr beach is unique and the situation was challenging, as the River Doon and the River Ayr both run in at Ayr beach. Agricultural run-off from neighbouring farms was another factor that was affecting the water quality there. Losing bathing water status would be catastrophic for Ayr.

As a ward councillor at the time, I worked with Keep Scotland Beautiful. I thank my colleague Emma Harper, who, back in 2018, arranged a meeting at the Scottish Parliament between me, Scottish Water and SEPA to discuss how we could improve the water quality at Ayr beach. During 2020, Scottish Water invested £10 million to include three increased storm storage tanks in the surrounding area.

In 2021, Ayr beach, after being classified as poor for four years in a row, finally—with collaborative work from South Ayrshire Council, SEPA, Scottish Water, supported by the Scottish Government, and farmers and rural land managers—received classification as good.

However, the work does not stop there. It is indisputable that the discharge of raw sewage into rivers and seas in Scotland is, unfortunately, on the increase. Scottish Water has said that the growing problem of sewage discharge into rivers is caused not by a failure to provide the correct infrastructure but by the increase in heavy rain as a result of climate change. Climate change and flooding is a huge problem.

I highlight an on-going project in Prestwick, where there are historical and complex issues

relating to sewer flooding. In 2019, the Prestwick strategic drainage project was set up; it included Scottish Water, elected members, Ayrshire Roads Alliance and local community councils. The aim of the group is to identify strategic short-term, medium-term and long-term measures to be put in place in local areas of concern where flooding occurs regularly. Short-term solutions were put in place, such as speed tables, where the tarmac on the road is raised slightly to alleviate flooding, and medium-term solutions such as new storage pipes and water tanks are planned.

The on-going work has led to improvements in Prestwick. However, there are things that we, in individual households, can do to mitigate surface water flooding when we experience increased rain as a result of climate change. For example, rain butts—big tubs that hold rainwater—can be used in gardens, along with rain garden planters. We can also limit the area that we tarmac—for example, driveways—as that adds to the problem of surface water locally because it cannot be absorbed into the ground. We can all do our bit and be mindful about climate change.

I welcome that the Scottish Government is being proactive in this regard and has implemented its “River Basin Management Plan for Scotland 2021-2027”, which takes comprehensive action on sewage spills, among other water quality issues. The plan includes actions to increase monitoring, provide more public information and reduce sewage litter and spill frequency. I look forward to hearing from the minister on how the plan is going.

I welcome the genuine concerns that members have raised tonight. However, I highlight that Scotland’s bathing water quality is the best that it has been since 2015, when stricter standards came into force. On top of that, 38 per cent of bathing sites are now rated as excellent. In addition, we should not forget that Scotland has the highest number of high-quality rivers in the UK, with 66 per cent in good condition; I look forward to that number increasing further as a result of the improvement plans that SEPA has outlined.

I want to see Scotland as a world leader in water quality, across all possible measures. Yes, we have our problems, and those need to be addressed, but we are improving and are on our way to reaching that goal.

18:34

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for securing the debate, because the issue of sewage and pollution needs to be tackled more effectively. I also thank *The Ferret* team for the work that they do in general, and more specifically for what they have done to help to uncover this problem and to draw our attention

to the problems that far too many of our communities face.

Alex Cole-Hamilton focused on the problems that have been identified in the River Almond, but there are also problems that constituents have raised with me regarding the River Esk, the Water of Leith and the River Forth. In relation to the River Esk, one of my constituents gave me examples of the impact that waste and sewage are having on the immediate area and on downstream areas. My constituent identified Dryburn as an area where there was a particular issue and showed me photographs of the negative impact. My constituent has also identified problems with the Water of Leith that impact on the river all the way down to the shore at Leith, where pollution is then released into the River Forth.

I raised those issues with SEPA in the summer. In the response that it sent me this autumn, it was interesting to see the different classifications for bathing waters in Edinburgh and East Lothian. Although nine of the areas identified were categorised as “Good” or “Excellent”, it was interesting that Portobello’s west and central beaches, Seton Sands and Milsey Bay at North Berwick were identified only as “Sufficient”. Pollution can arise, and the challenge that we face is that there needs to be more monitoring and more mapping so that we have accurate information for all our rivers and action can be taken to address the problem upstream, as well as where it occurs on our beaches.

For me, one of the most striking impacts of Covid was people’s greater reliance on their local beaches for leisure, swimming and surfing. People were holidaying at home. In addition, there are many more people who do wild swimming all year round. Therefore, we need to know that our beaches and rivers are as safe as they can be. As Mercedes Villalba highlighted, we need accurate, up-to-date information so that people can be confident of their safety.

