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Thursday 12 January 2023

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 12 January 2023

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

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):
The first item of business is general question time.

Primary Care Services

1. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to protect primary care services in light of reports showing the workforce and demand pressures on general practice. (S6O-01764)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): I am immensely grateful to general practitioners and GP practice staff up and down the country, who are doing an incredible job during a period of significant challenge. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that being a GP remains an attractive career choice with a manageable workload.

Despite the pandemic, we have recruited 3,220 whole-time-equivalent healthcare professionals to provide support to GPs, underpinned by an investment commitment of more than £500 million since 2018. We have a record number of GPs working in Scotland, and we are committed to having 800 additional GPs by the end of 2027.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the cabinet secretary for his response, but he should know that statistics for 2022 show that the WTE number of GPs has fallen to 3,493. That is 81 fewer than in 2017, when the Scottish National Party announced its intention to boost GP numbers.

Dr Andrew Buist of the British Medical Association has said:

“the SNP government’s failure to boost GP numbers and provide sufficient funding has locked primary care into a ‘vicious circle’ of rising workloads forcing GPs out of the profession.”

Does the cabinet secretary agree?

Humza Yousaf: I am sure that Jackie Baillie knows—it was probably just an oversight—that our target for the period between 2017 and 2027 was based on headcount. Of course, the overall GP headcount has increased by 291 from 4,918 to 5,209, so there has been an increase in the GP headcount and we are making good progress towards the 800 figure.

On the whole-time equivalent issue that Jackie Baillie raises, we are engaging with Dr Andrew

Buist, who I meet very regularly, and the Royal College of General Practitioners on what more we can do in relation to retention. However, it should be recognised that having more flexible working patterns is a good thing; it helps with work-life balance, which we hope will help with GP retention.

I commend the RCGP report that was released just before Christmas, which focuses on a number of initiatives that the Government might want to explore in relation to the retention of GPs. We will continue to engage with the BMA and the RCGP on those important issues.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Announcing total funding hides the fact that the Scottish Government may make cuts this year to GPs and primary care. The pressure on GPs will only increase, given that we have 23 fewer GPs than last year. Yesterday, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde announced that it is pausing non-urgent elective surgery and going on to an emergency footing—despite the money—which will increase the pressure on primary care.

On BBC Radio Scotland today, we heard from many people who are suffering from long Covid and who say that the service is failing them. A nurse who we cheered and clapped for during the pandemic says that she will lose her job and her home because of long Covid. If patients are saying that they cannot get help from hospitals, they will go to their GP and increase the pressure. What more is the cabinet secretary willing to do to help long Covid patients?

Humza Yousaf: Dr Sandesh Gulhane is right: we had to make some really difficult choices around our budget this year, including the reprofiling of funding for primary care. We did that because his party completely mismanaged the economy of the United Kingdom, and high inflation costs meant that our budget in the health and social care portfolio was worth £650 million less than when we set it in December last year. Difficult decisions had to be made because we do not have the full fiscal levers in our hands.

We will continue to invest in multidisciplinary teams, which will help to spread the workload from GPs to other members of staff. We will also continue to invest in NHS 24, for example, from which people get really excellent advice.

I announced the additional recruitment of 200 staff for long Covid, and Sandesh Gulhane knows that we have committed £10 million over three financial years. We will continue to invest that funding to help long Covid sufferers as well as anybody else who is suffering from any condition at a time of great pressure on our national health service.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):

This week, a Shetland GP surgery posted on social media that

“Due to high demand and staff availability, we are currently dealing with clinically urgent requests only. If your request is of a non-urgent nature, please consider contacting us next week.”

What can the Scottish Government say to people who are seeking medical help and the staff who are under pressure in our island NHS services?

Humza Yousaf: The period over the past few weeks has been and continues to be one of the most difficult periods that the NHS has faced in its existence. We know that that is a result of the cumulative impact of the pandemic, the rise in Covid cases—Beatrice Wishart will know that, on Friday, when the Office for National Statistics released the most recent data, the figure was one in 25—and the fact that flu cases are higher than they have been in many years, together with the rise in cases of Strep A and other viral infections. All of that was combined with the festive period and a snap of cold weather. The combination of those factors has made it a really difficult period for the NHS and social care up and down the country.

What are we doing? On Tuesday, I gave Parliament some detail on what we are doing to provide support, which includes helping with the issues around discharge and investing further in the NHS 24 service that is available up and down the country.

Difficult decisions will have to be made at a local level, whether in the NHS Shetland area or elsewhere, but I hope that those difficult decisions will be time limited. As the additional support that we have provided kicks in and as the flu and Covid cases begin to abate, as, in time, I hope they will, that will help the health service through what has been a really difficult time. I again express my gratitude to every member of the NHS and social care workforce, who are working so hard during these difficult times.

Scottish Government (Meetings)

2. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands)

(SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. (S6O-01765)

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

I have not yet met with the current chancellor and I did not have the opportunity to meet with either of his two predecessors. I last met the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 17 November, after the United Kingdom autumn statement.

Gordon MacDonald: Forecasts compiled by Consensus Economics show that the UK faces the

worst and longest recession in the G7. The Office for Budget Responsibility predicts that we are facing the biggest fall in living standards since records began, due to inflation, and more than three quarters of members of the British Chambers of Commerce say that the UK Tory Brexit deal is not helping them to increase sales or grow their business. What economic levers does the Scottish Government need in order to escape a future of Westminster failure, to build on Scotland’s economic strengths and to become as successful as comparable independent European countries?

John Swinney: With all the available evidence, the extent of the economic damage that is being done by the Brexit that was imposed on Scotland by the United Kingdom Conservative Government is becoming very clear. Among the specific areas in which we are suffering is that of free trade with the European Union. Companies are suffering in that regard, so it would be an advantage for Scotland to be an independent country with the ability to rejoin the EU.

Given the failures in the energy market, the ability to redesign the energy market would be an important attribute for Scotland to have. The ability to use employment laws to ensure fairer work would be an advantage, as would the ability to have a migration policy that was designed to boost our working-age population. That can come only with Scottish independence, given the UK Government’s hostility to such approaches.

Mr MacDonald correctly highlights the severe economic damage that is being caused by Brexit and the opportunities that Scottish independence would give to create much more fiscal flexibility for the Government in Scotland.

Emissions Reduction (Reports)

3. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its response to the Climate Change Committee’s reports “Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland—2022 Report to Parliament” and “Scottish Emissions Targets—first five-yearly review”. (S6O-01766)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson):

The Scottish ministers will take the appropriate time to consider the recommendations in the Climate Change Committee’s advice and will respond in the spring. We will work closely with the Climate Change Committee, as part of our continuous review of policy, to ensure that we benefit fully from the committee’s expertise while progressing delivery and considering possible new actions. The committee’s advice will also support the development of the next climate change plan, which will be published in full later this year.

Liam Kerr: The Climate Change Committee said that the Scottish National Party targets were not “accompanied by deep thinking” about policies, and it accused ministers of “magical thinking”. Clearly, this portfolio must be prioritised, but I have discovered that the Scottish Government has only six people working on its climate justice fund, while just four are dealing with the loss and damage fund that was announced at the 27th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP27. If we compare that with the 25 civil servants who are working on an independence prospectus costing £1.5 million a year, the Government’s skewed priorities are very clear.

Will the cabinet secretary be taking steps to realign Government resources away from the manufacture of grievance and division and instead direct them towards delivering practical priorities to address the climate emergency?

Michael Matheson: We always deploy staff in the civil service to take forward our areas of policy priority. That is why Scotland’s emissions are down by well over 50 per cent on the 1990 baseline, which takes us more than halfway to our target and has us ahead of other parts of the United Kingdom in addressing climate change.

I assure the member that we will continue to take forward a range of policies to tackle the issue of climate change and ensure that we do so in a fair and just way. I gently point out to the member that we certainly will not tackle climate change effectively if we are opening up new coal mines.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The Climate Change Committee’s report recognises key policy areas, such as industry and electricity supply sectors, that are reserved to the UK Government. To what extent is meeting our net zero targets here in Scotland reliant on decisions that are taken by the UK Government, and how is the Scottish Government working with the UK Government to ensure that our ambitions in Scotland are matched by the rest of the UK?

Michael Matheson: We take seriously the range of areas that are the responsibility of the Scottish Government, and we pursue policies to make sure that we deliver on our statutory climate change targets. However, there are also areas that are reserved to the UK Government that have a direct impact on climate change policy in Scotland. For example, in the energy sector, negative emissions technologies play an extremely important part in helping us to meet our climate change targets both in Scotland and across the whole of the UK. That is why taking forward carbon capture and the Acorn project are mission critical not only to Scotland’s climate change targets but to the UK’s. Any further delay

in making a decision about supporting carbon capture, use and storage and the Acorn project just creates uncertainty, risk around employment and a lack of investment in key areas, and it places a greater burden on other policy areas. That is why we need the UK Government to step up to the plate, show leadership in this area and give the go-ahead to the Acorn project in Scotland.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): If we are to meet our national target of reducing car mileage by 20 per cent by 2030, reliable, affordable and readily available public transport will be key. One of the Climate Change Committee’s recommendations for achieving that is to invest in sustainable forms of transport, yet the Scottish Government is proposing widespread service cuts to Scotland’s railway. Will the minister think again and rule out service reductions to demonstrate his Government’s commitment to Scotland’s railway, to protect jobs and to reduce transport emissions?

Michael Matheson: I recognise that access to good public transport is an important part of getting people out of their cars and on to public transport, which is why we have been making significant investment in our railways in order to decarbonise them. We are now at the point at which more than 75 per cent of all journeys on Scotland’s railways are on electrified routes that have been decarbonised as a result of the investment that the Government has made. We have also made significant investment in decarbonising the bus system, through grant schemes that support the electrification of the bus network with electric buses, which are now being rolled out.

I am sure that the member will also recognise that almost 50 per cent of people in Scotland travel free on our bus network as a result of the concessionary travel schemes for those who are over 60 or under 22. I am sure that the member welcomes that as an example of showing leadership in encouraging people on to our public transport network.

The Presiding Officer: I would appreciate concise questions and responses.

Bladder Cancer Deaths

4. **Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to reduce bladder cancer deaths. (S6O-01767)

The Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport (Maree Todd): Bladder cancer mortality reduced by 14 per cent over the period 2010 to 2020 and we are committed to continuing to improve that. As outlined in our “Endoscopy and Urology Diagnostic Recovery and Renewal Plan”,

we will refresh and implement once for Scotland clinical pathways to prioritise demand for cystoscopy, including for bladder cancers. We have also introduced six urology hubs in Scotland, which provide rapid access to diagnostic procedures to enable earlier cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Michelle Thomson: Bladder cancer has one of the highest mortality rates of all cancers. The rate is currently around 50 per cent. It also has a high rate of recurrence, making it one of the most expensive cancers to treat fully, and Scotland's ageing population will likely result in longer-term, more complex treatments. To that end, will the minister confirm what funding has been made available specifically for research into bladder cancer, including treatment of the disease and data gathering to enable correlative research?

Maree Todd: The funding schemes that are supported by the Scottish Government's chief scientist office provide opportunities for applied health research across a range of health challenges including bladder cancer. Applications are assessed through independent expert review with funding decisions being based on the recommendations of independent expert committees. They would be very happy to consider any applications for research into bladder cancer.

The CSO also contributes financially to a range of National Institute for Health and Care Excellence research funding schemes, which are open to applications from researchers in Scotland. In addition, the CSO invests through NHS Research Scotland in a cancer research network to support the delivery of studies in the area.

Finally—

The Presiding Officer: Please be brief, minister.

Maree Todd: —our national cancer quality programme has developed quality performance indicators for bladder cancer, which were first published in November 2021, and it is encouraging that targets relating to 30 and 90-day mortality rates indicate a good performance.

Young People's Mental Health Services

5. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what it is doing to support young people's mental health services, including in colleges and universities. (S6O-01768)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): The Scottish Government continues to provide record funding for mental health services to ensure that all children and young people have access to the right mental

health support at the right time. That includes continued investment in improving child and adolescent mental health services; funding for 230 new and enhanced community supports and services for children, young people and their families; and provision of access to counselling services for all secondary school pupils.

In addition, we have exceeded our commitment to deliver 80 additional counsellors in further and higher education, with 89 additional counsellors now working to support students across institutions.

Willie Rennie: If that is the case, I am flummoxed as to why the Government is even considering cutting the very mental health counsellors that the minister has just described in colleges and universities at the end of this academic year. I remind him that two thirds of college students report having low wellbeing and more than half report moderate to severe symptoms of depression. If that is the case, why is it that, when students need their help, the Government is withdrawing the support of the very people that were designed to help them?

Kevin Stewart: As I said in my previous answer, we have exceeded the 80 counsellors that we planned for, with 89 supporting students. The student mental health plan that is being taken forward by the student mental health and wellbeing working group, which will sit alongside the Scottish Government's forthcoming mental health and wellbeing strategy, will inform the Scottish Government's future approach to student mental health and wellbeing. On its publication, in the spring of 2023, it will provide the framework for institutional action on the issue. As part of that, officials will work with the university and college sectors to move to a position where they fund elements of student mental health support, including counsellors, as part of their core offer to students.

The Presiding Officer: Question 6 has been withdrawn. Question 7 was not lodged.

Caledonian MacBrayne Replacement Booking System

8. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it expects the replacement booking system for CalMac to be fully operational. (S6O-01771)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): CalMac's new booking system, Ar Turas, is expected to go live across all CalMac routes in the spring of 2023. I am extremely disappointed that there has been a delay in the introduction of Ar Turas, which I do not think is acceptable. My officials in Transport Scotland have engaged with CalMac and have been informed that it will be

operational by this spring. I will meet CalMac next week to seek further assurances to that end.

The benefits of Ar Turas include better live deck-space management for the use of capacity, better communication about disruption and a standardised accessible digitally enabled service, both online and through apps, as a means to purchase tickets and apply any changes instantly.

Richard Leonard: I thank the minister for that reply, but the problem that the minister has is this. The project started as far back as August 2016. More than five years on, in December 2021, we were told by the Government that it would be completed and operational by February 2022. In July 2022, we were told that it would be completed and operational by November 2022. Just last month, on 8 December, we were told that it would go live in the spring, but 11 days later, on 19 December, we were told that it would not be operational until November 2023. Do Scotland's islanders, who are dependent on lifeline services and work in fragile economies, not deserve an explanation, urgent action and a lot more honesty from the Government?

Jenny Gilruth: I will provide Mr Leonard with an honest response, and I hope that he heard in my initial response my own disappointment and my commitment to seek further assurances from CalMac in relation to the repeated delays to the introduction of the system. It is vital for islanders that we get the implementation of the new system right for Scotland's island communities. CalMac has advised my officials in Transport Scotland that its user acceptance testing has highlighted that a number of issues have been anticipated, given the complexity of the number of routes that CalMac serves. It is important that those issues are addressed before the system is launched and the supplier has been working to address those issues. The member will also understand that I, as minister, require to have confidence that the new system will work for islanders and visitors to our islands alike. To that end, I will continue to work with CalMac on achieving that cast-iron assurance, to ensure that the new system will deliver the improvements that passengers and islanders need to see.

First Minister's Question Time

12:01

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Cancellation of Procedures)

1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Last night, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde cancelled thousands of procedures. We know that the Scottish National Party's flagship Queen Elizabeth university hospital is already the worst performing in the country, and this morning there are reports of nurses at the hospital working 24-hour shifts. It is disgraceful to put national health service staff in that situation and, despite their incredible efforts, it could be harmful to patients.

A whistleblower has said:

"We are struggling to cope. In short, we're struggling to provide first world care in what feels like a third world environment."

Given that, how can the First Minister say that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has done all that he can to support NHS staff and prepare for this crisis?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, in relation to reports in the media this morning about staff in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde being asked to work 24-hour shifts, as I am assured by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and as the board has said publicly, that is not true. Let me just quote NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde:

"there is absolutely no truth to these claims. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde does not ask nursing staff to work a 24-hour shift, and there was no prospect that any staff member would need to work for 24 hours. To suggest otherwise is inaccurate and misleading",

and I would not expect any health board to request any member of staff to do that.

Secondly, staff across the national health service in Scotland—and, indeed, staff across the national health services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland—are struggling right now. They are doing an extraordinary and magnificent job, and my heartfelt thanks go to all of them. However, they are struggling in the face of unprecedented pressure on our national health service—pressure from Covid and, even more so, in recent weeks, from flu and other respiratory illnesses. We hope that that pressure will abate in the weeks to come, but in the meantime the Government continues to do everything possible to support NHS boards as they address those pressures.

In relation to the announcement from NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde last night, as I said on

Monday, we have empowered NHS boards to take action that they think is appropriate to protect critical and life-saving care. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has paused non-urgent elective procedures so that it can prioritise urgent treatment and cancer care, and I would expect that to be for a very short period.

Finally, it insults people's intelligence to suggest that the problems that are being encountered in the NHS in Scotland, which are the same as the problems that are being encountered elsewhere, are somehow down to the health secretary. Is it, for example, the fault of Humza Yousaf that the kind of action that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde announced last night has also been taken in health services in south London, Surrey, York, Scarborough, Derby, Leicester, Nottingham, Southampton and Portsmouth? I could probably go on. These are unprecedented pressures, which we continue to support our NHS to address. *[Applause.]*

Douglas Ross: How can nationalist MSPs clap such a despicable answer from Scotland's First Minister, in Scotland's Parliament, about Scotland's national health service?

Let us ignore the nationalist MSPs; let us look at what medical professionals are saying. They are damning about this Government's response to the crisis here in Scotland. On Monday, the First Minister placed some of the blame for the grave situation in A and E departments on, in her own words, "unnecessary attendances", but Dr Lailah Peel, deputy chair of BMA Scotland, criticised patient-blaming language, saying that it

"shows a lack of understanding of the current crisis."

We have analysed the figures, and Dr Peel is spot on. There are fewer people in A and E now than there were in the years leading up to the Covid pandemic. The problem is not unnecessary attendances. Fewer people attended A and E in the first week of this year than did in the first weeks of 2020, 2019, 2018 or 2017. Will the First Minister accept that the blame lies with her Government and not the patients?

The First Minister: Nobody, including me—certainly not me—is blaming patients. It is the case—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Let us hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: Unnecessary visits to accident and emergency units and unnecessary attendances and admissions to hospital are not in the interests of patients. That is why we are working hard to make sure that, where patients can and should be treated elsewhere, that happens.

Let me take Douglas Ross's points in turn, and let us look in detail at demand, and why the figures that he has quoted are the case. There is absolutely no doubt that demand on our health service right now is higher than it has been for some time. If we look at calls to NHS 24 over the festive period, those showed the highest demand in a decade. If we look at emergency calls to the Scottish Ambulance Service, those were higher in the most recent week than the average of the four weeks before that. The reason that they are not all translating into attendances at accident and emergency units or admissions to hospital is the work that NHS 24 and the Scottish Ambulance Service are doing to avoid that.

NHS 24 now provides advice and, where necessary, treatment to the vast majority of patients during the initial call that they make. Most of the calls to the Ambulance Service are treated through see and treat, so that patients are not taken to hospital. However, because of that, those who do go to hospital tend to be sicker and their length of stay is longer. That is part of the reason why we have pressure on our hospitals.

The waiting times in A and E are a reflection of the fact that occupancy in our hospitals is so high, which is why we have focused on speeding up discharge from hospital, where appropriate.

Finally, we listen very carefully to, engage with and work with health professionals each and every day, and it would be hard for me to find the appropriate words to describe my respect for our health professionals. Elsewhere in the UK this week, we have seen healthcare professionals on strike. They have not been on strike in Scotland, because of the work that this health secretary has done and because of the respect that we have for our healthcare professionals.

Douglas Ross: I think that those words may come back to haunt the First Minister. Also, if we are judging cabinet secretaries on sectors striking, I would hate to be Shirley-Anne Somerville right now.

We have just heard it: the First Minister is doubling down on her patient-blaming language. The problem is not too many people attending A and E; it is the Government's handling of the NHS crisis in Scotland. Dr Peel said that

"Exit block is the problem in A&E",

and the Government has known that to be a huge issue for years.

In her previous answer, the First Minister defended her position by saying that people are getting sicker, but people who are healthy and ready to go home cannot get out of hospital because the First Minister and her Government have not dealt with bed blocking. They were failing

to tackle that issue before the Covid pandemic, and now it is worse than ever.

New reports out today state that the number of avoidable deaths occurring in Scotland is now 60 people a week. That is 60 families, across our country, every single week, grieving the loss of a loved one who could have been saved. First Minister, will you confirm those tragic figures?

The First Minister: What I will absolutely confirm is that, when people wait too long for treatment, it has severe consequences, potentially, for patients. That is why we work so hard, and will continue to work so hard, with the health service to reduce long waits for treatment, whether that is at accident and emergency units or for elective care in our national health service.

I was not—to use Douglas Ross’s phrase—“doubling down” on anything. For the avoidance of any doubt, I am certainly not blaming patients for anything. It is in the interest of patients that, where appropriate, they can be treated outside hospital, because it is not in the interest of any patient to end up in an accident and emergency unit or hospital ward just because treatment is not available in the community.

I was trying to explain—because it is obvious from Douglas Ross’s questions that he does not understand this—the flow of patients through our national health service and that the reason why we see longer waits at accident and emergency is overoccupancy in our hospital wards.

Finally, on the exit block, the significant chunk of what I and the health secretary set out on Monday was about tackling delayed discharges. [*Interruption.*] We understand, from our daily engagement with health boards—

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear from the First Minister, please.

The First Minister: —that the number of delayed discharges has reduced slightly in recent weeks, but there is much more to do. That was the reason for the interventions and the additional funding that I indicated on Monday and that the health secretary set out to the chamber on Tuesday.

We will continue to focus on providing the support and making the interventions that are necessary right now to help the NHS during this period of unprecedented demand. I remind Douglas Ross and other members of the unprecedented demand that is being faced not just in Scotland but all over the UK, and in much of the rest of the world as well.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister can throw insults at me if she wants to. I was quoting— [*Interruption.*] I see that she laughs at this. You can laugh at it, First Minister, if you want—

The Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please.

Douglas Ross: —but I was quoting a front-line doctor in Scotland’s NHS who happens to be the deputy chair of BMA Scotland.

The First Minister has effectively confirmed that the tragic figures that we heard this morning are correct. That there are 60 avoidable deaths every single week in Scotland’s NHS is confirmed by Scotland’s First Minister.

Scotland’s health secretary is making the situation worse, not better. Here is just one example of what we are experiencing across Scotland. On Hogmanay, a family visited their 80-year-old uncle. He has had major heart surgery and hip operations, and he often struggles to breathe. When they arrived, they discovered that he had fallen and broken his neck. The family dialled 999 seven times, and it took more than 12 and a half hours for the ambulance to arrive. That was seven emergency calls, over 12 and a half hours, for an 80-year-old who had broken their neck. His niece told us:

“The ambulance crews were brilliant, but we are disgusted at what our uncle has been put through.”

That dire situation confirms, yet again, that the health secretary and the Government are not on top of this crisis. His failures are creating risk to lives across the country. First Minister, surely, for the good of Scotland, it is time to sack Humza Yousaf.

The First Minister: If I raised a smile in response to Douglas Ross, it was not directed at any health professional. I suppose that I was raising a smile—in challenging circumstances for everybody right now—about Douglas Ross accusing anybody else of throwing insults.

Every single day, the health secretary and I will continue to take the actions that are necessary to support our NHS during these very difficult times. I said earlier that I do not take anything for granted, and I do not intend to sound complacent at all about this: it is because we respect those people who work on the front line of our national health service so highly that we are offering them a much higher pay increase for next year than any other Government in the UK is offering. Thus far, we have avoided industrial action in our national health service. We will continue to do everything that we can to ensure that that continues.

We are supporting health boards, too, to address the reasons for long waits in our national health service—whether for an ambulance, in accident and emergency units or to be discharged from hospital—which is why we announced the action that we announced earlier this week. Too many patients are waiting too long for treatment

right now, so we will continue to do everything that we can to address that situation while hoping that the pressures that are caused by, in the main, Covid and flu, abate over the weeks to come.

That should not take away from the fact—true in our Ambulance Service, our accident and emergency units, our general practices and across our hospitals and other healthcare settings—that the vast majority of patients in this country, even during these extremely difficult times, get excellent care on our national health service. That is down to the dedication of those people who work in it, which is why they have my grateful thanks every single day.

National Health Service

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Yesterday, Jackie Baillie and I hosted a health summit with front-line national health service staff, representatives of organisations and experts who work across our NHS. They told us that our NHS is broken and that the system is failing; that they are being asked to do the impossible; and that, every day, that crisis puts patient lives at risk. They were united in telling us that the cause of that crisis is not Covid, the flu, Strep A or winter pressures; they said that it is a crisis that has been 10 years in the making. However, the First Minister does not agree. Why does she think that front-line NHS staff are wrong?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I do not think that front-line health service staff are wrong in what they say. I do not know why it took until yesterday for Anas Sarwar and Jackie Baillie to meet with health service professionals; the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care meets with them regularly, and I have engagements with them as well—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

The First Minister: What health service professionals say to us—I am sure that they said this to Anas Sarwar yesterday, too—is that challenges existed in our national health service before Covid. We have been taking action to address those challenges. On funding our national health service, front-line health funding has more than doubled under this Government—it is higher per head of population than it is in other parts of the United Kingdom. Almost 30,000 more people work in our NHS today than when this Government took office, and there are more healthcare professionals—doctors, qualified nurses or professionals across a range of groups—per head of population than there are in other parts of the UK. We will continue to work with front-line healthcare professionals to deal with those challenges.

I take issue with Anas Sarwar on his point that it is somehow not the case that Covid and flu are having a significant impact on those pressures. Right now, there are more than 1,200 patients with Covid in our hospitals, and anybody who says that that is not having an impact on what we are dealing with right now is, frankly, not dealing with reality. In the couple of weeks that led up to Christmas and over the Christmas period, 1,000 patients a week were admitted to our hospitals with flu, and anybody who says that that is not a significant factor in what we are dealing with right now is, frankly, not dealing with reality. I direct that comment at Anas Sarwar, not at healthcare professionals, who are dealing with those issues every day.

Whether on NHS pay—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister:—record investment or record staffing numbers, we will continue to support the NHS in these difficult times, as we always have done.

Anas Sarwar: It is clear from that answer who is not dealing with reality, and it is Nicola Sturgeon and her Scottish National Party Government.

Nicola Sturgeon might not want to listen to me, but she should listen to the organisations. The Royal College of Nursing, the Royal College of Midwives, the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, the Royal College of General Practitioners, Glasgow Local Medical Committee, the British Medical Association in Scotland, Unison, the GMB and Unite the union are all saying that they have heard the excuses before and do not believe them, and that they think that the First Minister is not doing enough.

The sticking-plaster approach will not solve the problem. We heard directly from staff about the impact that this crisis is having on them. They told us that it is causing them, in their words, “moral injury”—that is, personal distress and trauma, because they cannot provide the care that they know that their patients need. It is causing our NHS staff psychological and mental trauma. One of them said that the conditions that they are working in mean no dignity, no respect and no safety for patients.

The BMA and the Royal College of Emergency Medicine have both said that the crisis is leading to avoidable deaths—they predict that that could be as many as 60 avoidable deaths a week. The experts tell us that what was announced this week will not be enough to address the problem, so why

can the First Minister not see that her sticking-plaster approach is not working?

The First Minister: We will continue to take a range of actions. What we announced this week was in addition to the actions that are already being taken and, of course, the record investment that we are putting into our national health service. In the next financial year, supported by the tax decisions that we are taking—asking those who can most afford it to pay a bit more in tax—an additional £1 billion will go into our NHS. We will support investment and, where it is appropriate and in the interest of patients, we will support reform in care and patient pathways in our NHS.

Nothing that Anas Sarwar has said to me has not already been said directly to Government by healthcare professionals, because we engage with them day in and day out. They are dealing with unprecedented pressures right now. Some of that necessitates longer-term reform of our NHS, but some of that is also absolutely being caused by the winter pressures that have been at their peak in recent weeks. I hope that, over the coming weeks—very soon—we will start to see flu levels reduce significantly, and that will start to reduce some of that pressure on our hospitals, although the situation with Covid remains more unpredictable and volatile, given the new variants that are circulating. I hope that we will see some of that pressure abate, but that will still leave a challenging situation in our health service, which is why the investment, the increase in staffing and the reforms continue to be important.

No Government anywhere has a single solution to the issues right now, but this Government remains focused on taking the actions that are necessary, which is why I think that we continue to have the trust of the people of Scotland as we do so.

Anas Sarwar: The First Minister is just not listening, and the approach is not working. This is not just a crisis in winter; it is a year-round crisis. Nicola Sturgeon's excuses will not wash. The crisis in our NHS is not because of Covid, it is not because of flu, it is not because of Strep A and it is not because of winter pressures; it is a crisis that has been 15 years in the making. The result is that we have the longest-ever NHS waiting lists, with 750,000 Scots waiting; the worst ever accident and emergency waiting times, with 2,000 people a week waiting more than 12 hours; and record levels of delayed discharge, with 58,501 NHS bed days lost a month.

After 15 years of the SNP, our NHS is broken and the system is failing. Staff are being asked to do the impossible, patients are being asked to accept the unacceptable and lives are being lost. Is it not the case that the people who caused the problem cannot be the ones to fix the problem?

The First Minister: On the latter point, it is, of course, up to the people of Scotland to decide who they trust to be in government to lead the country through challenges.

Of course, there were challenges in the NHS before Covid—I have never sought to suggest otherwise—and the actions that we are taking around investment, staffing and reforms to patient pathways are designed to address that. There are record numbers of staff in our health service right now—almost 30,000 more than when this Government took office—and, of course, more staff per head of population than anywhere else in the UK. That is the reality.

