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Thursday 19 January 2023

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Scottish Parliament

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

General Question Time

NHS Borders and NHS Lothian

1. **Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with NHS Borders and NHS Lothian. (S6O-01796)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Ministers and Government officials regularly meet the leadership of all national health service boards, including NHS Lothian and NHS Borders, to discuss a range of matters. It will be of no surprise to Christine Grahame and other members that the most recent discussions have focused on the extreme winter pressures that both boards have been facing.

Christine Grahame: With reference to the extreme winter pressures, I welcome the announcement of £8 million for interim social care beds to ease pressure on our hospitals. I note that it is to be shared between health and social care partnerships. When will we hear progress about the division of that money between the partnerships, particularly those serving my constituency of Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale, which includes both NHS Lothian and NHS Borders?

Humza Yousaf: Good work is being done by both NHS Lothian and NHS Borders on delayed discharge. To answer the question directly, as the First Minister said earlier this week, we will get a further update at the Scottish Government resilience room meeting that she will be chairing tomorrow. I will, of course, find an appropriate way to update the member in that respect.

The additional 300 interim care beds that I announced last week are on top of the 600 interim care beds that are already being used, and it is fair to say that many of those will be in NHS Lothian and NHS Borders. It is so important that we do everything that we can in facilitating and helping our local partners to do everything that they can to get people who are in hospital but are clinically safe to be discharged back home. Ultimately, that is better for the individual, too. We will get an update tomorrow at SGoRR.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I was recently contacted by a constituent whose 92-

year-old mother, who lives in the NHS Lothian area, suffered a bad fall in her own home. She lay on a hard wooden floor in a lot of pain for five hours, waiting for an ambulance to arrive. Her daughter repeatedly called for an update and was told not to move her mother, who was crying in pain, nor to give her anything to drink. When the paramedics finally arrived, she was transferred to Edinburgh royal infirmary for an operation for two severe breaks. Such ambulance and subsequent treatment waits are inhumane, so will the Scottish National Party Government back our plan, introduce new crisis maximum waiting times and finally get a grip on the horrific waiting times across our NHS?

Humza Yousaf: I apologise for and deeply regret any situation such as the one that Craig Hoy described, where anybody gets a sub-standard level of service compared with what we collectively across the chamber would expect. Of course, if Craig Hoy wishes to follow it up with me, I will ensure that the Scottish Ambulance Service appropriately investigates that situation. I am sure that he understands—I know that he does—that, in particular, the few weeks of the festive period and the first week of January were incredibly difficult. They were probably the most difficult that the Scottish Ambulance Service has experienced.

I have looked at the plans that the Conservatives have brought forward, but I do not see any detail. I do not see how simply saying that a 15-minute turnaround time must be in place means that that will be the case. In fact, there are many similar schemes in England but we can see that ambulances are, unfortunately, queued up outside NHS trusts in England, too.

We are taking a range of measures to improve the turnaround time for ambulances, so that they are not stacked outside hospitals and can get back on the road and respond as quickly as possible. I have seen the most recent data from the Scottish Ambulance Service and there certainly has been an improvement, particularly among those most-urgent, immediately life-threatening calls, but I am happy to keep the member updated in that respect.

Public Health and Wellbeing (Local Government Services)

2. **Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the role of local government services in improving public health and wellbeing. (S6O-01797)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): We recognise the important role of local government services in improving public health and wellbeing, in order to

ensure that people in Scotland live more years in good health.

We know that prevention is key and that the building blocks of good health and wellbeing include good education, jobs, housing and communities, all of which local government services contribute to. In recognition of that, Public Health Scotland is jointly sponsored by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Government, with the aim of improving population health and combating health inequalities and their wider causes.

Brian Whittle: I know that the minister recognises that many of the solutions to Scotland's poor health record sit outside the national health service, predominantly in council-funded community activities.

Does the minister recognise that the financial settlement that the Government has given councils requires them to slash the very services for which he advocates and that the results will appear in the poor health ledger of the NHS, thus increasing the pressure on the NHS?

Kevin Stewart: We have listened to councils and are increasing the resources available to local government by more than £570 million in the next financial year. Local authorities also have a range of revenue-raising powers that are not available to other public services, including newly devolved powers over empty property rates relief.

I agree with Mr Whittle that it would be great if more money were available for all our public services. I ask him to do what the Scottish Government has done, which is to appeal to the Treasury to loosen the purse strings, stop austerity and invest in our public services.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Councils across the country, including Scottish National Party-run councils, are at breaking point due to the very cuts that have been discussed, which are made to local government budgets year on year. The minister cannot seriously expect councils to continue playing their pivotal role in improving public health and wellbeing through the provision of services such as green spaces, sports facilities and wider support initiatives if they continue to lose money.

Will the minister commit today to asking the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy to listen to local government leaders, including SNP leaders, who are clearly saying that, without support from the Scottish Government, those essential services—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Briefly, please.

Carol Mochan: —cannot be delivered?

Kevin Stewart: As I said in my answer to Mr Whittle, the Government has listened to local authorities and local government, which is why the available resources will increase by more than £570 million in the next financial year. I would like that to be more, as would the First Minister and the finance secretary, but we work within a fixed budget and we have no borrowing powers, as Ms Mochan is well aware.

It would be far better if austerity were to go, and HM Treasury were to provide and resource public services in Scotland and across these islands. That would be better and would lead to better outcomes for all. Unfortunately—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, please, minister.

Kevin Stewart: —what we have is a Tory Government that seems unwilling to invest in our public services.

Bairns' Hoose

3. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the progress of the bairns' hoose for young people within the justice system. (S6O-01798)

The Minister for Community Safety (Elena Whitham): A national bairns' hoose governance group has been established and extensive engagement with key partners has been carried out. The first national bairns' hoose standards will be published this spring.

We are developing a phased approach to implementation and will publish further information in the coming months, along with a progress report on our bairns' hoose project plan.

We are also progressing the roll-out of the Scottish child interview model for joint investigative interviews, which will be a cornerstone of the bairns' hoose approach to justice in Scotland.

Rona Mackay: Can the minister describe the benefits of the bairns' hoose system in detail? Which emerging practice developments, in line with other European models, will be used when creating that system and its collaborative approach in justice, health and children services?

Elena Whitham: I know that Rona Mackay, like me, has a keen awareness of adverse childhood experiences. The bairns' hoose represents a child-centred approach to delivering justice, care and recovery for children who have experienced trauma. Services will be co-located, which will reduce the need for multiple interviews by different agencies in different locations, which we know can be retraumatising.

The national standards are based on the European PROMISE quality standards and, as a

recent associate member of the Barnahaus network, we now have access to learning from existing best practice across member countries. Alongside partners, we will continue to draw on relevant best practice that is emerging in Scotland, including the Scottish child interview model, which continues to roll out at pace.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (Recovery)

4. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to help recovery from adverse childhood experiences. (S6O-01799)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): We are taking a wide range of actions to prevent and mitigate the negative impacts of ACEs and trauma and to support the health, wellbeing and resilience of all the people who are affected. That includes work to tackle harmful drug and alcohol use, address poverty, support mental health and reduce inequalities.

The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities have a joint ambition to develop trauma-informed and trauma-responsive workforces and services across Scotland. Since 2018, we have invested more than £6 million in a national trauma training programme. Work is under way to support the development of trauma-informed approaches in services and settings including education, maternity and social work and to support care-experienced children and young people.

Gillian Martin: I thank the minister for his comprehensive answer. I have a further question. Many care-experienced children have adverse childhood experiences and go into adulthood still needing support. Will the minister outline how the Government is delivering on the Promise and, specifically, how support for people into early adulthood is being developed?

Kevin Stewart: I welcome the question. The Scottish Government is committed to addressing the intergenerational impacts of adverse childhood experiences and trauma. We are providing a range of support to parents, carers, children and families to better prevent ACEs from happening, and a wide range of work is going on.

The Government is committed to delivering on the Promise and ensuring that we do better for care-experienced young people. We must recognise that that might involve help throughout their lives. To show how important the Government considers a trauma-informed approach—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, minister.

Kevin Stewart: —in November, the Deputy First Minister led a valuable session with ministers on trauma awareness and how best to support the people who are affected.

Gartcosh Primary School

5. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with North Lanarkshire Council regarding a new-build Gartcosh primary school. (S6O-01800)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We have been in regular contact with North Lanarkshire Council regarding a replacement for Gartcosh primary school.

Fulton MacGregor: Last week, I was delighted to hear the news, which came just a day or so after I lodged this question, that NLC has now identified land in Gartcosh on which to build the school. I fully welcome the council's statement, and I agree that it is a major step forward.

The question of a new school has been around for some time, and it really needs to be built at the earliest opportunity. The current Gartcosh primary school building is 110 years old this year and it is not fit for modern teaching. In addition, following massive growth in the population in the local area—

The Presiding Officer: Question, please.

Fulton MacGregor: —it is very much unable to deal with the current or future capacity. Sorry, Presiding Officer.

That said, teachers, pupils and the parent council are doing excellent work at the school and, against the challenging circumstances—

The Presiding Officer: Mr MacGregor, can I have a question, please?

Fulton MacGregor: Yes. Will the cabinet secretary join me in praising the work of the school community, and will she commit to working with me and North Lanarkshire Council to ensure that the new build that the community so richly deserves is delivered as quickly as possible?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am sure that we all appreciate Fulton MacGregor's enthusiasm and passion for an issue on which he has been working for some time. I very much praise his continued work and that of the Gartcosh school community. My officials will keep in close contact with the council to ensure that a new build for Gartcosh primary is delivered as soon as possible.

Rural Homes Commitments (Scottish Government Engagement)

6. Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what recent engagement it has had with community housing enablers, such as the Communities Housing Trust in the Highlands and Islands region, to support the delivery of its commitments regarding rural homes. (S6O-01801)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government regularly meets community housing enablers. In September, I met Communities Housing Trust and South of Scotland Community Housing, and I recognise the vital work that is carried out by those organisations in supporting communities to deliver more affordable homes in rural and island communities. I am keen for that to continue.

We have been giving consideration to the funding arrangements of community housing trusts to ensure that they continue to support the delivery of rural homes as part of our work to develop a remote, rural and island housing action plan.

Ariane Burgess: The Bute house agreement commits the Scottish Government to ensuring that community housing trusts are adequately funded, so that they can support the delivery of our enhanced rural home building plans. The Communities Housing Trust currently has a pipeline of 600 projects, 150 of which are at risk due to the lack of capacity. What more can the Scottish Government do to ensure that trusts have the long-term support that they need in order to be able to deliver on the opportunities that exist to increase the number of rural homes? Timescale is of particular importance here.

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government remains very keen to work with the Communities Housing Trust to ensure that deliverable projects are implemented and to ensure that communities can access the focused support that they need at the right time. I recognise the importance of such organisations having sustainable funding arrangements, so that they can support the delivery of more homes. In a letter to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee in December, I set out priority work strands for the remote, rural and islands housing action plan, including funding arrangements to achieve that. That plan will be published in the spring.

Vapes (Impact on Public Health)

7. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what work is under way to assess the impact of vapes on public health. (S6O-01802)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): We continue to work with stakeholders, including Public Health Scotland and ASH Scotland, to ensure that we have a broad understanding of the impact of vaping on public health. The World Health Organization states that vapes are “undoubtedly harmful” to health. However, given the limited time for which they have been used, there is limited evidence on their long-term impact.

We are working to review the range of evidence that is available, and that will influence our refreshed tobacco action plan, which is due to be published in the autumn.

Gillian Mackay: There are many issues with vapes, including in relation to flavours and advertising, that we should be tackling, and I hope that the cabinet secretary would support that.

As well as being an issue for public health, vapes are an issue for the environment. That is covered in today’s *Daily Record*, which is running a campaign on the issue. Would the cabinet secretary support a ban on single-use vapes?

Humza Yousaf: I congratulate the *Daily Record* on its campaign and make special mention of Laura Young, whom the *Daily Record* describes colloquially as the “vape crusader”, which I thought was a fair name for her. She has done an incredible job in going around the country picking up single-use vapes, which are undoubtedly causing environmental harm.

Gillian Mackay is absolutely right. There is a public health issue, which we are exploring and will explore, but, as she would imagine, I am working with my colleague the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity on the environmental impact of vapes. We will ask stakeholders with the relevant expertise to examine the evidence and assess what action the Scottish Government and other partners should take. That will include consideration of a potential ban. I will, of course, keep the member updated.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary might be aware, the issue of youth vaping is one that I have taken a particular interest in, and I am looking forward to a members’ business debate on the subject at the end of the month.

Has the Scottish Government conducted an assessment of advertising by the vaping industry?

Humza Yousaf: We should look into that issue. As I have said, there are a number of issues to consider from a public health perspective. We know that there is evidence that young people who would not have considered smoking cigarettes are taking up vaping. There is concern about advertising—in particular, the advertising on social

media platforms, but also the advertising on other platforms. That should be part of the consideration that I referenced in my response to Gillian Mackay. Stakeholders with the relevant expertise should explore and examine a range of issues in relation to vaping, including a potential ban on disposable single-use vapes.

Police Scotland (Racial Profiling)

8. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to address any racial profiling practices in Police Scotland. (S6O-01803)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): Police Scotland should operate at all times with fairness, integrity and respect, and irrespective of ethnicity. The chief constable has made clear his commitment that Police Scotland must become an actively anti-racist organisation.

In respect of stop and search, the code of practice in Scotland was developed by an independent advisory group and was approved by the Scottish Parliament. That code of practice, which came into force on 11 May 2017 and was reviewed in 2019, sets out clearly the rules for when and how the police in Scotland can use stop and search.

Maggie Chapman: Figures that were released in December show that people from minority ethnic backgrounds were up to 20 times more likely to be stopped by Police Scotland under counterterrorism powers. However, evidence tells us that far-right domestic terrorism is by far the greatest current threat and that racial profiling is both unacceptable and counterproductive. Does the cabinet secretary think that a reassessment of what a terrorism threat looks like is urgently needed in a Scotland that welcomes refugees and other immigrants? What actions does he consider are necessary to ensure that we tackle racist police practices?

Keith Brown: I want to be clear that Scotland welcomes people from all over the world. Over successive generations, migrants and refugees have greatly contributed to our society and brought diversity to our communities. Racism, in any form, is abhorrent and wholly unacceptable.

Counterterrorism is a reserved matter and is delivered through the United Kingdom Government CONTEST strategy. The Scottish Government is engaging actively with the Home Office to ensure that the recently announced review of the strategy appropriately reflects the situation and takes into consideration the terrorism threat throughout the UK, including in Scotland.

The operation of counterterrorism in Scotland is a matter for Police Scotland, taking account of the

specific code of practice for counterterrorism stop and search at the border, as issued by the Home Office.

I agree with Maggie Chapman that, in relation to the threat of terrorism and the assessment of it, Police Scotland holds the biggest piece of the jigsaw. It looks regularly at the issues that Maggie Chapman has raised.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general question time.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Teaching Post Cuts (Glasgow)

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

There are reports today from a leaked document that Glasgow City Council is considering cutting 800 teaching posts. The general secretary of the teaching union the Scottish Secondary Teachers Association said:

"This would potentially write off the current generation of young people."

Was the First Minister aware that a Scottish National Party-run council was considering such a drastic cut in teacher numbers?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): This is, of course, the time of year when we hear lots of reports about the savings options that different councils are considering and when Opposition parties, quite understandably, make hay with that. Very often, those proposals do not proceed. The Parliament's *Official Report* will be littered with examples of that.

I have not seen the detail of those particular proposals. Councils are, of course, autonomous in their areas of responsibility, which is something that parties across the chamber often call on the Scottish Government to respect. As my record shows, and as my Government's funding to councils demonstrates, I am in favour of more teachers, not fewer.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister's record is of 900 fewer teachers across Scotland, so I am not sure how her rhetoric matches her record. She says that I am standing here making hay. I am not; I am deeply worried that one of the biggest councils in Scotland is considering the loss of 800 teachers. If Glasgow City Council went ahead with that, it would reduce school staff by 15 per cent: one in seven teachers in Glasgow would be lost.

We have heard reports that SNP-run East Ayrshire Council is also considering cutting teachers and that East Renfrewshire Council is contemplating very serious cuts to education.

That is what happens when the SNP does not fund councils properly. It wastes taxpayers' money on ferries that do not float and on other pet projects, instead of providing Scottish education and Scottish schools with the support that they need.

Will the First Minister tell us—if she is listening to the questions—how many teachers in Scotland are going to lose their jobs as a result of her budget choices and costly mistakes?

The First Minister: I will come to my Government's budget choices in a moment. *[Interruption.]* With the greatest of respect to Douglas Ross, I will answer the questions. *[Interruption.]*

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

The First Minister: I will answer the questions fully. First, on the general issue, I know—and we have seen this week—that Douglas Ross favours riding roughshod over the decisions and powers of democratically elected institutions. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

The First Minister: I, on the other hand, respect the autonomy of democratically elected institutions.

Turning to budget choices, let me set out the Government's budget choices. In this financial year, 2022-23, the Government provided £145 million of additional funding to local authorities to employ up to 2,400 more teachers and 500 more classroom assistants. That funding is being protected in the budget that we have put forward for the next financial year. Overall, we are increasing the resources that are available to councils by more than £570 million. That is a real-terms increase of £160.6 million.

Those are the budget choices of this Government. Had we followed the advice of the Conservatives, of course, we would not be able to do all that, because we would have cut taxes for the very richest people in the country.

Douglas Ross: First, I asked Nicola Sturgeon about 800 teacher losses potentially happening in Glasgow. She gave no answer. The next question was how many teachers fear losing their jobs across Scotland as a result of her Government's budget. She gave no answer again. There are 900 fewer teachers in Scotland since Nicola Sturgeon's Government came to power. That is the reality.

Let us look at quotes about the First Minister's budget. SNP councillor Shona Morrison, the leader of the council umbrella group the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, said:

"The reality of the situation is that yet again, the essential services Councils deliver have not been prioritised by the Scottish Government."

That is the reality that councils and councillors, including SNP councillors, are facing across Scotland.