As the motion says, pouring sewage into the water puts us at risk of harmful bacteria and viruses, such as E coli, gastroenteritis and ear, nose and throat infections. As local members will know, E coli has a disruptive impact, which includes businesses having to close.

The BBC has reported that the number of recorded spills from combined sewer overflows in Scotland’s rivers and seas has increased by 40 per cent over the past five years. There were 12,725 “spill events” in 2020, and at least 120 million cubic meters of waste water was spilled from CSOs between 2016 and 2020. We need to look at those overflows. CSOs are designed to spill during heavy rainfall to prevent sewer flooding in properties, but the data is incomplete. The BBC

suggested that the number and volume of spills is likely to be higher, because the list that it received related to only a fraction of the operating CSOs. That is because Scottish Water is only required to monitor less than 3 per cent of CSOs for pollution, and no volume data is provided for more than half the spill events. Therefore, we need more action.

SEPA and Scottish Water have recognised that there has been an increase in the frequency with which some CSOs are discharging sewage. They state that that is due to increases in water flows, which exceed the flows that sewers were originally designed to handle, and to blockages resulting from the flushing of inappropriate items, which other members have mentioned.

In its improving urban waters route map, Scottish Water has stated that it will increase monitoring to cover all CSOs and that that should involve around 1,000 additional monitors. I am keen for that work to be progressed as soon as possible so that practical improvements can be made in our rivers and our natural environment.

According to the advocacy group Surfers Against Sewage, Scottish Water data shows that the equivalent of 47,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools' worth of waste has been discharged since 2016. That gives a sense of the scale of the challenge.

When the minister sums up the debate, I am keen to hear her respond to the proposals of Surfers Against Sewage for stronger and bolder targets to end the discharge of untreated sewage; an enhanced testing regime that gives a true picture of our water quality in real time; nature restoration to reduce pressure and minimise impacts on sewage infrastructure; and increased investment from industry in infrastructure to prevent destructive practices.

In their powerful speeches, Audrey Nicoll and Siobhian Brown highlighted the issue of climate change, which means that we will get more rainfall and more intense rain. Therefore, we need to up the standards and up the investment so that, as well as meeting the current challenges and ensuring that people across the country have clean water, we tackle the issue for the future so that our rivers and beaches are not damaged by sewage and pollution.

18:39

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): I am very pleased to be taking part in today's debate, and I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for securing it. It is a topic that I know he cares about, as do I.

The debate has given me the chance to listen, as I always want to do. In closing, I will respond to

what has been said, rebut some of what, in my view, is inaccurate and, most important, offer reassurance to the public—which I know has a strong interest in the issue—that the Scottish Government is absolutely committed to the protection of our water environment; that our water environment already meets standards that are high by international comparisons; and that we have achieved that by working with our public water company, Scottish Water, which is regulated by the independent SEPA, such that we consistently have the lowest water bills in the UK. Finally, I want to reassure the public that we are never complacent and that we are always striving for progress. We are doing what we can, with concrete plans that are backed by multi-annual funds.

I said that Scotland enjoys a higher standard than our neighbours. To put figures on that, 66 per cent of Scotland's water environment is already classed as being in good condition, compared with a European average of around 45 per cent and a figure for England of just 16 per cent. I can understand why Liam Kerr and the other Tories might not want me to repeat those figures, given that it is their party that is presiding over that deficit down south, but I am very proud of the Scottish figures.

Liam Kerr: Will the minister take an intervention?

Màiri McAllan: I have a lot that I want to put on the record this afternoon, but I will take a short intervention.

Liam Kerr: The minister appears to have entirely missed my point: if we monitor only 10 per cent of the overflows, as against the 80 per cent that are monitored in England, we get a false equivalence. Does she not appreciate that? If she does, will she not increase the monitoring to 80 per cent, as is the case in the jurisdiction that she cited?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I can give you all the time back.

Màiri McAllan: The figures that I cited are not linked directly to the monitoring of CSOs; they relate to a holistic assessment of the water quality in Scotland. If we break it down to the factors that constitute that overall water quality—which is about the water quality itself, water quantity and fish migration—the figures are higher than 66 per cent. I would be delighted to provide the member with them.

I am proud of the figures, but we are not complacent. Through our third river basin management plan, we have set out our most ambitious plans ever, including the steps that we want to take to get our overall water quality to 81 per cent by 2027. In December, I gave a

statement on the plan and how it, together with Scottish Water's "Improving Urban Waters Route Map", would drive substantial improvements in future years.