People watching at home—including the one in 25 people in the Scottish population who have Covid and the many people suffering from flu and other respiratory illnesses—who hear Anas Sarwar say that the fact that we have 1,200 Covid patients in our hospitals and the fact that, in recent times, 1,000 patients with flu have been admitted to our hospitals every week have nothing to do with the pressures in our NHS will wonder what on earth he is talking about.

We will continue to work with and listen to those on the front line of our national health service as we continue to strive to give them fair pay increases and as we continue to support them to deliver excellent care, which, even during these tough times, they continue to do for the vast majority of patients across our country.

Cabinet (Meetings)

3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S6F-01684)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Tuesday.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: My Opposition colleagues are quite right to raise the crisis in our national health service. Liberal Democrat research has quantified just how bad things are. Last year, we discovered that one in six people who could not get a general practitioner appointment carried out a medical procedure on themselves or got somebody else to do it.

Maria is 22 years old. She is a Ukrainian refugee who has been living in Scotland since the summer. She suffers from a hormonal thyroid condition that requires regular testing and treatment. However, when she presented to her new GP, she was faced with an unexpected dilemma. The wait was so long that it made more sense for her to risk travelling back to a war zone to see her doctor in Kyiv—so she did so. The air raid sirens, drone strikes and cruise missile attacks in the Ukrainian capital were less daunting

to Maria than the wait for treatment in Scotland's NHS. That is appalling.

Those are the risks that people are taking for the sake of their own health—and all for the want of basic access to primary care. Is the First Minister embarrassed by that?

The First Minister: I do not know the circumstances of that case beyond what Alex Cole-Hamilton has narrated, and it would be wrong for me to comment on an individual case. What I do know is that we continue to support general practice. There are more GPs per head of population in Scotland than there are anywhere else in the United Kingdom—there are 83 GPs per 100,000 people here, compared with 63 per 100,000 in England, 63 per 100,000 in Wales and 75 per 100,000 in Northern Ireland. We have a target, of course, and right now we are working towards the delivery of increased numbers of GPs. I think that we have recruited more than 3,000 members of the wider multidisciplinary teams in general practice and primary care.

Like access to other parts of the health service right now, access to GPs is challenging—and very challenging for some patients. We continue to work to address that, and we will continue to do that with record investment and record support for recruitment, in partnership with those who are working so hard across our health service.

Record Temperatures

4. **Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the implications for Scotland and the Scottish Government are following Met Office reports that temperatures in Scotland and the United Kingdom reached the highest on record in 2022. (S6F-01689)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Met Office figures underline that we are already experiencing climate change impacts in Scotland. We must adapt to those changes and prepare for further impacts of global climate change, which are, of course, already locked in.

We are currently preparing the third climate change adaptation programme for publication next year to succeed the current programme. Those programmes respond to the United Kingdom climate change risk assessments, which present the best available evidence and climate projections from organisations across the UK, including, of course, the Met Office.

The Climate Change Committee has urged that risks from higher temperatures be prioritised in the upcoming programme. We are working across Government and with public bodies to ensure improved preparedness for a projected increase in hotter years in the future.

Fiona Hyslop: The figures are, indeed, alarming. Across the world—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: We will have a brief suspension.

12:28

Meeting suspended.

12:29

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I call Fiona Hyslop.

Fiona Hyslop: The record temperature figures are, indeed, alarming. Across the world, we are seeing more extreme weather experiences, with increased flooding and extreme heat at home. Every Government bears acute responsibilities for tackling the climate emergency. With the Scottish Government's draft energy strategy that was published this week and the Climate Change Committee's critical report that was published in December, does the First Minister acknowledge that the Government now needs to accelerate delivery on housing and transport emission reductions and a just transition to renewable energy? Will she ensure that the Government's budget is sufficient and that public bodies ramp up on delivery, given that, on current trends, we will not meet our ambitious net zero targets?

The First Minister: I absolutely agree with Fiona Hyslop on all those points. It is worth pointing out that the energy strategy that was published this week, with the just transition vision alongside it, is, in part, about how we accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels to renewable and low-carbon sources of energy in a fair and just manner. That is really important.

We must remain 100 per cent focused on delivering our policy programme, which includes transport and the heating of homes, across the whole of society. As I have just said, we have to decarbonise the energy system, and the draft energy strategy goes into detail about how we do that. We must make sure that the climate change plan reflects all of that. A draft of that plan will be published later this year, alongside sectoral just transition plans, to set out a clear path for emissions reductions. Of course, we also need to make sure that investment is in place to back up all of that.

The Government remains focused on the issue. We often talk about it in terms of a challenge, and much of it is challenging, but there are also massive opportunities for Scotland in all of this, which we must seize.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): By 2050, there could be well over 100 heat-related

deaths a year, according to the UK Climate Change Committee. Adapting buildings for cooling will be key to avoiding a worst-case scenario, and I welcome the joint work with the UK Government on that.

Can the First Minister confirm when an assessment will be ready of the cooling systems that will be required for the current housing stock?

The First Minister: I will come back to the member with a precise answer on when an assessment will be ready, but I absolutely agree with him that that is an important strand of work.

How we decarbonise the heating and cooling of our buildings is incredibly important as part of the overall delivery of our climate change objectives, so we will continue to work in partnership with the UK Government where necessary, because some of the levers and powers lie with the UK Government. I will be seeing the Prime Minister this evening, and I am sure that these issues will be among the many issues that we will touch on.

I am sure that we will debate the detail of all these important issues robustly in the chamber, but I hope that there will be a lot that unites us as we live up to the responsibility on our shoulders to help to combat the climate emergency.

Islay Ferries

5. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister for what reason two ferries that will serve Islay are being built in Turkey. (S6F-01680)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In line with relevant procurement legislation, the contract for the ferries that are currently being built for service on the Islay routes was awarded following a full and open tendering process, led by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd—CMAL—which is the procuring authority. The bid that was received from that yard represented the best value for money in terms of quality and price.

Liam Kerr: I thank the First Minister for that answer, but the Climate Change Committee's report last month was not just critical but devastating in exposing the Government's failures on the environment and emissions.

Is the First Minister comfortable that the steel for those two ferries is coming not from a Scottish steel mill—there is one about 40 miles from here, for example—but, rather, from China, the world's largest polluter, whose steel sector is the second largest contributor to its emissions?

The First Minister: First, on the procurement decisions, over recent weeks, the leader of the member's party has rightly questioned me in the chamber and has seemed to suggest that, somehow, we did not follow proper procurement

policies in the award of other ferry contracts. Therefore, it is really important to stress that, in all these matters, we have complied with the relevant procurement legislation.

In relation to steel, that is a matter for the company that has the contract. The contract that has been awarded is a standard international shipbuilding contract, and, as such, decisions regarding materials and equipment lie with the shipyard. I understand that the shipyard might have originally intended to source steel from Ukraine, but, for obvious reasons, it has had to look elsewhere. The shipyard will take those decisions, and I am sure that it will apply all necessary objectives to the decisions that it reaches.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The two new ferries will each be able to carry up to 450 passengers and 100 cars or 14 commercial vehicles, which will provide a combined 40 per cent increase in vehicle and freight capacity on the Islay route. That will represent an improvement for islanders and businesses, and it underlines the Scottish Government's commitment to our island communities and the ferry network.

Does the First Minister share my view that questions such as the one that we have just heard reiterate the fact that the Tories are interested in politicking, and not people, when it comes to the ferry network?

The First Minister: On Jenni Minto's last point, she is absolutely right. More importantly, people the length and breadth of Scotland, including our island communities, will draw their own conclusions from the approach that the Conservatives take on such issues.

Jenni Minto, who, in the Parliament, represents a number of islands, is right: the award of the contracts is good news for islanders and island communities, which is why it is important that they are progressing well. I understand that there will be an update on steel cutting and keel laying, which we expect in the coming days. We will continue to take decisions that are in the interests of people who live in our island communities, and that includes the decision that we are talking about.

Bus Fare Capping

6. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister, in the light of the extension of bus fare caps in England, whether the Scottish Government supports capping bus fares in Scotland for those aged between 22 and 60. (S6F-01697)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I point out that Scotland already has the most generous concessionary fare scheme in the United Kingdom. More than 2.3 million people in

Scotland are eligible not for capped bus fares, but for free bus travel. We continue to develop and assess options to create a fairer and more transparent system of fares in order to maintain and increase affordability for people who need it, which is why we are progressing the fair fares review. That review is considering the cost and availability of services and the range of discounts and concessionary schemes that are available on all modes of transport, which includes bus, rail and ferry.

Neil Bibby: The maximum cost of a single bus fare in London is £1.65. In Edinburgh, it is £1.85. In Manchester, Liverpool and West Yorkshire, where Labour mayors have taken control of transport, it is £2. It is £2 in Cardiff, and now it will be £2 in every part of England for the next few months. However, in greater Glasgow, it can be as much as £2.65 for a 2-mile journey. We really do not need a fares fair review to tell us that that is not fair. It is time to cap fares, for greater public control of buses, and for there to be a bit of urgency. In a cost of living crisis, why are people in Scotland paying among the highest bus fares in the UK?

The First Minister: Neil Bibby has omitted to say that people who are over 60 do not pay anything at all for bus travel, which is replicated in other parts of the UK, and that in Scotland, no one who is under the age of 22 pays for bus travel either. Fares are not capped for them; their bus travel is free. Across our country, 2.3 million people are eligible for completely free bus travel.

On the question of capping costs for people who do pay, it is right that we progress any such proposal through the fair fares review so that we properly consider the cost and availability of services and the whole range of discounts and concessionary schemes that are already available. That is exactly what we will continue to do. I will say this yet again, because I think that it is a fantastic statistic: the reality is that 2.3 million people in Scotland do not pay anything at all. They do not pay a single penny to travel by bus in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: We move to general and constituency supplementary questions.

Influenza (Vaccination Uptake)

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I refer to the exchanges on the pressures that are on the national health service. I understand that some 2 million people have accessed the flu vaccine—90 per cent or so did that when getting their winter Covid booster—but can more be done to ensure access for those who are eligible? Flu is very serious indeed.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Uptake levels for the Covid and flu vaccines are high, which is welcome. We will continue to promote vaccine uptake for those who are eligible but have not yet been vaccinated.

We will, of course, think most carefully about those who are in the most vulnerable groups. Figures for, I think, the first week of January show that almost 90 per cent of older care home residents in Scotland are vaccinated, which is higher than the figures for England and Wales, and that 77 per cent of over-50s in Scotland are vaccinated, which is again higher than figures for other parts of the United Kingdom. We will continue to work hard to encourage everybody who is eligible for a vaccine to take that up.

NHS Fife (Major Incident Criteria)

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The First Minister is more than aware of the crisis that the NHS faces. Last week, a whistleblower from the accident and emergency department at Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy contacted me to express their concerns that patients were waiting for more than nine hours to be seen and that patient examinations were being conducted in ambulances that were in the hospital's grounds. Staff in that department believed that the major incident criteria were being met but they were "not allowed" to call or declare the situation as such.

Will the First Minister confirm that no political direction was given to NHS Fife—or any other health board, for that matter—to ensure that a major incident was not called? Will she agree to investigate why staff were "not allowed" to follow standard protocol?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I said on Monday, and the health secretary confirmed in writing to health boards this week, that although health boards can seek advice and guidance from the Government when they think that that is appropriate, it is up to them to take whatever decisions they think might be appropriate to prioritise critical and life-saving care. Douglas Ross started his questioning to me today by criticising the fact that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has, in effect, done that by pausing non-urgent care in Glasgow—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me, First Minister. Members must treat one another with courtesy and respect. I would appreciate it if there were no interruptions at the moment. Continue, First Minister.

The First Minister: The point that I am making is that the action that NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde announced last night demonstrates that health boards have the flexibility to take such

action when they feel that it is necessary, which is right and proper.

Cameron House Hotel (Fatal Accident Inquiry)

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The fatal accident inquiry into the tragic fire at Cameron House hotel more than five years ago reported yesterday. I thank the sheriff and the Lord Advocate for their assistance in getting to this point. The report includes a range of recommendations that are designed to prevent such a fire from happening again.

Will the First Minister give a commitment today that all the recommendations will be implemented as a matter of the utmost urgency? Will she also consider whether the fire brigade requires further enforcement powers, given that, before the Cameron House fire and the more recent fire at the New County hotel in Perth, people appear to have been warned of fire risks but to have done nothing about them?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In relation to the FAI report that was published yesterday, I, too, thank the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service for its work on this extremely important FAI and for publishing the report. I thank again the emergency services for their response on the night of the fire, and I give my condolences again to those who were bereaved in the incident.

Of course, we will thoroughly consider all the sheriff's recommendations and I expect that, yes, we will accept all the recommendations. However, we must go through a process of considering them properly. We require to respond in due course, and we will do that.

In the light of the Cameron House fire and the more recent incident in Perth—my condolences go to the bereaved in that incident, too—it is right to look at enforcement provisions. Under the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is appointed as the enforcing authority for fire and, as part of that, it produces all the relevant enforcement procedures, while applying the principles that are contained in the Scottish regulators' strategic code of practice. As the enforcing authority, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service works with duty holders in relevant premises to achieve compliance in fire safety, through providing advice and support and taking enforcement action when necessary.

Those systems are set out very clearly, but, of course, as part of our consideration of the recommendations of the sheriff, we will ensure that all appropriate aspects of that are looked at in an appropriate way.

Trade Union Legislation

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): The Tory UK Government continues to show contempt for workers with its proposed anti-trade union legislation. Does the First Minister share my concern about the impact that those plans could have on the rights of people who are working in devolved public services? Will she join me in condemning and opposing that brazen attack on trade union rights?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): That is a really important issue. It is important to make the point that the UK Government already has the most anti-trade union laws in western Europe, and the proposed bill threatens to undermine and weaken the rights of workers even further. We strongly oppose any bill that undermines legitimate trade union activity and does not respect fair work principles.

As Governments, we should be working with the public sector and trade unions to reach fair and reasonable settlements that respect the legitimate interests of workers, rather than pouring fuel on fires or taking away workers' democratic rights. I will make those points very strongly when I see the Prime Minister this evening.

Gorgie City Farm (Closure)

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Gorgie city farm, which gives volunteering opportunities to disadvantaged young people and adults and provides a wonderful green play and learning space in one of the most urban parts of the capital, is due to close on Monday. The First Minister will be aware of the incredible value that that community facility provides, because she has visited the farm, which is one of Scotland's last urban farms. What emergency support could be made available to help keep the farm going in an interim period? Will ministers also agree to meet me, the council and local campaigners to discuss a way forward to save the farm?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I have visited Gorgie city farm, so I am well aware of the excellent work that it does and its real value to the community and to Scotland as a whole. Of course, if there are any reasonable steps that the Government could take to support a way forward, we would certainly consider doing so. I will ask the relevant minister to meet with Miles Briggs, the council and representatives of the farm, if that would be helpful and appropriate, to consider options for the future. I will ask that that be taken forward with all due haste.

University of Edinburgh Admissions (Scottish Students)

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): A mother in my constituency has provided me with data that shows that, this year, for many courses at the University of Edinburgh—outside the very welcome widening access places—zero Scots were admitted. For Scottish pupils from ordinary families and an average school, the doors are closed, no matter their mind or endeavour. For 440 years, the University of Edinburgh has admitted among the best and brightest of Scotland, including Walter Scott, Katherine Grainger, Stuart McDonald, Robert Louis Stevenson and Joanna Cherry—all great minds who worked hard and gained entry to study law here, in our capital city. With funding frozen for 13 years and the Scottish National Party's cap on Scottish students, the historical promise of a Scottish education is broken. After five centuries, how has it come to this?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Forgive me if this is not parliamentary language, but, for reasons that I will come to, I am actually quite gobsmacked that that question has been put in that way by a Labour member of Parliament.

Let me first give these facts: a record number of young people secured places at university in this latest Universities and Colleges Admissions Service cycle, and a record number of 18-year-old Scots have secured a university place. That number has gone up by 20 per cent since 2019, the most recent year when there were exams.

The data provides a really positive story for those who are applying from deprived areas. The number of 18-year-olds from the most deprived areas who secure places has increased by 31 per cent since the 2019 cycle, and acceptances for people of all ages from the most deprived areas are up by 4 per cent.

This is where I take issue with Michael Marra. In my earlier days as First Minister, I used to be regularly criticised for the fact that too few young people from deprived communities were going to university. Now, I appear to be being criticised for the fact that too many of them are going to university.

I do not come from a deprived background. I come from a working-class background and went to a state school, and, when I studied law at Glasgow university, I was very much in the minority. Within a context of a record number of young Scots at university, I think that it is really good news that we are seeing more people from the most deprived areas actually going to our universities.

St Fittick's Community Park (Rezoning)

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The First Minister will be aware that people from Torry and other Aberdeen campaigners are at the Parliament today. They are angry that they face losing their community's last remaining green space, St Fittick's community park. Torry contains the most concentrated area of multiple deprivation in the north of Scotland. Losing St Fittick's will be detrimental to residents' health and wellbeing and bad for wider social and environmental justice. Will the First Minister support the calls of Torry residents and others to save the park for current and future generations by using powers under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 to ensure that St Fittick's is not rezoned for development?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I know that there is strong feeling on the issue. However, Aberdeen City Council has notified ministers of its intention to adopt the local development plan. Ministers will now consider that and, as part of their scrutiny, will consider previous Scottish Government recommendations and check whether reporters' modifications have been fully translated into the modified plan. Of course, ministers will set out a decision in due course.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's question time.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I note that, when the First Minister spoke about the current delayed hospital discharge situation, she referenced live data. As far as I am aware, that live data is not public. The Office for Statistics Regulation has made it clear that, when information is used to publicly inform Parliament, it should be published in an accessible form. Will you seek from the First Minister a commitment to publish that data as soon as possible?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Burnett. That is not a matter for the chair, but your comments are on the record.

There will be a brief suspension before we move on to members' business.

12:51

Meeting suspended.

12:53

On resuming—

Caledonian Sleeper Service

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-07156, in the name of Richard Leonard, on the Caledonian sleeper service. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes that ScotRail Services transferred into public ownership on 1 April 2022 and that Scotland's rail passenger services are operated by Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd, a company owned and controlled by the Scottish Government; notes that the sleeper service between Scotland and England is approaching its 150th anniversary; recognises what it sees as the significant social, economic and environmental values of the Caledonian Sleeper service, including for the Central Scotland region; notes that the current franchise is due to end in June 2023, following the Scottish Government's decision not to rebase the franchise; further notes that the Scottish Government has not yet confirmed how sleeper services will be operated from June 2023 onwards; notes the view that this is the ideal opportunity to bring the Caledonian Sleeper Service into public ownership via established structures and reintegrate the sleeper service with ScotRail and that, in so doing, the public purse would not be expected to fund profits for a private operator of the service, and further notes the calls on the Scottish Government to confirm that it will not give Serco a further contract for the Caledonian Sleeper service and that it will instead use a Scottish Government-owned company to run the service from June 2023.

12:54

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I begin by referring members to my voluntary entry in the register of members' interests. I thank members who signed the motion enabling the debate. In so doing, they have honoured a commitment not just to all those who care about our railways, but to all those who care about parliamentary democracy and open government.

Next month marks 150 years of an overnight rail sleeper service running from Scotland to London, but this is a service that cannot merely be consigned to its glorious past; it demands active support in the present to secure a bright future as an integral part of a wider and longer-term plan for our public transport system—a plan that means that, instead of closing down booking offices and cutting jobs, we invest in our railway and cut fares. If we are really serious about climate change, we should be getting people out of their cars and on to public transport and, when it comes to cross-border travel, we should be getting people out of their airline seats and into railway carriages.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I thank Richard Leonard for the points that he has

made. Does he accept that, if passengers are not returning to the railways in the numbers that used them previously, and if there is therefore a shortfall of money, we cannot just keep increasing the subsidy?

Richard Leonard: It is not a subsidy; it is an investment. If we are serious about climate change, we need to get people out of their cars and on to public transport.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Will Richard Leonard take an intervention?

Richard Leonard: No, I need to press on.

That is why not only this Parliament but the workforce, the trade unions, the travelling public and the people deserve some straight answers from the minister this afternoon.

The position is this: on 5 October last year—the eve of the Scottish National Party conference in Aberdeen—instead of making a ministerial statement or speech in the Parliament, the Minister for Transport issued a press release based on a carefully crafted reply to a Government-initiated question, announcing that Serco was being stripped of the sleeper contract and issued with a notice of termination. Then, exactly two months later, after the SNP conference was all done and dusted, in reply to a series of written questions that I lodged, the minister was forced to reveal, with a smoking gun in her hand, that an

“appropriate assessment of a direct award to Serco Caledonian Sleepers Ltd is being made”.—[*Written Answers*, 5 December 2022; S6W-12362.]

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): Does Richard Leonard understand that I am somewhat constrained by United Kingdom legislation that, as a Scottish minister, I have no power over? It requires me to look at a direct award and, if that is ruled out, the operator of last resort arrangements that we have in place in Scotland. Does he understand the process that I have to go through as a Scottish minister?

Richard Leonard: Yes, I understand the process and I will come on to that.

Jenny Gilruth is guided by not only the Railways Act 1993 but the Scotland Act 2016, which devolved rail services to Scotland. The truth of the matter is that the company that runs the Caledonian sleeper called for more public money to run the service. That request was assessed and rejected, then, 60 days later, the minister was forced to admit that the Government was lining up a direct award to the self-same company.

Let me be clear: this is not just another run-of-the-mill ministerial U-turn; it is a governmental betrayal of the highest order. It goes well beyond

the simple question of a train contract to the very values that define the Government. Let me remind Parliament and the minister that this is the same Serco that presided over a culture of bullying and harassment of its own staff on the Caledonian sleeper service. It is the same Serco that boosted its profits by 64 per cent in 2021 and hiked up the pay and bonus of its chief executive officer by shamelessly exploiting the deadly Covid-19 pandemic as a money-making opportunity. It is the same Serco that, for more than a year, conducted a reign of terror, night after night, among asylum seekers in Glasgow with its hostile lock-change programme and forced eviction policy. That is who we are dealing with.

I say to the minister that it is not too late to do the right thing and bring this service into democratic public ownership. It is not too late to make a direct award to Scottish Rail Holdings, because there is a clear legal basis for bringing in a public sector operator under section 25 of the Railways Act 1993.

The burning question is this: has Scottish Rail Holdings been asked to be prepared to operate the Caledonian sleeper service? If not, why not? If not, will the minister instruct it to do so today?

Finally, there are some who will accuse me of making this demand out of some kind of rigid, dogmatic, socialist ideology.

John Mason: No.

Richard Leonard: Well, I have to confess that I do stand here this afternoon guilty of the charge of standing up for an ideal. I stand guilty of the charge of holding the firm conviction that this natural private monopoly run for profit should be a natural public service run for passengers. I plead guilty to the charge of believing that public ownership of the railway is economically rational, socially responsible, environmentally sustainable and democratically unanswerable.

I do plead guilty, but I also make a plea. This decision rests in the hands of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government alone. It is both legally competent and morally correct. So, this afternoon, I hope that the minister is not only listening but hearing, and that she is prepared to act, and to act decisively, to take this public transport service back where it belongs—into public ownership.

13:01

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): I thank Richard Leonard for bringing the subject of the sleeper service to the chamber for debate.

I am enthusiastic about rail and use the train as often as I can. However, I have to say that the sleeper service is extremely expensive, which is

why I have not used it since the new rolling stock was introduced. The most basic return fare, including a bed, is meant to be about £280, but when I looked at dates in the near future, I found that the cost of a classic ticket was more like £400 for a return. By contrast, the last time I travelled to London, which was in July, I travelled by West Coast daytime train and the cost was £77 for a return.

All rail travel is heavily subsidised—or invested in, for those who like that term—and rightly so, normally by around 50 per cent. It has been reported that the average subsidy on the sleeper is £164 per single ticket. Broadly speaking, I am in favour of public ownership in many sectors, especially when it is a public service and is virtually a monopoly. All the trains run on the same track and use the same stations, just as all our electricity runs through the same wires and all our water runs through the same pipes, so the idea of competition in the rail sector or the electricity sector will always be a bit artificial.

Of course, it must be said at this point that the Scottish Government is bound by relevant Westminster legislation, which I think is principally the Railways Act 1993. Therefore, we do not have complete freedom to act in the way that we might want to if all rail powers were fully devolved.

Richard Leonard's motion mentions

"profits for a private operator".

It may be the case that a private operator makes profits but, equally, a private operator can make losses. I think that that has happened to Abellio with the ScotRail contract and to Serco with the sleeper. Therefore, public ownership is not without risks and, if there is a loss, it is the public purse that has to foot the bill.

There has sometimes been the illusion that, with nationalisation, all the financial pressures would somehow magically disappear. People talked as though bringing ScotRail into public ownership would automatically mean lower fares, higher pay for the staff and more frequent and improved services, but the reality is that income and expenditure still have to match, whoever owns and operates our railways. We can do all the things that I mentioned—have low fares, pay staff well and all the rest of it—but that still comes at a cost, whether the owner is in the public sector or the private sector.

We could increase the subsidy, but would that be the right thing to do at a time when the national health service and other public services are so under pressure? Let us be realistic: only a tiny number of people use the sleeper service. Unless they are using the seated coaches, they generally need to be fairly well off or have their employer pay for it.

Serco has fingers in a lot of pies. Although some of its work for the public sector might be of high quality and provide value for money, as Richard Leonard said, those of us in Glasgow will not quickly forget how Serco was involved with the Home Office in threatening asylum seekers with eviction just a few years ago.

My final point is on a sensitive subject. There is a balance to be struck between the needs of passengers—or “customers”, as they seem to be called these days—and the needs of the staff who work on the railways. We must all be clear that the passengers must come first, but that has not always been the case. Those of us who are older remember—years ago, in the days of nationalised British Rail—the awful sandwiches, which were a standing joke throughout Scotland, England and Wales. Certainly, at that time, it seemed that the railways were often run for the staff, and the passengers were a bit of an afterthought. Therefore, by all means let us take the sleeper into public ownership, but if we are to do so, let us also make the commitment that the passengers must come first and remember that we, as politicians, together with the railway staff, are here to serve the paying public.

13:05

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I, too, thank Richard Leonard for securing the debate, not least because it is always good fun to hear him speak and wind the clock back several decades. That aside, this is an important topic to debate—because it is a debate and we are not all going to agree. It is also an opportunity to hear from the minister, as we have yet to discover what she intends to do about the sleeper service.

We need to know that, because it is an important and iconic service. Six mornings a week, a little piece of Scotland rolls into London, full of people who are ready to start their day. The background to the debate was the announcement last year by the Scottish Government that the sleeper contract with Serco would be terminated halfway through this June. That was after the company wanted to discuss finances in the wake of the pandemic, so it seemed a very sudden decision.

When ScotRail became NatRail on April fools' day last year, with the obligatory plaque unveiling by the First Minister, it followed years of negative publicity for Abellio. However, that is not the background here. Since Serco started running the sleeper service, it has invested in new fleet—there have been 75 new carriages in less than four years. Revenue was falling when the contract was awarded but, since then, Serco has grown revenue by 48 per cent, with 2022, incredibly,

being its best-ever year. This coming year looks set to be even better.

Customers must like what Serco does—it has scored its highest-ever customer satisfaction scores, with full trains. Employee satisfaction is also up, despite what the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers might say. Against that background, it seems strange for even Richard Leonard to be arguing for change, although for him, as he confirmed, it is ideological.

Serco is clearly doing something right. I have not yet travelled on the sleeper, but I hope to do so soon on a trip to London, because on a one-way trip, it offers great value for money when compared with other options.

There are a range of ways to travel on the sleeper: passengers can just take a seat, or there is a choice of cabin options, too. There is lots of Scottish produce on board—even the mattresses are from Aberdeen.

The minister has to make up her mind, and she has three options: the sleeper service could rejoin ScotRail; she could bring in an operator of last resort; or she could offer a direct contract award, which might be the best option in terms of value for money. I have spoken to Serco and I hope that the minister will do so, too. It is keen to discuss a direct contract award, which would mean ministers having complete control of the contract. That must surely appeal to the Government. Last month, Jenny Gilruth said that she was assessing that option. Has she now done so?

A cloud of uncertainty hangs over the sleeper service, which is unfair to staff. I have outlined some of the options for the minister. She needs to say what she intends to do and why, and she should set out the business case for that decision. How would taking the service off Serco help passengers and the taxpayer? With the current contract ending in June, we are running out of track.

The Government never said why taking ownership of ScotRail would be better and it never had a plan for making it so. I hope that the minister does not repeat that mistake with the iconic Caledonian sleeper.

13:09

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Richard Leonard for securing this important and timely debate.

The Caledonian sleeper is 150 years old this year. From the Victorian era up to the present day, it has been a vital and valued link between Scotland and London for travellers of all kinds. Now more than ever, the sleeper has a potentially vital role to play as a means of low-carbon travel.

The two most-used domestic flight routes are between London and Glasgow and between London and Edinburgh. There is clearly significant potential for modal shift from domestic flights to rail, and a reliable, affordable and comfortable sleeper service can play a key part in that shift. It can and should play an important role in getting people back on to our railways and in meeting Scotland's and the UK's climate commitments. It is also vital for our tourism sector.

For the sleeper to play that role, however, we need to have a world-class service and value for money for passengers and taxpayers. Under the Serco franchise since 2015, we have had neither. Not only has Serco failed on its franchise commitments, but its running of the sleeper service has not been a particularly happy experience for either passengers or staff. A 2021 survey of Caledonian sleeper staff by the RMT found that nearly 60 per cent of those surveyed had felt harassed by management at work, and nearly half had felt bullied.