Let us remember that, more than six years ago, Nicola Sturgeon made bold promises about education. She said that it would be her number 1 priority. She claimed that her Government would close the attainment gap completely, but

yesterday her education secretary rubbished Nicola Sturgeon's promise. Shirley-Anne Somerville said:

"I think in reality ... that is exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, to achieve—to get to the point of zero."

Is the education secretary right that the First Minister's key promise is never going to happen?

The First Minister: Our commitment to substantially eliminate the poverty-related attainment gap by 2026 still stands. I have said that in the Parliament before and I say it again today. I stress the phrase "poverty-related attainment gap". Of course, we are also trying to tackle child poverty through something that I think Douglas Ross might have referred to as a pet project earlier: the Scottish child payment, for example.

That task of tackling child poverty and helping to reduce and substantially eliminate the poverty-related attainment gap would not be as difficult as it is if we did not have a Tory Government pushing more children into poverty every single week. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

The First Minister: Let us come back to teachers. The number of primary teachers in our schools is among the highest today that it has been at any time since I was at primary school. The overall teacher pupil ratio is the lowest in the UK. In Scotland right now, there are 7,573 teachers per 100,000 pupils. That compares with just 5,734 where the Conservatives are in government in England. Of course, as I said, we are providing £145 million to councils—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister: —to support additional teachers. Those are our funding choices. That is our record and I am proud to stand on it.

Douglas Ross: Nicola Sturgeon is proud to see SNP councils considering cutting teacher numbers. She is proud of that. She should be embarrassed if not disgraced. Nicola Sturgeon said, "Judge me on education." Well, the education secretary has done exactly that and found that the First Minister makes promises that her Government will not meet. Her failures have left teachers frustrated, disappointed and angry.

Today, schools in North Lanarkshire and Moray are on strike. Tomorrow, it is Angus and East Dunbartonshire. Next week, schools in another 10 council areas will go on strike including in Edinburgh. The following week, another 10 are striking, from the Scottish Borders to Aberdeenshire.

After years of disrupted education because of the Covid pandemic, when the Scottish

Government was too quick to shut down schools and limit teaching time, pupils are once again getting a raw deal. All of this affects young people's opportunities and causes real problems for parents. Can the First Minister tell young people and Scottish families whether education will ever be her number 1 priority?

The First Minister: I will let the people of Scotland continue to judge the record, actions and decisions of the Government. Let me repeat some of that. At a time when the Tories have been slashing budgets for local councils, this Government, in the budget that we have put forward for next year, is increasing council budgets by more than £570 million. We are providing £145 million to councils to support the employment of additional teachers. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members!

The First Minister: Again, I repeat that we would not have been able to do that had we followed Douglas Ross's advice and cut taxes for the highest paid. Instead, we are asking those at the top of the income spectrum in Scotland to pay a little bit more to protect our public services.

When it comes to pay disputes with teachers, this Government continues to negotiate and to seek settlement. Again, that stands in marked contrast to where the Conservatives are in power. The education secretary in England said this week:

"We didn't negotiate ... pay"

with teachers, because

"that's not what we are there to do."

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister: The Tories, of course, are trying to take away the right of public sector workers to strike. We will continue to seek fair pay deals in the national health service, the teaching profession and elsewhere across our public sector. We will continue to take decisions that prioritise education and health, which is in stark contrast to anything and everything that the Scottish Conservatives do.

Social Care

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Last week, we heard directly from front-line national health service staff, who said that many of the problems that they face in acute care are because of the on-going crisis in social care.

Yesterday, I met front-line social care workers and their trade unions to discuss the state of the sector in Scotland. They told me about the burnout that has been experienced by their colleagues, their fears about the levels of care that are being

offered and their inability to provide care to those who need it.

The workers and experts were clear that the problem has been more than a decade in the making and is a direct result of decisions by this Government. They told me that many of their colleagues have quit or retired early because of the pressures of the job, and they say that the pay does not reward their hard work or reflect the importance of their role in society.

Does the First Minister agree?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I value those who work in our social care sector, and I agree that the work that they do has traditionally—not just in Scotland but in many places—been undervalued. That is what we seek to change and address.

I also agree that some of the pressures in acute and emergency care, and some of the pressures in our hospitals, could be alleviated by reform and by increasing further the capacity in social care, which is why so much of what we speak about is directed at exactly that. That is why, for example, just last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care announced additional funding to secure additional interim care home beds; £1.7 billion has been provided for social care and integration in the past year; and we are progressing our commitment to increasing spend on social care by 25 per cent by the end of this parliamentary session—which, of course, will be an increase of more than £840 million. We continue to take such actions.

In relation to wages, we are providing £100 million of additional funding to uplift pay from April this year, having already increased it. We will continue to do that so that our social care workers get the value, not just in our rhetoric but in their pay packets, that they so richly deserve.

Anas Sarwar: It is important to note that the proposals that the First Minister has just outlined have been widely criticised by front-line staff as being nowhere near enough to meet the demands of the crisis that we face.

The First Minister should not ignore the facts. Social care staff will be paid £10.90 an hour, which represents a 3.8 per cent pay increase—that is, 40p—at a time when inflation is running at 9 per cent and NHS staff are being offered, on average, an increase of 7.5 per cent. That is in the context of a First Minister who said that she would reward social care staff who put their lives on the line to get us through the pandemic. However, in a cost of living crisis, 40p more does not feel like much of a reward to those workers, and it will not address the on-going workforce crisis.

Why can the First Minister not see that there is no solution to the NHS crisis without a solution to the social care crisis? Seventy-one per cent of care-at-home services are reporting vacancies, as are 75 per cent of care homes. Yesterday, we heard that staff are leaving to work in Sainsbury's, Costa and Lidl, because they can get better pay and better conditions there. Will the First Minister finally commit to an immediate pay increase to £12 an hour, rising to £15 an hour, for social care workers across Scotland?

The First Minister: Those are serious issues, and we take them seriously. However, it is important that we can fund the decisions that we take. First, on the £10.90 an hour wage that Anas Sarwar derides, it is important to point out, just as an aside, that that is the rate paid by the Labour Government in Wales to the social care workforce.

Over the past two years, there has been a 14.7 per cent increase in pay for social care workers. Pay has increased from £9.50 an hour in April 2021 to £10.90 an hour from April this year. For a full-time adult social care worker, that increase represents an uplift of more than £780 over the course of this financial year.

I want us to go further, and we intend to go further, but we have to be able to fund that. Labour is asking us to increase pay to £15 an hour for all social care workers. I understand why people want that to happen, but it would cost up to an additional £1.75 billion. Labour has not set out how it would fund that or what it proposes to cut as a consequence.

Yes, we want to see pay increase further, but we have to do that in a properly funded way. That is responsible government.

Anas Sarwar: I will tell the First Minister what is derisory. Derisory is giving a 3.8 per cent pay increase to front-line workers when inflation is running at 9 per cent. That is what is derisory and is causing the social care crisis.

The First Minister asks where the money would come from. This Government's failure to eliminate delayed discharge is costing at least £150 million a year. Its national care service is estimated to cost £1.3 billion—the money that will be spent on set-up and administration should be spent on front-line services to address the current crisis.

Organisations that, like Scottish Labour, support a national care service are calling on the Scottish National Party to pause the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. Those organisations include the GMB, Unison, Unite the union, Social Work Scotland, Scottish Care, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Trades Union Congress. The GMB told the Parliament that social care staff are "broken and exhausted". It said:

“now we are giving them a ... bill that does not give them any job security, any value or any feeling of worth ... We want reform—we want to make social care better—but what they are being offered right now is”

nowhere near

“good enough.”—[*Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee*, 15 November 2022; c 38.]

Will the First Minister finally listen to workers on the front line, pause this flawed bill and put the money where it needs to be, so that we can actually confront the NHS and social care crisis?

The First Minister: First, Parliament is scrutinising the bill, and that process of scrutiny is important. However, fair work and sectoral bargaining are at the very heart of those reform proposals.

Calling for a reform that is due to be implemented in future years in order to fund a pay increase in this financial year is an example of the completely irresponsible and incoherent approach that Labour takes to budgeting. That is not how budgeting works. By all means, let us continue to scrutinise the national care service legislation, but do not mislead people into thinking that, if we just stopped the bill, we would suddenly free up money now for pay increases. It simply does not work that way.

Let me repeat the actions that we have taken. There has been a 14.7 per cent pay increase for social care workers in the past two years, and we want to go further. For NHS workers, the offer this year is 7.5 per cent on average, compared with 4.5 per cent where Labour is in government in these islands. Our actions demonstrate the value that we place on those workers. Within our budgets, we will continue to prioritise that, but we will do that in a responsible and deliverable way, in stark contrast with Labour.

Teachers Strike

3. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government has taken to bring the strike action by teachers to an end. (S6F-01716)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As I think that we have demonstrated, not least in the national health service, we are—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I suspend business briefly.

12:19

Meeting suspended.

12:21

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We will go back to question 3. I ask Mr Kerr to repeat his initial question.

Stephen Kerr: To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government has taken to bring the strike action by teachers to an end.

The First Minister: As, I think, we have demonstrated, not least in the national health service, this Government values public sector workers and seeks to negotiate fair pay deals. To that end, we continue to work closely with trade unions and local government partners to reach a deal that is fair and affordable.

That dialogue has been constructive. There still remains a gap between the union asks and—to be blunt—what is affordable within our finite resources, and therefore we look for further compromise.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills is in regular dialogue with the unions and with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and has, during the past week, spoken with each of the union general secretaries individually to progress things. There were two meetings of the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers negotiators last week, and another one is scheduled for tomorrow. There is a shared commitment—certainly from this Government—to reach an agreement as soon as possible.

Stephen Kerr: Last week, the First Minister, talking about Humza Yousaf, said something about how there had not been any strikes because—she thinks—he is so brilliant. In contrast, in education, we have Shirley-Anne Somerville and the first teachers strike in 40 years. The strike means chaos for hundreds and thousands of parents and carers and pupils, and yet the cabinet secretary shows no energy or urgency to get involved and resolve it. That is not just my view, but the view of the unions. The First Minister used to say that education was her “top priority”. Will she step in and end the strike?

The First Minister: As teachers strikes loom in England, the hypocrisy of the Tories is absolutely staggering. Shirley-Anne Somerville will continue to do everything possible to reach an agreement with COSLA and our teaching unions to deliver a fair pay increase for teachers.

Over the past few years, teachers have already had a 21 per cent pay increase, which demonstrates the value that we attach to what they do. I think that teachers in Scotland are, on average, the highest paid of any of the teaching professions across the United Kingdom, and we will continue to seek a fair settlement.

The hypocrisy really is staggering. Stephen Kerr talks about the efforts that Shirley-Anne Somerville is making, which are strenuous efforts. The Tory education secretary in England, just in the past few days, said:

“we didn’t negotiate pay”

with teaching unions because

“That’s not what we’re there to do.”

In Scotland, there is a demand that the education secretary resolves the issue, while in England, of course, the Tories simply wash their hands and dig in their heels, because they do not value public sector workers. They want to take away the right to strike of public sector workers. This Government values all our public sector workers.

“Closing the Accountability Gap”

4. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s response is to the report “Closing the Accountability Gap”, published by the National Autistic Society Scotland. (S6F-01736)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We welcome the survey by the National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism. It adds to the diverse range of views that we have from autistic people, people with a learning disability and other neurodivergent groups on a learning disability, autism and neurodiversity commissioner. The survey highlights areas where autistic people feel that they need better support, including around mental health and education. We have recognised the need for additional work on mental health and have been working closely with autistic adults and adults with a learning disability on this. We are committed to bringing forward a consultation later this year on the learning disability, autism and neurodiversity bill, including on the creation of a commissioner.

Stephanie Callaghan: The National Autistic Society Scotland and Scottish Autism surveyed over 1,200 autistic people, their families and professionals. Ninety-six per cent of them supported the creation of a Scottish commissioner for autistic people and learning disabled people, which would be a world first.

Does the First Minister agree that, although we already have sound policies and strategies in place, we need the focus of a commissioner to champion, promote and protect the rights of people in those groups and to ensure that individuals are supported to reach their full potential?

The First Minister: I agree with that. The learning disability, autism and neurodiversity bill will extend further than autism to include people

with a learning disability and, potentially, a wider range of neurodivergent conditions. However, from our scoping work with a range of stakeholders, we understand that, even within the autism community, there are a range of views on how that is best taken forward.

That is why we are establishing a lived experience panel to work closely with us to co-design key elements of the bill’s development. That will include delivering a consultation paper later this year to provide an opportunity for people across Scotland to express their views, including on the potential role and duties of a commissioner.

Key Diagnostic Tests (Backlog)

5. Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): To ask the First Minister what progress the Scottish Government has made in clearing the reported backlog of people waiting for key diagnostic tests. (S6F-01727)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): A range of work is being taken forward by national health service boards to increase capacity, workforce and activity for diagnostics, including the use of seven mobile MRI and five mobile CT scanners to provide additional activity. I am conscious that the Conservatives claimed this weekend that there are five-year waits for diagnostic tests and that they described that as “scarcely believable”. There is, of course, a reason for that, which is that it is simply untrue.

NHS Grampian has pointed out that the Tories have misrepresented data that they received in a freedom of information request response. It is routine for patients who have been treated for forms of cancer or received neurosurgical care to have pre-planned and scheduled scans in future years, to monitor their progress and condition after treatment. Those are not diagnostic tests prior to treatment, as the Conservatives claimed.

Clearly, our NHS is wrestling with a number of very significant pressures right now, but it does no service to anyone when the Conservatives distort figures and mislead the public.

Sue Webber: One health board has taken the decision to reduce its endoscopic capacity by 3,500 procedures over the next 12 months. That means that there are 35 people living with undiagnosed cancer. Because of Scottish Government cuts, rather than being able to increase its diagnostic endoscopic services to meet the demand, that board is being forced to cut the service. How can the backlog be cleared when diagnostic services are being cut?

The First Minister: There are no cuts to national health service budgets. On the contrary, we are proposing a £1 billion increase to the budget of the national health service next year.

Again, that is something that would not have been possible had we taken Tory advice to cut taxes for the richest people in our society. Within that, capacity for diagnostic tests is being increased, because everybody recognises that the earliest possible diagnosis, especially for cancer, is vital. We continue to build up capacity and to support the NHS to fully recover from Covid.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): A woman in my constituency has waited a year since her initial smear test, which reported an abnormality, to receive an appointment for a follow-up colposcopy. The appointments that were offered to her in December and then January have both been cancelled. She is not alone, because waiting times for colposcopies are going up, not down, and women's health is at risk.

Will the First Minister prioritise action on women's health and ensure that women are not put through the emotional turmoil of having to wait a minute longer than they need for urgent diagnostic tests?

The First Minister: People who need urgent tests are seen quickly. Often, individual cases are, rightly, raised with me in the chamber and, although I am not saying that this is the case with the incident that Jackie Baillie has narrated, and although I obviously cannot go into individual case details in the chamber, sometimes, there is more complexity to these cases than is put before the chamber. That is why I always say that I am happy to look into individual cases.

There is significant investment in capacity for diagnostic tests and for any follow-up that is required as a result of them. That is particularly important around a range of women's health conditions. We prioritise women's health and, shortly, we will publish the report on our women's health plan, and we are making progress with the appointment of a women's health champion.

These issues are of priority, and will continue to be so.

Foster Caring

6. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to encourage people to become foster carers, following reports that only 40 of 400 children referred to Barnardo's fostering service in Glasgow and Edinburgh have been placed with families in the last year. (S6F-01719)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): As part of keeping the Promise, we are committed to ensuring that children and young people who are looked after away from their own families and homes are provided with caring and loving foster families.

Although responsibility for recruiting sufficient foster carers lies with local authorities, we are aware that the pandemic and the cost of living crisis have put additional pressure on foster carer capacity. Of course, that is compounded by some of the wider pressures facing the social work sector, and we are determined to address that. That is why we are working with key national and local partners, including the third sector, to identify action that we can take collectively now and in the future to improve the situation.

The Scottish Government also provides £145,000 each year to the fostering network to raise the profile of foster caring and encourage the recruitment of new carers, as well as providing wider advice and support.

Kenneth Gibson: I thank the First Minister for that response and for her continued commitment to the Promise.

Unfortunately, 691 children and young people are waiting for foster care—up from 461 in 12 months. Over the past year, many Scots have welcomed Ukrainian families fleeing war, partly due to Scotland's call for volunteers campaign.

Will the First Minister consider launching a renewed drive to encourage more potential foster carers to come forward and help to ensure that children and young people who are waiting to be fostered can be placed in safe, stable and loving homes as soon as possible?

The First Minister: We will give consideration to that. I take this opportunity to thank the people who have opened up their homes to Ukrainian families in the past months. That is testimony to the welcoming nature of people who call Scotland home.

There are, of course, important differences between supporting Ukrainian families and fostering children who might have complex needs and who require day-to-day caregiving, including, for example, supporting contact with their birth families. However, I encourage anyone who is thinking about fostering to speak to their local authority or a fostering organisation. Fostering brings great benefits not only to children—that is the most important consideration—but to foster families.

We will certainly consider all options that might have the potential to improve the lives of children with care experience, and I will ask officials to work with stakeholders and caregivers to consider the possibility of having a national communication campaign and its potential to recruit more foster carers.

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

Cost of Living Crisis

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): A report from Nourish Scotland has uncovered a dignity gap relating to the cost of living crisis for Scotland's most hard-pressed families. The research explains how many families have been compelled to select the cheapest food and drink that is available, rather than the products that they would prefer to choose but cannot afford. That is described as "a dignity gap". Does the First Minister share my view that it is disgraceful that families who are living in a country of such abundant wealth are forced to make such sacrifices?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, I share that concern. The cost of living crisis is, of course, affecting everyone, but it is having a disproportionate effect on those who are already living in poverty. That is why the Scottish Government is taking the range of action that it is taking, including the Scottish child payment, for example. I call on the United Kingdom Government to provide more help to those who are most in need, and to do so urgently.