Today's discussion has focused on the sewer network and swimming in bathing waters, so I will address both of those issues. There are misconceptions around the operation of the sewer network in Scotland. There has been some focus recently on Scottish Water supposedly discharging raw sewage on a regular basis. While I am on that point, I would like to clarify that, in my intervention on Alex Cole-Hamilton about Loch Leven, I was not saying that there had not been an incident; I was talking about the characterisation of the incident and what SEPA had done as part of its licensing and monitoring of the situation.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am very grateful for the clarification from the minister, but her intervention did change the character of the debate. A person listening to the minister's intervention during my speech would be forgiven for believing that there had been no event on Loch Leven. However, we know—and we have empirical evidence to show—that there are events not only on Loch Leven but in watercourses the length and breadth of this country. The Government cannot go on pretending that it is not happening. I am concerned about the slightly disingenuous intervention during my remarks. Why did the minister intervene on me in regard to that case?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, again, I can give you all the time back.

Màiri McAllan: If I was disingenuous, that was not my intention. I have just clarified my intention, which was to point out that SEPA has made an active assessment of the situation and that members ought not to refer to the discharge of raw sewage when the system is designed not to allow that to happen. That is the point that I was trying to make.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: When I asked the First Minister about the matter a few months ago, Scottish Water contacted me and we had an in-depth meeting about this very issue. Scottish Water admitted that what it describes as "foul sewage", which is the untreated stuff that comes out of our toilets, is regularly being pumped into the waterways of this country. Does the minister recognise that that is the reality of the situation that we are here to discuss?

Màiri McAllan: The point that I am trying to make is that, when we seek to refer to specific incidents, we should be very clear about the term "raw sewage" and the extent to which SEPA monitors it. If the member wishes to discuss individual situations with me, I am always happy to do so, and SEPA will be content to do that, too.

As some members have explained, the system that we have is designed to overflow so that, when there is intense rainfall, very dilute sewage will spill. The alternative would be to have waste water backing up into customers' homes, which I think—and I hope that we can all agree—would not be acceptable.

As members should know, the process must be licensed by SEPA, our environment agency, which will ensure that there is no adverse effect on the water environment. Unfortunately, and as members such as Siobhian Brown and Sarah Boyack have reflected, climate change means that we are now experiencing storm conditions more regularly, and intense rainfall events, which are going to become more frequent, are overwhelming urban drainage systems.

We are already taking action in anticipation of that. Scottish Water no longer accepts new surface water connections to the sewer unless there is no alternative, and we are looking to utilise nature-based solutions including blue-green infrastructure, which can turn the management of rain and surface water from a problem into an opportunity. That is preventive action. I understand, however, that members and the public want to know that the infrastructure and the CSOs are being improved.

I will briefly say where we have come from, before looking to where we are going. Since 2010, Scottish Water, working with SEPA, has taken action to upgrade 104 waste water treatment works and 279 storm overflows across the country. That has been backed by £686 million of investment. We now plan to go even further. In the Scottish Water route map, plans are set out to invest a further £500 million during the period from 2021 to 2027. That will include approximately £150 million to improve the remaining 40 waste water treatment works and 26 priority storm overflows over the next six years. That will benefit around 400km of Scotland's rivers and lochs. The route map also sets out how it will deliver solutions for another 235 storm overflows by 2031. Again, that is backed by £150 million. I mention for the benefit of Mercedes Villalba that the work is on track, and I will be happy to keep members up to date on that.

Monitoring has been mentioned. The route map sets out plans to improve monitoring and public communication regarding more than 1,000 of the highest-priority storm overflows by 2024. Scottish Water is currently working to identify the right locations for monitoring. In December this year, it will publish its first annual update to highlight the progress made.

In the time that I have left, I will briefly mention wild swimming. The figures that are cited in the motion were not produced by SEPA, and, in

SEPA's opinion, they do not reflect how advice on water quality ought to be given. It must be remembered that rivers and other open water locations that are not bathing waters are managed for the purpose of protecting fish and wildlife, not people. Indeed, the UK Health Security Agency advises that

"Anyone can become unwell from swimming in any open water".

As I have said, however, 99 per cent of our designated bathing waters are passing environmental standards, with more of them than ever reaching the "Excellent" level.

I will conclude, as I am conscious of the time. After a decade of investment, backed by nearly £700 million, 66 per cent of Scotland's water is of good quality. There will always be challenges, with an ageing infrastructure and the challenges of climate change, but we are determined to keep improving. We will continue to deliver investment to ensure that our environmental targets are met. As I said in December 2021, I will continue to work with members across the Parliament to achieve the Government's ambitions.

Correction

Keith Brown has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):

At col 17, paragraph 3—

Original text—

Around 3,000 service personnel in Scotland accessing universal credit—38,000 is the figure for the rest of the UK—will come as a shock to many people.

Corrected text—

Around 3,000 service personnel across the UK accessing universal credit—38,000 is the figure for veterans—will come as a shock to many people.

Meeting closed at 18:49.

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