Meanwhile, price hikes mean that the cost of a standard bed on the service is now up to £190 one way. That is out of reach for many people in Scotland. I believe that many people would far rather take the train to London but, at prices like that, it is no wonder that many people have to opt to take a cheaper flight.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Given that the current subsidy is, as I understand it, £164 per ticket, how on earth—I refer back to John Mason's speech—could the ticket price be made any cheaper without huge funds being ploughed in from the public purse?

Neil Bibby: Clearly, there is a need for investment and subsidy in the railways. There always has been and there always will be. However, we want a publicly owned railway that reinvests the profits from those private companies into services. If we have that, we can make rail travel more affordable.

As Richard Leonard said, despite significant cost and revenue risk being transferred to the Scottish Government for a number of years, Serco has received fees for running the service. Indeed, this week—I say this to Mr Kerr—Serco reported an operating profit of £11.2 million. However, the public pay the price. As Richard Leonard's motion says, money from the public purse is being used to fund the profits of a private operator.

There is a better way. I believe that there is a clear case for the Caledonian sleeper being taken into public ownership in June 2023. Such a step would mark an important move away from the inefficient and costly fragmentation of our railways and it would stop public money going to fund private profits. Instead, it would see those profits

channelled back into the network to the benefit of passengers and the public.

What is more, we have a pre-established structure and model for doing that. Following ScotRail being brought into public ownership after the failure of Abellio, the structures are there to run the sleeper in the public sector alongside ScotRail.

My question to the minister, though, is this: what is the Government's policy intention? As Richard Leonard said, before the minister's party conference, she appeared to be talking about public ownership. Recently, however, there seems to be talk of a direct award to Serco. I hope that, today, she will deliver some good news to rail users, staff and taxpayers by confirming that her policy intention is that the Caledonian sleeper will be brought into public ownership and run for the benefit of passengers, not for private profits.

13:13

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I, too, welcome the opportunity to debate the future of the Caledonian sleeper service. I thank Richard Leonard for securing the slot.

Fundamentally, I do not think that we can deliver a people's ScotRail without a sleeper service that is fully integrated, operated in the national interest and run by a public company. Like many members, I am uncomfortable that a company that is better known for running detention centres and evicting people who are seeking asylum is currently the operator of a national rail service. I am pretty sure that that on its own is not a valid reason to pull Serco out of the running of the franchise, but I would certainly get a better night's sleep on the train knowing that it was being run by an operator that reinvested its profits back into the national interest.

A nationalised sleeper service should not just be at the heart of the Government's vision for rail; it should also be at the heart of its vision for aviation, because there is no credible way to meet our climate targets without a reduction in unnecessary air miles. The number of short-haul flights within the UK and to continental Europe can and should be reduced, and the sleeper service should play its full part in that.

We have already seen rail overtake flying as the most popular mode of transport between Edinburgh and London. Rail's share of that market rose from 35 per cent before Covid to 57 per cent last year. Rail operators have been smart; they have understood the market well on the east coast and have geared their marketing and pricing to what people now need and can afford following Covid.

There is the opportunity to replicate that success with the sleeper service, but better integration is needed, and that must start with better ticketing and fair fares. With single ticket prices in the hundreds, the sleeper is simply not an affordable service at the moment, so we need to do all that we can to ensure that the sleeper—nationalised or not—is a low-cost option that is competitive with aviation.

Since the Eurostar terminal shifted to St Pancras, there has been the opportunity for seamless connections with Europe for rail passengers coming to and from Scotland. For example, a passenger getting on a sleeper at Inverness has only one platform change to get to Paris, Brussels or now Amsterdam by the morning of the next day, but the lack of an integrated and affordable ticket remains the biggest stumbling block. Therefore, we need to think big. The Irish Taoiseach and the French President have already announced that, starting this year, there will be a combined ferry and train ticket to link the two countries. A big discount for young people should also be a feature.

Graham Simpson: Does Mark Ruskell not accept that the sleeper service is, in fact, incredibly popular and that the trains often run full?

Mark Ruskell: I do not think that that is the case on every journey. Operators on the east coast have been very smart in how they structure their fare prices and in the offerings that they create. I think that more could be done with the sleeper service, particularly on integrated ticketing, which I want to return to.

It is not just France and Ireland that are planning to ditch air travel. A new European sleeper train from Belgium to Berlin will be launched in May, with plans to expand the route to Prague. New direct rail services between Paris, Madrid and Italy are also getting ready to be launched next year, and our German Green Party colleagues have already been promoting a plan at the European Parliament for a fully integrated European sleeper service, which would include our Caley sleeper as a vital part of Europe's rail network.

Scotland should not be left out of the rail renaissance that is happening across Europe. Brexit has left us isolated and, at times, locked up in a 10-mile tailback outside Dover. We need to be better connected. Of course, most European rail services are run by nationalised rail companies that have the vision and backing of their Governments at their heart. We need a Caley sleeper that is run in the public interest and integrated with the rest of Europe's national rail services. I welcome that vision and look forward to that day coming soon.

13:17

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I want to make a short contribution to the debate as someone who used to use the sleeper. I used to commute to and from London on the sleeper, and I still take it reasonably often. I readily recognise Richard Leonard's claim of

"the significant social, economic and environmental"

contribution that the sleeper makes, having experienced at first hand the excellent upgrades to the rolling stock and the use of local produce in the buffet car, and having seen the economic and net zero benefits to the north-east, in particular, of bringing people in and taking them to London.

However, it is that experience that causes me great disquiet in relation to the calls for nationalisation of the service. Richard Leonard first suggests that he is persuaded of that model by making an analogy with ScotRail, yet for anyone who uses ScotRail—as I do but often cannot, with Aberdeen having been cut off for much of last week, for example—that claim is extraordinary.

That leads me to the fundamental question that has not been answered: would nationalisation, in itself, improve the service? After all, as Graham Simpson said, it has not helped ScotRail. Indeed, last February, Richard Leonard said in a debate that we must encourage people back on to the railway in volumes that signal a modal shift. That is absolutely right. He went on to say that that cannot be done in the context of ticket office cuts and closures, service reductions and increases in fares.

Neil Bibby: There is a difference between supporting public ownership and the SNP's management of the railways. We would take different decisions from those that the SNP Government has taken in the past years.

Liam Kerr: I readily acknowledge the appalling decisions that have been taken by the SNP Government—Neil Bibby makes a good point. However, the fact is that we have all seen cuts since nationalisation. My point is that public ownership of the sleeper service will not, in itself, improve passenger or staff experience or any other aspect of the service. It cannot.

The motion demands that

"the public purse would not be expected to fund profits for a private operator of the service",

but Richard Leonard clearly did not bother to take even a cursory glance at the publicly available figures, which show that Serco has lost more than £60 million running the sleeper since it took up the franchise.

I remind Mr Leonard that the transport minister told me last year that ScotRail's rail passenger

services, which cost £266 million in 2016, were expected to cost £407 million by the end of 2022. I will be putting in a parliamentary question after this debate to see what that figure actually was.

If Richard Leonard had done his homework, he would know that the rise in working from home has cut fare income on the railways from £11 billion to £9 billion, which means that the only way to drive improvement in our nationalised railway—

Richard Leonard: Will the member accept an intervention?

Liam Kerr: I do not think that I have time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can allow a wee bit of latitude with time, should the member wish to take the intervention.

Liam Kerr: I would be grateful if the member could be very quick.

Richard Leonard: If all of this is caused by people working from home, why are the motorways and roads into our major city centres as congested as they are? We need to get people out of their cars and on to the railway.

Liam Kerr: We absolutely do. That is why, when Richard Leonard talks about the need to deliver investment in the railway and cut fares, he must appreciate that there are only three ways to drive people away from their cars and make the modal shift that he and other members have rightly mentioned. One is to increase taxes on the people of Scotland—even those who never use the railway and are already subsidising every sleeper journey to the tune of £164—and hypothecate any increased tax take to the railway. Another is to generate more money to invest in the sleeper by cannibalising other portfolios such as health or education, which, quite rightly, no Government will ever do. That leaves cannibalising the railway budget from within as the only option, which the Scottish Government has done with ScotRail. Railway funds could be reprofiled by cutting ticket office hours, staff or services, or by ramping up fares to squeeze more money from a smaller passenger base.

There is absolutely no analysis that suggests that nationalisation could deliver a better service for passengers, staff or Scotland's taxpayers. I return to Richard Leonard's comments about the need for a modal shift. I absolutely support him on that, not least as it is a way of achieving our net zero ambitions. However, in the context of the Climate Change Committee telling the Government that it is guilty of magical thinking with its net zero plans, I fear that there is more of that thinking in Mr Leonard's motion. He must be careful about what he dreams of, because, if we were ever to nationalise the sleeper, he would find that rapidly turning into his worst nightmare.

13:23

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank my comrade Richard Leonard for bringing the debate to the Parliament. As we have heard from members across the chamber, this is an important issue.

The Caledonian sleeper service is one of the jewels of Scotland's rail infrastructure and represents a transport offering to the public that few other parts of the UK can enjoy. The sleeper has been in operation since 1873, making it 150 years old this year. It holds great memories for many—even Opposition members have mentioned that. It connects Scotland to the rest of the UK and remains in demand to this day, despite what has been said about its present affordability.

Graham Simpson said that bringing this subject to the chamber takes us back in time, but the debate has been about the way in which we sustain transport and bring people back on to our railways as part of properly looking at our carbon footprint.

I associate myself with the comments that Richard Leonard made about the fact that public ownership brings huge benefits to staff and customers, to bring in John Mason's point. It is important that staff and customers are both seen as being part of the equation.

We should not hand the service back to Serco in June under any circumstances. Now is the right time to bring the sleeper back under public control through a Government-owned company. We have heard in the debate that we can do that. What better way is there to reward the staff of the sleeper service than to bring the service back into a long-term future in public hands? That would be popular.

Liam Kerr: Let us say that that happened. How would we generate the money to pay for all the benefits that were being brought in by nationalisation?

Carol Mochan: Conservative members have to understand that it is necessary for us to nationalise the sleeper. Neil Bibby mentioned that we have always subsidised our railways, and rightly so. As Mark Ruskell said, we want to integrate ourselves into Europe and be part of that service. There is an opportunity for us to do that and we can do it. The privatisation of the railways has been a disaster in the UK and throughout Europe. Other European countries have done much better, having retained public ownership.

The current operator, Serco, is paid by us to run the service while, at the end of the day, we take the risk that is associated with that anyway. It is an incredible situation in which private enterprise can extract fees to run public assets and, if anything

goes wrong, just send them back to the public sector anyway.

When the railways across Britain were privatised, we were told that it would increase competition and drive down costs for the consumer. However, there is zero competition and zero risk to the companies while customers are paying increasingly high prices and shouldering the long-term financial burden. That cannot go on.

The sleeper is a fantastic service that should be in public hands. If the Government is serious, it will soon take it back into public hands in the way that has been described.

13:27

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests and congratulate Richard Leonard on securing this important debate, which is part of a wider discussion about public transport, the climate challenge and how we get people to move from cars and planes to rail, in particular, as the greenest form of transport.

We need to compare where we are in Scotland and the rest of the UK with other European countries. In Germany, it is possible to travel by train throughout the country for €9. In Spain, most train travel will now be free for another year. France has recently obtained permission from the European Commission to ban domestic flights on routes where the train is available. I listened to Liam Kerr's speech and it is clear that we need big decisions to be made by the UK Government as well as the Scottish Government.

Serco has operated the Caledonian sleeper franchise since March 2015. Prior to that, it was integrated into the ScotRail franchise and, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in March 2020, the sleeper was transferred on what is called an emergency measures agreement—now a temporary measures agreement—so that all cost and revenue risk was transferred to the Scottish Government and Serco received a fee for running the service.

Therefore, the risk is already with the Scottish Government, and Serco is eligible to receive fees, which it has been doing. This debate is to encourage the Scottish Government to take the Caledonian sleeper back into public ownership.

Graham Simpson: Can the member tell me—I have not yet heard this from anyone—what Serco has done wrong with the Caledonian sleeper service? One member said that it has been running a very good service.

Katy Clark: I suspect that the member has not spoken to as many Caledonian sleeper employees as I have. We could have a debate in its own right

on some of the practices that have been operated in the Caledonian sleeper service. We have already heard from Richard Leonard about some of the alleged bullying that has been taking place, but some of us have a dossier on some of the problems with the way that the service is operated.

The Green Party member who spoke has already talked about some of Serco's behaviour in relation to people seeking asylum and bespoke accommodation. We also know about its track record on the test and trace system. Therefore, there are some issues of principle with regard to the kinds of organisations to which the Government awards contracts, but there are some very specific issues with regard to how Serco has operated sleeper services. It is discredited and it is not fit to receive public money from the Scottish Government, but that is a wider debate that we could focus on in detail.

The issue before us today is whether that is the best way for a public service to be operated. I do not think that we have the specific figures, but we believe that nearly £2 million in fees has been given to Serco as part of the current contract. I ask the Scottish Government to confirm how much money Serco is receiving. I hope that, over the coming months, as the minister makes decisions, she will take into account the very strong support that she has from the Scottish Labour Party in particular to bring the sleeper service back into public ownership.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call minister Jenny Gilruth to respond to the debate.

13:32

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): I congratulate Mr Leonard on securing this important debate on the Caledonian sleeper. I am not sure how many MSPs in the chamber have travelled on the sleeper, but I certainly encourage colleagues to take the opportunity to do it. Travelling on the sleeper is a fantastic experience. I undertook it for the very first time in November, and it was really enjoyable.

As, I think, both Mr Leonard and Mr Bibby noted, sleeper rail services have existed in Scotland for almost 150 years, and they give us connectivity from Scotland to other parts of the UK. The Caledonian sleeper is an essential part of the vital mix of rail services that we have in Scotland.

I have listened to the debate with interest, and I want to return to members' points in turn. It is fair to say that there are some different views in the chamber, which are perhaps split along ideological lines, but, for context, I remind members that it was this Government that brought ScotRail into

public ownership. That context is an important point to start from.

Neil Bibby: On the issue of ScotRail, delivering better rail services obviously requires real leadership. Chris Gibb is leaving his key post as chief executive of Scottish Rail Holdings after less than a year. *The Scotsman* has reported that political interference was one of the factors in his decision and linked it to the postponement of engineering works in Fife. Will the minister confirm or deny whether that was the case?

Jenny Gilruth: I do not recognise Mr Bibby's outline of that individual. That individual's post came to an end this year, so the issues that the member has highlighted in the chamber are not my understanding of why Mr Gibb is leaving. If the member would like to speak with Mr Gibb, as I have done, actually, he would be more than welcome to do that, and I am sure that Mr Gibb can give him his own views on that matter. Mr Gibb has made a substantial contribution to the first year of public ownership of ScotRail.

I want to respond to some of the history around the sleeper service. Going back to the beginning of the sleeper service in 1873, train journeys could last in excess of 11 hours. Obviously, things have moved on since that time. In the UK today, there are two sleeper services: the night riviera from London to Cornwall and the Caley sleeper.

The sleeper is really the prominent example of connecting communities in Scotland directly to London. As important as the fact that the Caledonian sleeper opens up travel for people who live in Scotland is the fact that it opens up travel for visitors. We heard about that from members today.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will remember that I wrote to her about some of the employment practices of Serco, especially with regard to staff based in Inverness. Serco was making staff redundant, with no hope of any redeployment and without consultation with the unions. Will she give that some consideration when she makes her decision?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank the member for that intervention; she made an important point, and I will absolutely consider that. I spent an hour and a half with the rail unions yesterday, and we talked about that issue at length, as the member will understand, so I am more than happy to look at that—particularly in the round of the decision that I will need to make on the future viability of the sleeper service and how it will be delivered.

As I mentioned, there has been a shift in our railway traffic to the tourist end of passenger outputs. Liam Kerr spoke to some of the societal benefits that the sleeper service brings—the economic and social benefits—but, as we have

started to recover from the pandemic, tourist services are driving growth in the Caledonian sleeper business. The situation is perhaps different from when Mr Kerr and others might have used the service, when it was more of a commuter service.

As Graham Simpson noted, we have quite high satisfaction levels from customers, and it is important to reflect on that.

Liam Kerr: The minister is right in saying that it is important to reflect on that. Carol Mochan described the sleeper, which is being run by Serco, as a “fantastic service”. Does the minister agree with that? If it ain't broke, why fix it?

Jenny Gilruth: I recognise the member's point. Serco is running a broadly good service, and I will come on to talk about that in more detail. However, it is important to say that the rationale behind the decision reached on the provision of services was based on value for money. We have spoken at length about the importance of recognising the challenges that the Government faces in relation to the sustainability of public funding and providing that subsidy, and it is important to recognise that.

Graham Simpson noted some of the Scottish products that are available on board. Those are important in helping the service to support local communities, and they give VisitScotland an opportunity to promote Scotland to visitors travelling from London.

The success of the Caley sleeper has surpassed the success of any other train company in the UK, and that is an important point. We have seen, based on passenger satisfaction levels, as I mentioned, that Serco has been running a broadly good service. Its revenues from the past year outstripped pre-pandemic performance and its bookings are stronger than ever. As the franchising authority, it has lifted the Caley sleeper to new levels of success.

Some years ago, Scottish ministers took the decision that the Caledonian sleeper would be operated separately from ScotRail services. That allowed a level of dedicated management for the service, which has been hugely important for how it has progressed. The service has evolved, and with that it has been able to make progress. I recognise that there have been challenges historically, but it is important to put that on record.

The policy decision was made ahead of the resurgence of sleeper services across Europe, which we heard about from Mark Ruskell, and the Caledonian sleeper has established a model that has attracted attention from international sleeper operators. It is important to say that.

The Caledonian sleeper service is now thriving, and that is unique in the current context of rail. It is a testament to not only the quality and attractiveness of the service, but the work of the staff, who continue to help make the service as successful as it currently is. The service is increasingly recognised internationally, and it attracts passengers from all over the world.

Of course, there are challenges, and I recognise that the franchise has had its problems—we heard about some of them from members. The issues around the introduction of new trains are well documented; bringing in a complicated fleet with en suite facilities was ambitious and challenging at the time. However, we can also recognise the success that we have now, with the strong recovery as we move forward from the pandemic.

As we have noted in the debate, I have decided not to accept the rebasing proposal that was received from Serco at the end of last year, so the current franchise agreement will end of 25 June. I need to repeat that the decision not to rebase was in no way a reflection on the quality of the product that has been developed, nor on the commitment of the staff, who deliver the service very well, every day. Instead, it was a question of the terms of the rebase offer and because those terms did not represent value for money anymore.

The decision about the arrangements that will replace the current franchise when it comes to an end in June need to be taken in accordance with existing UK railway legislation. As a Scottish minister, I cannot unpick that legislation—as much as I might like to—and the Scottish Parliament does not have the power to change that legislation, at least not currently. Working within the constraints of that legislation, we are in the process of determining the arrangements to secure the continued provision of the Caledonian sleeper services beyond June.

Richard Leonard: The minister has referred a few times to section 25 of the Railways Act 1993, but does she accept that section 57 of the Scotland Act 2016 provides her with an opportunity to put the contract out to a tender process, which would allow a public sector bid?

Jenny Gilruth: I hear what Mr Leonard says, but I do not think that the legislation that he cites recuses me from adhering to the current UK legislation. That is the advice that I took from my civil servants in Transport Scotland. If Mr Leonard has legislative advice that contradicts the advice that I am receiving, I am more than happy to consider it.

Working within the constraints of the current UK legislation, I will move forward. As I noted in my letter to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee back in October, it has been

determined that it would not be appropriate to pursue a competition for the re-letting of the franchise at this time, because we do not consider that the prevailing conditions in the current UK rail market would sustain that option. The post-pandemic recovery on rail has created, it is fair to say, substantial uncertainty and risk about future market conditions.

On current railways legislation, the remaining options for successor arrangements are the direct award of a new franchise agreement or the mobilisation of operator-of-last-resort arrangements, as was undertaken for ScotRail. As I mentioned, work is well under way—I note that June is fast approaching—to consider those options in accordance with the current legislation and the Scottish ministers' franchising policy statement, with the intent to deliver the best service for Caledonian sleeper passengers and the best value for the people of Scotland.

I again congratulate Mr Leonard on securing this debate on the future of the Caledonian sleeper. I have listened with interest to members' contributions on how those services should be delivered from June, and I commit to updating Parliament in the coming weeks on the new proposed delivery model, which will deliver for passengers and staff alike.

13:41

Meeting suspended.

13:59

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Education and Skills

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon, colleagues. The next item of business is portfolio questions on education and skills.

As ever, any member who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. As you might expect, there is quite a bit of interest in this item, so I would make the usual plea for brief questions and answers to match.

Question 1, in the name of Stuart McMillan, has been withdrawn.

Open-plan Classrooms (Primary Schools)

2. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it considers to be the educational impact of open-plan classrooms on primary school children. (S6O-01757)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that the schools in their area, whatever their design, are capable of providing an appropriate environment for effective learning and teaching. Therefore, consideration of the educational merits of open-plan classrooms is a matter for local authorities.

However, as part of our school building programme, we gather feedback from schools and we have heard how pupils and teachers can benefit from the increased connectivity that open-plan environments can offer. It is also important to consider the impact of activities that could be seen or heard between spaces and the positive or disruptive impact that they might have on others.

Kenneth Gibson: Open-plan environments are perceived to benefit child social development, but they are much noisier and such an environment impacts adversely on learning. Studies have found that children in the noisiest open-plan classrooms had significantly lower speech perception ability and slower response times than those being taught in traditional classrooms. Open-plan classrooms are therefore not appropriate for young or sensitive children. For teachers, they can mean raised blood pressure, increased stress levels, headaches and fatigue.

What steps are Scottish ministers and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities taking to review the use of open-plan classrooms, or at

least to improve the acoustics in classrooms to minimise noise and ensure that adequate learning can take place?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Although the design and operation of school buildings is managed by local authorities to best suit their individual needs and circumstances—particularly those of their specific pupil cohorts—as I have mentioned, as part of our school building programme, we continue to receive feedback from schools and, importantly, from those who use open-plan classrooms.

Our learning estate strategy, which was produced jointly between the Scottish Government and COSLA, makes it clear that

“Learning environments should support and facilitate excellent joined up learning and teaching to meet the needs of all learners”.

It is important to stress that those facilities need to work for all.

The strategy also emphasises that teaching and learning environments

“should support the wellbeing of all learners”

and

“meet varying needs to support inclusion”.

We will continue to have discussions with young people and with parents and teachers as we move forward our learning estate strategy.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): The previous school estate programme was in 2009. The Scottish Government is responsible for the building standards technical handbook for non-domestic buildings, which calls on auditory investigations to take place for new buildings. Is the cabinet secretary confident that acoustic assessments are being undertaken in buildings where children in open-plan classrooms are being exposed to excessive noise?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is very important that we look into how we are developing our learning estate programme and at the work that goes on between COSLA and the Scottish Government as we develop the design process for that.

As we consider the programme, I would be more than happy to get back to the member specifically on how that works with the wider issue of building standards that he mentioned. If the member will forgive me, I will get back to him on the detail of that.

School Placement Decisions (Appeals)

3. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether parents should have the

right to appeal on school placement decisions. (S6O-01758)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, decisions on school placements are the responsibility of the local authority. The views of parents should be taken into account.

Parents should also be informed of the options that are available to them to appeal those decisions. If an agreement cannot be reached, parents and carers have the right to make a placing request to a school of their choice. If a placing request is refused, parents have a right to appeal.

Rona Mackay: I am trying to help a constituent who has been told that her son, who is flourishing in a mainstream primary school, must go to an additional support needs school next year instead of to a mainstream secondary school with his friends and peer group. Will the cabinet secretary set out what right to appeal parents, carers and pupils have in a situation like that?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, local authorities have a duty to provide education in a mainstream school unless specific exemptions apply. Authorities are supported in those decisions by our guidance on the presumption of mainstream education.

I set out the routes to appeal in my initial answer. I would urge the member's constituent to engage with the school and local authority to resolve their concerns. The constituent might also wish to contact Enquire, which is an advice service, to discuss the details of their situation.

If my original answer is not detailed enough to allow Ms Mackay to help her constituent, I would be happy to receive further details from her in writing, so that I can see whether there is additional information that I can give her on the right to appeal in the very specific circumstances of her constituent's case.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): In 2022, there were more than 350 fewer primary school teachers than there were in 2021, and there were fewer teachers from the teacher induction scheme teaching in their post-probation year than at any time since the scheme began.

Key to restoring our education system to its world-class status is reducing class sizes. Why is the Government cutting teacher numbers when school pupils have faced so much disruption over the past three years?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Forgive me, but I am not seeing the relevance of that to the original

question; however, I am more than happy to answer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would certainly agree, cabinet secretary. Keep your response brief, on that basis.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Certainly. Recruitment and retention of staff is, of course, a matter for local authorities. The Government has a commitment to ensure that we have 3,500 additional teachers by the end of this parliamentary session. Part of that process has been the provision of further funding of £145 million, which has been baselined to local government, to support the teaching workforce.

Autism (Support for Children)

4. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what cross-government review it has undertaken of policies supporting children with autism, including any assessment of the links between autism and other conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. (S6O-01759)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey): In March 2021, following a review, the Scottish Government published "Learning/Intellectual Disability and Autism: Towards Transformation". Our plan looks at the actions that are needed to shape supports, services and attitudes to ensure that the human rights of autistic people and people with learning or intellectual disabilities are respected and protected. The plan includes a range of actions across the lifespan, including actions related to education, restraint and seclusion, health, post-diagnostic support, social care and employment.

In September 2021, we published the national neurodevelopmental specification for children and young people. It sets out seven standards for service providers to ensure that children and young people who have neurodevelopmental profiles receive the support that they need. Those cover autism and ADHD.

ADHD affects 5 to 7 per cent of the population, and co-occurrence across neurodevelopmental conditions is the norm. We know from research that 50 to 70 per cent of autistic people also present with ADHD, and that 20 to 50 per cent of children with ADHD also meet the criteria for autism.

Miles Briggs: I thank the minister for that useful answer.

One of my constituents is a mother of two boys who were diagnosed with autism by NHS Lothian some years back. She has told me about how she has watched her boys struggle to function at school and in society for up to six years. She took

her boys to get a private assessment for ADHD, after which both were diagnosed and given the necessary support and medication. That has helped to transform their lives.

Will the Scottish Government agree to review pathways and guidance to ensure that health boards across Scotland are taking a holistic approach to the assessment of children? Will the Government also ensure that health boards review cases from over the past five years of children who have been diagnosed with autism to offer them a chance for an assessment for ADHD?

Clare Haughey: I think that we are straying into territory that is under the portfolio responsibilities of my colleagues in health. I will ask the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care to respond directly to the points that the member raises about health board pathways.

However, I can say that Scottish Government policies take a wide developmental approach that is inclusive of people with a range of conditions, including autism, learning disabilities, ADHD and fetal alcohol syndrome. We fund the national autism implementation team as a key partner, and it supports us with policy development across health and social care, as well as in education.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): There are a couple of supplementaries. They will need to be brief, as will the responses to them.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): It is understood that the impact of changes that occur in adolescence are more difficult for some neurodiverse young people to manage than for their neurotypical peers. What engagement has the minister had with neurodiverse adolescents and their parents to ensure that Scottish Government policies that are intended to support young neurodiverse people reflect the particular difficulties that are associated with that transition?

Clare Haughey: In line with the development of all policy that affects those with lived experience, the Scottish Government will engage regularly with service providers, children and young people and their families and carers, and with key stakeholders, in the development of pathways and service provision.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): Multiple constituents have approached me, as parents, with their concerns about how schools are treating their child with autism and the impact that that has on their child's mental health. What action is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that children with autism are offered sufficient mental health support in school and that safeguards exist against poor practice?

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

Clare Haughey: Again, I think that that question strays into the territory of the health portfolio. The "Review of additional support for learning implementation: report", which was published in 2020, set out a clear direction of how we can continue to build on our progress, and it made recommendations on how to improve the implementation of additional support for learning, which is vital for those young people.

We published our joint action plan with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland in October 2020, which set out the measures that we will take to implement those recommendations. Last November, we published our second progress report and an updated action plan, which highlights that 24 of the 76 recommendations have been completed and that the rest are under way.

I hope that that gives the member some reassurance about the work that is being done in the education portfolio, but, if he wishes to pick up on other areas that are covered by my colleagues in health, I am more than happy to get them to write to him.

Budget 2023-24 (Impact on Schools)

5. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact its draft budget for 2023-24 will have on schools. (S6O-01760)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We have protected councils in the most challenging budget settlement since devolution by providing more than £13.2 billion through the local government settlement, which represents a real-terms increase when compared to 2022-23 and supports the continued delivery of high-quality education for our children

In addition to that, our schools funding will impact the most important areas in relation to education delivery, attainment and tackling child poverty. For example, we are investing a further £200 million for the Scottish attainment challenge to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap.

We are also providing funding to local government to significantly reduce the cost of the school day.

Murdo Fraser: Despite the largest block grant from Westminster in the history of devolution, the Scottish Government's budget delivers real-terms cuts in funding for local councils, as the Accounts Commission has made clear in its report this morning.

In my region, Perth and Kinross Council is facing a £20 million budget gap in the current year, which could see teacher and child psychologist numbers cut and primary swimming lessons, all school-crossing patrollers, and breakfast clubs for underprivileged children scrapped. How can the cabinet secretary possibly defend a budget settlement that is leading a Scottish National Party-run council to take decisions such as those?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The council budgets are not set yet, and a variety of suggestions might come forward from officials, on which it will be for councillors to take decisions in due course. The numbers that I mentioned in my original answer are correct. We compare—as we do every budget year—the proposed budget to the allocations that Parliament approved in the previous year, and that shows the best like for like comparison of available funding at this stage in the budget cycle.