Sexual Assault Cases (National Guidance for Universities)

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I have been raising the case of Ellie Wilson, who was a victim of rape while she was studying at the University of Glasgow. Ellie survived that ordeal but was shocked to discover that the perpetrator had been allowed to transfer to another university, despite being under investigation for rape at the time. It has since been discovered that there is no national guidance for how universities should deal with sexual assault cases. Will the First Minister agree to sort that out urgently, so that no other victim has to suffer such an ordeal?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Obviously, I am aware of that case and its extremely serious implications. We take that seriously and will consider what further action the Government needs to take to address some of the issues that are raised.

EmilyTest is an important initiative that the Government worked on with universities and which it encourages universities to take very seriously. However, it is clear that serious issues that we need to reflect further on are raised by the case in question, and I give the assurance that the Government will do that.

Health Inequalities

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The Health Foundation's report that was published this week is grim reading. It lays bare the extent of health inequalities across Scotland, from the

growing gap between the richest and the poorest in life expectancy to the widening gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged in infant mortality. There is a similar story across the United Kingdom, but it is amplified in Scotland. Those chasms have widened while we have had 13 years of Tory Government, but it is a reflection of the Scottish National Party Government that Scotland's inequalities remain greater.

The Health Foundation said:

"Understanding the causes is not enough; a radical shift in approach is needed ... Without action, Scotland's most deprived communities are likely to continue suffering from poor quality of life and die younger."

Will the First Minister respond to its comments?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I agree with those comments by the Health Foundation. Those are not new, or even recent, challenges in Scotland, but it is vital that we do more and as much as possible to tackle them. Tackling health inequalities is a major concern for Governments and communities across the world, and Scotland faces the same challenges as many other countries face.

It is important that we act in a preventative way as much as possible. That is why the Government is doing so much to tackle poverty—as much as we can—within our powers and resources. That is, of course, the route to tackling health inequalities and other inequalities. We will continue to take a range of actions, and we call on the UK Government to step up, as well.

Violence in Schools

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Yesterday evening, I watched a social media video of a female pupil attacking another at Waid academy, which is in my constituency. To be frank, I wish that I had not done so. I cannot get it out of my head; it was an ugly scene.

Earlier this year, the then president of the Educational Institute of Scotland, Heather Hughes, warned about increasing violence in our schools. I am supporting staff, the council and the school locally. What action is the Government taking across the country?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Willie Rennie for raising that issue. I have not seen the video that he mentioned, but I will watch it if it is available, because I think that it is important that we have a full understanding of such issues.

Violence is never acceptable, and the safety of pupils and staff is paramount. Obviously, I cannot comment further today on the specifics of the case at Waid academy, but I am very clear that violence towards anyone is unacceptable.

I asked the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities spokesperson for children and young people to discuss what further support to local authorities is required and what further support we can provide. They met on 2 December, and they discussed a continued commitment to work together in partnership through the Scottish advisory group on relationships and behaviour in schools, and to use the behaviour in Scottish schools research as the national evidence base to inform future policy on relationships and behaviour in schools.

We are also investing an additional £15 million this year to enhance capacity in education authorities and schools to respond effectively to the needs of children and young people.

We will continue to consider fully what additional steps we can take to support councils in making it very clear that violence is unacceptable and in taking action to support children, young people and teachers who face such violence.

Protection of Workers

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): Research from the work foundation at Lancaster University has found that, unless it is delayed or amended, the UK Government's Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill

"will put the rights and protection of more than 8.6 million UK workers at risk",

with women accounting for around 6 million of those who will be most affected.

Can the First Minister advise what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the impact that the bill will have on workers in Scotland and, in particular, on women in the Scottish workforce, and can she provide any information about what assessment has been made of the impact that the bill could have on devolved responsibilities?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Natalie Don is right to raise the issue. The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill risks damaging a range of sectors, including protections for workers that have been gained over 40 years of European Union membership. Unison describes it as

"an attack on working women".

The facts that the bill was previously promoted by Jacob Rees-Mogg when he was in the Government and that it is supported by hard Brexiteers is evidence of the "race to the bottom" ideology that lies behind the proposals.

This Parliament has called for the bill to be scrapped, and, if the UK Government had any

respect for devolution—it is now obvious that it does not—that is exactly what would happen.

If the bill proceeds—we will continue to argue against it as hard as we can—we will do everything possible to limit the damage that it does to Scotland. However, giving UK ministers the power to legislate on devolved matters without the consent of this chamber is yet another example of the growing—and very real—threat that the UK Government now poses to the Scottish Parliament.

Malicious Prosecution (Compensation)

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Eighteen months ago, I asked Nicola Sturgeon about the malicious prosecution of innocent men in Scotland, with taxpayers being hit with a £24 million compensation bill. Today, that figure has risen to more than double that amount—£51 million—with every penny being taken from front-line services.

Now a police officer who abused his power has resigned, and a sheriff who abused his power will also resign. The First Minister and her Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans have gone silent on a scandal that contaminates Scottish justice. What does it take for people to be held to account in SNP-run Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I think that Russell Findlay exposed the motive behind his question in his last few words.

Those are issues that flow from decisions that were taken independently by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service; the Crown Office is independent on all decisions relating to prosecutions. There have been live court proceedings on the cases and ministers cannot comment while court proceedings are live. The Tories would be among the first to criticise us if we did.

There is also a commitment to have a full inquiry into the matter as soon as possible so that there can be full scrutiny and, where appropriate, full accountability.

Partick Thistle Charitable Trust (Programme Funding)

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Yesterday in Parliament, I met a group of people from Partick Thistle Charitable Trust's "Accepting activity" programme. Every day, the programme supports homeless people, refugees, asylum seekers and people who are living with mental ill health. The group told me that the project has been a lifeline and, quoting their late friend, they said that it is often the reason why they believe in the goodness of others. They also told me that the trust is facing unprecedented energy costs and

they worry that it will no longer be able to provide its current support without more help. Is there anything that the First Minister can do, and will she work with me to help them?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I understand that the issue was raised with the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, Shona Robison, at committee today and that she has undertaken to look into the issue and to write to Pam Duncan-Glancy. I suggest that that is the appropriate way to proceed for now.

Celtic Connections (30th Anniversary)

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): This month marks the 30th anniversary of Celtic Connections. I ask, as one Glasgow MSP to another, will the First Minister welcome this landmark anniversary of a Scottish cultural gem and great contributor to Glasgow city's economy, and will she be going along herself to enjoy it, jig time? [*Laughter.*]

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Will I be going along? If I get the opportunity, I will certainly relish it.

As a citizen of the great city of Glasgow, I am pleased that Celtic Connections is back for its first full live run since 2020, and is showcasing 2,100 musicians from around the world at more than 300 events across multiple genres of music.

I am delighted that the Scottish Government continues to support the festival through our expo fund. I congratulate Celtic Connections on the 30th anniversary of a festival that has grown to become a cornerstone of Scotland's annual cultural calendar and that continues to raise Glasgow's profile worldwide as an exciting, cosmopolitan and welcoming city. I hope that I get the opportunity to sample some of the festival's delights this year. I believe that I was at some of the events in its founding year, 30 years ago—which perhaps says something about my age that I would prefer to have left unsaid.

Road Safety on A90

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): Around lunchtime last Saturday, a car smashed into a property just off the A90, near Dundee. Just about every driver in Scotland will travel on that road at some point, and that was the 10th crash at the same spot in only six years, according to *The Courier*.

The owners of the property live in fear that their grandchildren could be seriously injured or even killed when they are playing in the garden. I raised the issue two years ago, but no remedial action has been taken. Will the First Minister treat it as a matter of urgency?

The First Minister: The crash last weekend was extremely serious, and my thoughts are with all who were involved. It is important that appropriate investigations into the incident are allowed to take their course and that we reflect on their findings. I undertake to have the Minister for Transport write to the member directly with any further steps that are required to be taken, once we have had the opportunity to do that.

Points of Order

12:48

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. On Tuesday 15 November, in relation to the misleading claim that Scotland had 25 per cent of Europe's offshore wind potential, I asked Minister Lorna Slater when ministers first became aware that they were using a figure that had not been properly sourced. She responded:

"Ministers became aware of the issue on Tuesday 8 November".—[*Official Report*, 15 November 2022; c 6.]

On Thursday 17 November, I raised a point of order that Minister Slater appeared to have misled the Parliament in her assertion, and I reminded her that section 1.3(c) of the ministerial code requires the correcting of the record. I stated—[*Interruption*.]

The Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, if you could just give me a moment. Members who are leaving the chamber should do so quietly, and members who are conducting a conversation should please do that elsewhere.

Liam Kerr: I am slightly stunned to see the minister in question leaving the chamber as I am speaking. On 17 November, I stated that the utter disregard from certain ministers

"in not abiding by our processes and codes risks bringing the Parliament into disrepute and undermining your position as Presiding Officer."—[*Official Report*, 17 November 2022; c 27.]

The record remains uncorrected by Minister Slater or, indeed, to the best of my knowledge, any other ministers who have deployed that statistic.

On Monday 16 January, in relation to the claim that Scotland had 25 per cent of Europe's offshore wind potential, Minister Michael Matheson was asked at the Scottish Affairs Committee when he became aware that the figure was inaccurate. He said:

"If I recall correctly, sometime back in September."

Both statements cannot simultaneously be true. Either Ms Slater has misled the Scottish Parliament, or Mr Matheson has misled the House of Commons.

Presiding Officer, since ignoring and disrespecting the ministerial code is endemic among the Government, and none of its members feels any obligation to do anything about it or, indeed, to listen to points of order, I wonder whether you might request that Minister Slater appear before the Parliament to make a statement as to why she apparently misled the Parliament, why she and her colleagues feel that it is

unnecessary to abide by our codes, and, finally, to give an honest and accurate answer to my original question.

The Presiding Officer: I thank the member for his point of order. As he will be aware, I have dealt with related matters before. I repeat that issues in relation to the ministerial code are a matter for the Scottish Government.

As all members know, the Parliament has a corrections mechanism that enables any member to request a correction to any factual inaccuracy that may have been contained in a contribution during our proceedings. As a matter of courtesy and respect, I expect all members to be accurate in their contributions and to seek to remedy any factual inaccuracies, whether that is through the corrections mechanism or through other methods, at the earliest possible opportunity. All members—[*Interruption*.]

I suspend the meeting briefly.

12:50

Meeting suspended.

12:53

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: All members are aware that it is not the Presiding Officer's role to make rulings on the accuracy of contributions; rather, whether each member considers their contributions to have been accurate is a matter for them. If a member is dissatisfied with information that has been provided to them, it remains open to them to pursue the issue through all the avenues that are available to members.

Mr Kerr asked whether I could call the minister to make a statement to the chamber. That is not something that is within my power, but, in seeking a ministerial statement, Mr Kerr may wish to raise the matter with his business manager, who can raise it in the Parliamentary Bureau.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con) rose—

The Presiding Officer: Edward Mountain has a point of order.

Edward Mountain: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I do not raise this lightly; I realise that there has been some delay in getting to this point.

In response to my topical question on 6 September last year, the Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise, Ivan McKee,

assured the Parliament that the budget and completion timescales for vessels 801 and 802 were on target. Just four days before I asked that question, I visited the shipyard, where I met the chief executive. He was clear that the budget would be exceeded and that vessel 802 would not be delivered on time. The notes of my visit are available, should they be required.

Ivan McKee's answer to my topical question baffled me, as it appeared that it was more than a political non-answer of the type that we can often expect. Subsequent freedom of information requests revealed email exchanges between Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd and Ferguson Marine showing that they both knew of the problems before my question was asked. That begged the question: was the minister aware before he answered my topical question that there were, indeed, further delays and expenses relating to hulls 801 and 802?

Through an FOI request, I obtained Ivan McKee's briefing notes—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Mountain, might I ask what your point of order is?

Edward Mountain: I am coming to the point of order. If I can just finish this sentence, I will come back to it.

I obtained, through the FOI request, Ivan McKee's briefing notes, which had been prepared by his staff in order to allow him to answer my questions. I can only assume that he read those briefing notes, and it was clear from them that he was aware of the delay to hulls 801 and 802 and of the extension to the budget cost.

Presiding Officer, I know that it is disrespectful and unacceptable to suggest that somebody has lied to or misled the Parliament, so I will not do so, but it is clear from the unambiguous evidence that I have here that the minister's response was, at best, a misrepresentation of the facts or, worse, plainly untruthful. Therefore, I seek your guidance on how members of this Parliament can hold the Government to account if it takes numerous FOI requests to prove that a minister has clearly been economical with the truth.

The Presiding Officer: I think that all members will be aware that a point of order takes precedence where a member has concerns that proceedings have not taken place in a proper way. The points that the member raises are not points that I can rule on from the chair. I have just addressed a point of order regarding the accuracy of members' contributions in the chamber, and, again, I point the member to the many avenues that exist for members to pursue one another on issues when they are dissatisfied with a response.

Alex Cole-Hamilton has a point of order.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. On the basis of what you have just said, I will withdraw my point of order on this occasion.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you. We will move on to members' business. I will allow a moment for the gallery to clear.

Fire Brigades Union DECON Campaign

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

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06671, in the name of Maggie Chapman, on the Fire Brigades Union DECON campaign. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members wishing to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament commends the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in Scotland for leading the DECON Campaign, whose aim is to protect the health and save the lives of firefighters by reducing exposure to harmful contaminants that cause cancer and disease; recognises what it sees as the fundamental role that research and data play in fully understanding the risks that firefighters face in their day-to-day working lives; understands that in 2022 the World Health Organization declared occupational exposure experienced by firefighters as carcinogenic, a preventable cause of human cancer; further understands that, in the UK, the FBU, alongside Professor Anna Stec from the University of Central Lancashire, has led research into the links between cancer and firefighting, as well as best practices that can help mitigate potential risks from fire contaminants, including commissioning and working with independent researchers to develop a Firefighters Cancer and Disease Registry; applauds the FBU and its partners for producing best practice guidance and training for firefighters alongside the DECON campaign; understands that DECON is the largest study of its kind in the UK; expresses its solidarity with all involved in the campaign, and wishes them every success in improving the lives of firefighters in the North East Scotland region, more widely across Scotland and throughout the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I reiterate my plea to those leaving the public gallery to do so as quietly as possible.

I invite Maggie Chapman to open the debate. You have around seven minutes, Ms Chapman.

12:58

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): It is a great privilege and honour to lead this debate, which is of vital importance to every region and constituency in Scotland. I thank all members who have supported my motion, and I welcome and thank our guests in the public gallery: Professor Anna Stec from the University of Central Lancashire, and John McKenzie and his colleagues from the Fire Brigades Union.

For many of us here today, there is no more terrifying threat than fire and there are no greater heroes than firefighters. Each of us can perhaps

take a moment to rediscover our memories, stories and histories—all the ways in which we and our families and communities owe so very much to those who keep us safe from the horrors of uncontrolled flames, and of entrapment, suffocation and smoke.

In a world of climate change, drought and wildfire, and of corporate corner-cutting and official indifference, we need firefighters more than ever before. The burning tower of Grenfell stands as a terrible testament to the priorities of the powerful. We remember with grief the people who lost their lives there and renew our solidarity with the hundreds who were injured and bereaved.

We know now of another appalling price that was paid for that greed and contempt, with the news that many firefighters who battled that blaze have now been diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Grenfell represents a particular horror, but those impacts on the health of firefighters are neither unique nor unusual. Here, in Scotland, Anne's story is typical of the experience of firefighters and their families. Anne—a nurse—writes:

"My husband George was due to retire from the fire service in June 2017 and we had planned our retirement; intending to travel and enjoy a new freedom. In July 2017 we were to be enjoying an extended holiday on a sunny beach, instead we were sitting in the waiting area of our local cancer hospital after he was diagnosed with stage 4 kidney cancer, six weeks before he retired. George sadly died in 2020 from cancer and as many fire fighters will tell you, they all know a colleague with a cancer diagnosis or one who has sadly died of cancer and often at a young age with a young family."

A ground-breaking study, which was led by Professor Anna Stec, has been published in the scientific journal *Occupational Medicine* this month. It is entitled "Scottish Firefighters Occupational Cancer and Disease Mortality Rates: 2000-2020" and reveals the extent, depth and scope of what we can, with accuracy, call a scandal, for it has gone unaddressed in the United Kingdom by research, law and practice.

The study indicates that Scottish firefighters have higher mortality rates from cancer at younger ages than their counterparts in the general population. Rare cancers are often diagnosed in firefighters only when they have already reached a terminal stage, and prostate cancer, leukaemia and cancer of the oesophagus, among others, have mortality rates in firefighters that are several times that of the general population. Other diseases, too, are far more likely to kill firefighters than the rest of us, with mortality rates from strokes more than double and from heart attacks multiplied by five.

Those findings are supported by a four-part study of firefighters' health risks across the UK and by an assessment by the International Agency

for Research on Cancer—part of the World Health Organization—which concluded that firefighting as an occupation is carcinogenic. Both of those studies were published last year and align with evidence from many other countries.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Maggie Chapman on securing the debate.

Following the WHO's decision on the carcinogenic aspect of firefighting, does she agree that we perhaps now need to look to its being registered as both an industrial accident and a disease, so that support can be given to firefighters across the UK?

Maggie Chapman: I will come to some of the requests of the FBU's campaign, but that is an interesting avenue to explore and I am happy to talk to the member about it after the debate.

Firefighters in the UK have waited far too long for protections that are standard practice elsewhere. Many have died waiting, as we know. In Scotland, we now have the opportunity to change that and to bring justice, care, humanity and respect to the firefighters to whom we owe so very much. That is why I am calling on the Scottish Government to make four vital commitments today.

The first, very simply, is for regular annual health screening for firefighters, both during their period of service and afterwards, into retirement. We know the importance of preventative health and the crucial difference that is made by early diagnosis. Let us give our firefighters and the medics who care for them the best possible chance of avoiding the worst.

The second commitment that I and the Fire Brigades Union seek is for occupational information to be included in health and similar records, including death certificates. Again and again, in the chamber and our committee rooms, we reiterate the vital importance of data and accurate information to inform policy and practice. When patients are or have been firefighters, that fact matters. It needs to be known and recorded.

The third reform that firefighters need is the establishment of a just and fair compensation scheme, which might relate to Martin Whitfield's point. Many jurisdictions, including Australia, Canada, Poland and nearly all US states, have presumptive legislation for firefighters—laws that recognise their enhanced risk and the realities of long-term and repeated exposure. We can learn from best practice around the world to develop a Scottish model, filling the shameful gap in our justice and protection.

Finally, I am asking for a budget to support the practical work that needs to be done on the

ground in fire stations across Scotland. We must ensure, as a matter of urgency, that stations have the resources, facilities, training and systems to minimise contamination and maximise health. It is a substantial but achievable task, and the FBU is ready and willing to work with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the Scottish Government and MSPs to make it happen in every constituency.

Three years ago, in Dundee, a huge fire broke out in an industrial estate unit, the roof of which contained asbestos cement. It is too early to know whether those burning fibres in the air have affected the health of the brave local firefighters who put out the blaze. What we know is that firefighters across Scotland, day in and day out, bear the risks of significant and life-threatening disease. For far too long, those risks to firefighters in the UK have been much higher than they need to be.

Our firefighters put their lives on the line every day for us, the safety of our homes and the wellbeing of our pets and communities. They are the ones we trust to come into our homes. They are the public servants who command the highest levels of public support and respect. It is time for us, in Scotland, to take a lead, to recognise and respect our heroes and to support and enable the FBU's vital campaign. I hope that the minister will agree to meet the FBU and me to discuss how best to do that. It is definitely time to act.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Understandably, there is a lot of interest in participating in the debate among colleagues. We started late, and afternoon business will resume at 2 pm, so I must ask colleagues to stick to their speaking time allocation.

13:07

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): I thank Maggie Chapman for securing this important debate. I place on the record my gratitude to all fire and rescue officers and emergency service workers, who keep us all safe every day—I am sure that I will be joined by colleagues from across the chamber in that. However, that collective gratitude will be worthless if we do not heed the warnings of Professor Anna Stec, whose ground-breaking research has informed the Fire Brigade Union's DECON campaign.

As we have heard from Maggie Chapman, UK firefighters are four times more likely than other people to get cancer during their working life—it is important to repeat that shocking statistic.

In short, the DECON campaign aims to protect firefighters and their families from carcinogenic fire contaminants. Not only are our firefighters risking their lives to keep us safe; they are risking their health and the health of their family members. I

am pleased that the Parliament is debating this matter. It is incumbent on us all to do everything within our power to protect the people who risk their lives to protect us.

I had the pleasure recently of visiting Blackness fire station in my constituency. Having discussed the DECON campaign directly with firefighters, I lodged a written question to the minister on the matter. I was very pleased to be informed by the minister that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is engaging with the research. Representatives of the SFRS met Professor Stec in November last year to hear about the important research that she is doing and to offer the SFRS's co-operation in that work. I was further informed that the SFRS has a management of contaminants group, which has already made significant changes in procedures, equipment and facilities in order to reduce firefighters' contact with equipment that could contain contaminants that are harmful to health. I understand that that important work will continue, and it is really important that the Parliament uses its power to ensure that it does.

I understand that one difficulty that is encountered by officers is having suitable facilities to decontaminate their protective equipment after use, which means that they often reuse the same equipment for a second emergency call-out. One of the key recommendations in Professor Stec's report is for all fire and rescue services to establish and strictly maintain designated zones within fire stations as a priority for preventing cross-contamination. That will not always be straightforward, so I call on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to work with the FBU at station level to establish designated zones as quickly as possible.

The report sets out some of the ways in which firefighters may be exposed to toxic contaminants, which include inhalation, dermal absorption and ingestion. The report also highlights some of the health conditions, in addition to cancer, that are risked through exposure, such as coronary heart disease and cirrhosis of the liver, among many others. I have a quote on that, but I am mindful of the Presiding Officer's point about timing. I encourage members to look at the report on the DECON work.

I conclude by again thanking Maggie Chapman for securing this important debate, which allows members across the chamber to highlight the risks that are experienced by firefighters every day. I also thank the Fire Brigades Union and Professor Anna Stec and her team at the University of Central Lancashire. Finally, I thank, once more, all our fire and rescue officers for keeping us all safe. I hope that the Scottish Government can work with the SFRS and the FBU to ensure that all the key

recommendations of the report are implemented as soon as possible.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, Mr FitzPatrick, not least for your exemplary time keeping, which sets a good example.

13:11

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I begin by informing members that I have a commitment to attend an event at Glasgow airport this afternoon, which means that I am unable to stay for the duration of Maggie Chapman's important debate. I mean her no disrespect, and I am grateful to the Presiding Officer for agreeing to my request to leave after the opening speeches.

The issues that the debate raises are extremely serious. The University of Central Lancashire's study, which was commissioned by the FBU and is referred to in Maggie Chapman's motion, is shocking. Professor Stec and her team found deeply concerning cancer rates among firefighters. That follows last year's WHO designation of firefighting as a carcinogenic occupation.

I know that other members will talk in detail about those findings. I will turn to the two most significant recent publications from or about the SFRS. The first is the Scottish Government's "Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2022", which was published 10 months ago. It contains seven strategic priorities, number 6 of which is the category of "People". There are references to fair work and pay, equal opportunities, new skills and being representative of society. I have no doubt that that is all important stuff, yet, in 37 pages, there are just two paragraphs about health, wellbeing and safety, and there is not a single mention of contaminants.

The other report is the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's "Annual Performance Review: 2021-2022", which was published four months ago. It lists 10 priorities, number 10 of which is "People". That section includes almost five pages on diversity, inclusion and other matters. There is a page about physical wellbeing, although it is mostly in the context of physical fitness. Again, that is all very important, but the entire 48-page report contains just two sentences on contaminants. It says:

"we continued to strengthen our approach to health and medical surveillance and considering a range of options to ensure we deliver health assessments in accordance with our statutory requirements."

That does not tell us much. I do not know what the firefighters here and elsewhere would make of it. In two official reports, which comprise 85 glossy and expensive pages, there is only the most fleeting mention of contaminants, which are likely

to be the cause of high cancer rates and premature deaths.

I do not doubt for a moment the commitment of senior officers to their people. Few organisations have such an admirable esprit de corps, which I saw at first hand on a recent visit to Paisley fire station, but I am left questioning why the corporate output shies away from such an important issue.

The bottom line is money, specifically the financial choices that are made by the Government and, more specifically, the choices that are made by Scottish National Party ministers in Edinburgh about how money is spent. Many fire stations are old, lack basic facilities and are in a state of serious disrepair. It is beyond question that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has been starved of cash year after year. Members need not take my word for that. Interim chief officer Ross Haggart confirmed to the Parliament's Criminal Justice Committee that he needs £500 million—half a billion pounds—just to bring infrastructure up to a decent standard.

I commend Maggie Chapman's motion and back her specific calls for action on this very important subject.

13:15

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I sincerely thank Maggie Chapman for her superb speech. I was delighted to host a presentation about the report with her late last year.

According to Action on Asbestos, firefighters are two and a half times more likely than other people are to develop mesothelioma, a type of lung cancer. It is an invariably fatal cancer that results from exposure to asbestos fibres. It causes horrific suffering and loss, not only for those affected but for family and friends who witness someone close to them suffer and die.

As we have heard, asbestos-related illnesses are not the only risk that firefighters face as a result of their occupation. Firefighters are four times more likely to get cancer than the average working person and might get it up to 15 years earlier. That has been directly linked to contact with toxic contaminants that are released during fires. It is unacceptable for that to go unaddressed any longer.

As other speakers have said, the World Health Organization declared occupational exposure experienced by firefighters to be carcinogenic and a preventable cause of human cancer, but there is, as yet, no policy of regular checks or screening for cancer throughout their careers. That is totally unacceptable.

The issue is not confined to Scotland. We heard recently that a dozen firefighters who tackled the

blaze at Grenfell tower in June 2017 have since been diagnosed with terminal cancer. There is no doubt that firefighters are exposed to life-threatening contaminants as a result of their occupation.

A number of studies have focused on the risks and dangers associated with contaminated personal protective equipment and workplaces and on the bringing of contaminants back to fire stations on clothing, PPE and vehicles. Those studies have shown that there is a high, but preventable, risk of exposure to carcinogenic and toxic substances in fire stations.

As we heard in the presentation, firefighters working in rural Scotland have expressed the fear that they are at increased risk of cancer because so many of our rural fire stations are without running water. Their inability to shower quickly after returning from fires means that they cannot properly clean cancer-causing chemicals that are released during fires from their clothes and skin. I am sure that the minister will address that concern. A report last year stated that 11 Scottish fire stations in remote countryside areas had inadequate facilities, which is a matter that the FBU has repeatedly raised.

Professor Stec's study and the research that was commissioned by the Fire Brigades Union absolutely confirm what firefighters and their representatives in Scotland have been saying for years: unfortunately, firefighting causes cancer.

I fully support all of Maggie Chapman's asks. Worryingly, it seems that the industrial injuries disablement and benefit advisory group, which was set up by the Government in 2016, has not met for some time. It is important that we get that up and running.

Having previously been involved in the fight against asbestos-related cancers in other industries, I know that it is important to look for and establish causal links. When there is an accepted causal link—sadly, that is the case for some workers—workers need to challenge their employers and fight for compensation for being put in those conditions. We should make it easy for firefighters to be able to do that, as we have done for other professions, such as shipyard workers, under the mesothelioma compensation scheme. It is a difficult issue to raise, but it is one that we must address.

I fully support the Fire Brigades Union's asks on the matter and look forward to hearing the minister's response.

13:20

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank Maggie Chapman for hosting this important debate

and Unity Consulting, which is led by Neil Findlay, for its contributory work in bringing the FBU's campaign to the Scottish Parliament's attention.

Globally, 15 million firefighters work to protect people and the environments in which we live and work by putting themselves on the line by entering dangerous situations to take control of fires and save lives. It is an inherently dangerous job, so firefighters deserve our praise and respect for the risks that they have to take. However, we are here to do more than that: we are here to consider what we can do to protect the health of firefighters in return.

The Fire Brigades Union's DECON campaign outlines practical steps that can be taken to promote the health of firefighters. It is based on new findings that reveal the higher cancer risks that firefighters face just by doing their jobs. The campaign is based on the comprehensive work of Professor Anna Stec from the centre for fire and hazards sciences at the University of Central Lancashire—UCLan for short.

The FBU has been working with UCLan for three years to understand the link between fire exposure and cancer. Together, they have now evidenced that firefighters are four times more likely to get cancer than the average working person. That drives home how important it is that parliamentarians, the Government, unions, fire stations and firefighters gain the best possible understanding of what health risks firefighters are being exposed to and what preventative actions can be taken. The FBU's general secretary made a strong statement to that effect, saying that the report on the research

"delivers clear and authoritative guidance to fire and rescue services across the UK about the measures they can take to minimise firefighters' exposure to contaminants."

Right now, there is a step change in the firefighting profession to re-evaluate how health is best protected. Vital global research has facilitated that shift. Last year, the World Health Organization looked for the second time at cancer rates among firefighters. Due to the work of 30 global studies that had monitored firefighters' health, it was finally able to verify that they are more likely to get cancer.

However, as UCLan has shown, that has not yet translated into awareness on the ground, as 84 per cent of firefighters frequently or sometimes do not know how to use respiratory protective equipment well enough, despite inhalation and ingestion being main routes for cancer to develop. More needs to be done to incorporate the report's suggestions so that that statistic is reversed. Facilities must also be in place on site for cleaning and decontamination.

I highlight some parallel work in the welding sector to address the inhalation and ingestion of carcinogenic contaminants. John Brown, who is based at BAE Systems on the Clyde, and the GMB have launched the breathe easy campaign to address the impact of heavy metal welding fumes on GMB members and their families. There is potential for collaboration across sectors with similar cancer risks on how we encourage preventative measures to be adopted, so that more workers follow protective procedures and so that employers and the Government make sufficient provision for such measures in the first place.

13:24

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Maggie Chapman on securing the debate and thank the Fire Brigades Union for all the work that it is doing on the issue.

The exposure of firefighters to toxins during their employment is creating a health crisis. There are currently 357 fire stations in Scotland and the FBU estimates that more than 100 lack sufficient showering or toilet facilities.

That figure was confirmed by Interim Chief Officer Ross Haggart when I questioned him at the Criminal Justice Committee recently. He also confirmed that around one in four fire stations in this country lacks basic bathroom facilities and that some stations do not have a running water supply. In total, 220 stations are in poor or bad condition, 150 do not have showering facilities, 100 lack drying facilities and 11 have no water supply at all. The FBU also claims that a number of stations are held together by internal scaffolding.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has also cancelled a multimillion-pound contract for a new command and control system due to financial pressures. Mr Haggart estimated that £138 million is needed just to address those essential health and safety issues that have been highlighted. He also said that there was a backlog of £630 million in the fire service's capital budget.

Those issues are nothing to do with this year's budgetary issues or with whatever settlement might be coming from Westminster. The issues are a result of a failure to give the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service the resources that it needs to invest in its capital projects over many years. It is shameful that we are in this position today. The resource budget for the fire service has been cut by £40 million in real terms since 2012-13, and it is set to suffer further real-terms cuts over the next four years.

It is clear that there is a rich seam of research that shows that firefighting, as an occupation, is

carcinogenic. It is also clear that the employer has a legal responsibility and that, if cases were taken to court, it would be liable.

The debate raises some very practical issues. From 2012-13 to last year, almost 1,100 firefighter jobs were cut across all uniformed posts in Scotland, which is almost 15 per cent of the total workforce. That is partially due to a lack of investment, but there is also a growing perception that firefighting is not a safe profession and that the pay levels are not attractive. The FBU is currently balloting its members with regard to pay.

The message that comes out of today's debate is that the Scottish Government needs to make it a top priority to address the risks that are being highlighted. It has a legal responsibility to act, just as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has a responsibility to put in place a safe system of work for the people whom it employs. Frankly, this situation is not good enough. Firefighters deserve better.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jamie Greene, to be followed by Richard Leonard.

13:28

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I am not sure how I am going to do this ahead of Richard Leonard, as I know that he will give a stumping speech on behalf of Scotland's firefighters, but I will do my best.

I thank Maggie Chapman for raising the issue in the chamber. It is an important debate on an issue that I have raised in the chamber and in the Criminal Justice Committee on a number of occasions.

We should not be debating this issue as a members' business debate from an Opposition or back-bench member. It should come from the Government benches, because what has happened to Scotland's firefighters over the past 16 years is shameful, and it is a mark of shame on the Government. I mean that as no disrespect to the minister on the front bench, because she is new to the role and the Parliament. However, this debate has been a long time in coming, and it is absolutely right that we get it on the record today.

The briefing from the FBU made the situation starkly clear. I cannot add much to the statistics that we have been given in some of the excellent speeches that I have already heard in today's debate. However, the FBU has made some clear asks, which Ms Chapman reiterated at the beginning of the debate. First, legislation is needed so that firefighters have a clear route to compensation. I have worked on compensation legislation in the Parliament and I know that it is

difficult and complicated, but it is not impossible. I want the Government to reflect on that.

Secondly, there should be annual health monitoring for all current firefighters and those who have retired. That is key, because the average age of a firefighter in Scotland is 41, which falls well below the threshold for many of the standard checks for older people, but we know that firefighters need those checks for all the reasons that we have heard today.

The final and most important issue that I want to focus on in my brief comments is investment in facilities, equipment and what I call the absolute basics. I have raised the issue in the chamber before. None of us would come and sit in the Parliament if the roof was dripping and falling down. None of us would sit in our offices if we could not go to the toilet. None of us would cycle to work if there was not a shower facility at the end of every corridor in the members' block. We would not put up with such conditions, so why do we expect firefighters to do so? It is shocking and shameful.

Firefighters put their lives on the line day in, day out, every hour of every day, and recent high-profile fires across Scotland have reminded us of the tragedy that can occur when fire breaks out. Firefighters are always there for us when we need them, so why are we not always there for them?

I will mention briefly that, when firefighters with the FBU held a protest outside the Parliament in October last year, I went out to see them. I got some bemused looks from some trade union officials but, nonetheless, I was pleased to be there, and I think that they were grateful for my presence. Minister, the reason that I went out was to speak to the firefighters themselves. It is all very well hypothesising over academic studies, but let us go and talk to people one to one. They told me what it is like on the ground. They are proud of their work and their success rate, and they do it in the most difficult of circumstances.

Why do we have fire stations without running water or basic shower facilities? Decontamination needs to happen quickly—within hours or even minutes of getting back to the fire station. If you cannot have a shower or change your clothes, of course you will be at higher risk of cancerous outcomes later in life; we know that, because the health experts and academics tell us that. If we know all that, why can a firefighter not do the most basic thing of having a shower when they get back to the station? We can all do that when we finish work, so why can they not? The Government needs to think about that.

As Katy Clark mentioned, it is about capital budget, not resource budget. It is not a pay discussion; it is about investment in facilities.

There is a £0.5 billion backlog, and I know that the minister does not have £0.5 billion up her sleeve to fix that, but this chronic underinvestment has been happening for 16 years. The minister must reflect on that, and the Government must not only apologise but realise what needs to be done to make a difference. I do not expect it to pull rabbits out of hats to find that kind of money, but it has to come up with a plan for how it will invest in basic facilities so that we reduce those risks.

I could talk about this issue all day, because it is important, but I will close with this: every one of us in the chamber owes it to Scotland's firefighters to protect them as much as possible, but that is simply not happening. We are playing catch-up with our emergency services. The Government must and should do better.

13:32

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I thank Maggie Chapman for bringing the motion to Parliament, and I thank the Fire Brigades Union for supporting the critical, significant and groundbreaking research that has been carried out by Anna Stec and her team at the University of Central Lancashire.

That there is a direct relationship between working-class occupations and life expectancy, health and wellbeing has long been recognised. Go and look at the old trade union banners:

"Shorter hours and longer life",

or

"Out of darkness into light",

or

"The Hope of Labour is the Welfare of All".