Murdo Fraser hears this every year: on this matter and on all aspects that relate to the budget, if he wishes more funding to be spent, whether in local government or directly in the education budget, he has to say where in the Scottish Government budget that money would come from, because it will be fully allocated—

Murdo Fraser: Scrap the national care service.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): There you go!

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If the member wishes to see changes rather than continue to talk through my answer, he might start to write down fully costed allocations and propose them to the Deputy First Minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a number of supplementaries to this and subsequent questions. It would be helpful if members limited themselves to asking the questions and listening to the responses.

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for her previous assessment. Schools are only one part of the multifaceted infrastructure of Scotland's education system. Further to her original response, can she say how the 2023-24 budget will protect and enhance our whole education system, from early years through to lifelong learning?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As briefly as possible, cabinet secretary.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Through the budget, I am continuing to invest in changing the lives of children and young people and learners of all ages. For example, we have the £1 billion of funding each year that is continuing to deliver 1,140 hours of high-quality early learning and childcare; we have agreed that £50 million should

be allocated to the whole-family wellbeing fund, including preventative holistic family support; and, of course, we are investing £30 million in activities to keep the Promise to our care-experienced children. Those are just some of many examples that I could give of how we are improving our education system, from early years to lifelong learning.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Michael Marra—briefly.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has warned that the budget will result in significant reductions in teacher numbers across the country. The cabinet secretary is committed to recruiting 3,500 more teachers, despite the fact that 100 were cut in the past year. How many more of those teachers will be delivered this year?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Of course, in the current financial year, the Scottish Government provided £145.5 million that was baselined into local government to ensure that councils could change temporary contracts to permanent contracts. I am exceptionally disappointed that, despite that funding, we saw a reduction in teacher numbers.

I will continue to have discussions with COSLA on that area, but I repeat—very briefly, Presiding Officer—the same point that I made to Mr Fraser: if Mr Marra would like changes to be made and additional funding to be put into this or other areas, he can, of course, suggest where that money should come from.

School Inspections

6. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that schools are inspected regularly. (S6O-01761)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Each year, His Majesty's chief inspector of education determines the scale and priorities of the inspection programme, in agreement with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

Prior to the pandemic, Education Scotland strengthened its scrutiny functions and committed to carrying out 250 school inspections each year. This academic year, Education Scotland will meet that commitment. An estimated 500 school inspections would have been carried out if it had not been for the disruption caused by Covid-19.

As is set out in the programme for government, an education reform bill will be introduced to establish an independent inspectorate. A high-level operating model for the new independent inspectorate is being developed and will be shared

with stakeholders and users early this year. That will set out how the inspectorate will operate effectively to provide the independent assurance of quality that our education system needs.

Daniel Johnson: The reality is that those steps have been inadequate. A freedom of information response that was published in September showed that 1,118 state primary and secondary schools in Scotland had not been inspected in a decade. In my local area, the picture is even worse: 10 schools have not been inspected in the past 10 years, and four schools have not been inspected in more than 10 years—indeed, one of them has not been inspected since 2006. In my area, there are three schools that will not have been inspected in the entire lifespan of Education Scotland. As we look to its successor organisation, can we guarantee parents and pupils that their schools will be inspected at least once in the time that the children attend them?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I set out in my original answer to Daniel Johnson what Covid has had on the carrying out of school inspections. A point that I hope will reassure Daniel Johnson is that inspections are not the only method of scrutiny, as schools and local authorities also have responsibility for evaluating performance. Indeed, as the provision of education is a responsibility of local authorities in Scotland, they have a duty to provide adequate and efficient school education. Under the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc Act 2000, the local authority is responsible for improving the quality of education in the schools that it manages, with a view to raising standards.

School inspections are exceptionally important. That is exactly why we have the high-level target operating model that is being developed. I welcome any contributions that Daniel Johnson wants to make when we publish the model, but, again, I state that inspections are not the only way in which the Government, its agencies and local authorities can ensure continuous improvement in schools.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stephen Kerr for a brief supplementary.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): That was just more complacency from the cabinet secretary. The reality is that 1,118 schools—nearly 50 per cent of Scotland's schools—have not been inspected for 10 years. Are you not embarrassed, cabinet secretary? Tell us one thing that you are going to do now in order to rectify the situation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should speak through the chair, Mr Kerr.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I stated in my original answer to Daniel Johnson's question, there was, of course, an impact from Covid in the fact that 500 school inspections that we would

have expected to see did not happen. Pre-Covid, Education Scotland did a great deal of work to ensure that it strengthened its scrutiny functions and carried out more school inspections each year than it had done in many years before then.

It is important that we take the role of school inspections very seriously. That is exactly why we have a reform process that is leading to an independent inspectorate. I would welcome the constructive views of Mr Kerr and others on how we can ensure that that independent inspectorate is as effective and efficient as it can be.

Closing the Attainment Gap

7. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its progress in closing the attainment gap. (S6O-01762)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): In December, we published the latest achievement of curriculum for excellence levels statistics, the 2023 national improvement framework and plan, and the stretch aims that each local authority has put in place for closing the attainment gap. Together, those set out the latest evidence on progress and our plans, shared with local government, for substantially eliminating the poverty-related attainment gap by 2026.

There are promising signs that the attainment gap is, once again, beginning to narrow. However, there is more to do. That is why we will invest a further £200 million next year in the Scottish attainment challenge, as part of our £1 billion commitment this parliamentary session.

Graham Simpson: In fact, there has been no progress in the past five years.

In the aftermath of the Scottish budget, the general secretary of School Leaders Scotland, Jim Thewliss, said that education cuts will see class sizes increased and subjects removed. How will cutting subjects and increasing class sizes help to eliminate—or “substantially eliminate”; that is the Government's phrase—the attainment gap by 2026?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: For the sake of brevity, I will point to the previous answers that I gave in response to Murdo Fraser's questions about the importance—[*Interruption.*] If the member will allow me to answer the question, that is exactly what I will do.

The issue around budgets has been discussed with Murdo Fraser and others. It is important that we look at the investment that is going into not only education but local government. We are taking steps to ensure that we continue to invest in our children and young people, and it is gravely

unfair of the member to suggest that there has been no improvement.

For the sake of speed, I will give only one example. The gap between the proportion of primary pupils from the most deprived and least deprived areas who achieve their expected level in literacy narrowed from the previous year. That is important. We saw that in numeracy, as well. For both literacy and numeracy, the figures represent the largest single narrowing of the gap since data collection began in 2016-17.

As in other educational areas across the United Kingdom and further afield, Covid has had an impact. It would be wrong to suggest that that is not the case. However, we are seeing an improving picture within the ACEL statistics, and I would have thought that the member would welcome that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: In fairness, that was not a brief response, cabinet secretary. That means that I am not able to take supplementaries from either of the members who were looking to get in on that question.

We need to move on to question 8, from James Dornan, who is joining us remotely.

Scottish Government Education Priorities 2023

8. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its priorities for education will be in 2023. (S6O-01763)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Tackling the poverty-related attainment gap remains the priority for the Scottish Government, and it is at the heart of our ambitious reform programme, which aims to provide learners with the best opportunities to succeed. The priorities for Scottish education are set out in the 2023 national improvement framework, which was published in December 2022. They place the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education, alongside improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people, closing the attainment gap, improving attainment and skills, and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people.

James Dornan: I welcome the fact that tackling the attainment gap remains a key priority for the Scottish Government. I also welcome the news that Professor John McKendrick has been appointed as the new Commissioner for Fair Access in Scotland. How will that appointment help to drive forward progress to further close the poverty-related attainment gap?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should be as brief as possible, cabinet secretary.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I, too, am delighted to welcome the appointment of Professor John McKendrick, who brings great experience to the role, and I look forward to working with him alongside my colleague Mr Hepburn. That is, of course, a very important role as we continue to see further success in the Scottish Government's ambitions on widening access.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sue Webber is next—a brief supplementary, please.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): Teachers are on strike—the first strike for 40 years. We have heard from countless teachers and the unions, who say that they feel ignored by the Government and that it is not fully engaged in the negotiations.

We also know that violence in the classroom is up, with more than 20,000 instances of violence against teachers and school staff in the last academic year.

Ignored by the Government and unsafe in the classroom—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Ms Webber.

Sue Webber: Does the cabinet secretary accept that ending teacher strikes and making teachers safe in the classroom must be a priority for education in 2023?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is, indeed, a priority, and that is why further constructive talks are happening today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Next is Beatrice Wishart—a brief supplementary, please.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): In terms of priorities for education, the Scottish Government made a commitment to replace Erasmus and to create a Scottish education exchange programme. Although repeatedly asked for in this chamber by colleagues, a date is still elusive. Wales made such a programme happen, so what discussions has the Scottish Government had with Welsh counterparts on that, and will the cabinet secretary commit to a timetable so that students know when they will be able to benefit from a learning exchange?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary—as briefly as possible, please.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That is, of course, a Government commitment that we hold dear. Work is progressing on that and we will deliver on it within this parliamentary session.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. That concludes portfolio question time.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. You tried to fit in as many supplementary questions as possible, but you said that it became impossible largely because of the length of the ministerial answers. That is not unique to this question session. I ask for your guidance on what is being done to encourage ministers—including the First Minister—to shorten the answers that they give to the questions, which are becoming more concise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Kerr for his point. As a former business manager, he will be well aware of the on-going discussions that there have been with business managers from all parties about the length of not only the answers but the questions.

In portfolio questions, we have seen evidence of both questions and answers not being brief, and all parties suffer as a result. I would impress this upon all members: in order to provide opportunities for as many questions as possible, the questions and the answers need to be as brief as possible. However, Mr Kerr, I think that attributing blame in one direction in this instance is unfair and inaccurate.

We will now move on to the next item of business.

Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by Patrick Harvie on the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:28

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): I am pleased to be able to make a statement to Parliament today to accompany publication of the first of the Scottish Government's three-monthly reports on the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022, covering the period 28 October to 31 December 2022.

The Parliament will recall that we took emergency legislative action in October last year to provide critical, time-limited protection for people who rent their homes. People renting their homes have, on average, lower household incomes and higher levels of poverty and are more vulnerable to economic shocks—63 per cent of social rented households and 40 per cent of private rented households do not have enough savings to cover even a month of income at the poverty line, compared with 24 per cent of households that bought with a mortgage and 9 per cent of households that own their home outright.

With that context in mind, the 2022 act has three key aims: to protect tenants by stabilising their housing costs through the rent freeze; to reduce the impact of evictions and homelessness through a moratorium on evictions; and to avoid tenants being evicted from the rented sector by a landlord wanting to raise rents between tenancies during the temporary measures and to reduce the number of unlawful evictions.

The provisions are in place until 31 March, but the Scottish ministers can, with the approval of the Parliament, extend them for two further six-month periods, should circumstances and evidence show that to be necessary.

From our constituents across the country, we all continue to hear about the unprecedented challenges that are being faced by people across Scotland due to the on-going cost of living crisis. The unprecedented economic position has not yet changed fundamentally, and I know that many households that are on low or modest incomes continue to struggle. People face increased costs across the board, but the biggest impact is felt by

people who are on the lowest incomes. The Office for National Statistics estimated that inflation for low-income households was 11.9 per cent in October 2022, leaving many people struggling to cope.

The current economic situation is a key part of our on-going review of the emergency act. Similar to the approach that we took to the coronavirus emergency legislation, we committed to reviewing and reporting on the on-going necessity and proportionality of the act's provisions. The Parliament will recall that, during the passage of the bill, in recognition of the distinctive ways that the rent cap provisions would impact social rented sector landlords in particular, the Government lodged a stage 3 amendment in which it committed to setting out its intentions, beyond 31 March, for the rent cap provisions relating to the social rented sector in its first report to the Parliament and no later than 14 January.

That is where I will start. I have been clear from the outset that I want to work with the social rented sector to seek an agreed way forward as an alternative to the continuation of the rent cap beyond March 2023. The Parliament will be aware that we have been working closely with a range of social rented sector organisations, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, through a task and finish group. Statements of intent were published late last year by COSLA, which confirmed local authorities' commitment to keeping rent increases in April 2023 to an average of no more than £5 a week, and by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, which reported that its members are consulting with tenants on a set of increases in April 2023 that will average 6.1 per cent.

Although I anticipate that many rents will be increased at a level that is well below those figures, the agreement to set out average figures rather than a fixed cap allows for flexibility for social landlords to respond to their consultations with their tenants, which are part of their statutory responsibilities as landlords. Some social rented sector landlords might, for specific reasons, have to go beyond those rent levels—for example, to allow for planned improvements or maintenance to proceed as agreed through tenant engagement. That will allow for the statutory tenant consultations that are currently taking place to be taken into account in housing associations' business plans and local authorities' housing revenue account plans. No social landlord is consulting on a rent increase that is at or above consumer prices index inflation, which was 11.1 per cent when the data was collected. In the light of the voluntary agreements that have been reached across the social rented sector, I can

confirm that we will introduce legislation to expire the social rented sector rent cap provisions from March 2023.

Having set out the position on social sector rents, I will turn to how other parts of the emergency act and other parts of the rented sector will be affected. The report to the Parliament that the Scottish Government has published today sets out that the Scottish ministers have undertaken a review of the provisions in part 1 of the act in order to consider whether they remain necessary and proportionate in connection with the cost of living. The first report considers the status of measures through to 31 December—the initial period that was covered by the legislation—and alludes to what factors might be taken into account after 31 March to determine the on-going necessity of the measures, which will be subject to a separate parliamentary process later this month.

At the end of the first reporting period, it is clear that the unprecedented economic challenges are continuing to have an acute impact on those who rent their homes. Therefore, having considered the outcome of the review, the Scottish ministers are satisfied that the status of the provisions in part 1 of the act is appropriate at the end of that reporting period. That will be kept under review.

On the next issue, although the Scottish Government is committed to expiring or suspending specific provisions when they are no longer necessary, emerging evidence on the cost crisis makes it likely, at present, that some provisions of the act will be required after the current expiry date of 31 March 2023. For example, to continue to reduce the impacts of eviction and homelessness on tenants in the social and private rented sectors, it appears crucial for the current moratorium on evictions to continue with, of course, the safeguards that were put in place last October.

In addition, the Parliament will be aware of the distinct differences in operation between the social rented sector and the private rented sector. Private renters still face economic challenges, and there is not the opportunity to agree a collective voluntary approach in the private rented sector, given the sector's very different nature. I therefore anticipate that it will remain necessary and proportionate to extend beyond 31 March the rent cap provisions in the private rented sector, although I recognise that the act gives the power to vary what the cap is.

The rent cap in relation to student accommodation is also being considered—particularly in the light of the evidence that shows that it is having a very limited impact because of the different way in which such tenancies are managed. I hope to set out our intentions on that very soon.

We will continue to weigh up all such matters and bring them back to Parliament soon with specific proposals that are based on the most up-to-date evidence that is available. The decision on whether to extend is for the whole Parliament to make, and we look forward to hearing the outcome of the future consideration of such matters.

As is required by section 9 of the act, the Scottish ministers have conducted a review of the provisions in part 1 and have prepared a report. We are satisfied that the status of the provisions that are set out in part 1, as at 31 December 2022, remains appropriate. We have also undertaken a review of the associated Scottish statutory instruments. The Scottish ministers are also satisfied that the status of those SSIs, at the end of the reporting period, is appropriate.

The provisions that we report on today are one part of Scotland's on-going response to the cost of living crisis. The Government will continue to do our duty to report and to be held accountable to Parliament for the use of the powers. We welcome the opportunity to engage with MSPs as the first report is considered.

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

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): It is clear from the statement that the Scottish National Party, Green and Labour emergency rent legislation is rapidly becoming an unmitigated disaster. Scottish Conservatives warned MSPs that the impact would be destabilisation of the social and private housing sectors, but ministers pressed ahead anyway.

I very much welcome the removal of the social rented sector from the provisions, but the damage has been done. What does that mean for people who rent in that sector? Instead of an average rent increase of 6.1 per cent, they could have an increase of up to 11.1 per cent. The Government is driving rents up at the same time as it is saying that it wants to do something to help.

What has the minister given the private rented sector today? That sector is in the dark about its future.

I will ask the minister two simple questions. What assessment have ministers made of the legislation's impact on private rental properties not coming to market? Here, in the capital, that is driving the housing crisis, and the situation will get worse as autumn approaches and student housing changes over.

The minister says that he has listened to and taken on board the pressures that affect the social

rented sector; the same pressures apply to the private rented sector, and he should understand that. Given that, why will the cap and continuing ministerial powers over the private rented sector not negatively impact on the number of homes, on rent levels and on the number of people who can find an affordable property to rent?

Patrick Harvie: I am sorry that it appears that Miles Briggs did not listen to part of my statement. I made it clear that, in the social rented sector, the position of COSLA and the SFHA means that we are looking at an average increase of no more than £5 a week, or 6.1 per cent, in those two parts of the social rented sector.

Given the concerns that were expressed by members across the chamber about the need to balance protection for tenants with protection for social housing providers—so that they can invest in the quality of homes, in maintenance and in supply, as well as in the wider services that they provide—I would have hoped for a strong welcome for the fact that we have reached an agreed way forward with the social rented sector, but that does not seem to be the case with Mr Briggs. He describes the legislation as a disaster, but I think that it would have been a disaster if Parliament had not taken the action that we proposed and tenants, particularly in the private rented sector, who had been landed with 10, 20, 30 or even 40 per cent rent increases, continued to be exposed to that kind of practice. That is still happening south of the border. It is not happening here as a result of the actions that we have taken.

Some of the other questions that Mr Briggs raised are about either the measures that we will bring forward later this month in relation to the future of the cap for the PRS or, indeed, the longer-term work that we are doing to reform the rented sector. Again, although it might already be forlorn, I express the hope that Mr Briggs will join other members in recognising that the rented sector needs continued attention and legislation to ensure that, in the future, people's human right to decent, adequate and secure housing is met in a way that it has not, so far, been met for everybody.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am the owner of a private rented property in the North Lanarkshire Council area.

In November, the minister reiterated that the freeze legislation is temporary and can be extended only for two further six-month periods. We know that landlords are already preparing increases to be introduced once the freeze ends. The ONS said that, by November, private rent increases were at their highest level since the office started collecting data in 2012. The long-

promised rent controls need to seamlessly dovetail with the end of that legislation.

Can the minister commit to ensuring that the housing bill passes and that the controls are introduced in time for the expiration of the provisions in the legislation? Although the moratorium on evictions continues, our monitoring information shows that the tenant hardship grant fund has only £2.5 million left and that 11 councils have spent the entirety of their funds. What does the Government plan to do to review that fund, so that tenants who are building up arrears through the evictions moratorium do not face a cliff edge when that moratorium also expires?

Patrick Harvie: I thank Mark Griffin for his questions, which raise substantial issues that are of concern to us. We want to ensure that the tenant grant fund is achieving the greatest possible benefit for those who need it. We are actively engaging with local authorities around the guidance on how that can be delivered as effectively as possible. I hope that we can rely on the support of Labour to achieve that objective.

In relation to the longer-term reform, of course, we discussed some of that during the debates on the bill. I know that Labour understands that the emergency legislation needs to be justified in the context of the on-going economic circumstances of the cost of living crisis, and there is a requirement in the legislation for us to continue to assess and report on its necessity and proportionality. If we were not doing that, there would, understandably, be much more danger of the measures being challenged. For the time being, we are satisfied that they remain proportionate and necessary. We will have to keep that under review and that review is why we cannot give an absolute guarantee about what the subsequent decisions will be at later six-month periods. However, the legislation includes a mechanism to reform the adjudication methodology so that we can have a bridge into the longer-term work that will be taken forward later in this parliamentary session.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank the minister for his statement and I welcome the decision on the social rented sector. I do not agree with the Conservative assertions on rent, especially following discussions with my local authority. What discussions have been held with COSLA since the introduction of the act and what key issues were raised?

Patrick Harvie: Even before we had the final debates in Parliament on the legislation, we had begun an active engagement with COSLA, as well as with social housing providers in the housing association field, through the task and finish group that I mentioned in the statement. Many of the issues that those providers raised were also raised

by parliamentarians from across all the political parties in Parliament.

We all understand that the social rented sector does not exist to make profit; it reinvests rental income for the benefit of tenants and the wider community. Affordability is built into the way in which it operates, and it sets rents in a different way from the private rented sector. Representatives of the social rented sector wanted us to understand that, and we wanted to assure them that we do so, we take it seriously and we want to work with them not just on protecting tenants in the here and now but on investing for the future in adequate supply and, of course, the transition to net zero, all of which requires them to be able to manage and plan for their investments. I am pleased that we have been able to reach agreement with the sector. I hope that members across the chamber will be reassured by that.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I am genuinely concerned about the potential risk of the extension of the current approach in the private sector. I have no interests to declare, but I know that, according to quantitative and robust research data from the private rental market, agents tell us that there has been a marked increase in the number of landlords who are seeking either to sell their properties or to increase rents between tenancies. That will surely have a knock-on effect on future rentals. Does the minister think that the situation will only get worse as a result of the extension? What consultation did he have with the private rented sector in advance of making today's decision?

Patrick Harvie: We have certainly been in regular dialogue with representatives of the private rented sector, who I have to say included not only landlords and investors but tenants, whose voices also deserve to be heard. We have maintained that dialogue. Clearly, when we debated the bill the Conservatives opposed the principle of having a rent cap in the private rented sector. They are entitled to that view. However, I would point out what has been happening to rents in the private rented sector south of the border in the absence of such measures. Rents have been rising at a faster rate than has been seen for a long time. Supply is also deeply challenging. The concentration of property wealth among those who own multiple properties as landlords, or as businesses that operate as landlords, has more than doubled in 10 or 20 years.

The situation in Scotland therefore requires longer-term reform, which the Government is committed to undertaking. However, I suggest to Jamie Greene that he should recognise that, in the absence of such measures, we would be seeing a far more unacceptable position for tenants in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A number of members wish to ask questions on the statement. We will have to pick up the pace on both the questions and the answers.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): As part of the regular monitoring of this vital emergency legislation, has the Scottish Government been working with Rent Service Scotland and the First-tier Tribunal to examine the volume of exceptional rent increase applications by landlords and challenges by tenants?

Patrick Harvie: We have been actively engaged in doing so. We believe that the number of applications for using the prescribed costs available has been relatively low. However, we are continuing to work with the organisations that are part of the landscape and the machinery of delivering that form of protection for landlords, given that not all landlords are in the same financial circumstances. We will continue to keep the issues under close consideration as we move forward with the short-term measures and the longer-term work on reform.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): For as long as tenants have campaigned for a rent freeze, private landlords have been threatening to sell up in response. Reports of a rise in the number of landlords doing so therefore come as no surprise. What systems has the minister put in place to monitor such sales and any subsequent evictions to verify such claims? Let us remember that landlords who have sold up have been able to do so thanks to the eviction exceptions that the Government included in the legislation. Will the minister tell us how many of the properties sold has the affordable housing supply programme supported the purchase of, to bring them into public ownership and remove any need for evictions?

Patrick Harvie: I know that Mercedes Villalba well understands that the exceptions were necessary to demonstrate that the protection against evictions could be presented as a defensible and proportionate measure that the Parliament was capable of passing. I point out that the exceptions do not include the simple desire to make a profit: landlords cannot apply for evictions by using that as an exception to the rule at the moment.

We must work towards a housing system that is fair and equitable and that meets people's human right to adequate housing. On the need to achieve that, I know that Mercedes Villalba and I have more in common than separates us. I hope that we will continue to work together with Labour colleagues, as we did during the passage of the emergency legislation, to achieve that.

Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): Pitch fees—the equivalent of rents for park home occupiers—are not covered by the legislation. I have constituents who are facing demands for a 14 per cent increase in pitch fees this year. Given that they are all older people, most of whom are on fixed incomes, that is outrageous.

I am aware of the planned consultation on changing the basis for pitch fee increases from the retail price index to CPI ahead of the forthcoming housing bill, and I very much welcome that. However, are there any additional short-term measures that the Government might explore to afford people in that situation some degree of protection?

Patrick Harvie: I thank Graeme Dey for raising that issue, which he has done previously. The Government's wider support to people in its cost of living response goes far beyond the measures that were included in the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022. I encourage him—I am sure that he is already doing this—to refer any of his constituents who have concerns about it to the Government's wider cost of living website to identify forms of support that they might be able to access.

Pitch fees are not private residential tenancies, so it would not have been possible or appropriate to include them in the 2022 act. However, we accept the argument that there needs to be a review of that inflation measure, and we will consult on that very soon.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The minister is right about social housing. However, he did not mention mid-market rent in his statement, so I would like some clarity on that. Kingdom Housing Association tells me that, if the rent cap is applied to that tenure, it will reduce the number of MMR properties that it is able to develop. Hillcrest Homes says exactly the same. I have written to ministers several times on the issue and they have been kind enough to reply, but I am none the wiser as to what the policy is. Will the minister clear up what is happening to mid-market rent?

Patrick Harvie: I thank Willie Rennie for that question, which raises a substantive issue. Mid-market rent homes are rented out as private residential tenancies. They do not fall within the social rented sector part of the legislation; they are private residential tenancies and, therefore, they are treated in that way.

It is really important to mention that, whether it is a social landlord or any other developer looking to provide new homes, the emergency legislation affects in-tenancy rent increases; it does not affect the rent setting for new homes. Given that the legislation can be in operation only for a further two six-month periods after the initial period, no

developer that is looking to provide new homes should consider it a barrier to setting rents in the first instance for new homes. It is about the setting of rent increases within tenancies, which, in any case, can take place only once a year. It should have marginal to no impact on any developer that is looking to decide how much investment it puts into the provision of new homes.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The minister has highlighted the decisive action that has been taken by the Scottish Government to protect tenants through these harshest months of the cost of living crisis. The swift response sits in the context of a firm commitment to introduce long-term rent control action, which no other part of the United Kingdom has come close to matching. Will the minister say how the current response might flow into the longer-term commitment, perhaps by changing the way in which tenants can challenge future rent rises?

Patrick Harvie: I am grateful to Ariane Burgess for that question. It is clear that Scotland is the only part of the UK that has taken these necessary measures. In fact, even when challenged by Plaid Cymru, the Welsh Government decided not to take bold action to protect tenants in this way.

The longer-term rented sector reforms that Ariane Burgess refers to are extremely important to me, and we are already working hard to develop proposals. We need to ensure that there is a bridge between the emergency legislation and the longer-term work. The changes to the rent adjudication methodology that the emergency act allows us to take forward in future will achieve that. If we simply return from the rent cap to open-market considerations, that could create an extremely damaging cliff edge. The adjustments to the rent adjudication methodology will provide the way forward to the longer-term work.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 was a crucial and ambitious intervention during one of the hardest winters in recent times, but, for the long-term sustainability of the rented sector in Scotland, tenants and landlords will be looking towards the upcoming new deal for tenants. Can the minister assure Parliament that work is continuing to be done towards the implementation of a fairer rented housing system?

Patrick Harvie: Absolutely. Several members have asked about that. We remain absolutely committed to bringing forward the new deal for tenants proposals, which the Government has already consulted on.

I want to again place on record, as I did during the debates on the Cost of Living (Tenant

Protection) (Scotland) Bill, my appreciation for the incredible hard work and energy that have been put into addressing the issue by officials in the Scottish Government, who had a great deal asked of them to deliver such groundbreaking emergency legislation and to continue to work on developing the longer-term legislation. I look forward to being able to introduce that legislation to Parliament and to its being scrutinised by members of all parties.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The economic consequence of rent control is probably the least disputed of any economic theory: it drives out private landlords and drives up homelessness.

I will give a case in point, and I would like the minister to respond. Last September, the University of Glasgow, under the threat of rent controls, told students, "Postpone your courses—don't turn up," because of the shrinkage in the capacity of the Glasgow rental housing market.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Mr Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: So, what is being done now by the Scottish Government and its ministers to ensure that we do not have an even more severe problem this coming September?

Patrick Harvie: I certainly disagree with that analysis. The idea that the serious challenges with regard to student accommodation, which have been experienced for years in Scotland and have been growing south of the border, too, relate to emergency or longer-term work on rent controls in Scotland is simply spurious.

There are other European countries with a private rented sector that is larger than ours by share of the housing stock that have had rent control systems in place for decades. High-quality, affordable, sustainable and secure housing is absolutely affordable. Further reform is required.

My final point to Mr Kerr is that the thing that is least disputable about the situation is that, if we had not taken action, tenants in Scotland would have been lumbered with the same kind of excessive, eye-watering increases that tenants south of the border are living with.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I was against enforced rent freezes in the social rented sector. I welcome the fact that that will not happen, and I acknowledge the statements of intent from housing associations, in which they say that rents will go up not by the level of inflation, which sits at around 11 per cent, but by an average of 6.1 per cent. That would represent an average increase of £3 a week and would secure £170 million to invest in the sector.

How will the Scottish Government monitor how housing associations implement those rent rises,

the average of which is 6 per cent, given that some tenants could face a far more significant increase?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask you to be as brief as possible, minister.

Patrick Harvie: We will actively engage with the whole of the social rented sector—housing associations and local authorities—to monitor the implementation of rent rises and to understand the impact on tenants.

Mr Doris is right to say that the agreement that we have reached means that the average rent increases will be low. We are all aware of the distinct nature of the social housing sector and its hugely important value to communities across Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes that item of business. I apologise to the member whom I was not able to call.

National Drugs Mission

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-07469, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: cross-Government response to the Drug Deaths Taskforce report, “Changing Lives”.