They are a reminder that the trade union movement from its very inception has always organised and campaigned for its members, not just to mitigate the effects of the system but to fundamentally change the system. So, what comes in the report should not surprise us, but it should nonetheless shock us all, and it should shame the Government into action.

The findings are stark: Scottish firefighters compared with the general population are almost twice as likely to die from urinary cancers; two and a half times more likely to die from cancer of the oesophagus; more than three times as likely to die from acute myeloid leukaemia; and nearly four times more likely to die from cancer of the prostate.

So, let us be clear that the high prevalence of cancer and the high mortality rate are caused by occupational exposure, which is why it strikes not only the older but the younger firefighter. Only last week, the *Daily Mirror* revealed that, just five years

on from the Grenfell tower fire, 12 of the heroic firefighters who saved so many lives there are now suffering from rare terminal cancers. Some of them are only in their 40s.

Yet, as recently as March 2021, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council ruled against recognising cancer as a prescribed disease for firefighters, citing "insufficient evidence". Well, we now have irrefutable evidence, now we have this new data, so not to right this wrong would not only be an abdication of duty; it would be a negation of the truth and it would be justice denied.

The action that we need from the SNP-Green Government is this. First, we need resources for our Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for preventative screening and monitoring of firefighters, irrespective of their age. Secondly, we need the routine monitoring of firefighters who are exposed to toxic fire effluents after attending incidents. Thirdly, we need properly resourced and active joint health and safety committees, but we also need facility time for training on the Fire Brigades Union DECON programme as part of that preventative health approach.

Fourthly, now that we have the devolution of the industrial injuries disablement benefit—IIDB—we should have our own active industrial injuries advisory council for Scotland. That is precisely what my old friend and comrade Alex Bennett—a miner, trade unionist and tireless fighter for his class, not least at IIDB appeals tribunals, who sadly passed away last week—long campaigned for. That is how we should honour his memory. It is also precisely what Mark Griffin is calling for in his proposed members' bill.

This FBU campaign is about saving the lives of those who save the lives of others. We keep our faith in them. It is now our turn to repay their faith in us. Justice for our firefighters. Victory to the FBU.

13:37

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Maggie Chapman for bringing the debate to the chamber. I also welcome everyone who has spoken in the debate and our guests in the public gallery.

Many of us will have friends, family members or colleagues who have been diagnosed with cancer, and we will have witnessed the intolerable toll that that takes on them and their families.

For those who dedicate their lives to protect us from the risk that fire presents to life and property, the likelihood of suffering from cancer is, as we have heard, four times higher than it is for other people. That is totally unacceptable. Despite that knowledge, firefighters still bravely face the flames

and take on a job that few of us have experience of. I cannot imagine what that feels like and how brave someone must be as they continue to do the job that they love.

As with so many things relating to cancer and other associated health outcomes, we do not fully understand the details of why that level of increased exposure is so prevalent in this line of work. However, through the FBU's brilliant report and accompanying campaign, we now know so much more. Even better, we have detailed information about the steps that we must take to protect those workers. That truly groundbreaking research lays the foundation for an improvement in the fire service, the likes of which we have not seen for many years. It is important that we take the report seriously.

The FBU's DECON campaign is a welcome example of how first-class research can be utilised to increase awareness, to decrease harm and to achieve progress in the workplace. I believe that we should be using that model across workplaces, industries and services. I whole-heartedly applaud the FBU and the university team for their achievement and for taking forward that work.

The report not only provides evidence of the heightened risk for firefighters as a result of what they face but provides practical steps that we can get behind, which other speakers have mentioned. We can successfully minimise firefighters' exposure.

For the sake of time, I will comment in particular on the fact that, although some of the steps that can be taken are actually very simple, as we have heard, due to the decrease in the resources that go into firefighters' workplaces, we cannot carry out some of those simple steps at this time, which is quite shocking. I think that everyone in the chamber will agree that that must change. The research is groundbreaking, and we must take those simple steps immediately.

By taking steps such as ensuring that firefighters wear respiratory equipment at all times, prevent cross-contamination of personal protective equipment, change clothes and shower within an hour, and through having regular health screening for firefighters—and, as another member mentioned, retired firefighters—we can hugely change the outcomes, and it is essential that we do so.

I will conclude by remarking on the importance of the study for firefighters and for the way in which we look at workplaces. It is informative, and I really enjoyed reading it and thinking about how it could change the outcomes for many of our workers across industry and services and improve outcomes for those valuable professions.

I thank everyone who spoke in the debate, and I thank Maggie Chapman for bringing this crucial issue to the chamber.

13:41

The Minister for Community Safety (Elena Whitham): I, too, thank Maggie Chapman for raising this important issue and for bringing it to the attention of the wider Parliament today.

I acknowledge the significant work of the Fire Brigades Union in commissioning this important research with the University of Central Lancashire and producing the report that is being discussed today, which I have read closely. I welcome representatives from the Fire Brigades Union and Professor Anna Stec to the gallery today.

The safety, health and wellbeing of all SFRS staff, who work so hard to protect communities in some of the most challenging environments, are of the utmost importance and are a key priority to me. Although the FBU's DECON campaign, the research and any of its subsequent findings are matters for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, as the employer of firefighters in Scotland, it is an issue that I, as the minister with portfolio responsibility, intend to pursue rigorously, given its vital significance.

Through regular meetings with the SFRS board chair and chief officer, I am fully aware of the research. I know that the SFRS has engaged with the work for a number of years and that it met Professor Anna Stec in November 2022 to hear directly about the important research that she was doing and to offer the SFRS continued co-operation on that work.

The SFRS established its management of contaminants working group in 2018, to look, as we have heard, at potential risks and how to support firefighter safety. The group includes representation from the FBU, has links to external specialists and is supported at the highest levels of SFRS staffing. The purpose of the working group is to look at technical, procedural and cultural solutions to mitigate the risks of personnel and any others who might be affected by the actions of SFRS personnel being exposed to contaminants.

Katy Clark: I am very aware that the minister is quite new to her role and that she has been presented with a massive challenge, but does she accept that the research that is coming out makes it clear that the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has significant legal liabilities and that there will be a need for significant capital expenditure, which puts it into a priority category for attention? Is that something that the minister will try to address?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I will give you the time back.

Elena Whitham: I assure Katy Clark that this is something that I intend to pursue rigorously for the reasons that she outlined.

Not that long ago, a soot-stained tunic was inextricably linked to the courage and the dedication of our firefighters. Now, we absolutely know that that soot, along with the aerosol vapours, signifies harmful contaminants. The SFRS has already made significant practical changes in procedures, equipment and facilities to reduce firefighter contact with equipment that could contain contaminants that are harmful to health. That important work will continue.

Many years ago—probably about 15 years ago—I was on call in a communal refuge in Ayrshire when we had a fire. I will forever be indebted to the firefighters who came out that day and to their dedication in ensuring that all the women and children were safe. For two years after that, I noticed the soot working its way out of every single nook and cranny in the refuge, so I know that soot is a significant contaminant.

We know about some of the practical changes that have been introduced, including working practices to ensure that firefighting equipment is properly cleaned and stored, in order to reduce contamination. Operational personnel, who might have been exposed to contaminants, are encouraged to shower as quickly as possible on their return to station grounds.

I know that, in some remote and rural areas, we have limited welfare facilities, and procedures have been developed to ensure that firefighters in those areas have appropriate decontamination solutions. That is not ideal, and I am very clear on my intention to engage directly on that urgent matter. A number of steps have also been taken to mitigate risk, including supplying all SFRS appliances and training centres with specialist decontamination wipes and, as Joe FitzPatrick mentioned, the trial of station zoning systems to limit potential spread.

Jamie Greene: I am listening with interest and I take at face value what the minister is saying about the urgency of the matter, but I have not heard any of the practical solutions that we need to hear. It is all very well offering decontamination wipes to people, but they need showers and facilities. If those do not exist, where will they come from?

Elena Whitham: As Jamie Greene pointed out, it is very difficult to answer those questions when I have not yet directly engaged with the FBU on that matter, although I will do so in a few weeks' time. That will be an extra meeting because of the significant importance of the matter. I will come

back on those issues, because I recognise their importance.

Opportunities are now being explored as to how the SFRS can work with Professor Stec on the potential positive impacts of policies, training, awareness and preventative measures, as the contaminants group continues to explore steps to minimise risk and improve firefighter safety as a result of the newly published report.

As part of the wider commitment to the welfare of SFRS staff, the service has developed a dedicated cancer awareness and prevention area in its internal i-hub. That is important, given that the increased rate of some types of cancers in some age groups is significantly higher than just 1.5 per cent or 5 per cent. The SFRS has also implemented enhanced cancer-focused screening questions and discussions—about, for example, skin checks and testicular and breast self-checks—during routine medical assessments, and it has introduced a data collection process to record, monitor and report on cancer diagnosis, which includes details of the type of cancer, age, gender, role, duty, system, work and home location. Given the recent research that highlighted a potential increase in the rate of heart attacks and strokes, I am keen to explore that further and will engage with the FBU on its asks surrounding annual health monitoring. I think that that is really important.

In February 2022, the service also signed the Dying to Work charter in order to show continued commitment to the welfare of its staff by protecting the rights at work of those people who face a serious or terminal illness. It is important that they can choose the path that is right for them and their families, without the additional worry of financial uncertainty.

We will continue to carefully consider any specific proposals from the FBU on the potential for any new legislation surrounding compensation and protection. Certain aspects of the health and safety legislation are reserved, so specific proposals would be required, so that they can be assessed against legislative competence. Should we get to that position, I am clear that I will work with the United Kingdom Government on that. My officials will also continue to investigate the current status of occupation recording, and we will look at options and procedures to see whether the proposed changes are feasible.

I know that capital resources are very tight, specifically this year, and we have ensured that the current level will be protected, but I will continue to discuss capital requirements with the SFRS, including looking at a degree of estate rationalisation to ensure that fire stations are located where they are most needed, in order to cover risks in our communities and to allow

additional investment in remaining fire stations, while keeping that research at the forefront of my mind.

Katy Clark: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that the minister is just about to conclude.

Elena Whitham: In closing, I again thank Maggie Chapman for the opportunity to discuss the issue and I thank members for their considered contributions from across the chamber.

For my retired firefighter uncle—who, because of his very sunny disposition, was forever known to his watch mates as Dark Cloud—and for all current and future firefighters, members can rest assured that I am keenly focused on the issue, and I look forward to working with the FBU on that at our meeting on 1 February.

13:49

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Net Zero, Energy and Transport

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The next item of business is portfolio questions on net zero, energy and transport.

Any member who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. Given the level of interest in asking supplementaries today, I make a plea for questions to be as brief as possible, with answers to match.

Question 1 was not lodged.

Glenprosen Estate

2. Graeme Dey (Angus South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what plans Forestry and Land Scotland has for the Glenprosen estate. (S6O-01789)

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): The Glenprosen estate will be managed by Forestry and Land Scotland in accordance with a variety of Scottish Government policy aims to benefit people, nature, the climate and the local economy. By collaborating with the community and neighbouring public and private landowners and managers, FLS and the wider Scottish Government are keen to lead a partnership approach to land management and habitat restoration on a landscape scale across the Angus glens and in the Cairngorms national park.

Graeme Dey: I thank the minister for that answer. More important, I thank Forestry and Land Scotland for its engagement with me, as the local MSP, on the purchase of the estate and the implications for employees, two of whom secured housing tenancies as a result of those discussions, which also helped to lead to a part-time employment opportunity for an estate staff member. It is only by extending that type of engagement to the wider community that we will, I hope, avoid ill-informed commentary of the type that surrounded the sale process.

I ask the minister to assure me that FLS will engage fully with the local community on its plans for the estate and with neighbouring land holdings in relation to deer management.

Màiri McAllan: I am glad to assure Mr Dey that FLS will actively engage with all stakeholders, including, in particular, as I said, the local

community and neighbouring landowners. I am pleased to hear that it has already been engaging with him as the constituency MSP. All of that will form part of the land management plan that FLS will develop over the coming year to ensure that the benefits of the acquisition can be afforded to everyone.

As well as the arrangements for employment of those who worked on the former sporting estate and an opportunity for landscape-scale restoration, the acquisition presents opportunities for community engagement, which was limited under the former use, and we can expect employment opportunities from woodland creation, among other pursuits.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Liam Kerr to be brief.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The purchase of the Glenprosen estate is one of the largest land deals involving settled land for years. However, despite the warm words that we have just heard about future consultation, the £18 million purchase happened entirely off market and behind closed doors with no meetings or consultations with any of the local community.

Given the recent public and media attention about so-called green lairds, does the minister consider that the purchase process was appropriate as regards how deals of public interest are conducted? Can we expect similar secrecy in future public land purchases?

Màiri McAllan: FLS operates in a competitive commercial land market, where its job is to work to optimise benefits for the people of Scotland. It was one of a small number of potentially interested parties that were approached by the agents to bid. Given the enormous strategic opportunity that the former sporting estate presented for Scottish Government objectives, FLS opted to offer.

I have already rehearsed some of the multiple benefits that will come from the purchase. Landscape-scale woodland creation is an opportunity, as are peatland restoration and community involvement.

As Liam Kerr has taken the opportunity to state on the record what the actual sale price was, I hope that he and his colleagues will consider some of the more spurious figures that they have used in the chamber before, which I was unable to correct owing to confidentiality. I will leave it to them to consider their responsibilities for correcting the record.

Network Support Grant Plus

3. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it has carried out an assessment of the potential

impact of its decision to end the network support grant plus for bus operators. (S6O-01790)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): It is clear that the current cost of living crisis is making it challenging to deliver bus services in many local communities. That is why the temporary network support grant plus has been extended until 31 March 2023, to help people to afford to travel this winter.

I continue to collaborate with bus operators, through the bus task force, to address the immediate challenges, to help them move to a more sustainable footing and to ensure that the sector is supported by wider policies to improve bus services across Scotland.

Alexander Stewart: After the Scottish National Party-Green Government decided to cut the network support grant plus on 9 October, it did a quick U-turn and reintroduced the scheme in December 2022. However, the scheme has been brought back only until March, and the funding for bus operators has been reduced by 22 per cent. Will the minister confirm the reasons for ending the scheme again and why the funding that is offered has been significantly reduced?

Jenny Gilruth: I am not sure whether Alexander Stewart is aware that the NSG plus grant was always a temporary fund. It was always meant to come to an end at the end of the pandemic. I have made two decisions to extend that funding further: one in June and one, as he alluded, in October. The funding that is coming to an end in March brings us into line with the end of the funding in England and Wales; there is now parity across the United Kingdom on that. That emergency funding was announced during the pandemic to help our bus operators to survive and sustain themselves further as we continued to support that recovery from the pandemic.

It is important to put on record the additional funding that we provide to bus operators. We gave around £210 million during the pandemic, which has ensured that our bus operators are well positioned and at the forefront of the green recovery. We also need to tackle congestion and improve bus journey times. We have awarded £25 million of initial funding for that to 11 bus partnerships covering 28 local authorities across Scotland.

Looking ahead, we will consider any further support that we might be able to provide to the sector. However, these are very challenging times for the Government, as Alexander Stewart will recognise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask Mark Ruskell to be brief.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Despite the huge investment in bus from the Scottish Government, from Covid recovery funding to the extension of concessionary travel, many of our constituents still face poor services. I understand that receipt of the network support grant plus is conditional on operators meeting particular terms and conditions, from freezing fares to protecting service levels. Will the minister provide further information on whether any current recipients of the fund have been penalised for not meeting its conditions?

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

Jenny Gilruth: I do not have the detail of what Mark Ruskell has asked for, but I confirm that a freeze on fares is a condition of participation in the NSG plus extension. I will be happy to write to him with the detail that he seeks.

Ferry Contracts

4. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what economic analysis it considered prior to awarding ferry contracts reportedly worth £115 million to a shipyard in Turkey. (S6O-01791)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): The long-term economic benefits of that investment will be derived from the improvements to the ferry services for Tarbert on Harris and Lochmaddy on North Uist. Increases in vehicle capacity, of more than 40 per cent in summer and more than 10 per cent in winter, will support sustainable growth on our islands. The vessels will also provide significant benefits in reliability and resilience across the wider west coast routes.

In line with the relevant procurement legislation, the contract was awarded following an open tendering process by Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd as the procuring authority. The bid that was received from the yard represented best value for money in quality and price.

Paul Sweeney: The glaring omission in that answer was about the impact on the Scottish shipbuilding industry.

When I asked a written question about what weighting is applied to foreign shipbuilders as against domestic shipbuilders, the Scottish Government told me that it scores foreign and domestic shipbuilders in the same way on social value and other criteria. Therefore, an apprenticeship that is created in Turkey weighs the same as an apprenticeship that is created in Greenock. That is absurd, given that analysis shows that every pound that is spent on domestic shipbuilding returns a 35 per cent benefit to the local economy and supply chains in Scotland.

Does the minister not realise how foolish that approach is and that continuing with it will result in the terminal decline of shipbuilding in Scotland, given that most foreign shipbuilders are heavily subsidised by their Governments and are therefore able to submit bids that domestic shipbuilders are simply unable to compete with?

Jenny Gilruth: Paul Sweeney touched on a number of points in his question, and I recognise that he has also asked several written parliamentary questions, which, I believe, I have responded to.

When it comes to the vessels themselves, the relevant procurement legislation has been adhered to. To my mind, the most important challenge at the current time is in bringing that additional capacity to the Western Isles, in particular, and to CalMac Ferries. We have to provide additional capacity.

I am proud that, in the past year alone, we have been able to confirm that there will be two new additional vessels for Islay. We have the additional vessel on the Oban to Craignure route—MV Loch Frisa. At the end of last year, I confirmed the additional vessels to which the member has alluded. The bid that was received from that yard represented the best value for money in quality and price.

The two vessels that are in construction at the yard, which I announced earlier last year, are progressing well and remain on time and within budget. CMAL's recent confirmation of signing the contract for the additional two vessels, at the same design specification and with the same yard, follows the recent procurement exercise to which the member has alluded—but that also includes a full builder's refund guarantee.