14:59

The Minister for Drugs Policy (Angela Constance): Every life lost to drugs is as tragic as it is unacceptable. As we enter a new year, we continue to face a public health emergency, and we must not underestimate the scale of the crisis.

Last July, the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce published its final report, “Changing Lives”. The report was the culmination of three years’ work examining the drivers of our drug deaths crisis and providing evidence-based recommendations for change. I again thank all those who were involved in the work of the task force for their dedication and commitment.

We have not waited for that final report to act. Since the formation of the task force, we have announced our national mission and we have taken a wide range of actions to save and improve lives. Many of those actions were informed by the task force as its work developed, including the medication-assisted treatment standards and the roll-out of naloxone.

The task force’s message was clear: change is needed and change is possible. The “Changing Lives” report set out 20 recommendations and 139 action points, reflecting the complexity of the needs of people who are at risk of a drug death and the scale of the challenge that we face. Meeting that challenge requires a whole-Government response. Indeed, a truly national mission requires an approach that involves us all.

Today, we have published our cross-Government response, which is underpinned by two transformative principles. First, we will treat problem drug use as we do any other health condition. Taking that approach across Government will help to ensure that every area considers what adjustments are needed to ensure that people who are affected by problem drug use are included and not discriminated against. The second principle will also help to ensure that that happens, by including representatives with lived and living experience of problem drug use in the co-production of policies and strategies in any and all areas of policy or service delivery that affect them.

Our cross-Government response sets out more than 80 actions. Although there are significant

challenges in tackling the drugs crisis, we are determined that a lack of investment should not be one of them. Despite the huge fiscal challenges that we face, today's action plan is supported by spending commitments totalling more than £68 million for the remainder of this parliamentary session.

Drug dependency is a health issue with undeniable roots in poverty. Therefore, our response highlights the work of the Scottish Government to tackle poverty and inequality, the social determinants of health, as well as actions on early intervention and family support.

I know that of particular concern, across the chamber, are the testimonies that we still hear far too often of people seeking help and being turned away or told that a service cannot support them, particularly when a person has a wide range of needs. The task force and the Government are clear that no door should be the wrong door and that there should be a more personalised and joined-up approach to support. Getting it right for everyone—GIRFE—is about providing a more personalised way to access help and support when it is needed, by placing the person at the centre of decisions that affect them. People who are accessing addiction services have been identified as one of five key themes for the new GIRFE pathfinders, which will test that approach using a co-design method.

We will also invest a further £2.4 million over three years to implement the recommendations from the rapid review of care for people with co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions. We know that people often need to travel to access services and support, which can be a barrier to treatment, particularly in rural areas. We will therefore work to update the referral process for access to the concessionary travel scheme and will explore the feasibility of expanding the scheme to people with a substance dependency, with £500,000 being made available for an initial pilot.

The successful implementation of MAT standard 7—which is all people having the option of MAT shared with primary care—will see better joined-up working, which will help to address the wider health needs and inequalities of people who use drugs. To enable that, from April 2023, we will ring fence £30 million—£10 million a year—for the remainder of this parliamentary session from the Scottish Government's enhanced services allocation for primary care services to support specific services related to drug treatment.

We will continue to embed a whole-family approach and family-inclusive practice, building on the framework that we published in December 2021. I am particularly pleased to announce £4 million in funding to expand Routes—a

programme for young people who are impacted by substance use in their families that is supported by Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs.

Recognising the breadth of needs that people with problem drug use often have, there are also actions on dentistry to develop a programme to meet the oral health needs of people who use drugs, actions on education to ensure that provision for our children and young people reflects the latest evidence on what works in drugs education, actions on employment to maximise access to and the impact of our existing employability services, and actions on housing including the introduction of new duties to prevent homelessness.

The actions that are set out in the cross-Government response also include prioritising early intervention in the criminal justice system, using custody for remand as the last resort, ensuring that people with problem substance use in the prison estate can access the support that they need, and removing barriers to people accessing services and treatment on release from prison. For example, the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill will end liberations on Fridays or in advance of public holidays, which have presented a significant barrier to many people accessing services on liberation.

As I set out in my statement to Parliament last month, we know the challenges that our workforce faces and we have brought together an expert group to develop a longer-term workforce action plan, as the task force recommended. I confirm today the provision of £0.5 million per year to deliver that plan and a further £480,000 per year for additional recruitment to the very successful addiction worker training programme. Recognising the importance of having a trauma-informed workforce and services, today's publication also includes investment of up to £1.1 million per year in the national trauma training programme.

Section 2 of today's publication outlines our response to the task force recommendations that relate specifically to drug services and policy. Alongside that, we have published a supporting document that provides our current position on each of the task force's 139 actions. We have regularly discussed in Parliament the importance of stabilisation and crisis services as part of a suite of options that need to be available for people. I am therefore pleased to announce that our task force response includes an £18 million commitment to develop stabilisation and crisis care services, over and above our investment of £100 million in residential rehabilitation. We will better align crisis stabilisation, detox and rehabilitation to reflect the full range of recovery pathways.

All the actions that are outlined in today's publication can and will make a difference, but we know that stigma too often prevents people from seeking support or puts barriers in their way when they seek it. Stigma kills, and actively fighting it is a crucial component of a human rights-based response to Scotland's drug deaths crisis. Section 3 of the publication includes our stigma action plan, which I committed to in the debate on stigma last year.

As a Government, we will lead by example by reviewing our policies to remove barriers for people who are affected by substance dependency. However, we also recognise the need for broader change. We will develop and implement a national programme of activity, including an accreditation scheme for organisations, to improve awareness and challenge stigma across public life. That will challenge public stigma, encourage individuals to examine their unconscious assumptions, educate people on the harms that are caused by stigma and celebrate the positive outcomes of recovery in all its forms.

I will conclude, Presiding Officer. Today's publication of our cross-Government response to the task force marks the next, even more ambitious phase of our national mission. It demonstrates the actions that we will take to ensure that people who need support for their drug use, and their families, can access both that support and any other public service that they need—

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: I am about to finish, I am afraid. Mr Marra may have missed the boat. Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We might not have time in hand later in the debate, but at this point there is a little time in hand.

Angela Constance: I will take the intervention if Mr Marra is really brief.

Michael Marra: I appreciate the opportunity that the minister gives me. My intervention is in relation to the publication this week of the report from the ministerial oversight group for mental health in Tayside, and the comments about the continued lack of interaction between mental health and substance misuse services. I know that that is an issue that we have talked about in the chamber before, but it would be good to get on the record the minister's observations about that report and what actions she wants to see in order to take that forward.

Angela Constance: I am grateful to Mr Marra for that intervention. I have that report here. It is a

very thorough report and I have to say that it very much aligns with the work that I am pursuing on the implementation of MAT, which is, of course, crucial to the overall integration of substance use and mental health services. It also aligns with our rapid review into mental health and substance use care—on which I will come back to Parliament with a further and more detailed response—and it aligns with our observations on the very recent Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland report. I assure Mr Marra that I take the report very seriously and that, where it relates to my portfolio interests, I will be pursuing that very vigorously indeed in relation to not just Tayside, but the length and breadth of Scotland.

To conclude, I very much believe that the actions in the cross-Government plan that we will take will help to ensure that people who need support for their drug use, and their families, can access the right support at the right time, and also ensure that they can access any public service that they might need without facing stigma or discrimination.

I agree with the task force that change is possible—indeed, change is happening—and I look forward to hearing the contributions of colleagues from across the chamber.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the cross-government response to the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce final report, *Changing Lives*; supports the transformational principles underpinning that response of treating problem drug use as any other health condition is treated, and ensuring that people with lived and living experience of problem drug use are included in the co-production of policy and strategy development in any area of government policy or delivery that affects them; recognises that cross-government planning and activity is needed to support the National Mission, and that this has resulted in over 80 actions; acknowledges the publication of the stigma action plan, which will play a vital role in the culture change required, and recognises the role of the Scottish Parliament in this regard, and believes that, with commitment across government, the Parliament and beyond, it is possible to save lives and improve health and wellbeing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now. I call Sue Webber.

15:11

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I would first like to mention, without seeming to be too confrontational to start with, that it was quite a challenge this week for us to look at a motion from the Government without the cross-Government response having been published in enough time for us to come together as a team. However, I welcome the fact that, following discussions that I had with the Government, we got sight of it, albeit

that that was only yesterday. I want that on the record.

Consensus across the chamber is always key for this topic, but Conservative members often find that we are caught between a rock and a hard place. We wanted with all our hearts to fully back the Government motion, but members will note that we have lodged an amendment to it, albeit that it is quite subtle. I want that on the record, as well.

I welcome the inclusion of dentistry, education and housing, and reinforce that we welcome the report and the cross-Government response to that report.

Two basic principles have underpinned all the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce's work. The first is that drug-related deaths are preventable and we must act now, and the second is that Scotland and the Scottish Government must focus on what can be done within the powers that are available.

The Scottish Drugs Deaths Taskforce published the report, "Changing Lives", in July 2022. As I said, I welcome the chance to speak to it today. I met the chair, David Strang, at the time of its publication in the summer, and we had a very frank and positive discussion. We all want to reduce the tragic numbers that we face. It goes without saying that every single death that is brought about by misuse of drugs is a tragedy—not only for the victim, but for their families, friends and loved ones, and the communities in which they live.

More should, and could, be done on tackling drug-related deaths in Scotland

"until there is a meaningful and sustained downward trend in drug-related deaths."

That is a quote from the report that we are welcoming. Something must change, and we can be that change. That is a specific recommendation from the DDTF report. We can be the chamber that unanimously stands together, puts politics to one side, says that enough is enough and ensures that we have meaningful and sustained action that will save lives.

Under the Scottish National Party, drug-related deaths have continued to get out of control. The current strategies to help people who are struggling with addiction have failed and are still failing—there are just not enough of them, or they are not being put in place fast enough where it matters, on the front line. Scotland still has the highest drug-related death rate in Europe, and the rate is 3.7 times higher than the rate in the United Kingdom as a whole. We cannot forget that.

As I have said, we all agree that every death is a tragedy. There can be no doubt that our drug deaths crisis continues to be an emergency, but

saying that repeatedly here in the chamber, in reports and in press releases does not save lives. Real embedded change—societal change—and action will save lives.

I want to reinforce several recommendations in the "Changing Lives" report. It said that

"all people at high risk of drug-related harm"

should be

"proactively identified and offered support."

It said that MAT standards should be fully implemented by May 2024, and it went on to say that

"Overarching treatment and recovery guidance, with defined and measurable standards, should be developed and implemented."

According to the report, services need to co-ordinate better to ensure that every person is offered support, even after they leave a service. That relates to what Mr Marra said earlier about Tayside.

The report also says that drug users should be

"better supported when they leave prison than when they entered."

I will highlight two of those points further: implementation of MAT standards and support for drug users on leaving prison. Support for drug users on leaving prison is vital, when we consider the fact that the number of prisoners who are caught with drugs in Scotland's jails has increased by a staggering 1,100 per cent since Nicola Sturgeon became First Minister. Figures from the Scottish Prison Service reveal that in 2021-22, the number had soared to 1,832 instances. The number of deaths in Scottish prisons is also at a record high: in the past two years, at least 25 of them were the result of drug use.

The shocking level of drug use in Scotland's prisons is unacceptable and is a damning indictment of the Scottish National Party's soft-touch justice.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I was really pleased to hear Sue Webber say that she wanted to put politics aside. Before she makes political attacks, she might want to reflect on what she said at the start of her speech, because such attacks help no one.

Sue Webber: I am stating facts. If they are too hard for Gillian Martin to face, I cannot apologise for that. I said earlier that there are often red lines. I am mentioning some of them. When it comes to justice—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We should not have commentary from a sedentary position. Please continue, Ms Webber.

Sue Webber: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The level of drug use in Scotland's prisons is a symptom of the failure to support people in our prisons, who demand as much right to recovery as people outside our Scottish Prison Service. Many of them want to escape the cycle of addiction and to access recovery programmes. The SNP Government slashed funding for addiction services—

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Sue Webber has mentioned several times Douglas Ross's proposed right to recovery bill. We have not seen the detail of the bill, but I probably speak for the whole chamber when I say that there is a desire to support it. For the record, will the bill acknowledge the importance of things like safe consumption rooms, pill checking and heroin-assisted treatment?

Sue Webber: I have not mentioned the right to recovery bill yet—I will do so in closing. Those elements are not included in the scope of the bill, which is all about access to recovery services, but I will refer to them later.

The second point that I want to highlight is the report's recommendation that MAT standards be fully implemented by May 2024. I agree that MAT standards must be implemented, but it is disappointing that the Scottish Government failed to introduce MAT standards by April 2022, which was the original intention. The Scottish Conservatives are calling for urgent action to be taken to ensure that standards 1 to 5 and 6 to 10 are fully implemented by April 2023 and April 2024, respectively.

All of us, across the chamber, can agree that more action needs to be taken. As a result of the continuing crisis the Scottish Conservatives will not oppose drug consumption rooms—more specifically, the pilot of such rooms. However, we have serious reservations about their operation. We must remember that drug consumption rooms are not a magic bullet and will not solve all our problems. Chief Constable Iain Livingstone has said that we need to proceed with caution. Although we support most of the recommendations in the report, more needs to be done. The gap continues to widen between the warm words of the SNP on the drugs deaths scandal—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member must bring her remarks to a conclusion.

Sue Webber: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The gap continues to widen between the warm words of the SNP on the drugs deaths scandal and the reality of how little action it continues to take on the ground.

As I have said today, the Scottish Conservatives believe that a different approach is needed to help people who are suffering from addictions. The SNP Government must finally start listening to front-line experts and back our right to recovery bill, which would guarantee treatment for those most in need.

I move amendment S6M-07469.3, to leave out from "cross-government response" to end and insert:

"publication of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce final report, *Changing Lives*; supports the transformational principles of treating problem drug use as any other health condition is treated, and ensuring that people with lived and living experience of problem drug use are included in the co-production of policy and strategy development in any area of government policy or delivery that affects them; recognises that cross-government planning and activity is needed to support the National Mission, and that this has resulted in over 80 actions; acknowledges the publication of the stigma action plan, which will play a vital role in the culture change required, and recognises the role of the Scottish Parliament in this regard; believes that, with commitment across government, the Parliament and beyond, it is possible to save lives and improve health and wellbeing; welcomes many of the report's recommendations, including that individuals should never be turned away from treatment and therefore urges the Scottish Government to back Douglas Ross's Proposed Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill, which would enshrine in law a right to treatment, so that all people with addiction in Scotland can get the support they need; notes that the report states that 'While we believe legislative change is required, more should—and can—be done in Scotland under current constitutional arrangements'; believes that the Scottish Government should accelerate its focus on tackling drug-related deaths until there is a meaningful and sustained downward trend in the number of drug-related deaths; regrets, therefore, the recent decision to cut the alcohol and drugs budget for 2022-23 by £1 million; notes, with disappointment, that the Scottish Government failed to introduce Medication Assisted Treatment standards by April 2022, and calls for urgent action to be taken to ensure standards 1-5 and 6-10 are fully implemented by April 2023 and April 2024, respectively."

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Paul O'Kane to speak to and move amendment S6M-07469.2. You have up to six minutes, Mr O'Kane.

15:20

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): In opening the debate for Scottish Labour, I would like first to take the opportunity to commend the work that was done previously on the issue by my colleague, Claire Baker. She has been a strong advocate for people who are affected by addiction, their families and communities, and has had a relentless and forensic evidence-based focus on the Scottish Government's work and on what more we can do in terms of finding new solutions that have been proved to have an impact in other parts of the world. That is certainly the vein in which we intend to continue to approach the issues.

We are debating the subject early in this new year. In doing so, we reflect once again on the tragic costs of drugs deaths in Scotland in the year past. As always, I seek to put at the heart of our debate those who are bereaved and, indeed, all those who continue to live in pain.

I know that members across the chamber want to see tangible progress being made on drug deaths and are supportive of action that serves to meet that objective. Scottish Labour supports the objective of the national drugs mission, which is to tackle the public health emergency of drug deaths.

We acknowledge the Government's having provided its response to the "Changing Lives" report today, and the list of 80 actions that have been taken across Government. I recognise some of what Sue Webber said about availability of that information, but I am grateful to the minister for provision of that response. There is much in the document. Of course, we support concerted Government action across all portfolios. However, we must ensure that we do not lose ourselves in the detail and that we are making the right progress on the actions that can make the most difference.

There has been a myriad of reports—10 in two years. We must ensure that the reports and action plans do not just sit on shelves, but are backed by delivery and support for people in their lived experience. That means that we, in Scottish Labour, must be honest and call out areas where we feel that still not enough is being done, as well as issues on which the Government is still falling short, even by its own standards. It has been three and a half years since the Government established the Scottish Drugs Deaths Taskforce but, tragically, the most recent figures show the second-highest number of drug-related fatalities on record in Scotland, and bring the total number of drugs-related deaths since 2007 to over 12,000.

It has been almost two years since the First Minister announced a national mission to tackle the drug deaths crisis. However, progress has often been slow—indeed, it has often been painfully slow for so many people.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): The member will know that some of the areas that we mutually represent, such as Inverclyde, are stubbornly high up the league table of drug deaths. Does he think that enough has been done to target specific parts of the country where there is clearly a propensity for much higher drug-taking criminal activity than there is in other parts of the country? Is enough resource getting to the front line in areas such as Inverclyde?

Paul O'Kane: Jamie Greene has made an excellent point about areas where there are substantial challenges. My colleague Michael

Marra will, no doubt, speak about Dundee and the experience there.

Having met service providers in Inverclyde, I think that it is clear that there has to be more resource. That is needed just to keep the lights on and the doors open in many of the third sector services. I have had correspondence with the minister on that issue and am keen to work on supporting those organisations, as well. We need a relentless focus on areas where the issues stubbornly persist. I am sure that we will hear much about that from around the country, in the debate.

I am concerned that, to date, Scotland has no drug-checking facilities, and that we have not yet got a single overdose prevention centre. The latest estimate of the number of people who are living with substance dependence in Scotland is over seven years old, having been published for 2015-16. In addition, the Government has not yet provided a workforce plan to overcome the workforce challenges that are experienced across our health and social care services, and which are particularly acute in addiction and rehabilitation services.

I am also concerned about cuts to alcohol and drug partnerships and to third sector providers and others, which have been exacerbated, as I have just mentioned, by the cuts to local government funding. Indeed, we should all be concerned about the role that ADPs will have and about the associated discussions around them, as the Government presses forward with the national care service.

Angela Constance: Will the member take an intervention?

Paul O'Kane: I am not sure. Is there time in hand?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a wee bit of time.

Paul O'Kane: Okay.

Angela Constance: Bearing in mind that I have given continuity to alcohol and drug partnerships, I am somewhat curious about the cuts that you have mentioned. I wonder whether you would acknowledge, too, the £65 million of national mission resource that has been put into the third sector.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members need to speak through the chair.

Paul O'Kane: I said in my response to Jamie Greene that I am cognisant of that third sector funding. The minister and I have discussed, in particular, the third sector providers that I mentioned. There is an issue, however, about baseline funding, which ensures that third sector

providers can meet their core obligations and remain financially viable, over and above the additional funding that is levered in, so further discussion is needed in that space.

We need to ensure, too, that ADPs are front and centre of our response and that they continue to receive support so that they can move forward in communities. I stress that this is not about scoring partisan political points; it is a genuine belief and offer from me in my role. We have to acknowledge some of the discussion that has been had with Audit Scotland, for example, in relation to overarching plans for the drug and alcohol problem. The Parliament's own Public Audit Committee considered that the scale of the drug and alcohol problem that Scotland faces is perhaps not always fully understood because of a lack of available data.

We have to look at things such as medication-assisted treatment standards and the Government's commitment on them. The goal posts have been shifted. Full implementation of the standards was originally planned for April 2022, but as we have heard already, that has shifted. We want decisive action to ensure that the date is not delayed further, because the MAT standards will be crucial in moving forward and dealing with the issues.

I am very conscious of the time, Presiding Officer.

Families and communities need the Scottish Government to meet the magnitude of the moment. The focus must now shift to a relentless programme of delivery and implementation of meaningful steps to properly address this public health emergency. It has to start immediately with the MAT standards and full publication of a workforce plan for alcohol and drug partnerships.

I move amendment S6M-07469.2, to insert at end:

“; regrets that over 12,000 people in Scotland have tragically lost their lives to drugs since 2007; notes that it is three and a half years since the Scottish Government established its Drug Deaths Taskforce, but that the most recent figures show the second highest number of drug-related fatalities on record; is concerned by the slow progress with implementing the Medication Assisted Treatment standards, in addition to concerns that the proposed National Care Service could distract from Alcohol and Drug Partnerships (ADP) in delivering these standards, and calls on the Scottish Government to urgently publish a workforce action plan for ADPs.”

15:27

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I welcome the debate. It is refreshing to see the regularity with which we address this very important issue. Given the tone and tenor of the speeches so far, this debate, unlike many others,

carries a consensus across the Parliament, which I welcome. I welcome, too, the publication of the report. I endorse its findings and offer the minister the support of the Liberal Democrats in that regard.

As we are all acutely aware in the chamber and beyond it, our drug deaths crisis is a stain on our conscience across this country—it is a national outrage. We need only look at the official statistics to see how far we still have to travel. In 2021 alone, more than 1,300 people succumbed to this awful affliction—which is an illness, not a crime. That is a 445 per cent increase since we started recording drug-related deaths in 1996. In fact, in those 25 years, approximately 15,000 lives have been cut short because of drugs. Those deaths are accompanied by countless people who will never be able to hug their loved ones again; countless families have been left with a permanent hole—tears and rents in our communities. It is our duty as elected representatives to put an end to that toll and human suffering.

It is therefore heartening to see some important policy outlined in the report, particularly regarding integrated family support, which is a matter that I have tried to raise since I first came to the chamber from a charity in a sector that works specifically with children who are affected by parental substance use, and on which the Liberal Democrats have campaigned for a long time.

However, it concerns me that, over the years, despite the many debates, reports and pledges, the changes that we have made and that the Government has enacted have been painfully slow—the pace has been almost glacial. I hope and believe that we are starting to see an acceleration in that process. Our country cannot afford to rest on its laurels or act slowly.

The services that are available to people can be life changing and life saving. However, they can be so only with the right infrastructure. It is therefore vital that we give more support to those providing care, particularly those in our national health service. We must employ more staff and offer more training in our hospitals, our general practitioner clinics and our pharmacies. We need to recognise the different requirements of service users in urban and rural areas—the minister will know that I have raised many times the issue of same-day access to treatment services in areas of rurality.

That also involves giving more resources and funding to our local communities, and trusting in local relationships, as those are the people who are most knowledgeable and best placed to offer support. Often, those meaningful relationships are what can offer people with chaotic substance-using behaviour a route out and a route to more comprehensive support, and they can act as a

lifeline when times get tough, as they invariably do.

However, it is not enough to view this crisis at face value. We must address the prevalent link between substance abuse and poverty. Last year, people from deprived areas were 15.3 times more likely to die from drug misuse than people in more affluent areas. That is because the causes of drug addiction are complex and the risk is increased with the higher levels of trauma, adverse childhood experiences and poor physical and mental health that we know go hand in hand with deprivation.

We are currently in the midst of the worst cost of living crisis that our country has faced in living memory, which means, by extension, that more citizens will be engulfed into poverty and, therefore, that more people will be at risk of addiction. It is only by giving tangible support to those who most need it and tackling the huge rates of inequality within Scotland that we can begin to address this problem at its root.

Given the scale of the crisis, we need radical solutions. Although attitudes are rightly beginning to shift away from viewing this problem as a criminal justice one, such a move needs to be mirrored in our legislation. We want to start that with the introduction of safe drug-consumption rooms, which we know are capable of effectively reducing drug-related harm. I hope that we will hear from the Lord Advocate on that soon. Moreover, the Government must outline plans for a network of those services, which would hasten their roll-out should the outcome of the Lord Advocate's consideration be favourable to that approach.

We also need to work with the Sentencing Council to ensure that those who are prosecuted for personal use are referred to treatment and rehabilitation, as a first port of call, rather than incarcerated.

My amendment, if successful, would bring about the roll-out of drug-testing facilities. I was made aware of the crucial part that they can play in reducing the number of drug-related deaths due to a tragic case in my constituency late last year. I will say more about that particular example in my closing speech.

It is not our job as legislators to pass judgments on situations that have been brought about by experiences that we cannot fully understand, nor do we move any nearer to a solution by doing so. We need radical solutions that are holistic and directly address drug-related harms while tackling the socioeconomic and childhood roots of addiction.

We need to ensure that our public sector and local authorities have all the tools that they need to

offer support, so we should not slash their budgets. It is then and only then that we can begin to rid ourselves of this stain on all of our consciences.

I move amendment S6M-07469.1, to insert at end:

“; further believes that the Scottish Government must use its response to the Drug Deaths Taskforce report to propel effective and immediate action to tackle the continuing high numbers of drugs deaths in Scotland; asserts that there are some actions which can be undertaken now, such as the implementation of drugs testing facilities, as seen in other parts of the UK, at events such as festivals, to prevent harm; acknowledges the current work being done to implement safe consumption facilities in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and calls on the Scottish Government to start preparing plans immediately for a Scotland-wide network of facilities so that those outside of the central belt have access to lifesaving spaces.”

15:33

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Any life lost as a result of drug harm is a tragedy, and the Scottish Government is absolutely committed to implementing approaches that we know work to save lives and reduce harm. The Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce's report, “Changing Lives”, contained 20 recommendations and 139 detailed actions for the Scottish Government to consider. The report represented almost three years' work, with contributions from a broad range of people with expertise in the area, including those with living and lived experience—I know that the minister is focused on listening to examples from those people.

One of the areas that I have a particular interest in is tackling drug-related stigma, which requires action from all levels of government and, indeed, the wider population. The “Changing Lives” report states that “Stigma kills people”. The report focuses a lot on tackling stigma and discrimination. Stigma is not only damaging to individuals' mental health and sense of self-worth; it discourages people from coming forward to seek the help that they need.

Stigma is particularly harmful in rural areas, in which communities are often very tight knit—Alex Cole-Hamilton has just mentioned that—and in which it can be harder to seek treatment because of the fear of prejudice and discrimination.

Section 3 of the “Changing Lives” report states:

“Primary care settings offer a key environment in which direct care and treatment can be offered to people”

who are affected by harmful drug use. Treatment services that are offered by, for example, GPs, dentists, community nurses, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians can also help to address

issues around access to drug treatment services in rural areas and, therefore, reduce stigma.

I picked up the issue of stigma with NHS Education for Scotland and asked whether mandatory education could be created and delivered, perhaps in an online module, for all health and social care staff, including pharmacists and allied health professionals, as opposed to stigma education being provided just for those working in alcohol and drug services.

Sue Webber: You might recall that, when I was on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, we received some quite harrowing evidence from people in Dumfries, which is in your area, about some of the challenges that they faced at their pharmacies. What are your comments on that?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members need to speak through the chair.

Emma Harper: Absolutely. From the conversation that we had in the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I picked up that issue directly. We have taken action locally, and the alcohol and drug partnership team is well aware of the issue. It took action, and that issue has been dealt with. I thank Sue Webber for raising that issue.

I am keen to explore whether mandatory education related to stigma will add to Scotland's work to ensure that people can access the treatment that they need without prejudice and judgment, and I hope that we can make progress. That is really important, based on my experience as a nurse and a nurse educator and on hearing conversations involving people whom I worked with in the past.

Peer navigators and peer support workers are also crucial in supporting people in treatment and in overcoming stigma. Those workers can and do make a difference to people's lives. The "Changing Lives" report notes that the

"provision of navigator services across Scotland is patchy. Coverage in the central belt is good, but rural areas are less well catered for."

I know that the minister is very much aware that issues in rural areas must be addressed, and I know that she has engaged with the Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders alcohol and drug partnerships and NHS boards. I welcome that.

The expansion of navigator services nationally, supported by a comprehensive framework, standards and guidance, might help to remove the postcode lottery that many individuals now face in accessing services. Community-based services that link to the hospital navigator service are necessary, and knowledge of local areas is imperative for navigators.

I absolutely welcome and endorse the vital work that We Are With You is conducting. It uses the peer support model. I met the local team at the Buccleuch Street centre in Dumfries just last year. I ask the minister for a commitment that peer support services will be supported and expanded, particularly in rural areas.

In the minister's statement to Parliament in November, she stated that she wanted to expand the scope of the MAT standards so that they include treatment options for benzodiazepines. I am aware that there is current research regarding a naloxone equivalent for benzodiazepines, and I would be interested to hear an update from the minister on treatment options for benzos. Obviously, that does not have to be today—I know that we are meeting soon.

The Westminster war on drugs has been an abject failure. Instead of solving problems, it has made them worse by stigmatising people who use drugs and creating barriers to tackling substance addiction.

The UK Government's latest white paper—"Swift, Certain, Tough: New Consequences for Drug Possession"—sets out a three-tier framework for adult drug-possession offences. Those proposals are contradictory to the public health approach that is being taken in Scotland, and they could undermine aspects of the national mission if they are implemented here. I know that the Minister for Drugs Policy has written to the UK minister to express opposition to those policies being operated in Scotland. I challenge Conservative members to do all that they can, by making representations to their Westminster colleagues, to ensure that that policy does not impact on our approach in Scotland.

Without reform of the law, efforts to tackle the drugs crisis in Scotland will always be impeded. That cannot happen, so I welcome the steps that are being taken by the minister. I know that it is not a quick fix; long-term work needs to take place. I know that the minister is working hard to reduce the number of drug deaths in Scotland, and I look forward to my continued engagement with her.