The most important point in all of this is that we deliver that extra capacity to CalMac to allow it to provide a more sustainable service to the Western Isles, in particular.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are two supplementary questions, but they will need to be brief, as will the answers.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I remind Labour members that it was the SNP that took action to save Ferguson's shipyard from closure.

As the minister has just highlighted, the new ferries will increase capacity and resilience for islanders. The investment is therefore welcome news for islanders and businesses. Does the minister share my view that, instead of seeking to score political points, we should all focus on the real differences that the vessels will make to the lives of the people who rely on them?

Jenny Gilruth: I absolutely do. Ms Minto is right to highlight our intention in respect of the vessels

and the benefits that they will bring to our island communities and the businesses that they will serve. The challenges have been well rehearsed in the chamber in recent months, so we should all welcome this investment from the Scottish Government.

Consider the progress made in the past 12 months: we now have four additional major vessels on order or under construction, in addition to the two major vessels under construction at Port Glasgow. The Scottish Government remains absolutely committed to improving our lifeline ferry fleet and better meeting the needs of our island communities.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): If there is one thing of which the minister should not be proud—as she put it—it is the construction of ferries for the Western Isles. She should be ashamed of what has happened rather than proud of it.

Were there any clauses in the contract with Cemre Shipyard stipulating that Scottish businesses should form part of the supply chain?

Jenny Gilruth: I answered the question in relation to procurement, which is the wider point of Mr Rennie's question, in my response to Mr Sweeney's question.

In relation to Ferguson's more generally, we know that the yard is actively pursuing opportunities for future vessel contracts. As a shareholder and as a Government, we will do all that we can to help the yard to secure those opportunities, but decisions on what vessel contracts to bid for are a matter for the yard management and the board itself.

Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 (Rail in South Scotland)

5. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how the strategic transport projects review 2 will improve rail infrastructure, journey times and rail connectivity across the South Scotland region. (S6O-01792)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): A number of the STPR2 recommendations make a direct contribution to improving rail in South Scotland. They focus on infrastructure to provide access for all at railway stations, decarbonising the network, high-speed cross-border rail enhancements, consideration of the upgrade or relocation of Stranraer rail station, and rail freight terminals and facilities. All of those will contribute to meeting the aims of protecting the climate and improving lives through better transport connectivity.

Emma Harper: STPR2 makes a commitment to improve journey times, specifically on the

Glasgow-Carlisle line. Can the minister comment further on how that commitment will be taken forward and on timescales for the changes being made? Improving that service from the current two-hour journey from Dumfries to Glasgow will allow more people to rely on public transport across the region and will attract people to Dumfries and Galloway, because the stations in the region could be key commuter lines to Glasgow.

Jenny Gilruth: I very much agree with the sentiment in Emma Harper's question. The long-term plans for our rail network in Scotland, including in South Scotland, are set out in STPR2, which was published in December last year.

The recommendations for future rail investment focus on decarbonisation of the remainder of the network and on reducing emissions from road transport by getting more freight and passengers on to rail. STPR2 will help to deliver the vision, priorities and outcomes that are set out in the national transport strategy. It will also provide improved rail infrastructure, rail journey times—which the member alluded to—and rail connectivity across South Scotland.

The delivery plan, which will give the further detail that Ms Harper has sought today, will be published later this year. I believe that the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport will be making a statement to Parliament next week on that very matter.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): After years of waiting and hundreds of thousands of pounds of public funds being spent, the long-awaited STPR2 report leaves us none the wiser about what investment the Scottish Government will commit to transport infrastructure in South Scotland. For the sake of all those who live in the south-west, when can we expect any details on actual projects for an area of Scotland that is already ignored by the Scottish Government, and when can we expect the transport infrastructure to be brought up to an acceptable standard?

Jenny Gilruth: As I mentioned in my response to Ms Harper, the delivery plan will be set out in the coming months, and the cabinet secretary will make a statement to Parliament next week.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): During budget consideration, the Deputy First Minister said that a

“six-month pilot ... will remove peak-time rail fares”.—
[*Official Report*, 15 December 2022; c 69.]

It turns out that that will affect only some peak rail fares. Can the minister tell us from which rail routes in South Scotland peak fares will be removed, because it is clear that it will not be all of them?

Jenny Gilruth: My understanding is that that will apply to all routes. Details will be forthcoming. I await further advice from my officials in Transport Scotland on how the scheme will operate.

Public Transport Use (East Kilbride)

6. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to help increase public transport use in East Kilbride. (S6O-01793)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): The Scottish Government is investing more than £100 million in the East Kilbride rail project, which is enabling more diesel trains to be replaced across Scotland and encouraging greater modal shift. The electrification of the line from Glasgow to Barrhead is under way, alongside the relocation of Hairmyres station, whereby the plan is to create a new fully accessible transport interchange, which will give the local community the option to walk, wheel or travel by bus to the station.

In addition, we are supporting bus use through the under-22s free bus travel scheme, which means that around half of Scotland's population can now travel by bus for free.

Collette Stevenson: Can the minister provide an update on the East Kilbride rail enhancements and set out the benefits that the Clyde metro will bring to the town? Will she outline the local engagement that is taking place on those matters?

Jenny Gilruth: For East Kilbride, Network Rail advance works have been undertaken at a number of locations, including the successful removal last weekend of a redundant footbridge at the site of the proposed new Hairmyres station.

We continue to make good progress with the East Kilbride business case, including a well-received event for members that was held in the Parliament late last year. As the project develops and the full programme of works is finalised, Network Rail will intensify its activities and will continue to work closely with communities, MSPs and other stakeholders along the line of the route in order to keep them informed.

Work on the Clyde metro has been undertaken through the 2022 scoping programme-level business case. That is being undertaken collaboratively, led by Transport Scotland and its partner, which are Glasgow City Council and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport. A delivery plan will be prepared following completion of the programme-level business case, and engagement will be key to that business case as it progresses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a couple of brief supplementaries.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): The people of East Kilbride, along with me and, I

am sure, Collette Stevenson, want to know when work is actually going to start on the East Kilbride line and when it will be complete.

Jenny Gilruth: In my response to Ms Stevenson, I alluded to the on-going engagement with Network Rail. It is important that Mr Simpson too, as a local MSP, continues with that engagement. I think that he met Network Rail very recently about the project.

With regard to the timescales for the decarbonisation work, I am happy to write to the member with an update on those if they have changed in any way, shape or form in the past few months, although to my knowledge they have not.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): At a previous portfolio question time, the minister gave a commitment to ask Transport Scotland officials to compile data on the number of bus service cancellations and the reasons for those cancellations. Can the minister update us on that matter, and tell us whether and when the Government expects to know the full extent of bus service cancellations in Scotland?

Jenny Gilruth: I did commit to ask my officials in Transport Scotland to provide that data. I have not yet received it, but I will be happy to publish it as and when I receive it in order to give a national picture of cancellations, because I very much recognise the on-going challenges that we face in that respect, to which Neil Bibby alluded.

Fuel Poverty (North Ayrshire)

7. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address fuel poverty in North Ayrshire. (S6O-01794)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): We are tackling fuel poverty throughout Scotland, with £119 million allocated this year to provide heat energy efficiency and fuel-poverty measures to fuel-poor households. That includes funding for our area-based scheme, which is delivered in partnership with local authorities. Since 2013, North Ayrshire Council has received more than £13.2 million in ABS funding, which has enabled energy-efficiency upgrades to be made to more than 2,700 homes.

This year, the council has been awarded £1.8 million to target homes in five fuel-poor areas for installation of external wall insulation and to help to support 100 fuel-poor homes to receive solar photovoltaic systems

Ruth Maguire: I have constituents in housing association properties that require work to make them more energy efficient. The landlord tells me that it has no funds for capital improvements. My

constituents' wages are stagnant and all their bills are going up year on year, including rent, which has seen a rise of 7 per cent this year.

What guidance can the cabinet secretary give on what funding is available to housing associations, whether it is in grants or loans, for such work? Further, what advice can the Scottish Government give to support my constituents in housing association homes?

Michael Matheson: The schemes that apply to housing associations are the area-based schemes to which I just referred. Housing associations that are seeking to undertake energy efficiency programmes should be looking to engage with the warmer homes Scotland scheme on the range of funding that is available to them to support installation of energy efficiency measures in properties.

A9 Dualling

8. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when the final design for the dualling of the A9 Perth to Inverness road between the Pass of Birnam and the Tay crossing will be published. (S6O-01795)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): The design work for that challenging section of the A9 is continuing, following a community co-creative process. That process has helped us to form an extremely positive working relationship with the local community and to broaden the vision for dualling that section of the A9. An announcement on the preferred route option is expected to be made in the coming months, after which the preferred option will be further refined, developed and assessed before commencement of the statutory process.

Murdo Fraser: The community in Dunkeld and Birnam, and indeed other users of the A9, have been waiting eight years to see a finalised design for the section. I know that there has been extensive engagement with the local community, but that ceased many months ago and we still have not seen a finalised plan, which we were expecting by the end of last year.

Can the minister be more specific about when exactly a finalised design will be published? Perhaps more important, when can we expect the works to be completed for the dual carriageway on that section?

Michael Matheson: Murdo Fraser will recognise that, having gone through a co-creative process with the local community and having identified their preferred route option, we have to compare that option against other potential route options. There are three other options to consider alongside the one that is supported by the local

community. That assessment work is on-going. Once it has been completed by officials, we should be in a position to set out our preferred route option. As I mentioned in my original response, we will then communicate that. I hope to be able to do that in the coming months.

The final aspect is in relation to the procurement process. Before the work can be undertaken, we have to go through the orders process. Obviously, that is a statutory process. Once it has been completed, we will look at the procurement process for that particular part of the A9.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Even now, the Transport Scotland website says that the dualling of the A9 between Perth and Inverness will be completed by 2025. If that happens, I will go out and purchase a hat in order to be able to eat it.

Seriously, do we not owe an apology to the people of the Highlands and of Scotland because we will not achieve that target? Shall we not come clean? Above all, when will we bring forward a fresh timetable and the full details of how we will implement one of the longest-standing pledges we have ever made?

Michael Matheson: I recognise Mr Ewing's long-standing interest in the issue. I want to reassure him of the Government's long-standing and on-going commitment to dualling the A9.

A number of factors are being taken into account at the present moment in relation to the procurement process for the next section that we are looking to dual, and that process has been impacted by Covid. It has also been quite significantly impacted by the very significant levels of construction-cost inflation that are being experienced. Because of some of the economic challenges that we now have, we are also having to look at the procurement approach that we take in relation to this particular project.

We are looking at taking forward further procurement in the months ahead. I can also reassure Mr Ewing that we are looking at the forward timetable for the programme in the years ahead.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions. We will briefly pause to allow the members on the front benches to change before we move to the next item of business.

Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by Lorna Slater on Scotland's biodiversity strategy. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement and, therefore, there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:24

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): We—Scotland, the United Kingdom, Europe, the world—are in the midst of a biodiversity crisis. The facts are indisputable: nature is declining—fast. It is estimated that 1 million species across the world are at threat of extinction—mass extinctions, driven by our exploitation of the natural world.

Here, in Scotland, the picture is no different. Nearly half of our species have decreased in abundance and 11 per cent are under threat of extinction, including some special species such as the northern damselfly and the large heath butterfly. There is a real risk of some iconic species being lost from Scotland: chough are now breeding only on Islay and Colonsay, and the great skua, with its globally significant population in Scotland, has been ravaged by avian flu.

Just today, we have had publication of the "Marine and Terrestrial Species Indicators" report, which shows little sign of species recovery. Species on land remain at broadly similar levels to those in the 1990s—well below the level of historical populations. The indicators also show that the numbers of Scotland's internationally important seabirds continue to decline. Even more worryingly, since the surveys used to assess seabird numbers took place, there has been a significant outbreak of avian flu, and it is expected that that will further impact Scotland's seabirds.

Why does that matter? First, it just does. Nature has an intrinsic value. The plants and animals that we share this world with enrich our lives with their diversity, beauty and character. However, that complex diversity and abundance of life is also central to our survival as a species. Our economy, jobs, health and wellbeing depend on it. It is essential to our food production and security and to our fishing industry, it protects our soils, it provides us with clean air and water, and it helps to mitigate flooding, which has been brought into sharp focus over recent weeks.

Crucially, our biodiversity is essential in tackling the climate crisis. Across the world, ocean and land ecosystems remove about 50 per cent of the carbon emissions that are produced by us each year. Nature-based solutions—restoring our

peatlands and native forests, for example—are key to our success in tackling the climate crisis. We need a net zero, nature-positive future.

The year 2022 was a key moment for biodiversity. After many delays, the 15th meeting of the conference of the parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity—COP15—was held in Montreal in December. Flagged as biodiversity's "Paris moment", it was a once-in-a-decade opportunity to agree a new set of global goals and targets to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. I led a small Scottish delegation and participated in a packed programme of events and bilateral meetings, including a speech to the conference's high-level segment on behalf of sub-national bodies around the world. Throughout our engagements, Scotland was recognised for its excellent leadership of the Edinburgh process.

Since 2019, when the process was kicked off at the request of the Convention on Biological Diversity's secretariat, the Scottish Government has been leading a consultation with sub-national bodies—city, regional and country governments—on their role in addressing the biodiversity crisis. The process culminated in the Edinburgh declaration, which was signed by more than 300 sub-national bodies. It called for a high-ambition outcome from Montreal and recognition of the critical role that sub-national bodies play in addressing the biodiversity crisis, as well as the allocation of the necessary powers and resources to sub-national levels of governance.

Scotland forged new partnerships with declaration members. For example, it did so with California and Quebec on protecting 30 per cent of land for nature by 2030; with Paris, Madrid and Nagoya on urban biodiversity; with Parks Canada on the establishment of new national parks; with the European Parliament delegation and European regions—Catalonia and Lombardy—on 30 by 30 and peatland restoration; and with São Paulo on the establishment of a working group under the Edinburgh process on financing biodiversity recovery in cities.

The Convention on Biological Diversity's co-chair personally thanked me for Scotland's leadership of the Edinburgh process. They said:

"The Edinburgh Process has driven action for nature in cities, regions and other sub national governments around the world while raising awareness of the vital role these governments play in protecting biodiversity. This is a message that has been heard loud and clear by State Parties at COP15 in Montreal, supporting a high ambition outcome from the talks. I want to thank the Scottish Government for their leadership on international biodiversity issues, overseeing the Edinburgh process and delivering the Edinburgh declaration."

We are now supporting and exploring the next steps, with a focus on working with and supporting

sub-national Governments to deliver the global framework.

After some tense negotiations, I was delighted that the Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework was agreed at COP15. The framework builds on a vision of the world living in harmony with nature in which,

“By 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services”.

The framework includes 23 global targets for 2030, including some truly ground-breaking actions, such as protecting 30 per cent of our land and sea by 2030; eliminating, minimising, reducing or mitigating the impacts of invasive species, preventing their establishment and eradicating or controlling them; sustainable management of areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry through biodiversity-friendly practices; eliminating subsidies that are harmful for biodiversity in a proportionate, just, fair, effective and equitable way; and bringing the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance close to zero through spatial planning and management.

Our challenge now—everyone’s challenge the world over—is to deliver on that agreement.

On 13 December, I published the draft Scottish biodiversity strategy, which builds on the significant progress that we have begun to make in recent years. We are scaling up our peatland restoration rates, with the aim of restoring 250,000 hectares of degraded peat by 2030. We have created more than 10,000 hectares of new woodland in the past year, with 42 per cent of that consisting of native species. Our new vision for agriculture aims to make Scotland a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture, with nature and climate at its heart. We have committed to highly protect 10 per cent of our marine areas. Our ground-breaking nature restoration fund is providing multiyear funding to drive restoration at scale. Recently approved grants include funding to Cairngorms Connect to restore natural rivers and flood plains at Insh marshes, and to the Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust to restore Argyll’s Atlantic rainforest.

However, the strategy is clear that we need to go further and faster. It sets out our high-level ambition to halt decline by 2030 and to reverse biodiversity loss by 2045. That high-level vision is underpinned by a detailed set of outcomes that span our land, seas, rivers, lochs, wetlands and coasts. Those outcomes spell out what success in tackling the biodiversity crisis will look like.

The strategy details 26 of the most urgent priority actions that we need to take to achieve a nature-positive future. Those outcomes and actions are framed around five key aims: to

accelerate restoration and regeneration; to expand and connect our protected areas and improve their condition; to support nature-friendly farming, fishing and forestry, which are some of our key industries; to recover and protect vulnerable and important species; and to generate the investment that is needed to support nature recovery.

The strategy remains in draft form to allow us to incorporate the outcomes from COP15 and to ensure that we are properly aligned with our international obligations. The strategy is a starting point. It gives us our guiding vision and a pathway to a nature-positive future, and it will be underpinned by a dynamic delivery plan that sets out how we will achieve that vision.

The year 2023 will be a critical one. We are working with stakeholders to develop the delivery plan, and we will consult on and publish our plan later this year. We will lay the groundwork for the introduction of statutory targets and the natural environment bill.

We will set out how we will protect 30 per cent of our land and seas for nature by 2030—the cornerstone of the global biodiversity framework. We will be creating highly protected marine areas in at least 10 per cent of our seas. We are currently consulting on the policy framework for highly protected marine areas. Once the consultation is completed, the selection process to identify the most appropriate areas, so that 10 per cent of our seas are highly protected by 2026, will begin. We will consult on the draft fisheries management measures that are required for existing marine protected areas, if those are not already in place, as well as measures for key coastal biodiversity locations outside those sites.

We will be forging ahead with land reform and the reform of agricultural subsidies to ensure that they deliver positive effects for biodiversity. We will continue to deliver real change on the ground through our world-leading nature restoration fund, with a new round of funding to be announced in spring 2023. Critically, by the end of 2023, Scotland will publish a new climate change plan that will set out how we will get back on track to deliver net zero. As part of that, we are looking at what more we can do through investment in nature-based solutions. Net zero and nature positive will increasingly go hand in hand.