15:40

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): Preventing problem drug use indeed requires a whole-systems response across Government. A public health approach to tackling a decade of Scottish Government failure is the right way forward, so long as—and this is important—that public health approach is complemented by cracking down on violent organised crime and on the drug dealers who profit from the illicit and immoral trade in Scotland.

Given that organised crime does not respect borders, surely it makes sense to join an already established cross-border initiative, with £59 million of investment, that is already helping to tackle drug dealing criminal networks? I am interested in understanding from the minister why, if the Scottish Government is so keen on tackling the harms of substance abuse, it is not co-operating with the rest of the UK on project ADDER—addiction, disruption, diversion, enforcement and recovery—which could have seen more funding directed to places such as Dundee that have a significant problem.

Angela Constance: I can reassure the member that we participate in the learning network for project ADDER and that Police Scotland, as he would expect, co-operates with all law enforcement agencies across the UK. However, I am sure that the member will appreciate that, where other approaches undermine a public health approach, we also have our red lines.

Sandesh Gulhane: Thank you for that response.

Our response to drug abuse requires strong health interventions, but we also need to cut the head off the snake. We need a targeted criminal justice approach to better target drug supply chains. Given that Scotland's drug deaths rate is almost five times the rate seen down south and is higher than any in Europe, we must make Scotland a significantly harder place for organised crime groups to operate in.

Before I move on to matters that are directly focused on treatment and rehabilitation, I will deal with the contentious issue of drug consumption rooms. We will not oppose the establishment of a pilot project. We can then gather evidence in a Scottish setting and use that evidence. However, let us not underestimate the legal complexity; there are legitimate concerns. If the route that the Scottish Government is going to take involves drug consumption rooms, I am interested in finding out the following: what will the location criteria be? Could people in possession of drugs, travelling to a drug consumption room, run the risk of arrest? Also, can we protect workers in such rooms from civil liability if a user experiences a medical problem or, tragically, dies?

We will not oppose a pilot project but, as Police Scotland's chief constable has said, we need to proceed with caution. I will add that this caution also applies to establishing licensed drug-checking facilities where people can anonymously submit samples of psychoactive drugs for testing.

Paul Sweeney: Given the rate of drug deaths, which is currently running at around one drug death every seven hours, does the member not agree that we need to proceed with a degree of

urgency rather than caution and that, although I acknowledge those concerns, there are quite clear solutions to addressing all those concerns, which have been well known for some years now?

Sandesh Gulhane: We need to be moving with urgency, but we must not move in the wrong direction, because that could be as bad as moving slowly.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Dr Gulhane says that we need to move forward with caution and not in the wrong direction. Does he accept that we are not pioneers in this? The approaches that we are discussing, such as safe consumption and pill testing, are used quite extensively internationally and have been shown to save lives.

Sandesh Gulhane: It is not clear that it would work in a Scottish setting, and that is the point. Pilots are needed to see how such things work in what is a different country.

Everybody who seeks treatment for addiction should be able to access the necessary addiction treatment that they require, with an obligation on NHS boards, Scottish ministers and others to provide treatment and to set up reporting arrangements so that the quality of and access to the treatment that is provided can be monitored and reported on to the Scottish Parliament. That will ensure that individuals may access a preferred treatment option unless it is deemed to be harmful by a medical professional. A statutory right to addiction and recovery treatment services should include community-based, short and long-term rehabilitation; community-based and residential detox; stabilisation services; and substitute prescribing services.

Our proposed right to addiction recovery (Scotland) bill also aims to prevent individuals who are seeking drug and alcohol treatment from being refused access to it. I am pleased that another planned outcome of the task force's report is to establish a national approach to substance abuse and harm prevention that incorporates drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

We need to ensure that far fewer people in Scotland develop problem drug use. I am interested in seeing how the plan seeks to strengthen the evidence for how best to deter the use of recreational drugs, to ensure that adults change their behaviour or face tough consequences, and to prevent young people from starting to take drugs in the first place. Of course, as the minister knows full well, delivery is everything.

De facto decriminalisation of drugs does not seem to have worked as planned, as it has contributed to increased admissions to psychiatric hospitals since the introduction of the measure for class B and C drugs. The Scottish Government

pledged to fully implement MAT standards, which define the consistent delivery of safe and accessible drug treatment and support, by April 2022. However, delivery of those standards has been put back two years. Given the well-documented pressures on our NHS, including record staff vacancies, record accident and emergency waiting times and GP practices being at breaking point, I am keen to understand whether the Scottish Government intends to deliver on the recommendations of the task force, particularly the calls to operate more drug services in the evening and at weekends and to provide emergency 24/7 care.

In 2021, there were 1,330 drug-related deaths in Scotland—too many. We need a credible, strong and well-resourced plan to tackle the problem. It must amount to much more than just an announcement. The country needs a commitment from the Scottish Government to deliver.

I declare an interest as I am a practising NHS GP.

15:46

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I was struck by a paragraph in the report by the Drug Deaths Taskforce, because I thought that it really challenged us. It said:

“The biggest thing that needs to happen ... is culture change. For far too long, people who use drugs and their families have suffered the effects of discrimination and stigma in society, in the media and in services. They have been demonised, criminalised and ignored. Shamefully, discrimination is even enshrined in UK law, which actively discriminates against people with drug dependency in crucial areas of human rights.”

As politicians, we can come to the chamber with our views on how to help people in Scotland who are at risk of death from drug use. I do not have any personal experience of drug misuse either professionally or in my personal life, and I am aware of that every time I speak on the topic. With some exceptions, most members who are speaking today are in that position. We have not had to see our children struggling with addiction, wondering whether they will ever become healthy again, and we have not had to live in a constant state of anxiety about what might happen to them. We may not have experienced the damaging effect of a stigma being attached to our health needs. That is why the commitment in the Government’s response to the task force to work with those who have lived experience is vital.

The work that was started in 2022 with the national collaborative, which the minister has built on with her comments today and the recommendations that she has made, is so important. The phrase “nothing about us without us” must apply to people who have been affected

by problem substance use. They simply have to be involved in the development of our policies, strategies, treatment and support, and in addressing the wider factors that contribute to their life-threatening relationship with drugs—and so must their families. If we leave them out or pay lip service to them, the mission to end drugs deaths will simply fail. In the short time that I have had to read the Government’s response to the report, I was pleased to note its key acknowledgement that

“People’s experiences do not fit neatly in one policy area and so our engagement and participation must take into account the vicious cycles of problem substance use, homelessness, lack of income, unsafe environments, lack of access to education and other basic services.”

Angela Constance cannot do all that herself in her portfolio. She needs to work with people across the Government and society, as that is the only way that we will be able to tackle the problem. The vast majority of people with problem drug use tend to have suffered some kind—or, indeed, many kinds—of trauma. Many people have led a life of poverty, and many have suffered abuse or childhood insecurity. No one who is standing to speak in the debate should ever ignore the root causes that have led someone down a path of problem drug use. We need to be treating causes as well as symptoms.

Problem drug use is a health inequality. With that in mind, I think that dealing with drug deaths is a whole-Government endeavour that expands into portfolios across the Government. We urgently need to tackle poverty and inequality to address all the health inequalities, but that goes double for problem drug use, because thrown into the health inequality mix is the justice element, which can compound trauma, reduce life chances even further and make recovery even harder and sometimes impossible.

I was pleased to see that the Government’s response mentions women who have multiple pregnancies and are not allowed to keep their babies. I have said a few times in the chamber that my daughter is a student midwife. I have been quite shocked at how often she has come home from a shift in Aberdeen maternity hospital and said that she has cared for a young woman who cannot keep her baby—often for the second or third time. That is heartbreaking, and I commend the Government’s moves to have more family residential rehabilitation units, some of which have been recently announced, although that is just one action that we need to take to help mothers who are struggling with their substance use.

Such situations are complex and need multiple actions. I am encouraged by the funding that the minister announced today to support vulnerable parents and break the cycle so that, with such interventions, some of those mothers might one

day be able to have a family of their own in recovery.

We need to leave entrenched political ideology on drugs at the door. That is why I got a bit upset when we talked earlier about keeping politics out of this, because it does not help at all. Earlier in the week, I was struck when Jackson Carlaw talked in another debate about a time—I do not think that it was while I have been here—when the Parliament took health off the political football pitch. He made a really strong point; maybe we need to make such a commitment for drugs policy, stop the blame game, get together and—as Ms Constance has often said—throw the kitchen sink at this.

When I previously spoke about the subject, I said that politicians in Scotland and in the wider UK have been too wary of following other countries' radical approaches—Paul O'Kane mentioned that in his excellent speech—and have ignored the fact that some of those approaches have been successful, as Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned in his intervention. If the work of the national collaborative and the discussions with people who have lived experience come up with radical approaches, we will need to work across parties and across the Government to be open to those suggestions. We need to turn our eyes away from right-wing commentators, tabloid editorials and Mr Angry of Arbroath writing in the letters pages of *The Times*, because those people do not have the answers, whereas people with lived experience and their families very likely do.

15:52

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the debate and the work of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce. We all know that Scotland consistently has the highest drug deaths rate in Europe, and we all appreciate that the drug deaths crisis is complex and caused by a range of factors, including the types of drugs that are used and the high levels of poverty and deprivation in Scotland. We must also be honest about the fact that Scotland faces similar challenges to those of many other countries and the response has been slow.

Safe consumption facilities have operated in many parts of Europe for about three decades. They offer the opportunity to reduce the risk of disease and death. I say to Conservative members that the evidence is that such facilities do not increase drug use or the frequency of injecting.

On 3 November 2021, the Lord Advocate noted in evidence to the Criminal Justice Committee that any proposals for drugs consumption facilities would require to be

“precise, detailed and specific, underpinned by evidence and supported by those who would be responsible for policing such a facility”—

in particular,

“Police Scotland.”—[*Official Report, Criminal Justice Committee*, 3 November 2021; c 20.]

The Crown Agent wrote to the Criminal Justice Committee this week and said:

“the pilot presents significant operational challenges in relation to policing any facility; no doubt made more difficult by the lack of a clear legal framework. Prosecutors continue to work closely with the police to ensure that there is a clear plan for the policing approach to such a facility. There has been recent and ongoing correspondence with the Chief Constable of ... Scotland in relation to outstanding issues which require to be considered.”

I know that the minister advised the joint committee meeting—of the Criminal Justice Committee, the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, and the Social Justice and Social Security Committee—that she was still awaiting advice from the Lord Advocate on the legality of such facilities, and I would be grateful if she could provide the chamber with an update on whether advice has been obtained and what the timescales are for progress on that issue.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I did not intend to make an intervention, but I am aware of the letter that Katy Clark referred to—it came 14 months after the Lord Advocate gave evidence to the committee on a pilot drug consumption room. I find it slightly concerning that the letter specifically states that there is no timeframe as to when that information might be made available. I know that Katy Clark cannot answer that particular question, but I would be very grateful if the minister could do so when she is summing up.

Katy Clark: I thank the member for that helpful intervention. The reason that I have raised that issue is in order to make the point that the progress that we are making is too slow. I know that the minister has been awaiting that advice and I appreciate that she has probably been pushing for it, but I have to say that we need to see action.

In 2020, the First Minister said that it was her Government's responsibility to deal with that crisis and that she would not shy away from that. However, despite the fact that we declared a public health emergency three and a half years ago, at a minimum, there have been a further 11,500 deaths and 26,000 drug-related hospital admissions.

As a member of the Criminal Justice Committee, I would like to focus on the justice section of the Government's response. Like others, I have not had much opportunity to consider the full document, but it would be fair to say that the

approach that is outlined in the response is quite different from many current practices in the justice system. I know that the minister has worked in the justice system and will have first-hand knowledge of that. Drug abuse and use in prisons is endemic. We know that many people who were not drug users before they went into prison are introduced to drugs in prison. The task force recommendation is that

“the Scottish Government should make key changes to fully integrate a person-centred, trauma-informed public health approach to drug use in the justice system.”

I support that approach and I support what the Government says in its response. However, I am not clear how that relates to the justice legislation that is currently being brought before this Parliament. We know that Scotland has the highest jail population in western Europe and the highest numbers of people on remand. The number of people who are on remand in prison is now approaching almost 30 per cent of the prison population. It is far from clear what the public safety test—in the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill that is currently being considered—will be, and it is far from clear that it will result in what the report is asking for, which is that bail should be available and that remand should be used only as a last resort.

I very much welcome the worthy ambitions that are in the response, but I think that we face massive challenges. The justice budget is facing real-terms cuts, and many of the recommendations in the report will require significant resources. I look forward to what the minister has to say and I welcome what is in the report, but I think that we need to do a lot more work.

15:59

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): In 2021, 1,330 people in Scotland lost their lives to drugs. As we know, each such death is a tragedy. I echo the view of my colleagues that the number of drug deaths in Scotland is simply unacceptable.

We are all in no doubt that our drug deaths crisis is a public health emergency. However, we are starting to see positive progress as we tackle it. Police Scotland data shows that, during the 12 months to September 2022, there were 21 per cent fewer drug deaths than there had been during the 12 months to September 2021. However, it is important for us to recognise that, although there has been a reduction, a lot more work is still to be done.

The first core principle of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce’s report is the most important. Drug deaths are preventable. We must act now, and it is everyone’s responsibility to take action.

Today, the minister has outlined that the cross-Government response to the report has so far resulted in more than 80 actions to drive forward our national mission.

As other members have done in their contributions, I will focus on the view that we can tackle drug deaths by ending stigma and taking a public health approach. In 2005, the World Health Organization dubbed Glasgow the murder capital of Europe. In the previous year there had been 83 murders in the city, where gangs were known for their crime culture. Police in Glasgow decided to rethink their strategy. They set up a violence reduction unit, guided by the philosophy that violence is a public health issue. Violent behaviour spreads from person to person. To contain it, we therefore need to think in terms of transmission, risk, symptoms and causes. Thanks to taking such an approach there was a dramatic reduction in crime in Glasgow and it became a model that other countries could follow. A public health approach worked for that and I fully believe that it could work for drug deaths, too. I am pleased to hear that the Scottish Government shares that view.

Statistics and evidence are, of course, important, but if we get too bogged down in them we run the risk of taking the humanity out of the problem. By taking a people-centred approach we can get to the root causes of addiction and support people who are addicted. After all, it is important to remember that no one makes an active choice to have a drug addiction.

As always, the minister has been very honest about our monumental task and the amount of work that is required. However, I would welcome more powers being handed to her and to the Parliament to take further, more radical action. The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh notes that bold action is required to tackle the issue. It supports decriminalisation of the possession of drugs and the provision of safe drug consumption facilities. However, we know that the policy area that includes criminal justice sanctions for drugs offences is currently reserved to Westminster. Without control of that, we cannot possibly take an all-encompassing public health approach. We are where we are, though, and we will do all that we can with the limited powers that we have. I am pleased to see that in the budget the Government has increased to £160 million its investment in reducing the avoidable harms associated with drugs and alcohol. That is much needed and will help to address the many complex factors that come into play.

As we know from many studies, drug deaths are closely related to deprivation and austerity. Research published by the University of Glasgow and the Glasgow Centre for Population Health

suggests that, across the UK, people are dying younger as a result of austerity brought about by the UK Government. Such austerity has two impacts: one is reducing the levels of important services such as those for addiction, housing, mental health and welfare rights; and the other is cutting individual incomes through reductions in social security payments, leading to further drug use as a coping mechanism or an escape from grim reality. Furthermore, the research shows an association between cuts to disability-related social security payments and increased drug-related deaths across all local authority areas in Great Britain. The Scottish Drugs Forum said that today's drug use in Scotland is linked to the economic impact of deindustrialisation in the 1980s.

The reason that I mention all that is that, all too often, our national conversation on drug deaths is warped and misguided. We still hear people saying things such as "People make their own choices" and "They get what they deserve". Not only is that outlook completely wrong; it is inhumane. That is why it is so important that we make tackling the stigma around drug use a priority.

In my Ayr constituency, a new support organisation called Harbour Ayrshire has been set up by local businesses and is already doing fantastic work to help people with addiction issues. It focuses on prehab, rehab and aftercare to empower individuals to become independent and get involved in their local communities, and it also provides employment opportunities through those businesses.

I will end my contribution by recounting a moment from several years ago that really touched me. As a councillor at the time, I was listening to an inspirational man who had managed to break his addiction to drugs and had become clean. He used the following analogy, which has always stuck with me. If you come across a dying, withering plant in the corner of a room, do you go over and tell it to get its act together, then ignore it? No, most people would water it, nurture it and give it what it needs to grow and flourish. That is the approach that we and the Scottish Government must take. We must stop stigmatising people with addiction issues as Scotland's shame.

16:05

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I thank all the people who contributed to the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce report, the task force members and, for advance sight of the Government's response, the minister. The task force's report is wide ranging and comprehensive. I will focus on a couple of key recommendations.

Recommendation 4, regarding an approach of no wrong door and holistic support, is key in ensuring that people receive support and treatment when and where they need it. Support must cover all services to capture the points at which people with an addiction engage with a service. We must be aware that that initial contact might not come through a health service and that the service providers in settings such as housing also need the correct training and guidance to properly support people with an addiction. Such training must be trauma informed. Many people who are dealing with an addiction also deal with trauma and other mental or physical health issues, and we must ensure that any training that is provided to people who deliver services takes account of a person's entire circumstances. We know that stigma and poor experience with services might stop people continuing to engage with services and, when such engagement breaks down, that might prevent people seeking help again in the future.

To address recommendation 4, the cross-Government response to the task force report points to a large number of strategies, and it will be good to ensure that there are specialist support services available to the people who need them. However, with so many initiatives, there is the potential for people to find their situation spread across multiple initiatives, which can lead to people falling between the gaps. I would be keen to know from the minister, either in summing up or now in an intervention, whether she believes that we have enough of a balance of strategies to ensure that, on the whole, people cannot fall through the gaps between services.

Action on all the recommendations must be closely linked, but recommendation 4 on a no-wrong-door approach and recommendation 10 on a national stigma action plan have to be in sync if we are going to tackle some of the reasons why people do not seek help.

The minister and many members across the chamber recognise the impact that stigma can have, and I am pleased to see that work is under way to address that through the stigma charter. As ever, we must continue to be responsible with language and ensure that we do not use stigmatising language and challenge it whenever it is used.

For many people, recovery is lifelong, challenging and not always a linear path. I have had the privilege to speak to many people who are in recovery, and there is a piece of the recovery journey that we do not currently talk about enough: keeping people well once they have completed treatment with acute services.

I visited a Lanarkshire recovery community, and a young woman spoke to me about how, having

stopped using drugs, she had to rebuild her life. Often, we think about the structural things that people need, such as housing and income. However, she told me about the impact on her of not having hobbies or not even knowing what food she liked and disliked and the journey that she has taken to discover those things. She told me that, when going for job interviews, being asked questions such as, “What do you do in your spare time?”—I am sure that we have all been asked such questions—were hugely daunting for her. She believed that society expects people to have such things all figured out by the time that they are adult and that, for those without already established family or friend support mechanisms, providing access to courses or groups could help them to find out some of those things about themselves as well as connect them to their communities.

Since speaking to that young woman, I have heard the same from other people in recovery, and I thank them for their open and honest reflections. Some told me that, even with strong community links, they felt a sense of embarrassment in not knowing what they liked and disliked. That is another type of stigma that we need to tackle. I would be grateful if the minister, either in closing or after the debate, would provide examples of where such work is already happening and how we can share good practice to ensure that we continue to keep people well once they have completed the acute period of their recovery.

People deserve a rich and full life, regardless of their journey. Once someone has gone through the trauma, poverty or deprivation that has led to their addiction, has endured addiction and the stigma and turbulence that that causes in a person’s life and has sought help and come through rehabilitation, the least that they deserve is a fulfilling and full life, with all the things that we take for granted. I hope that we can find ways to support that in the future.

Many other issues are raised in the report that have also been raised in briefings that we have had, such as that of reform of UK drug law, which we fully support. As I have said many times before, the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is out of date and is now hindering some of the good work that is being done. The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh has spoken about decriminalisation. As a party, we support that. We previously welcomed the Lord Advocate’s decision on diversion from prosecution.

There is broad recognition across the chamber that, although the justice system has a part to play in supporting prisoners to deal with drug addiction, we need to take a public health approach to what is a public health emergency.

I thank again all those people who have been involved in the work of the task force, all those who have shared their lived experience and all those who are working hard in services across the country to implement the changes, who are making a difference.

16:10

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): It is with mixed emotions that the Scottish Parliament once more debates the shocking and challenging subject of drug addiction. It represents such a horrible life experience for far too many families and wreaks havoc on too many communities around the country.

As a teacher, it was not unusual for me to come into contact with children whose families were affected by drug addiction. That is a huge burden for a child, and for their struggling parents and carers, to carry. There was an understandable reluctance to ask for help with the addiction, for fear of the children being separated from their parents. In such circumstances, the role of schools in providing a stable and nurturing environment for the child, while the family receives holistic and individualised support, cannot be overstated. It undoubtedly contributes to positive long-term outcomes.

I welcomed the opening last November of Harper house in Saltcoats, where parents can be treated for addiction without being separated from their children. Harper house accepts referrals from right across Scotland. I hope that more family-orientated rehabilitation centres like Harper house can be funded across the country. There is a great need for such an inclusive and non-judgmental approach to recovery.

Today’s debate is an opportunity to focus on the urgent and challenging actions that are called for by the Drug Deaths Taskforce. Quite rightly, its final report demands that the Scottish Government focus on what can be done within devolved powers. In the light of that, I welcome the Scottish Government’s commitment to provide an additional £50 million of funding in every year of the current parliamentary session to deliver a significant reduction in deaths and harms.

The task force called for Scotland to develop

“the most extensive naloxone network anywhere in the world”.

In 2021-22, the number of take-home naloxone kits issued was just under 30,000, which represented a 29 per cent increase on the previous year. Nearly 65 per cent of people who are at risk of an opioid overdose have been issued with a kit. That is a welcome expansion of the network.

I believe that the Scottish Government is committed to embedding the public health approach at all stages, including throughout the criminal justice system. As the task force has so powerfully declared,

“Addiction is not a crime and you cannot punish people out of addiction.”

As colleagues across the chamber have mentioned, internationally, different public health approaches have been taken. I recognise that those cannot be transplanted in a different country, but they are worth noting. It is more than 20 years since Portugal decriminalised the public and private use, and the possession, of drugs. That marked a radical departure from a criminal justice-based approach to drug use to a public health-based one. Portugal has gone from having one of the highest drug death tallies in Europe to having one of the lowest. Decriminalisation of possession of drugs led to a halving of the number of problem drug users and a huge reduction in petty crime, which freed up law enforcement to tackle other crime.

Jamie Greene: I will keep my intervention brief. The architect of that programme said that it was not the decriminalisation alone that was the solution; it was only half of the solution. The other half was about providing front-line services and support to those people whom it diverted from prosecution.

Kaukab Stewart: That is a valid point. I am not saying that decriminalisation is the answer in and of itself, and I have outlined that the Government wants to provide the other half of the solution, which Mr Greene mentioned.

The situation in Portugal does not mean that there is no police intervention when an individual is found to be in possession of drugs, but it means a different response. If the person has less than the legal limit for individual possession, they are required to report within three days to the commission for the dissuasion of drug addiction, where they are interviewed and evaluated by a team of health professionals to assess whether they are in need of treatment. Every individual is then invited to attend a treatment facility. Eighty per cent of people accept referral, including those who are not problematic users. As well as providing access to high-quality treatment and recovery options, there is also access to a psychologist or counsellor to discuss their drug use. That massive transfer of focus from punishment to access to treatment has been highly successful in reducing drug deaths and petty crime.

We must acknowledge that a key underlying factor of drug deaths in Scotland is poverty. In 2021, people in Scotland’s most deprived areas

were 15 times more likely to have a drug-related death than those in the least deprived areas. Tackling poverty is a key priority for the Scottish Government and I urge it to continue to fund benefits such as the Scottish child payment and other essential anti-poverty measures.

The inequality that stokes our appalling drug deaths statistics must be undone if we want to see a dramatic reduction in drug deaths and drug misuse and an increase in hope and wellbeing in communities where those are currently sadly lacking.

16:17

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Today, we are addressing an area of national shame. Scotland’s drug deaths epidemic is out of control, and we are in need of urgent leadership in order to stop the surge of preventable deaths.

As my colleague Sue Webber pointed out, the problem in Scotland seems to be bigger than it is in other parts of the United Kingdom. Scotland has a rate of 245 drug deaths per million people, while England has a rate of 50 and Wales has a rate of 47.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I want to clarify the language that the member used. He said that the drug harm issue is “out of control”. Is he aware that the most recent statistics on drug-related deaths showed a decrease—albeit a small one—in the numbers? However, I am absolutely not playing down the issue.

Jeremy Balfour: I point out that the number of people who have sadly died is totally unacceptable. There has been progress but, as a number of members have pointed out during the debate, one death is too many. We need to look at it from that perspective.

It is not a new problem. We have known for many years that we need a response to illegal drugs. We have seen a lack of intervention over a number of years, and we are reaping the consequences. We need to make a dramatic change in our approach if we are to do anything about the issue and deal with the unthinkable death toll.

There is no silver bullet to deal with the drugs crisis. No one does the subject any justice by pretending that one single policy can fix an issue as complex as this one. Instead, it will be the implementation of a number of different initiatives that will act as pieces of the wider puzzle. One such measure is ensuring that those on the front lines of the battle have the tools that they require, and naloxone is one such tool.

The ability to mitigate the effects of an opioid overdose for a short period can be the difference between life and death. Between 2020 and 2021, take-home naloxone kits helped to treat an estimated 1,377 overdoses. In many cases, that has saved lives that otherwise would have been lost.

Far more can and should be done to get life-saving naloxone into the hands of those who need it. A third of the people who are deemed to be at risk of an overdose do not have access to it. We need to significantly broaden the circle of organisations and institutions that can distribute it and facilitate the police, homelessness charities and social workers to reach as many addicts as possible. I would be interested in hearing whether the minister has any proposals to roll it out further across Scotland. That seems to me to be an easy and effective way to make a real difference.

Consumption rooms have been floated as a possible measure to address drug deaths by giving those who struggle with addictions a safe place to consume drugs with supervision. Personally, I have major reservations about that proposal. A number of logistical and legal factors must be considered, including whether it would be a crime to possess drugs while travelling to a consumption room and what liability the Government would have in the awful event of someone dying at one of the sites. As my colleagues have said, if we are to trial consumption rooms, we will need to ensure that they work in a Scottish context, and any data that is collected must be fully analysed before we take any further steps.

I want to make it clear that helping those who struggle with addiction is tackling only half of the problem. Illegal drug use has to be tackled at the root of the problem, which is supply. Those who traffic in drugs are profiting directly from the trading of substances that not only ruin people's lives but, very sadly, often end them. We must do everything that we can to stop this immoral trade and I will support any measure that will bring these criminals to justice. Every tool that we have at our disposal should be utilised to find avenues through which drugs can come into our country, so that we can block and stop them.

However, that is not going to happen on its own. Governments have to be proactive in plugging the holes, so I am disappointed that the Scottish Government has refused to sign up to project ADDER, which is a UK Government scheme to tackle drug dealing and organised crime. I note what the minister said about that in her intervention on my colleague Sandesh Gulhane, but I ask the Scottish Government to think again. The scheme has been very successful so far, so it is hard to see the logic in the Scottish Government

not taking part, especially when we consider that the project has helped to seize 27 million benzo tablets that were destined for our country. I ask members to imagine the incredible difference that could be made for the people of Scotland if there was full co-operation on the issue between both Governments.

The long and the short of it is that something has to change. We cannot allow the trend that we have seen over a number of years to continue, with lives being needlessly lost and families being torn apart. There are measures that can be taken and I implore the Government to get a grip on the crisis. We do not need warm words. We need action and leadership. It is not just a matter of telling everyone what we would like to do. It is a matter of rolling up our sleeves and getting the job done. I hope that all of us across the parties can be involved in that process.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The final speaker in the open debate will be Paul Sweeney.

16:23

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Scotland's drug deaths crisis is the most important and pressing issue that this country faces today. I have said before and I say again that we must not shy away from the crisis, and the action that we take to tackle it must be bold, radical and, most important, swift.

That action will take many forms, including the roll-out of the MAT standards; ensuring that access to treatment and rehab is available to anyone and everyone who needs it; the overhauling of a criminal justice system that criminalises and warehouses vulnerable people in Victorian prisons; and the roll-out of overdose prevention centres. There is no one silver bullet, and I acknowledge and applaud the Government's recognition of that simple fact, which has been shared across the chamber this afternoon.

It is against that backdrop that I turn to the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce and its report. There is a lot to be welcomed in the report. I particularly welcome the emphasis on treating the drug deaths crisis as a public health issue and tackling the scourge of stigma that is faced by those who are battling addiction, and also the report's unequivocal backing for overdose prevention centres. It is filled with recommendations, many of which we have seen before, and that simple fact goes to the very heart of the issue. We can have all the reports in the world with the best recommendations possible, but, if there is a failure to implement them, they are a waste of time.

Take overdose prevention centres as an example and as a litmus test. We have been talking about those for almost a decade now and we are generally all in agreement as to their efficacy, but we are still waiting for so much as a pilot to be initiated. They are not some fanciful idea that is way outwith the scope of the Government to implement. Indeed, the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce chair has said:

“We believe that safer drug consumption facilities can be implemented now under the current legislation”.

So why the hold-up? I understand that a proposal for a pilot in Glasgow was submitted to the Lord Advocate more than six months ago, yet here we are—no further forward and with no mention of that in the minister’s opening speech this afternoon.