I will conclude by making two points. First, we need to continue to engage with and mobilise stakeholders and communities on their roles in delivering a net zero, nature-positive future. It is not just for the Government to deliver our biodiversity strategy; a whole-society approach is needed if we are going to be successful. We need to understand what a just transition looks like for biodiversity in the same way as we do for climate, and we need to lock in the new opportunities

relating to private investment and the generation of new green jobs and community opportunities.

My second point is on our level of ambition. Scotland can play a leading role in delivering the ambitious new global biodiversity framework, but none of us should underestimate the scale of the task ahead. For those who are not swayed by arguments about the intrinsic importance of nature and about the undeniably positive effects that it has on our health and wellbeing, they might be persuaded when they consider that more than half of the world's gross domestic product is thought to be dependent on nature in some way. If we do not make the transformational changes that are needed in relation to how we use our precious natural resources, the impact on our people and planet will be irreversible and devastating.

I look forward to working with members from across the Parliament, to hearing their views and contributions to this important debate and, in due course, to engaging with the committees on these important issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, minister. I note that the statement lasted considerably longer than the 10 minutes allocated, which will eat into the time that we have across business this afternoon. Nevertheless, I still intend to allow 20 minutes for the minister to take questions on the issues raised in the statement, after which we will need to move on to the next item of business.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank the minister for the early sight of her statement.

I welcome many of the actions and policies adopted into the strategy from the consultation. However, there are areas where the strategy falls short, and Scotland simply cannot fail here. As we all know by now, Scotland is ranked 212th in the world for biodiversity intactness, which is 48 places from the bottom.

There has been a 24 per cent decline in average abundance of 352 terrestrial and freshwater species since 1994, which in itself was not a high point. There has been a 14 per cent decline in range for 2,970 terrestrial and freshwater species since 1970. Peatlands are in such poor condition that they are emitting carbon instead of storing it and are responsible for 20 per cent of Scotland's total emissions.

Only around 64 per cent of Scotland's protected woodlands are in a favourable or recovering condition and 11 out of the 15 components in the UK marine strategy had not achieved good environmental status by 2020, with recognition that more action is required. "Scotland's Marine Assessment 2020" highlighted declines in biogenic habitats and in species such as Atlantic salmon, and there was a 38 per cent decline in the Scottish

breeding seabird indicator between 1986 and 2016.

Only 30,000 hectares of Scotland's unique Atlantic rainforest remain—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will need a question, Mr Whittle.

Brian Whittle: —and it is highly fragmented.

Strengthening accountability for delivery is highlighted as a key lesson learned for the new strategy. That is all well and good, but, to ensure that the Scottish Government—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I need a question, Mr Whittle.

Brian Whittle: I am coming to the question, Presiding Officer.

What does the minister plan to do to ensure that we have collected vital baseline data that has been continually missed out and that has been identified as a knowledge gap by multiple environmental organisations—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, I will have to ask you to respond.

Mr Whittle, there is an allocation of time for members, and I need to spread it evenly to allow everyone the opportunity to ask questions.

Lorna Slater: I share the member's concerns. The data that he has highlighted is alarming, which is exactly why we need the biodiversity strategy and its delivery plans. As the member has rightly said, whenever we can, we need to gather the correct evidence on the current state of nature. Also, as we go forward with our rolling delivery plans, we need evidence that what we are doing is working—that is the point of having the five-year rolling delivery plans to underpin the biodiversity strategy. We need to ensure that what we are doing is evidenced, that we are succeeding and that we are working towards our 2045 goal.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank the minister for the advance sight of her statement.

To tackle nature loss, we need to be clear about what caused its decline in the first place. No one sets out to kill off entire species or to risk our food security but, for decades, that is exactly what has been happening. It is therefore essential that any Government strategy to address nature loss has at its heart a plan to change the flawed system that got us here. That means requiring employers to account for the environmental and social cost of doing business so that chief executive officers and shareholders are no longer able to profit from the underpayment of workers and the pollution of our water, air and earth.

Can the minister explain how her Government will expand the nature conservation workforce in our public sector across our marine, woodland, peatland and other environments?

Lorna Slater: The member highlights that, clearly, it is not only the public sector that needs to work on nature restoration; it is something that everybody has to do globally and within Governments and businesses, and that includes workers. Every member of the population needs to work together. That is a key part of the biodiversity strategy. In its opening statement, it sets out the aim of ensuring that everyone in Scotland lives in “thriving communities” and that people understand their role and will

“play their part in the stewardship of nature for future generations.”

As it is set out, the biodiversity strategy is a vision for where we want to get to in 2045. As we start on the journey from the current nature crisis towards a thriving and abundant nature in 2045, it is important that we see where we are going, and we then need to agree on the delivery plans. To get to where we want to be in 2045, all those things need to be taken into consideration.

The member is right that a just transition in tackling the biodiversity crisis is as important as a just transition in tackling the climate crisis.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Will the minister set out what the relationship will be between the biodiversity strategy and national planning framework 4, as approved by the Parliament last week, in particular for peatland restoration? What does the Scottish Government anticipate the impact of those strategies will be on land-based wind turbines that are in peatland areas, bearing in mind that peatlands cover 20 per cent of Scotland’s land?

Lorna Slater: The new biodiversity strategy and national planning framework 4 are closely aligned. Both recognise the significance of the twin crises that we face and the need to place climate and nature at the centre of our policy development and delivery. NPF4 signals a turning point for planning and tackling the climate emergency, as well as improving biodiversity—those cross-cutting themes run throughout the strategy.

The continued growth of onshore wind and the restoration of our peatlands are not mutually exclusive, and we recognise the contribution that both make to the fight against climate change. A variety of measures can be included in wind farm design to improve degraded peatland, and those measures have continually developed as the industry has matured. Peatland restoration and enhancement, developed in tandem with improving habitats for important and protected species, allows projects to deliver multiple positive

benefits for biodiversity, the natural environment and our renewable energy ambitions.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Today, I received a response to a freedom of information request that confirms that no financial analysis has been conducted on how to deliver the detailed set of outcomes that have been referred to. The minister has stated that this is

“an emergency that requires an emergency response.”

Given that no financial analysis has been done, precisely how soon can we expect to see the financial data that underlies the delivery of the programmes in the biodiversity strategy?

Lorna Slater: As we have pointed out, successful delivery of the strategy is crucial. The finance gap for nature in Scotland in the next decade has been estimated at about £20 billion. That is why we are working hard to find ways to bridge the finance gap, through leveraging responsible private finance. Investing in nature is a growth area globally, and Scotland is well placed to take a leading role by offering investors the opportunity to play a part in enhancing ecosystems while generating sustainable returns. To aid that, we are preparing an investment plan that will set out our assessment of the investment that is required to deliver a nature-positive future and the actions that are needed to mobilise public, private and philanthropic finance.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): We face twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, and subnational Governments, cities and local authorities all have a responsibility to address that. Will the minister provide more detail on the Edinburgh declaration and the role that the Scottish Government played in leading on it?

Lorna Slater: While I was in Montreal, it was inspiring to meet and hear from so many signatories to the Edinburgh declaration and participants in the Edinburgh process and to get such positive feedback on the part that the Scottish Government has played in highlighting the role of subnational Governments, cities and local authorities in addressing biodiversity loss and supporting the high-ambition outcome from the talks.

In keeping with the principles of the Edinburgh process and the Edinburgh declaration, so far, more than £11 million from the nature restoration fund has been directly allocated to Scottish local authorities. Some of the projects that have been progressed, among many others, are for addressing coastal erosion in Montrose, climate resilient woodland planting in Dundee, wetland creation in South Ayrshire and Scottish Borders and river restoration in Renfrewshire.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The Woodland Trust has called on the Scottish Government to raise the target for the proportion of native trees in future planting to at least 50 per cent from the previous target of 40 per cent, and Labour supports that. The Greens' manifesto made a commitment to 60 per cent. Will the minister clarify the Government's current position? Is the target 40, 50 or 60 per cent? Will it be included in the biodiversity strategy delivery plan?

Lorna Slater: I absolutely expect targets to be included in the biodiversity strategy delivery plan, and I am happy to write to Colin Smyth with more detail on the exact figures that he looks for.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee has heard evidence from several environmental groups about Westminster's Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill. That has highlighted that

"the issue of invasive non-native species is one of the top five drivers of biodiversity loss globally."—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 1 December 2022; c 26.]

It is therefore critical to prevent the spread of such species. However, I understand that the regulations involve a mix of reserved and devolved powers. Will the minister please explain how the Scottish Government aims to ensure that those mixed-up powers do not impact on the important work that communities, individuals and organisations are doing to eradicate invasive non-native species and improve Scotland's biodiversity?

Lorna Slater: The Scottish Government is deeply concerned by and fundamentally opposed to the UK Government's plans to potentially dismantle laws that protect nature, as outlined in the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill. Scottish Government officials continue to work with their UK Government counterparts as part of the programme to identify devolved retained European Union law across devolved and reserved competencies and therefore what powers Scottish ministers might need to use to prevent deregulation, protect devolution and uphold our high environmental standards. The powers that relate to invasive non-native species are largely devolved to Scotland, but key reserved powers relate to controlling the trade in such species and their import into Scotland.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, we will continue to work closely with the other devolved Governments and the UK Government to tackle the threat that invasive species pose. The Great Britain invasive non-native species strategy will be published shortly.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Farmers have an important job to do on biodiversity, but we still do not have a bill for the agriculture support scheme. Will the minister encourage her rural affairs colleagues to speed up delivery of that bill, so that farmers can get on with the job of helping with biodiversity?

Lorna Slater: In a parliamentary statement on 8 November last year, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands announced the proposed timeline for the transition to the new agriculture support scheme, with the introduction of new conditionality informed by the national test programme, by 2025. That will be followed by a phased launch of the future framework starting with the enhanced payment to reward farmers and crofters for taking meaningful action for climate and nature in 2026. Delivering biodiversity protection and restoration is a key aim of that process.

However, we are not waiting until 2025. In the interim period, the agri-environment climate scheme will continue to support farmers. Today, my colleague Mairi Gougeon announced that more than £14 million has been awarded through the agri-environment climate scheme to 680 rural businesses with projects that protect the environment and mitigate the impact of climate change. She also announced that a new round of AECS funding is open for applicants.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does the Scottish Government support the reintroduction of species that are native to Scotland but that were eradicated by humans? Beavers and sea eagles have already been successfully reintroduced. The Eurasian lynx, a medium-sized wildcat that has been extinct in Britain for around 500 years, was the subject of a study by Trees for Life, Lifescape and Scotland: The Big Picture, reported in "Lynx to Scotland: Assessing the social feasibility of returning Eurasian lynx to Scotland", which found that Scotland could support a viable population. Does the minister agree that lynx would help to maintain ecosystem balance and diversity by regulating deer numbers while posing no danger to people and very little to livestock, as is shown in the many European countries with lynx populations?

Lorna Slater: Reintroductions of native species have an important role to play in nature restoration here in Scottish and across the world. I am incredibly pleased with the progress that we have made with the reintroduction of beavers over the past year, and we will continue to work with NatureScot to support that important piece of work.

The Scottish Government has no current plans to reintroduce lynx into Scotland. It is, of course, for NatureScot, as the relevant licensing authority,

to evaluate any applications that it receives, case by case.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Grazing pressure from deer continues to halt Scotland's ambitions to restore native woodland and regenerate our environment. Does NatureScot's use of powers under section 10 of the Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 this week represent a shift in gear on the Scottish Government's approach to deer management? What further action is planned ahead of the natural environment bill?

Lorna Slater: The Scottish Government is absolutely clear that effective deer management is vital if we are to bring populations into balance with nature and effectively tackle the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change. We are committed to implementing the recommendations made by the deer management working group, including new legislation, which is to be brought in during this session of Parliament. In the meantime, we are making full use of the existing intervention powers wherever they are required. Last week, NatureScot used powers available to it under section 10 of the 1996 act to carry out a deer cull on an estate in Sutherland where deer are having a significant impact including on the four sites of special scientific interest. I would like to express my thanks to the staff involved in that challenging but essential work.

NatureScot is also represented on the deer management project board and is working alongside the board on priority actions for deer in Scotland outwith legislative change.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests in that I own and manage land.

Minister, you suggested that the Government had planted 10,000 hectares with trees in the past year. That happens to be 5,000 hectares—or 30 per cent—below the target. In the past six years, you were 15,000 hectares below the target, and this year the budget has been cut by 14 per cent per hectare planted. How will you get more trees planted when you do not have a good record of doing that in the past?

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

Lorna Slater: Of course, ramping up and scaling up both our tree planting and peatland restoration are key goals for the Government and big parts of our biodiversity strategy. Last year, we met Bute house commitments by establishing more than 4,000 hectares of new native woodland across Scotland. Last year, the figure was 4,360 hectares of new native woodland created. That means that around 42 per cent of all new

woodland created was native species, which are so important for biodiversity. In 2022-23, £63.5 million was allocated to supporting 15,000 hectares of tree planting.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): During COP15, in December last year, the Scottish Government announced biodiversity funding, which I welcomed—not least because I am a champion for the corncrake. Will the minister outline the projects that have been supported by the Scottish Government's nature restoration fund and the impact that the fund is having with regard to protecting Scotland's nature and biodiversity?

Lorna Slater: The nature restoration fund is Scotland's largest-ever fund for nature. Since we launched it at COP26 in Glasgow, we have invested more than £20 million, which is having a real impact across Scotland through restoring rivers and flood plains, regenerating our forests and recovering our wildlife populations.

Thirty-one applications have been offered funding in the latest round of the Scottish Government's nature restoration fund. Projects to restore rivers in the Cairngorms and protect the rainforest in Argyll are among the initiatives that will share £7.6 million. This funding round has been focused on supporting large-scale projects, including multiyear ones that run up to 2026. One hundred projects had previously successfully bid for funding from the NRF, and a full list of projects that have been granted NRF competitive funding can be found on the NatureScot website.

Local authorities across Scotland have been allocated £11.5 million from the fund since its inception. That is just part of our commitment to invest at least an additional £500 million in the nature economy over this session.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A couple of members want to ask further supplementaries. I ask that those questions and their responses be very brief.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Liam Kerr asked earlier when the financial data that underpins the strategy will be published. We never had an answer, so I ask the minister again: when?

Lorna Slater: We are currently finalising the publication of the vision and strategy. We will then consider doing the delivery plans, which will come out in the next few months.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Does the minister know that the capercaillie has been under threat for about as long as I have been an MSP? That really is quite a long time. For almost all that period, it has faced predation by a variety of predators, all of which regard caper eggs as breakfast, lunch and tea rolled into one. Is she

aware that NatureScot has recently recognised that predators, including foxes, must be controlled? Will she instruct NatureScot to carry out capercaillie protection immediately, and with enthusiasm and dispatch?

Lorna Slater: I applaud the member's general enthusiasm and, of course, his enthusiasm for supporting capercaillie. Scottish Government officials, NatureScot and Cairngorms National Park are examining the matter closely and working together on a plan to protect that precious, iconic species.

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

Carbon Neutral Islands Project

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-07558, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the carbon neutral islands project: first steps towards decarbonisation.

I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to please press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call Mairi Gougeon to speak to and move the motion for around 12 minutes.

14:58

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): I am absolutely delighted to be here today to open the debate on first steps towards decarbonisation for the island communities that form part of our carbon neutral islands project. Today, I will outline the progress that has been made on that exciting project, which has the potential to be hugely transformational for our island communities.

I thank Liam Kerr, Rhoda Grant, and Liam McArthur for their amendments. I agree with the vast majority of what is in them, and I am happy to accept the Labour and Liberal Democrat amendments. Although I agree with a lot in the Conservative amendment, it goes against the spirit of what we are trying to achieve with the carbon neutral islands project: we want communities to be the decision makers at the heart of the project and to be the ones that really drive it forward.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): My intervention comes very early in the debate, so I appreciate its being taken. Which bit of our amendment does the cabinet secretary disagree with? We have tried to make it respectfully factual and to point out that, although communities drive this stuff, it needs Government support and resource. That is all that we are saying.

Mairi Gougeon: Of course it does, but it goes broader than that. I hope that I will make clear in my speech exactly what we are looking to achieve. Again, I did not feel as though the amendment said that, which is why I will not support it, although there is a lot in it that I would have been happy to support.

I reiterate the Scottish Government's commitment to this innovative project that places islands at the forefront of our response to the global climate emergency. The ambition is very much in line with Scotland's national islands plan, which includes objectives that support environmental wellbeing and biosecurity and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, while promoting clean, affordable and secure energy.

The carbon neutral islands project provides the opportunity to support communities in several areas and not just in decarbonisation. We recognise that many of the issues that our island communities face are interlinked, which is very much a key consideration of the project.

Before I go on to discuss the progress that we have made over the past year, I will take a moment to remind members about some important context.

Climate change and nature loss are among the greatest threats that our planet faces. Our island communities are particularly vulnerable to climate change and predicted sea level rises. It is expected that there will be increased instances of flooding and coastal erosion and impacts on water supply, food production, health, tourism and habitat depletion. Most island economies are highly dependent on outside sources for food, fuel and even employment.

All of that is being exacerbated by the current cost crisis: island communities are among those that are hit the hardest due to higher levels of fuel poverty and the additional cost of goods. That is why I recently launched the £1.4 million island cost crisis emergency fund, which is being delivered through our island authority partners. The funding is being utilised in a variety of ways, including the provision of free breakfasts for 1,400 pupils in Shetland and our support of third sector organisations in Orkney with the impact of higher electricity costs.

Everyone is aware that Scotland has declared a climate emergency, and we are stepping up our climate action with legally binding targets to reach net zero by 2045. Scotland's climate change legislation ensures that we prepare for and adapt to the impacts that are already locked in, including rising sea levels and more extreme weather.

As we are part of the international community, it is crucial that we take every opportunity to raise global climate action and ambition. We can do that while continuing to promote and support the huge energy potential and natural capital of our islands, which will help us to reach our net zero and climate resilience ambitions.