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service is saying that it is too complex to do, that there is a myriad of issues, that the chief constable is not up for it, that that is such a shame and that we do not have a timeframe for it yet. I am afraid that that is just not good enough. It is a disgrace when we have people dying and when we have seen the efficacy of that approach in Glasgow through the unofficial pilot run by Peter Krykant. Eight lives have been saved—what more context do we need? Let us get on with it; let us bang those heads together and get it sorted. If it needs to be the First Minister who does that, so be it.

Those prevention centres are far from the only area where the Government’s actions have not aligned with the expectations set. Let us look at the MAT standards. The minister came to the chamber in the autumn to inform us that the Government’s implementation of the MAT standards 1 to 5 by April last year had failed miserably, with just seventeen per cent of the standards being fully implemented and just one of the ADPs fully implementing MAT standard 1 by the agreed time.

It does not stop there. The Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce report talks about the importance of implementing all 10 MAT standards by May 2024, yet the Government’s target for full implementation of those 10 is not until 2025, and we are no further forward on the commitment made two years ago by the First Minister on the widespread roll-out of diamorphine or heroin-assisted treatments. Those are still basically statistically irrelevant in the front to tackle Scotland’s drug deaths emergency.

The report also talks about funding fit for a public health emergency, yet we know that the budgets of local authorities, who are largely responsible for the delivery of many of the services relating to drug death prevention, have been decimated and continue to be cut every financial year. As I said, the report is full of

welcome recommendations, but we have seen it all before and, frankly, actions speak louder than words.

Before I wrap up, I will make a more general point, which is that, unfortunately, a vacuum has been created when it comes to drug policy, which is deeply concerning. In the past year, we have seen proposals for legislation from Opposition members but nothing whatsoever from the Government. I do not say that to score points or to grandstand, and I certainly do not say it to decry the laudable work being done by the minister. I simply say it because it is emblematic of a structural inertia that seems to exist at the heart of Government, despite the efforts of the minister to turn it around.

It has been said to me that if this was about any other group of people, the crisis would have been fixed a long time ago. Although I do not want to believe that to be the case, it is an unfortunate and observable reality that the longer it drags on and the more time we waste, the more difficult it becomes to dispute that there are certain people in certain positions of power in this country who just do not think that it is worth the hassle.

I do not envy the scale of the task that the minister has in front of her. Scotland’s drug deaths crisis existed for a long time before she was responsible for the portfolio. However, my worry is that, based on the current trajectory, flatlining as it is but still at a sky-high rate relative to any other comparable country and jurisdiction, and despite the efforts that she is making, it will exist long after she ceases to have responsibility for it. That is a national tragedy.

The Presiding Officer: We move to winding-up speeches.

16:29

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): It is always difficult to follow Paul Sweeney in a debate such as this, because, among us all, he has the most visceral, real-life experience of the issues. He has helped to stabilise people in the very worst strains of addiction; sometimes, he has even helped to save their lives. I congratulate him for that and recognise his work in that regard.

I welcome the minister’s commitments on the report, particularly her remarks on stabilisation services. I would not say that she and I have crossed swords on stabilisation, but I have raised the issue with her several times. Therefore, it is gratifying to hear that that is now a primary focus for the Government, given that those services have been something of a Cinderella service in drug treatment provision in this country. I am also gratified to hear the minister talk about rurality. I

have raised the issue of same-day services several times before.

On the actions that are outlined in the report and the Government's focus on families affected by parental substance use, let us remember that someone who is born into a family where parental substance use is prevalent will, from day 1, suffer an adverse childhood experience. We know that adverse childhood experiences are, in large part, the cause of much of the addiction in our communities. If we offer comprehensive and holistic support to those families, we can break that cycle. Kaukab Stewart gave an excellent description of a service in her constituency that is hoping to do exactly that.

The report is comprehensive. It needs to be, because it is not just about what people ingest or put into their arm. It is about the other factors that follow them around in their life, and it is about their access to housing, training and their routes into the employment market. Oftentimes, we can stabilise people, but they go back into communities where there are toxic relationships and triggers that restart the cycle. If we can help them out of that with a level of social mobility, we will have succeeded.

I support Sue Webber's amendment—there is much in it that the Liberal Democrats agree with. However, it asks us to sign up to the proposed right to addiction (Scotland) recovery bill right now. We are moving forward with that in an atmosphere of good faith, but we cannot write blank cheques on it. I have picked up today, in some of the remarks from the Conservative benches—

Sue Webber: We heard from members from all parties about the importance of listening to the voices of those with lived experience. If the member has read the article on drugs in December's edition of *Holyrood* magazine, he will realise that the author, who is from Faces and Voices of Recovery UK—FAVOR—and who worked with us on developing our proposed bill, has such lived experience—he has nothing short of that. Surely, the member must understand the value of signing up to the bill.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I make no prejudicial remarks about where we will end up on that bill. I have told Douglas Ross that we will move forward in good faith. At the same time, there are fundamental areas of disagreement about our parties' approach to drugs policy. We have heard some of that with regard to safe consumption rooms, pill checking and so on. Although those approaches are outside the scope of the bill, that suggests that elements of discord might arise. I hope not, and I make no prediction about that.

Paul O'Kane was right to put bereaved loved ones at the very heart of his remarks. We should

all do that. Let us not forget the torment that they face, which has sometimes been increased by the actions of this Parliament. Colleagues will remember their postbags being filled with correspondence from the families of loved ones who had succumbed to addiction or overdose, who were waiting months, if not years, for a toxicology report to give them some closure on the circumstances of their loved ones' passing. That was a direct result of political decisions that led to cuts in that service. Those are the unintended consequences of some of the actions in which we participate.

Today, I am thinking in particular of the parents of a woman from my constituency who was killed at an event on 29 October at Terminal V at the Royal Highland Centre at Ingliston. She died after taking harmful substances that she had ingested for pleasure. She took them before she arrived at the festival because she knew that there was a zero-tolerance approach on site. I met representatives of Terminal V after the fact. They have one of the safest facilities in the world. They have security and state-of-the-art healthcare facilities, but they could do nothing for my constituent, because she had ingested the pills before she got to the venue. If Terminal V had had a pill-checking facility, she might not have taken the pills beforehand and it might have given her a lifeline.

We have seen the effect of that at drug-testing facilities that are already offered at festivals in England and Wales. A three-year research project that was conducted by the University of Liverpool and The Loop, which is a charity, found that, in 15 per cent of cases, pill-checking facilities revealed that drugs were not what the person who bought them had expected them to be. Two thirds of festival-goers would dispose of their drugs if they were unsure about what they contained, and, at festivals where drug-testing facilities were in place, nobody died. That is another example of something that works.

I come back to my intervention on Dr Gulhane, who is anxious that we should not rush into solutions. However, Paul O'Kane is right: we must rush into solutions, because the emergency is at our door. It is not the case that it might not work for Scotland. We are not the pioneers of safe consumption rooms—those have been working and saving lives effectively in countries across Europe for years. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. We need them in Scotland right now.

I conclude by paying tribute to some members for their excellent speeches. Emma Harper was quite right to talk about stigma, which is a massive barrier that we face in getting people into

treatment and changing the attitude of society to all of this—

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will close on that point. I assure the Government that the Liberal Democrats will support its motion.

16:35

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I am happy to add my thanks and the thanks of Scottish Labour to those who have been involved in the Government's response to the final report of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce.

Today, we will have to abstain on the Tory amendment for the same reason as Alex Cole-Hamilton will: we must wait to see the publication of the right to addiction (Scotland) recovery bill before we can add our support to it.

We are happy to support the Liberal Democrat amendment, the contents of which Alex Cole-Hamilton has set out so eloquently. We will also support the Government's motion, because we want to try to maintain a level of unanimity around the general approach, for which I think there is broad support.

I have to say, though, that reading the Government's response today has left me deeply underwhelmed. The report was another opportunity to signal a step change in the pace of the approach. If there is consensus in Parliament arising from the debate today, I believe that it is this: we must increase the pace of change.

We know that drug deaths in Scotland are now the second worst that they have been on record. With the current rate of change, it will take decades and decades to resolve the situation, and tens of thousands more lives will be lost to drug deaths if we continue on the path that we are on at the moment.

I would gently say to some SNP members that the suggestion that this situation is not grotesquely out of control must be immediately dismissed from their minds, because the situation is grotesquely out of control.

Audrey Nicoll: I do not think for one second that any of my SNP colleagues underestimate the challenge ahead.

One thing that I would put to the member is in relation to the UK Government's consultation on its white paper. It focuses on demand, possession and use, and it continues to take a justice-orientated approach. Would the member not agree that, when it comes to use and possession, a public health approach, which the Scottish

Government is attempting to take, is much more appropriate?

Michael Marra: There is clear unanimity in support of that, at least from Scottish Labour. We absolutely support taking a public health approach to the issue—that has been our position for a long time.

Paul O'Kane has pointed out that it has been three and a half years since drug-related deaths were declared a public health emergency and that it has been two years since the declaration of a national mission. However, we have no proper implementation of MAT standards. The First Minister told us that that they would be rapidly implemented.

We must recognise that what is happening is far from rapid. We have no drug-checking facilities, as has been highlighted; we have no overdose protection pilot; we have no workforce plan; and same-day prescriptions are available in only one ADP in Scotland.

The minister asked for recognition of funding that has been brought forward. The Public Audit Committee has told Parliament quite clearly that we do not have a proper account of the scale of the challenge to measure whether that funding is appropriate.

However, the report of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce, which we are responding to today, called the funding that is available to alcohol and drug services "woeful". That is the task force's word, not mine. It is clear that more needs to be done in resourcing as well.

We recognise that we require further information on both mental health and substance misuse services as well as on their interaction. When I intervened on the minister, I highlighted what is in the report on NHS Tayside. I hope that the minister will support the need for a Government statement on that report, because I think that that is critical. Scottish Labour has called for that today, and we would like to see the mental health and public health ministers in front of Parliament answering questions. After all, this Parliament called for that report and ministers commissioned it, so let us hear from ministers in response to it.

Emma Harper, who made an outstanding speech, as well as Alex Cole-Hamilton, raised the issue of same-day access to services in rural areas, for which I have great sympathy. I have also highlighted that issue in the chamber on occasion but not nearly as eloquently. We must set that against the full retraction of health services in villages and small towns. That is the context in which many rural communities are operating.

Jamie Greene contrasted that with a request to focus on areas of acute problems. I would highlight the issues in Dundee in that regard. More than anything else, as important as funding and having a focus on resources are, the pace of change—making change happen—seems, frankly, to be the single biggest problem in Dundee. Changing the services to the kind that we need requires absolute leadership.

I will close on what I believe to be a point on which real consensus has emerged in the debate. There is a lack of any real detail on what a consumption room pilot would look like. We need to see that proposal from the minister. Katy Clark has talked about it; Russell Findlay has highlighted it in his brief contribution; and Paul Sweeney, as ever, has talked eloquently about the need and the demand for it. I believe that Parliament is demanding that from the minister. Could she address that issue in her concluding remarks? Is a proposal on her desk? When will that be published?

16:40

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank all members for their constructive and considered contributions. I offer the condolences of Conservative members to anyone watching the debate who has been affected by the issue of drugs and by the passing away of someone in their family because of them. It is an issue that touches all aspects of life; any one of us, even in public life, will have close experiences of the devastating effects that substance abuse has on a person and on the unseen victims of addiction—our friends, partners, families and the people around us.

I commend many of the contributions that have been made today, including those by Siobhian Brown, Gillian Mackay and Kaukab Stewart among others, who shared personal experiences and anecdotes about the devastating effects that drugs are having in their communities, and about some of the very good work that is happening. I point to the work that is being done in Saltcoats, parts of Lanarkshire and elsewhere.

I welcome the fact that progress has been made in the past calendar year on reducing Scotland's drug deaths, which one member mentioned. However, it is a small reduction and the drug problem remains our national shame, as does our problematic relationship with alcohol and other substances, which I have previously spoken about in great detail.

Having read the motion and the various amendments to it, I think that we have approached the debate in the tone that it merits. There is, of course, some argy-bargy around the semantics of

voting and amendments, but we will support the Government and the premise of its motion today. We have one or two issues with the Liberal Democrat amendment, but only in the sense that the Criminal Justice Committee, of which I am a member, has not had a chance to consider the repercussions of what it suggests. If that amendment is agreed to, we will, unfortunately, not be able to vote for the amended motion.

All that amending, voting, and talking is one thing—that is procedural stuff, and we are very good at talking. However, it is the doing that matters. Sue Webber was right to point out in her opening speech that, as the report makes clear, drug deaths are preventable, but that requires action and action requires resource.

There are roles for all of us because, as Gillian Martin pointed out, it is not just a Government problem; it is an everyone problem. However, none of us in Opposition can legislate easily, as the Government can. I know that, because my colleague Douglas Ross is going through a very lengthy process, which is why we have not yet published his proposed right to recovery bill. I know that Mr Sweeney is doing the same with his bill on an issue in which he believes strongly. Those things take a lot of time. I know that, as someone who already has a member's bill in the system. I am afraid to say that the nature of the process is that members' bills often end in failure. The reality is that the Government, its ministers, its directorates, its public bodies and its agencies can act far more quickly and easily than any of us in the chamber can.

In the example of Inverclyde, which Paul O'Kane mentioned, and Michael Marra's examples from Dundee, we see that real action that is taken at pace can make a difference. If one treats the addiction, one can prevent the death—I want to give that important message today.

In my opinion, the task force is a step in the right direction overall and is, by its very nature, an acceptance and an acknowledgement by the Government that there is, indeed, a crisis that needs urgent and focused action.

The one thing that I took away from my brief reading of the report—given that it unhelpfully came out only yesterday—is that one cannot fight addiction on one's own. We have to consider that when we look at what the Government is or is not doing. Help must come in a form that is timely, appropriate to the individual, well resourced and unending for as long as it is needed.

The Government has, rightly, taken an absolute battering in the chamber over its historical failures. However, it is never too late to turn things around and it is never wrong to say "Sorry", although that is not easy for a Government to do. I appreciate

the work that the minister is doing, but it is still the case that too many people are being let down.

I say to Gillian Martin that this is not a blame game—certainly not on my part. That is not my style. This is about responsibility and accountability, and it is the job of Opposition members in Parliament to hold the Government to account.

As Katy Clark did, I want to talk about the justice interactions, because that is an area of the conversation in which I have a great interest. The reality is that our drug death epidemic reaches far into our justice sector in a range of ways. We have talked a little bit about prisons—I think that the word “endemic” was used to describe the situation with drugs in our prisons. Some 41 per cent of prisoners who enter custody in Scotland do so having had problematic drug use before they enter custody, so I understand that there is a real interaction between drug misuse and the criminal justice system. It would be naive to think otherwise.

However, the reality is that drug deaths in our prisons have risen sharply. There were, sadly, nine drug deaths in 2020. The figure rose to 15 in 2021, and the recent figures paint a worrying picture of the situation in 2022. In prisons, the trend is on the way up, even though the trend in the rest of the country is on the way down.

The issue is not just about preventing drugs getting into prisons; it is about addressing the underlying reasons why prisoners are taking drugs in the first place. Is it to do with a lack of meaningful activity? Is it coercion? Is it simply the conditions that they are in? We talk about Victorian conditions in prisons, and HMP Greenock is a perfect example of that. It is disgraceful. It is horrifying and inconceivable that someone can go into custody without a drug problem and leave with one. How can that happen in modern Scotland?

The issue of organised criminal gangs using the prison system is important. An inmate I chatted to in private when I visited HMP Edinburgh told me how easy it is to get drugs in prison. He said, “Give me five minutes and I’ll come back with some drugs.” That is worrying to me—not just as an MSP but as a member of society. Individuals are coming out of prison with a problem that is worse than the one that they went in with, which surely has to be a matter of importance.

I do not have time to go into the wider issues around diversions from prosecution, but I will say that we must look at the data on that. I want the Government to produce quantitative data on the decisions that it makes about diversion, and how that relates to consumption and use in the wider population and to reoffending rates. I do not have

that data, but I wish I did. If we had it, perhaps we could have a proper debate about it. The issue is important with regard to any class of drugs and any decisions that the Lord Advocate makes.

I will not rehearse the arguments about consumption rooms, but I will say that no one on the Conservative benches can make that policy happen or stop it happening; that power lies with the Government.

I will close by saying that no one has a monopoly on ideas in the area. We will have to work together, but we must also learn lessons. The lesson that we can all learn from today’s debate is that, on all sides, politics sometimes perversely does the opposite of what it is meant to do, which is to do good. It will get in the way unless we do what is required of all of us, and that is to agree where appropriate and disagree where necessary. I think that today’s debate has reflected that well.

16:48

Angela Constance: I thank each and every member who has participated in today’s debate. Although it might not always seem like it, I always appreciate and reflect on the contributions that members make, the causes that they champion and the casework that they often bring to my attention.

I also notice that many members have attempted to turn down the volume a wee bit on the politics—that is something that I always try to do. However, I accept that, although we can depoliticise the issue a wee bit, that does not remove the need for clear accountability and leadership. I have always sought to practise what I preach, and the scrutiny that I subject others to is exactly the same scrutiny that I am open to.

It is fair to say that there is more that unites us than divides us, and I appreciate members’ almost unanimous support for the detail of the recommendations and the actions in our plan that, of course, are evidence based, with some of that evidence coming from international sources because, as Alex Cole-Hamilton rightly said, we are not pioneers in this area.

Once again, I reiterate my thanks to everyone—past and present—who has served on the task force, and I put on record my thanks to drug policy officials and other colleagues across Government.

I have always made every effort. That comes in part from having a period of time outwith Government; to be direct and plain speaking, I think that it is called “a period of reflection”. I have never demurred from describing the scale of the challenge, acknowledging the pain and the heartache, or, indeed, showing my frustration and

anger at the pace and progress. I was very straight with Parliament a number of times last year—most recently in December—about issues relating to MAT standards. I will not repeat what I stated, but members will be aware of the unprecedented action in respect of scrutiny and financial and practical support. I will, of course, continue to return to Parliament on the issue of the MAT standards and the action plan on a six-monthly basis.

Michael Marra: I recall what was described as “unprecedented action” in terms of ministerial direction that was given to certain alcohol and drug partnerships in health boards in that regard. What can the minister publish and put in the Parliament’s domain to tell us about the instructions that have been given to those groups, the names of the accountable persons, the substance of the conversations, and the pressure that is being put on people to deliver changes at pace?

Angela Constance: Senior leaders and who is accountable at the local level should be published, and improvement plans should be published at the local level. The last time that I checked—which was before Christmas, in advance of coming to the chamber for the MAT standards statement—that had happened in the vast majority of cases. However, if there are particular examples that members want me to pursue, I would be more than happy to follow them up.

I also outlined in the statement what information would come to Parliament in June in respect of specific reporting on progress on the update to the red-amber-green assessment.

Like other members, I am not going to prejudice my judgment on the right to recovery bill. I want to see it and be reassured that it is inclusive of all treatment options. However, I can give the assurance that I will participate in the parliamentary process in good faith.

In the meantime, the Government will continue with its own legislative programme, including the work that Mr Brown is pursuing relating to the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill and ending Friday liberations, and our work relating to the human rights bill, which is about putting into Scots law internationally recognised human rights that are ultimately enforceable in court.

The national collaborative—that independent voice of lived and living experience and families—is developing the charter of rights. The implementation plan is not just about ensuring how we can put into practice the highest-attainable standards of physical and mental health in the context of the human rights bill but about how we can do likewise with people’s right to housing, education, a healthy environment and social

networks, all of which are determinants of good health.

I agree whole-heartedly that more can be done in Scotland and that more is being done in Scotland with the powers and resources that we have. After all, in an earlier incarnation, I was the minister who took through child poverty legislation without full powers over tax and welfare. When I was an employment minister, I reduced youth unemployment, despite having no access to employment law. Therefore, I think that I am a good example of the ever-pragmatic optimist. I will always roll up my sleeves and deal with the hand that I have been dealt. However, I know that there are constraints.

I hope that people support the task force’s call for change in equality law regulations, which exclude people with addictions, unless they have an addiction to prescribed medication under the disability regulations. We also need to have a mature debate, discussion and review of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

I kindly say that we need to move away from the rhetoric of soft justice. Our focus should be on what works.

What works in terms of public protection, which is the absolute priority? What works in terms of prevention? What works in terms of rehabilitation? What works to make each and every community and individual safer?

Paul Sweeney: Certainly, the one thing that we know works in prevention terms is those prevention centres and this pilot is critical. We need to get sight of the timescales, so could the minister please update the chamber on that?

Angela Constance: I cannot even begin to describe the impact that visiting OnPoint, the safer drug consumption facility in New York, had on me. It took a long time for me to process that. What I can say is that it has only ever increased my resolve to do everything that is within my powers to overcome barriers so that Glasgow can be the next city, following on from Dublin, to have such a lifesaving facility.

I do have to be really direct and candid with members in the chamber: the feedback that I have received through my officials to my inquiries is very similar—almost identical—to the feedback that committee members have received.

I cannot speak on behalf of the Lord Advocate or the Crown Office, but I can reassure members in the chamber that if anything is within my gift or my power, I will absolutely do it. Of course, there would have been an easier way to do this, but I will not make that perhaps more political point in today’s debate.

Michael Marra: Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: Actually, I am going to move on—I have taken two interventions from Labour members.

We have had some discussion around finance. Record funding is going into tackling Scotland's drug deaths crisis. People will have seen the draft budget, which has a £12 million additional resource going to the national mission.

I will also reiterate a point that I made earlier, that multiyear funding is available to third sector organisations and we are supporting organisations with an increase in relation to the cost of living crisis.

I am also determined to follow the money, because this is not just about quantum; it is also about impact and about ensuring that money is reaching where it is intended to reach.

I will quickly say to Alex Cole-Hamilton that I am with him in spirit in terms of what he has outlined in his amendment to the motion. For some of those more arcane technical reasons, I cannot support the amendment because he is technically asking me to do something that is not within my legal powers.

In terms of drug checking facilities, I would say to him that there is only one drug checking facility in the United Kingdom that is licensed by the Home Office, which is The Loop in Bristol. It is open once a month, on payday weekend. [*Angela Constance has corrected this contribution. See end of report.*] I want to see drug checking facilities in at least three of our cities and we are engaging closely with the city leads on those applications that have to go to the Home Office, including the details in and around that. I am happy to talk to Alex Cole-Hamilton in more detail about that point.

In the time that I have left, I will say that I agree with Jamie Greene—no one can fight addiction on their own, and that of course applies to services and indeed to politicians. When I came into this post, I made a commitment to ensure that drug policy and the national mission would be joined at the hip, whether that is in relation to education, prevention, housing and homelessness, employment, criminal justice, mental health or our efforts to tackle poverty and inequality.

I recognise that everybody is much more than their drug or alcohol problem. No one should be defined by their substance use issue. That is why tackling stigma is so important. We also have to recognise that people with lived and living experience are assets and that they have a contribution to make to every aspect of society, not just to drug policy.

I very much believe that our plan demonstrates how we are including people and not excluding them, as well as how we are scaling up our efforts. The Routes programme will expand into five new areas; Planet Youth will expand into eight regions; and Housing First is already in 25 local authority areas, with another two coming on stream, recognising that home is much more than bricks and mortar and that homelessness is much more than a housing policy.

In addition to our new, extended, residential rehabilitation services and the 891 funded referrals into residential rehab over the lifetime of the national mission, we will build on that progress and maintain momentum with £18 billion going into stabilisation services. That will also be a platform for change in terms of out-of-hours services.

I disagree with some colleagues in the Labour Party about the national care service, because I want to bring drugs services into the mainstream and core, universal services. That is why I want it to be part of the national care service, which is the biggest reform since the establishment of the NHS, in the same way that I want drugs services to be mainstreamed as part of our primary care response. With our pathways work, whether that is mental health, GIRFE, MAT or trauma, we are reforming services across the length and breadth of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: Minister, please conclude.

Angela Constance: Finally, Presiding Officer, we know that there is no one solution. Our work is complex, but we are in the business of mending and preventing broken lives. Our journey is both a sprint and a marathon. We are acting now, but we are also making long-term commitments. We will build on our progress and maintain momentum. There is much work to do, but I commend the report to the Parliament.

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-07469.3, in the name of Sue Webber, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07469, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: cross-Government response to the Drug Deaths Taskforce report, "Changing Lives", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a brief pause to allow members to access the digital voting system.

We will now proceed with the division on amendment S6M-07469.3. Members should cast their votes now.

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): On behalf of Stuart McMillan, I vote no.

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

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My system would not connect. I would have voted no.

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

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 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)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)

Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 29, Against 65, Abstentions 23.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-07469.2, in the name of Paul O'Kane, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07469, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: cross-Government response to the Drug Deaths Taskforce report "Changing Lives", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart: On behalf of Stuart McMillan, I vote no.

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

For

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)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

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

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)

Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 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)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 52, Against 65, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-07469.1, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07469, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: cross-Government response to the Drug Deaths Taskforce report, "Changing Lives", be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

Before I close the vote, I call Kaukab Stewart to cast a proxy vote on behalf of Stuart McMillan.

Kaukab Stewart: On behalf of Stuart McMillan, I vote no.

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

The vote is closed.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My vote has not registered. I would have voted no.

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

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)

Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 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)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 23, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-07469, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: cross-Government response to the Drug Deaths Taskforce report, “Changing Lives”, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the cross-government response to the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce final report, *Changing Lives*; supports the transformational principles underpinning that response of treating problem drug use as any other health condition is treated, and ensuring that people with lived and living experience of

problem drug use are included in the co-production of policy and strategy development in any area of government policy or delivery that affects them; recognises that cross-government planning and activity is needed to support the National Mission, and that this has resulted in over 80 actions; acknowledges the publication of the stigma action plan, which will play a vital role in the culture change required, and recognises the role of the Scottish Parliament in this regard, and believes that, with commitment across government, the Parliament and beyond, it is possible to save lives and improve health and wellbeing.

Circular Fashion

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06368, in the name of Stephanie Callaghan, on circular fashion: looping the thread. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament encourages the adoption of circular fashion methods that ensure clothing is produced in a more considered way that closes the loop on production, including responsible manufacturing, use, and the end-of-life stage, emphasising the value of utilising a garment right to the end; understands that, over the past decades, the production and consumption of clothing has increased exponentially around the world leading to a dramatic increase in the negative social and environmental consequences; notes that a report by Zero Waste Scotland, which assessed the carbon impact of Scotland's household waste, showed that textiles account for nearly a third of emissions even though they only make up 4% of waste by weight; further notes that Scotland is home to what it understands is the UK's leading circular fashion hub, Advanced Clothing Solutions (ACS), offering fashion brands and retailers a carbon neutral, rental and resale fulfilment service from a developing biodiversity area in Holytown, North Lanarkshire; welcomes the Scottish Government's £2 million Circular Textiles Fund, as well as the £18 million Circular Economy Investment Fund, administered by Zero Waste Scotland, offering investment for SMEs based in Scotland and supporting work that will deliver circular economy growth; considers that there is need for transparency in the fashion supply chain; notes the calls for legislation that helps to achieve fair pay for textile and garment workers around the world, in light of reports that modern slavery runs deep within the industry, and further notes the growing calls to incentivise responsible and circular consumption through fiscal and regulatory levers that reward fashion companies that design products with lower environmental impacts and penalise those that do not.

17:15

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a privilege to lead tonight's debate on circular fashion, and I thank Tony, Michael and Hayley from Advanced Clothing Solutions, who are in the public gallery, for inspiring it. I am also grateful to members on all sides of the chamber for supporting my motion and for staying late on this dark winter night instead of rushing home to get their slippers on.

Circular fashion is expanding rapidly, offering Scotland opportunities to further strengthen our environmental and social justice credentials and sitting neatly with our global leadership on net zero and climate justice. However, I start with the problem: we are addicted to fashion. Across the United Kingdom, we buy more clothes per person than any other country in Europe, and consumers now buy 60 per cent more garments than they did 15 years ago.

Fashion makes up 10 per cent of humanity's carbon emissions, which is more than aviation and shipping combined. In the UK, a massive 80 per cent of textiles end up in landfill, with the average person throwing away 3.1 kilos of textiles each year; that is enough to fill a small suitcase.

The use of chemicals in clothes production raises serious health concerns for workers and consumers, and 35 per cent of microplastics in the world's oceans come from synthetic textiles. At the same time, textile workers, who are primarily women in developing countries, are often paid derisory wages and forced to work long hours in appalling conditions in a way that shows complete disregard for human rights.

Closer to home, the uncomfortable truths that have been uncovered in the fashion industry in Leicester were right on our doorstep just a short time ago. The fact is that 98 per cent of fashion brands do not pay their workers a liveable wage, and yet, as a society, we still blindly consume the products of that labour. Things cannot go on as they are. We need to completely rethink our relationship with fashion and abandon the current take, make, waste model of production and consumption that relies on the exploitation of people and planet.

Circular fashion offers an alternative to that broken system, whereby our clothing and personal belongings come from a more considered model in which the production of an item and the end of its life are equally important. Circularity begins with responsible manufacturing, whereby clothing is built to last and can be maintained and reused right through to the end of its life, when it is then recycled.

Circular fashion is not new: in Scotland, we have been renting and reusing clothing for as long as I can remember. Hiring kilts and wedding attire is common, and those items are made with durability and reuse in mind. Personally, I have never quite managed to move on from the charity shopping of my student days—there is something exciting about those pre-loved vintage bargains that I just cannot resist. However, if we want to move circular fashion from niche to normal, we need to establish infrastructures that help brands to shift away from the destructive linear model of production that currently exists and bring consumers into the loop.

ACS Clothing, which I mentioned earlier, is based in Holytown, in my constituency. It is Europe's largest circular and sustainable fashion fulfilment hub, which is something to be really proud of. Its online platform allows brands to dip their toe in circular fashion without huge outlays, and ACS back-end logistics take care of garment cleaning, rental, repair and resale in a socially just and carbon-neutral operation. ACS Clothing has

received one of the highest B Corporation scores in the world, which demonstrates that circularity goes hand in hand with environmental and social performance.

In partnership with the University of the West of Scotland, the company has developed industry-leading oxygen compression technology that sanitises clothing, making it more clean and pristine than clothing from any shop shelf that can be found on the high street. Each manufacturing step, from developing environmentally innovative production processes to employing sustainable cleaning practices, carefully considers our planet. Amazingly, the technology can even clean personal protective equipment, making the unthinkable thinkable.

At ACS, respecting people goes hand in hand with respecting our planet. The company has been paying a real living wage for years, and it delivers modern and graduate apprenticeships and offers a range of placements in supportive employment opportunities, with wraparound care and a Scottish vocational qualifications centre on site.

The company's diverse range of workers includes people with disabilities, refugees and those on placements through the Scottish Prison Service. Its business benefits people, and people benefit its business, rewarding it with loyalty, commitment and hard work.

Today, I am wearing a dress from Hirestreet—I am breathing in a bit—which is one of the many retailers that ACS Clothing enables in the rental market. It looks and feels new, and it arrived on my doorstep, so the process could not be easier. Reshaping the fashion industry and creating new possibilities is so important, but many fast-fashion retailers continue to ramp up production and employ greenwashing strategies to hide their supply chains from consumers. That will not change until we incentivise and regulate fashion brands and bring them with us on the journey to circularity. Until then, sustainable brands are mopping with the tap on. It is high time that we levelled the playing field to help sustainable fashion to compete against fast fashion, for the sake of our people and our planet.

For example, we already do not pay VAT on children's clothes, because those are clearly not items to own for life, but what if we thought differently about all our clothing? From a policy perspective, the UK could follow Sweden's lead, where VAT has been slashed to 0 per cent on repaired and reused items, offsetting the costs of transitioning to circular economy models and encouraging more businesses to enter the market.

Alongside incentives, we need tighter regulations and more transparency, including on labelling requirements for materials that are used,

the environmental impact of production and the labour practices that are employed, in order to help consumers to make informed and ethical choices. We are falling behind the rest of the world by missing out on the new set of technical regulations that has recently been introduced in the European Union. That includes extended producer responsibility legislation, which means that the polluter takes responsibility for the products that they put on the market.

In the UK, producer responsibility schemes already apply to electrical goods, batteries, vehicles and packaging. In fashion, we could require brands and retailers to collect goods at the end of their life or outsource that process to someone else. That concept is exciting not only in terms of waste reduction, but because it creates a whole new manufacturing industry, which is currently still in its infancy. That in turn creates a massive opportunity for the Scottish economy. The demand for end-of-life recycling centres where items are broken back down into raw materials and brought back into the circular economy will only increase as we move away from the questionable practice of exporting and recycling to other continents.

However, although regulations can help to fund the necessary systems and infrastructure for collection and recirculation, more actions will be needed to avoid products being discarded in the first place. We should invest in education to bolster the connection between brands, communities and supply chains, and understand that we can, all together, meet the needs of local people and our environment.

Fashion is inherently about community and what we have in common, which is why we embrace the latest trends. Circular fashion harnesses that commonality: it champions the idea of sharing and reuse over ownership, and people and planet over profit. Circular fashion is our future—it has to be.

17:23

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

It is actually my birthday today, and there is no better way of spending it than speaking about circular fashion with my friends on all sides of the chamber.

I congratulate Stephanie Callaghan on bringing the debate to the chamber. I also give my apologies, as I need to leave at 6.15 pm to catch a train, although we may be finished by then anyway.

There is a compelling case for making clothes more sustainable. It means longer-lasting products, which is good for consumers; new opportunities for business, which is good for the economy; and a need for fewer resources, which

is good for the environment. I am therefore pleased that the motion recognises ACS Clothing in North Lanarkshire, because the company is a world-class example of a circular economy for clothes.

Last year, I visited the company to see for myself its operation and its incredible feat of logistics—renting, repairing and reusing thousands of garments that would otherwise cost individuals hundreds of pounds, and thereby reducing waste, generating jobs and creating value for consumers.

Clothing reuse and repair businesses of all sorts can be encouraged through the tax system by measures such as scrapping VAT on sustainable clothing. I wrote to the chancellor last year—I think that that was four chancellors ago—urging him to do just that. I urge the Scottish Government to act, too, by exempting sustainable clothing businesses from non-domestic rates.

When we buy new clothing, we should encourage the use of natural fibres, such as wool, whenever possible. That is great for farmers, consumers and the environment, so why is the Scottish Government not doing more to back that amazing Scottish natural resource? For starters, we could improve the data, as we do not know how much wool is used in textile manufacturing. We need a strategy for wool production to help to create more circular fashion. Although we all welcome the circular textiles fund, it is a relatively small budget, looks pretty stretched and comes seven years after the Scottish Government cancelled the textiles programme for Zero Waste Scotland.

We need far more than just a small fund; we need interventions throughout the textiles life cycle. For example, in the design phase, we need to encourage far more design for disassembly. We need zero-waste pattern formulation, design for durability and cradle-to-cradle phasing. In the manufacturing stage, we need to use single-fibre textiles as far as possible, use dry dyeing and printing to minimise our environmental impact, use disassembly technologies and use biodegradable materials whenever possible. In the retail and service phase, we need, like ACS, to employ hiring and leasing, incentivised return, collaborative consumption and reduced packaging. For remanufacture, we need fibre reprocessing, upcycling, refashioning and closed-loop recycling where the other approaches are not possible.

Consumers have an important role to play. My message to the public is a quote from the late Dame Vivienne Westwood, who famously encouraged people to

“Buy less, choose well, make it last”.

17:27

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): I thank Stephanie Callaghan for bringing this important members’ business debate to the chamber and extend my best wishes to Maurice Golden.

As I am sure we all agree, the need to tackle climate change is more urgent than ever. The emissions produced by textile waste in Scotland are alarming. However, the opportunities to grow the circular fashion market in Scotland are vast.

A report published by Zero Waste Scotland last year showed that, although textiles represented only 4 per cent of waste in Scotland, by weight, they account for 32 per cent of Scotland’s carbon impact. The Scottish Government’s target to meet net zero by 2045 is ambitious but achievable, and targeting the carbon waste generated from textiles will be key to reaching that goal.

Not only does fast fashion produce a high level of carbon emissions due to wasted textiles, but the industry’s water consumption is high and the use of chemicals in production can be damaging to the environment and the health of workers. Therefore, keeping garments in the loop for longer will help the fashion industry in Scotland to reduce its current emissions and bring Scotland closer to net zero.

Changing our focus from consuming to reusing will also provide new and exciting opportunities for shoppers and businesses. In Scotland, we already have some excellent examples of businesses that are working to introduce circularity to the fashion industry. For example, ReJean, which is based in Glasgow, repurposes denim that would otherwise be sent to landfill. Totty Rocks, which is based in Edinburgh, uses only material and designs sourced in Scotland to reduce its carbon footprint.

With the Scottish Government’s £2 million backing of the circular textiles fund, we can expect to see more innovative solutions to the issues. The fund, which is administered by Zero Waste Scotland, aims to develop circular supply chains in Scotland and help businesses to achieve net zero. Although that support from the Scottish Government is welcome, is it clear that we all need to do more to reduce waste in the textiles and fashion industry.

The opportunities for consumers to shop with small sustainable fashion brands are growing, but there are many other ways for consumers to shop sustainably and support their local economies. Pre-loved clothing can often offer better-quality, longer-lasting items for a lower price than many fast fashion brands, which is particularly important as we continue to deal with the rising cost of living.

In my constituency, the West Lothian Foodbank charity shop in Whitburn and the recently opened

Armadale store allow consumers to purchase pre-loved items. The Armadale store provides occasion wear for typically expensive events such as weddings and proms, which are typically costly pieces. The service will allow people a more affordable way to celebrate family and community events in style during the cost of living crisis. The store is opening a bridal room for that purpose in February, where customers will be able to try items before buying.

West Lothian Foodbank charity shop is a great example. It allows customers to shop sustainably while supporting their community, because sales from the shop help to fund the food bank. I look forward to visiting its new premises soon.

Consumers can utilise online services that allow the rental of clothing, such as the Moss box monthly rental service from Moss Bros—Presiding Officer, I do not know whether you are old enough to remember when Moss Bros originated as a rental outlet—and shop with second-hand retailers online with apps such as Vinted. By making the choice to rent, recycle and rewear, we can all play our part in reducing the emissions that are generated by wasted textiles.

My challenge, as we go into the new year, is not only to continue to support circular fashion in Scotland as we are doing in this debate, but for Scotland to be more conscious and make 2023 the year of recycling, reusing, refashioning and restoring our clothes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Hyslop. I should probably declare an interest in relation to Moss Bros back in the day.

17:31

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): For all the many issues that MSPs and political parties disagree on, it is safe to say that there is a common desire to create a sustainable economy and protect our planet and its resources.

It is certainly for that reason that we have seen such strong cross-party support for delivery on those fronts, which offer many positive outcomes for consumers, designers, producers, workers and, crucially, our natural environment.

In discussing our collective drive towards reducing our carbon footprint, we regularly debate the glaringly obvious: how we produce power, heat our homes and travel. Often, these discussions are about what someone else will do to fix the problem, from building cleaner power stations to designing better electric cars. A recognition that that only takes us so far is often missing from the conversation. To be successful in meeting our climate goals, it is up to every one of us to change our personal behaviour, including how we

consume and how we dispose and to consider the positive choices that we can make to deliver an impact.

The choices that we make about the clothes that we wear and how we move away from a wasteful and damaging take, make and dispose model of producing fashion is one area where there are solutions at hand and a growing public appetite to be more responsible and mindful about what and when we buy.

Indeed, when fashion platform Unfolded surveyed consumers asking what the most important factors were when buying clothing, the top answer was sustainable fabrics, which 86 per cent agreed was important. The same survey found that 61 per cent planned to upcycle and reuse their clothes more often.

Rethinking the fashion industry, and our fashion choices, is not about tinkering around the edges of the climate emergency. Modern textile production relies heavily on fossil fuels, and the United Nations environment programme estimates that fashion accounts for up to 10 per cent of global carbon dioxide output, which is more than international flights and shipping combined. Furthermore, with polyester replacing cotton as the major component in textile production, fashion now accounts for a fifth of the 300 million tonnes of plastic produced globally each year.

The problem is growing, with the World Economic Forum suggesting that annual garment production has doubled since the turn of the millennium. Polyester production alone will exceed 92 million tonnes in the next decade, which is an increase of 47 per cent. That is totally unsustainable. We have seen huge dumping of excess clothing in Africa and elsewhere.

It is alarming that a mere fraction of what we wear is recycled, with 87 per cent of total clothing fibre ultimately incinerated or sent to landfill at home and abroad. That means wasted energy in production, emissions from disposal and—thanks to polyester's dominance—ever more microplastics entering our seas and water courses.

Discussing the issue in global terms can often make the problem seem intangible or insurmountable, given the scale of the challenge. Credit is therefore due to Zero Waste Scotland, whose groundbreaking Scottish carbon metric methodology measures the whole-life carbon impacts of Scotland's waste, from resource extraction and manufacturing emissions right through to waste management emissions, regardless of where in the world those impacts occur. As Fiona Hyslop pointed out, it is shocking that Zero Waste Scotland's 2020 report showed that textiles, which made up just 4 per cent of

Scotland's waste by weight, accounted for a startling 32 per cent of our carbon impact. That is worth repeating.

However, it does not have to be this way. New technologies and new processes coupled with political support and behaviour change can help us reduce our demand for new textiles. Advanced Clothing Solutions—which I thank for providing my suit for this debate—is an excellent case in point. Its pioneering work with the University of the West of Scotland uses environmentally friendly ozone gas to sanitise garments, extending the life of used or damaged garments for some of the country's biggest brands. When we consider that 40 per cent of clothing purchased online is returned and that more than half of those returns are destroyed, it is clear that that service can make, and is making, a positive difference.

In learning about that new technology, I was encouraged to see that progress is under way to adapt it to the sanitisation and reuse of personal protective equipment garments, £4 billion-worth of which were burned by the UK Government last year. The importance of that will not be lost on any of us.

Such initiatives also create huge economic opportunities, allowing universities to develop commercial technology, generate new business and create green jobs in Scotland. With the support of Skills Development Scotland, ACS brought on its largest intake of 30 apprentices last summer, including five people with disabilities and five refugees, to help drive forward its net zero ambitions.

I again thank Stephanie Callaghan for securing the debate and ACS for supporting it. As a Parliament, we must continue encouraging people to evolve their habits and incentivising the responsible production, manufacture and reuse of products, while deterring and penalising the wasteful and unfair practises that are the very worst of the fashion industry. Only then we can deliver a material change to emissions and environmental sustainability.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Gibson. You have never looked more dapper.

17:36

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I join colleagues in congratulating Stephanie Callaghan on securing this debate and bringing the Parliament together. We can hear from the speeches that members are passionate about the topic, which is always very encouraging.

I wish Maurice Golden many happy returns. I hope that he has cake and candles waiting at

home, and I am sure he will wish for a circular economy. The minister is here to take note of that.

Like Stephanie Callaghan, I have had the pleasure and privilege of visiting ACS at its North Lanarkshire headquarters, which is in my region. I encourage colleagues from Central Scotland and elsewhere to reach out. I am sure that the team that is in the gallery, which is very welcome, would be glad to welcome visitors to its site. I was able to have an extensive tour of the site and to chat to apprentices. We are here to talk about the environmental benefits of circular fashion, but it is clear that there are benefits from fair work and the social change that we want to see. It is all about a fairer Scotland and the fairer world that we want to live in.

Before I forget to say so—it is always good to take opportunities in members' business debates—because there is such interest in the topic and the wider themes, I will be hosting an event in Parliament for Fashion Revolution on 27 April. Everyone is welcome to come to that.

Back in 2021, when the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—took place in Glasgow, I had the privilege of meeting Carry Somers, who is the co-founder of Fashion Revolution. We met to discuss a future world in which clothes enrich every aspect of our lives and the environment.

Fashion should be fun, but our addiction to fast fashion can be criminally damaging. I ask colleagues to reflect on the tragic disaster that happened almost 10 years ago at the Rana Plaza complex in Bangladesh. More than a thousand people lost their lives and thousands more were injured. When we talk about clothing and textiles and the aspiration for net zero apparel, we must think about the people behind the labels and the garments. I hope that, in Scotland, we will not just talk the talk but we will walk the walk.

It is really encouraging to hear about the values that ACS promotes both locally and beyond. That takes investment. Any company has to look at risk and at what is happening with legislation. Maurice Golden is right: we need to look at what more the Scottish Parliament can do working with the Government, and at where there should be co-operation between the Scottish Government and the UK Government.

The motion is right to recognise

“the growing calls to incentivise responsible and circular consumption through fiscal and regulatory levers”.

We need to talk about the carrot and the stick. Some of that will not be popular, but we need system change. Yes, individuals, communities and pioneering businesses are doing responsible things, but we are getting pockets of good practice

when we need structural and systemic change. It is important that those discussions involve our trade union colleagues, workers and those in the third sector who are doing innovative work.

Time is short, as it always is in members' business debates, and I have probably missed out all the people whom I wanted to mention. However, the debate has shown that there is a lot of common ground. Maurice Golden chairs the circular economy cross-party group, and we are looking forward to a circular economy bill. We have big opportunities in the Parliament. I hope that we can seize them and have a fashion revolution in Scotland.

17:40

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): I join colleagues in congratulating Stephanie Callaghan on securing this debate and on highlighting and promoting the adoption of circular fashion methods. I am not normally a fan of commenting on the appearance of politicians, but she and Kenneth Gibson both look magnificent in their hired outfits.

Although upcycling has become increasingly trendy, circular fashion is nothing new. Historically, clothes shopping for the average person was costly. Customers bought fabric, trimmings, linings and threads to be made up by a tailor or dressmaker, and the finished textiles involved so much intensive hand work that goods were expensive and items were made to last—and last they did. Clothes were repeatedly mended or restyled and, eventually, cut short for children to wear. Even when mass production of clothing was refined in the UK during the second world war, strict restrictions under the utility scheme ensured that manufacturers produced goods of a high standard that were able to be repurposed.

Now, we have fast fashion. Popular high street brands offer cheaper and speedier manufacturing and shipping methods, which facilitate increasing consumer appetite for up-to-the-minute styles and the ability to indulge the instant gratification of desires while promoting a throwaway culture and maximising their profits.

Individual purchasing is variable, which makes it important to understand inequality and the financial and social pressures, particularly on low earners and low-income families. Hand-made leather shoes that will last a lifetime with some care and repair might be cheap over the long run, but an initial outlay of hundreds of pounds is not possible for everyone. There are other ways and, today, it is more important than ever that we highlight the importance of dumping the linear take-make-waste model.

I applaud organisations that specialise in the rental and renewal of clothing, such as Advanced Clothing Solutions. I also applaud second-hand online and high street charity shops in which people can buy good-quality, affordable clothing, and community-led initiatives to reuse items such as school uniforms. Those examples are becoming more commonplace, and they illustrate successful initiatives that result in cultural change, reduce waste, are accessible for many, and can tackle poverty in a stigma-free way.

Those organisations value not just what they do or the garments that they provide but the people who work for them. Fair work should be at the centre of a move toward sustainable fashion. Fair wages and good conditions for the fabric and garment workers who produce our apparel are important.

Findings from the 2021 “Fashion Transparency Index” show that most major brands still withhold vital data on human rights issues, including workers' pay and conditions, purchasing practices, and racial and gender inequality. Although that might conjure up images of sweatshops in poorer countries, with workers toiling in dangerous conditions for minimal pay, Labour Behind the Label published evidence in June 2020 that exposed forced labour in UK garment factories, with some workers enduring intimidation and earning as little as £3 an hour.

With the current cost of living crisis, we need to ensure that our citizens are aware of options that are available to them to make cheaper, sustainable choices and move away from fast fashion. In November 2022, the Centre for Social Justice reported that, in the current financial crisis, the poorest in our society face a poverty premium in seven key areas, costing families around an extra £480 per year. It is disgraceful that lower-income households are incurring extra costs when purchasing the same essential goods and services that households that are better off are.

Our planet and people are no longer capable of maintaining a throwaway culture. It is necessary that we move at pace towards a sustainable future. People should know that a move to circular fashion is no longer just the privilege of the rich.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Graham Simpson, who is joining us online.

17:45

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I apologise for not being in the chamber. I like to speak in the chamber, but I have a constituency event that I need to get to. That is my excuse. I am certainly not putting my slippers on, which Stephanie Callaghan talked about members doing. I congratulate Stephanie on securing the debate.

The idea of offering rental clothes to MSPs has certainly paid off. It certainly seems to have cured Kenny Gibson's fashion woes. My message to him is that he should continue to rent.

I, too, have visited ACS's plant in my region, and it was an eye-opener for me. We have a rental sector, which should be expanded. Some of the figures that ACS gave me were startling. The fashion industry produces 10 per cent of global carbon emissions, and that could rise to 26 per cent by 2050. In addition, globally, 20 per cent of waste water comes from the fashion industry, and 50 billion plastic bottles'-worth of microfibres are released annually by the industry. As we have heard, 98 per cent of brands do not pay their workers a liveable wage.

Other MSPs have rightly said that we live in an age of fast, throwaway fashion. I should say that, in the spirit of the debate, I am wearing a jacket that I bought second hand in the 1980s—it probably shows, actually. My tie was also bought at the same time. They were made to last, and they have lasted. I can still wear them, and I think that they look okay. I think that I can see Maurice Golden chortling, as well he might.

That is what we should be doing. We should not be chucking away clothes that are perfectly usable, which happens too often. Thankfully, younger people are latching on to the message that we should not have such a throwaway society. Fiona Hyslop mentioned that there are apps out there that enable people to buy and sell clothes that have been worn before. We really need to change the market. ACS has come up with some solutions, such as implementing regulations on the use of synthetic materials, establishing minimum standards for sustainable production, implementing product labelling requirements and providing incentives for sustainable fashion.

One of my personal bugbears is to do not with clothes but with footwear. A number of shoes and trainers are built in such a way that they are very hard to repair. I like to get stuff repaired rather than throw it away. The way in which shoes and trainers are now manufactured means that it is extremely difficult to do that. We need to take a look at that. The issue is not just about clothes; it is also about footwear.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Simpson. I notice that you waited until you were joining us remotely before bravely having a go at Mr Gibson's fashion sense.

17:49

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Along with other members, I thank Stephanie Callaghan for securing this evening's members' business

debate on circular fashion, which I very much wanted to take part in, as it is a subject that I have had an interest in for many years. In the interests of Maurice Golden's birthday wishes, I have only a few words to say, so I should not keep everyone.

It was interesting when I spoke to Friends of the Earth this afternoon to hear about how far we have to go in Scotland on the circular economy. I had a very interesting discussion with it about how much we have to do. I hope that all members are very committed to ensuring that we can get this right.

When I was researching for this debate, I read something that really stood out for me:

"The vast majority of consumer fashion is stuck in a linear model with most used clothes perceived as having no value and being disposed of at an ever-increasing frequency ... In recent times modern culture has driven continued increases in oversupply and planned"

throwaway.

"Fast fashion is a linear business model that focuses on a rapid supply chain, working to design, produce and distribute new items of clothing at an accelerated rate."

Many members have mentioned that. The point that I want to make is that

"This model works due to the low cost of labour".

Many members have stated that changing fashion trends, purchasing power and consumer demand have an effect on those who work in the industry.

I want to highlight why I have an interest in this debate. I have an interest in low-cost labour, particularly child labour, around the globe. We have to be honest and not kid ourselves. We should not shield consumers and our constituents from the truth.

My interest in the issue stems from a visit that I made to India 30 years ago. Part of a tour on that visit took me to a factory in which tiny children were threading beads for fashion. I was only in my 20s. As I stand here, I can feel what I felt at that moment. A video was produced 30 years later, in 2021, when the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—was in Scotland. There are still tiny children across India threading beads, and that is absolutely unacceptable. The western world has huge responsibility for that.

It was good to bring this debate to the Parliament, and it is good to discuss the issue, but we need to be honest about where we are in the world on it. Unless we can change consumer attitudes towards clothes, purchasing and the things that we have discussed—valuing things and having things made to last—it will be really difficult to shift the industry, which is driven by purchasing, and change the supply chain for the circular economy. We see great examples—it is lovely to see those in the gallery. That can be done, but we

need to work hard to make that happen. The cost is the human cost of the fashion industry, and we have to take that seriously.

The motion asks the Parliament to encourage “the adoption of circular fashion methods”.

I hope that, one day, in Scotland and across the world, the legislation will be clear that we have no option but to manufacture, purchase and recycle in a responsible manner. I hope that that is legislated for. We can save the planet. Let us save our fellow workers and small children across the world and ensure that we change fashion for the better.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite Lorna Slater to respond to the debate. Bearing in mind Mr Golden’s birthday plans, minister, you have around seven minutes.

17:54

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): I would not want to keep Maurice Golden from his birthday plans. Many happy returns to him.

I cannot say how excited I am to be speaking in this debate. I am completely passionate about the topic. I am addicted to fashion, but that does not mean that I am addicted to consumption. In my left desk drawer you will find what I call my circular economy toolkit, which is a sewing kit for repairing and fixing buttons on garments and so on.

I thank Stephanie Callaghan for bringing the debate to the Parliament and all members who have spoken in it. The topic is an important one that affects all of us. We all wear clothing. Food, shelter and clothing are the fundamental needs of every human being, and the carbon footprint of our overconsumption of fashion affects all life on earth. I therefore agree with everything that Stephanie Callaghan said in her speech. I share her love of charity shops, although I do struggle to get these shoulders into vintage clothes.

Like Stephanie, I am showing my heart in my outfit today. I am a sewing addict and make many of my own clothes, including the skirt that I am wearing. It used to be a dress when I was a more svelte person, but now it will only cover the bottom half, so it is a skirt. During my Christmas holidays, I spent most of my time sewing, and I agree with many people who say that second hand is not second best. We need to make clothing to last, keep it for longer and learn to repair it. I am passionate about that, and I do not think that being fashion conscious needs to mean that we have to overconsume.

This is also a very timely discussion. We are not just in a climate crisis and we are not just discussing waste and pollution. We are also in a

cost crisis, and some members have highlighted that tonight. The circular economy holds within it the ability to tackle all those issues, particularly sharing, reuse, alteration and repair, which have the potential to reduce costs for consumers.

Every material that is wasted costs our planet, and it is clear that textiles have a disproportionate environmental impact. They account for almost one third of the carbon impact of Scotland’s household waste. Making fashion more circular requires changes at all parts of the supply chain, including design, production, consumption and recycling. I was very interested in what several members said about design and I made notes on design for disassembly and durability, and Graham Simpson mentioned design for repair. I agree with all those principles. The circular economy is not just about scooping up waste and dealing with it differently but about stopping that waste in the first place.

Our circular textiles fund will help to improve the circularity of textiles in Scotland by backing innovative ideas to tackle the environmental impacts that we know textiles have. Zero Waste Scotland is actively working on the fund and is working with and supporting circular businesses to develop new ideas.

Maurice Golden: I welcome the fund, but will the minister consider urging Zero Waste Scotland to develop a textiles strategy, so that we can attempt to make some of the interventions that the minister is talking about?

Lorna Slater: I listened carefully to Maurice Golden’s speech and was particularly interested in his thoughts on a textiles strategy and wool production. I spoke to officials about that yesterday, and I will meet some industry stakeholders in the wool and textiles industries in the near future, including the industry group leader for textile manufacturing in Scotland. I am so keen on that. I will be happy to follow up on those matters and see what we can do.

We will introduce a circular economy bill during the current parliamentary session, and it will establish the legislative framework to support Scotland’s transition to zero waste and a circular economy.

Our waste route map will set out how we intend to deliver our system-wide comprehensive vision for Scotland’s circular economy. We have established a £70 million recycling improvement fund, which marks one of the biggest investments in recycling in Scotland in a generation.

Householders have a big role to play in supporting the shift, so we have proposed a process of co-design with local government and households to set new standards for high-quality, modern household recycling and reuse services

across Scotland that will build on our commitment to consult on requirements to collect textiles separately by 2025.

Like many members, I have also visited Advanced Clothing Solutions, which gave me jars of its locally grown honey from its biodiversity initiative, which I loved. I saw for myself the great work that is being done there on sustainable fashion. I have also visited the Kalopsia collective, which is run by women and specifically includes pattern design for the reduction of waste and the use of those cut off-pieces of waste material—what we call “cabbage” when we are sewing—to make other products to prolong the textile’s life cycle, slow down unnecessary production and reduce waste.

One of the other businesses that I have visited is Remake Scotland, in Crieff, which has a reuse hub and a fantastic textiles room where it sells second-hand fabrics for £2 a kilo. I confess that I came away with quite a large bag that I then had to smuggle into the house past my husband, who feels like I already have enough fabric, but my mother says, “She who dies with the most wins,” so I am working on that principle.

Before I close, I want to highlight some of the key themes that I have heard from members today. Many members highlighted the work of ACS and the innovative work on cleaning PPE. What has really been highlighted there are the opportunities in circularity and circular business models for business opportunities and prosperity through job creation.

On the flip side of that, many colleagues highlighted the difficulty with workers’ conditions around the world and the tragedy that happened in Bangladesh as a result of such conditions.

Many members spoke about the climate challenges, with carbon, plastic and waste water being by-products of the fashion industry that we need to reduce. All of this is about culture change and helping consumers to move to a place in which second hand, upcycling, refashioning and repair are all second nature to us all. That will also help us with the cost of living crisis.

Monica Lennon: I feel a bit cheeky, because I saw Graham Simpson on the screen also trying to get in.

On the point about culture change, we have heard that young people are, in many ways, leading the way on that. There is a role there for education, as Stephanie Callaghan mentioned. I was looking back at social media and tweets ahead of the debate, and I saw newspaper headlines about a member of the royal family wearing a recycled dress, but it was actually just a dress that she had worn more than once. There is a lot of misogyny and sexism around when we talk

about fashion, particularly when we talk about women who are in the public eye. What more could the Government do with education and public information to challenge some of the more negative stereotyping that is out there?

Lorna Slater: I thank the member for her intervention. I am aware that I am short of time—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you some additional time.

Lorna Slater: The member highlights issues that drive me crazy, especially those headlines. I was just coming on to say that some members suggested some tools that might be used to improve the situation, and I hope that normalising and mainstreaming the repair, reuse and wearing of second-hand clothing will help with that. Several colleagues pointed out that we are falling behind the European Union on labelling. There was a call for extended producer responsibility for fashion, and suggestions were made about VAT changes and other changes to tax on clothes. All of that forms part of the toolkit that we can all look at together to shift in the right direction.

Finally, Graham Simpson and Ruth Maguire alluded to something that is often referred to as the Vimes boots theory of poverty, which is about how challenging it can be for people to buy good-quality clothing when they have cash challenges, and how, as a culture, we need to move to people having access to good-quality, durable clothing and the knowledge of how to repair it.

Thank you.

Meeting closed at 18:02.

Correction

Angela Constance has identified an error in her contribution and has provided the following correction:

The Minister for Drugs Policy (Angela Constance):

At col 117, paragraph 7—

Original text—

In terms of drug checking facilities, I would say to him that there is only one drug checking facility in the United Kingdom that is licensed by the Home Office, which is The Loop in Bristol. It is open once a month, on payday weekend.

Corrected text—

In terms of drug checking facilities, I would say to him there is only one physical site for drug checking in the United Kingdom that is licensed by the Home Office, which is The Loop in Bristol. It is open once a month, on payday weekend.

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