On 17 May 2022, I shared with the Parliament the fact that the islands included in the carbon neutral islands project are Yell, Hoy, Barra, Raasay, Islay and Great Cumbrae. The choice of islands allows for a varied mix of geographies, populations and socioeconomic make-up, and it includes one island per local authority.

I am delighted to share the fact that, over the past eight months, we have laid the groundwork for each island to become carbon neutral by 2040, which remains an ambitious target. The work has been detailed in a progress report that is published

today and that provides an update on all the key elements of the carbon neutral islands project. I will take a little bit of time to talk through some of that work.

We committed £800,000 to support initial development in partnership with Community Energy Scotland, which has extensive experience of working with island communities and delivering work that is based on effective community engagement. The organisation has been working on the important first step of supporting all six islands to carry out in-depth carbon audits. It will support communities in developing community climate change action plans, which will be published this year. That work will culminate in the development of investment strategies to support delivery of the action plans.

Those first steps are vital to ensuring a co-ordinated approach to decarbonisation with island communities at its heart. It is important to take a moment to provide more detail on each of those strands of work.

The work that Community Energy Scotland is carrying out on the six islands is embedded in island communities. Each island has a local steering group that employs a community development officer directly in a local anchor organisation, all of which are playing a key part in the implementation of the carbon neutral islands project.

It is great that some of the community development officers are young islanders who have taken the opportunity to return home to work on the project. That demonstrates that, from the start, the project will do more than just cut emissions; it can also be a vehicle for the growth of our island communities.

I was delighted to have the chance to meet some of the community development officers prior to this afternoon's debate, and I am delighted that they join us in the public gallery. They have been in Edinburgh to complete important training that will support their conversations about climate change within their communities. My islands officials look forward to working closely with them throughout the implementation of the carbon neutral islands project.

As I have mentioned, carbon audits are in full swing on each of the six islands. The audits are as comprehensive as possible. They focus not only on energy production and consumption, but on all aspects of life that lead to greenhouse gas emissions.

We know that, on some islands, audits have already taken place. We have been incredibly careful to avoid duplication, while ensuring that there is alignment and co-ordination with other efforts. In doing so, my islands officials and our

partners have developed a strong network of island net zero-related stakeholders who are fully aware of the project and keen to be part of it.

The carbon audits will not be limited to land but will include an audit of each island's blue carbon habitats, such as salt marsh and seagrass. Those audits, which will draw in expertise from the Scottish Blue Carbon Forum, will help us to understand the relative contribution of those important habitats for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The exercise that we are embarking on is not simply a technical exercise that specialists can appreciate; the audits are a starting point for community discussion. Islands can pave their way to net zero only if they have reliable data on what their climate change trajectory looks like. Consequently, the audits will be translated into plain language, be user friendly and have accompanying tools, so that they can be replicated over the years in the most cost-effective way.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I have a quick question, because I was struggling to find this information. What budget is being provided for the project, annually or over its lifetime?

Mairi Gougeon: As I have outlined, £800,000 has been committed to it in the current financial year, and the budget for the coming financial year, on which I gave evidence to the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee last week, commits £3 million to help us to deliver the project.

It is crucial that island communities set the net zero trajectory that they feel most comfortable with. I am confident that the structure that I have outlined, which puts the islands and their people at the heart of the process, will ensure that the project will be driven by the communities involved.

It is in that spirit that I look forward to receiving the six community climate change action plans later this year, but I am also keen to find out whether there are similar actions that several islands wish to take, whether on housing, energy efficiency, transport or renewable energy. We need to sit down with the island communities and fully digest and understand their plans so that we can identify the best way to support them in future. We will develop investment strategies to support the aims of the action plans only once we have understood the island communities' priorities.

That process will involve different funding mechanisms. We need to begin by pulling together public funding that already exists. The Scottish Government has a range of net zero funding pots that can be accessed, and there may be other initiatives that can work together to achieve the aims of our communities. I am delighted to say

that that approach is already being taken in the carbon neutral islands project, with the net zero portfolio providing £60,000 to bring an adaptation element to Community Energy Scotland's work with communities. That will bring together adaptation and net zero planning in a joined-up way and will ensure that mitigation efforts are climate resilient, while enabling us to understand climate trends and projections for each island.

However, we know that public money will not be enough to get us to net zero. We must also consider the use of public-private partnerships and private investment, where that is appropriate.

All of our work will be underpinned by three key drivers. I have already touched on the first driver: alignment. The project aims to align with existing efforts and avoid any duplication. That is important, especially for communities that often have to juggle multiple projects with little capacity.

The second driver—fairness—is also critical. We need to ensure that we bring communities with us on the journey to net zero and that they can take advantage of the opportunities that the transition presents. Supporting island communities through the already mentioned steering groups, local anchor organisations and community development officers is a step in the right direction to ensure the element of fairness.

Lastly, we need the ability to replicate that learning and take it to other Scottish islands to ensure that many other island communities can benefit from shared learning and good practice to overcome barriers. That was actively considered in the design of the project. The mix of islands included covers a range of distinct characteristics that will apply to many other areas. The network of community development officers who are delivering across the six islands has kick-started that sharing of experiences across, and beyond, the six islands.

The project also directly acknowledges the role of young people. It has developed a school component to ensure that young islanders can contribute to the carbon neutrality journey of Scotland's islands. Our delivery partner for that strand of work, Youth Scotland, is carrying out its activities in close alignment with the young islanders network, which is another important programme for government commitment on our islands policy. That network builds on the success and legacy of the climate change message in a bottle project that was previously supported by the Scottish Government.

I said at the start that it is crucial that we take every opportunity to engage with the international community to raise ambitions. Scotland is already doing that, and the carbon neutral islands project has developed an international strategy that

reflects the leading role of islands in decarbonisation. The project has begun sharing Scottish island-based renewable energy technologies and expertise with island partners in Europe and beyond.

I am genuinely excited by the first steps towards decarbonisation on the six islands. Scotland is fully committed to its legally binding climate change targets and the carbon neutral islands project is an exciting opportunity, demonstrating that we are putting our island communities at the heart of our climate action to achieve those ambitious targets.

That momentum will only continue to grow, and I look forward to the publication of the community climate change action plans later in the year. I know that our debate will touch on many climate change initiatives relating to islands. I reiterate the links between this work, the national islands plan and our wider work to support island communities.

I very much look forward to the debate and to discussing the importance of island communities and the steps needed to support them in reaching net zero.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's publication of a progress report on the Carbon Neutral Islands Project; notes that the first steps to support the six islands towards becoming fully carbon neutral by 2040 are underway; recognises that the six islands included in the project will act as lighthouse communities, spreading knowledge and good practices to other Scottish islands; acknowledges that communities are at the heart of the project and that they will be supported to take advantage of the opportunities that the transition to net zero presents; continues to support this initiative and the soon-to-be-published community climate change action plans, and acknowledges that the six Carbon Neutral Islands will demonstrate Scotland's climate change ambitions on the international stage.

15:12

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): We, too, welcome the publication of the progress report on the carbon neutral islands project and will be pleased to support the Government's motion today. However, for reasons that I will outline and my Conservative colleagues will develop, we will seek support for my amendment, which will, I hope, help the minister to frame her thinking as we move forward.

We all support creating carbon neutral islands to help Scotland to reach net zero, and it is right that the Scottish Government should set ambitious targets to support the six islands on their journey to carbon neutrality by 2040. However, the report comes just a month after Lord Deben, the chair of the Climate Change Committee, told a committee of this Parliament that the Scottish National Party's net zero plans and legal targets are so

overambitious that there are insufficient strategies that could be implemented to achieve them. He commented:

"There needs to be a very clear programme that states step by step how Scotland is going to achieve the targets".—[*Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee*, 20 December 2022; c 10.]

That principle can readily be read across to this report. We should bear in mind that the report covers pledges that were first made in the 2021 programme for government and then extended at COP26 but that it runs to only 18 pages, of which three are the front and back covers and the contents page. There must be some concern that the laudable ambition to help six of Scotland's islands become carbon neutral appears to lack the underlying data and the practical steps that islanders can take to ensure a just transition to meet the targets.

To drill into that position, I looked at page 4 of the report, which cross-references with strategic objective 5 of the national islands plan, which is

"to reduce levels of fuel poverty".

That is an admirable aspiration, but it is one that demands scrutiny. First, the fact is that the Government does not know how many Scottish households are in fuel poverty and has not had that data since 2019. We do know that the period from 2017 to 2019 saw the median fuel poverty gap being higher in island and rural local authorities. We also know that 170,000 properties in Scotland are off the gas grid and that the Scottish housing condition survey for 2017 to 2019 tells us that those properties are massively concentrated in our island and rural areas.

The cost of achieving the upgrades that Minister Harvie demands by 2025, principally using air-source heat pumps, has been estimated at £32,000, which islanders are going to have to pay themselves if they can afford it. However, nearly a quarter of those off-gas-grid properties are unsuitable for that technology. We need the Government to help people to understand what the alternative heat sources are if they cannot use the preferred heat pumps.

On that note, Minister Harvie told me last year:

"Recent advice from our statutory advisers, the Climate Change Committee ... states that 'sustainable bioenergy is essential for reaching net zero'".—[*Written Answers*, 11 February 2022; S6W-06460.]

The March 2021 "Bioenergy Update" stated that a bioenergy policy working group would be set up to

"outline how we intend to move forward over the next 18-24 months to understand the most appropriate and sustainable use of bioenergy resources in Scotland."

However, I learned three days ago that the bioenergy expert panel that is intended to inform that group has not even been assembled yet.

I find it rather concerning that the progress report does not directly address those issues and challenges.

At page 6, the report refers to transport being part of the carbon neutral islands project. We know that the Climate Change Committee said that Scotland will need 30,000 public electric vehicle charge points by the end of the decade. We currently have around 3,000, and reports suggest that, at any one time, around a quarter of those are faulty.

Just last month, Jamie Greene flagged up that Cumbrae, which is an island with more than 1,400 residents in winter and is part of the project, has only one public EV charging point. That is important, because not only do we need to have EV charging points on our islands for residents' vehicles in order to decarbonise, but, as people move to EVs, they need to be confident that they will be able to charge their vehicles on our islands, or the tourist pound might think twice before coming.

I hoped to see more on planning in the document. For example, how many charging points does Cumbrae need in order to become carbon neutral? How many will the Government install in the next 12 months?

No discussion of island transport would be complete without mention of ferries. Leaving aside the issues that have been rehearsed in the chamber many times, we simply have to decarbonise shipping. If nothing else, the SNP-Green Government pledged in its 2021 programme for government to make 30 per cent of Scotland's state-owned ferries low-emissions vessels by 2032.

If we are serious about island transport becoming carbon neutral, we cannot ignore the fact that the vessels that are used on the Ardrossan to Brodick and Uig triangle routes are more than 20 years old. We also cannot ignore reports that the project to make the notorious hull 801 run on liquefied natural gas and diesel is stalled after a failure to supply the sensors for the LNG fuel system. It will be diesel only for at least nine months after launch, and, as the LNG storage tanks at Ardrossan and Uig will not be ready until at least 2025, even when they run on LNG, the two ships will require between four and six road tanker loads to be imported from Qatar and sent up the road from Kent.

The final point that I wish to make is also about delivery. It is all well and good to demand, as the report does on page 10, that what must be produced at the end of this is

"6 carbon audits, 6 climate change action plans and 6 climate change investment strategies",

but someone has to build, install, test, maintain and generally look after the infrastructure, and we have to train those people. That has to be done in the context of the Accounts Commission saying just this week that Scotland's councils face their

"hardest spending choices in years"

to make up for budget shortfalls.

Mairi Gougeon: I fully appreciate the importance of all the points that the member has raised, but does he appreciate that the project update that we have delivered would not be the place to outline all that information?

What is really critical with the project is that, first of all, we need to get the baseline data. We need to know where we are at with the carbon audits. We need to build that community engagement to ensure that communities are part of that process, that they ultimately help to deliver on the aims of the project, and that they are at the heart of it. We need to build that capacity and we need to work on that as well.

Does the member accept those points? Does he accept that that is where we need to start? There will, of course, be further updates as the project progresses.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, I will give you the time back.

Liam Kerr: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Yes—I accept that. I think that that is a reasonable point to make. The key issue that I am bringing up is that this was first talked about in the 2021 programme for government, and it was revised and rebuilt for COP26, yet here we are today, in January 2023, and none of this is available, as I have pointed out.

To go back to the issue of how we are going to deliver, the key point is that, in the report, page 12 contains the first mention of skills—and, even then, it is only aspirational:

"we will commence a study ... that will map the net zero gap skills on Scottish islands".

I presume that that means a "skills gap", rather than "gap skills", but I would be interested to know from the minister in closing whether that study actually commenced in December—clearly, that was written before publication.

There is no time to lose. The report is welcome, and we absolutely back the aspiration to support the six islands to become carbon neutral by 2040. However, it is far from acceptable that, as apparently with so much of the Government's output, there is a demonstrable lack of data to underpin the aspiration; a blatant failure to plan

properly; and, ultimately, far too much of the magical thinking that the Climate Change Committee identified.

Accordingly, we will support the motion but, for all the reasons that have been demonstrated, I also move amendment S6M-07558.3, to insert at end:

“; welcomes UK Government investment in carbon-reducing initiatives on Scotland’s islands, such as the work of Reflex Orkney; notes the good work currently underway at a local level in many island communities; believes that Carbon Neutral Islands can only be achieved through a co-ordinated cross-government approach; emphasises that the desired outcome will require adequate, timely and demonstrably beneficial, targeted investment and resource in transport to and within the islands; recognises the need for a fit-for-purpose ferry fleet that achieves equally carbon-neutral objectives, adequate EV charging or hydrogen alternatives and opportunities to enable islanders, businesses and public transport to move to non-carbon or electric vehicles; advocates for a holistic approach to housing stock and insulation, transport, localised energy provision and storage and support for small businesses working towards net-zero operability, and believes that full decarbonisation of these islands will only be successful if all cogs of the governmental wheel back up that ambition with suitable investment.”

15:20

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of the “Carbon Neutral Islands Project Progress Report”. I am glad that the report mentions fuel poverty, because all our islands suffer from that, in common with other off-gas-grid areas. During this cost of living crisis, we must ensure that all islanders get the assistance that they require to tackle that.

In Barra, which is one of the islands in the project, six new affordable houses were built at a cost of £1.4 million. That is a true reflection of the building costs for affordable homes throughout all our island communities. Renewing the housing stock on the scale that would be required is therefore not an option. Existing housing stock needs to be retrofitted.

Although the Scottish Government has adopted Alex Rowley’s Passivhaus bill, which will make a difference to the fabric of new-build houses, more work and more research need to go into retrofitting property to help towards net zero goals and fighting fuel poverty.

The project is also looking at the net zero skills gaps. That is welcome, as the lack of those skills is a very real problem, which I have raised with the Government before but to little effect. It needs to look at how it accredits builders to do the work that is required. For example, currently, all training for retrofitting is available in the central belt. That involves a huge expense for small one-person or two-person operations—the average size of a

building company on the islands—to attend. They have no way of recouping that investment. Without that training, they cannot be accredited and they cannot carry out the required retrofitting work. That is not a just transition.

That example highlights the need to island proof all policy decisions. I hope that the Scottish Government will look at that. If, due to the project, island proofing comes to the forefront of decision making, it is most welcome.

The progress report goes into some detail about auditing and overseeing but, as has already been said, it lacks detail on how it will deliver. Although we need a clear view of where we are—a measurement of the current position—there needs to be an indication of the vision that is required to make the goal a reality. For instance, who is part of those partnerships? How will communities and private enterprise be included? Which public bodies will take part? All such organisations must be included, given their impact on island life. When will the cabinet secretary be able to put more detail into the public domain?

I ask also about energy generation. I spoke about fuel poverty because island homes are largely off the gas grid, yet many of our islands have the ability to generate renewable electricity. In many cases, island communities are prevented from generating renewable energy because they cannot get a grid connection to distribute that energy. Will that be one of the challenges that is looked at during the project?

Orkney is a case in point. Its grid is full, yet it is at the forefront of renewables development. It is unable to reach its full potential because of grid restrictions. In addition, when Orkney constructs public buildings, those buildings cannot utilise the renewable energy that is available at low cost in Orkney, because they need to use wood-fired boilers, in line with Scottish Government policy. There are few trees in Orkney, so fuel needs to be transported on island, and is probably procured from abroad, which has carbon generation consequences.

We also hope that the focus on islands in the project does not take the focus away from all our other islands. Again, I go back to Orkney, which recently missed out on having a green port. Orkney has very ambitious harbour redevelopment plans for renewable generation, which need to be realised in order for Scotland to meet its climate targets. I would welcome reassurance that Orkney will be assisted to develop those harbours.

I cannot speak about islands without mentioning ferries. I understand that the carbon generated by ferries will not be included in the carbon audit, despite the fact that everything that comes on island comes by ferry. The reason given was that

interisland ferries are run by local government. However, for many of the islands, their ferry provider is Caledonian MacBrayne, whose ferry-building programme is directly in the remit of the Scottish Government. Ferries must therefore be included.

It is also impossible to reach the carbon neutral goal without the input of local government. Indeed, every organisation with a locus on the six islands must be involved, including the United Kingdom Government, as well as the Scottish Government. On ferries, we must look at tried and tested technology to work towards new ferries being run on clean energy. The Government was warned that the dual-fuel ferries that it is attempting to build will not be any greener and will possibly even be less green. If we are to meet our goals, we cannot afford such design mistakes.

Scottish Labour welcomes steps that take us closer to net zero, but those projects must have a practical impact and not simply be window dressing. We will vote for all the amendments, because they add to the motion.

I move amendment S6M-07558.2, to insert at end:

“; recognises that the cost of living crisis is hitting some of the islands’ communities hardest, including fuel poverty being highest among some of the islands that are not included in the Carbon Neutral Islands Project, and therefore awaits Scottish Government plans to assist all islands during the energy crisis; calls for guarantees that a just transition for workers is included in all areas of the strategy, and believes that the Scottish Government, UK Government, local authorities and all other island-related agencies must be involved to truly reach net zero.”

15:27

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, am delighted to take part in the debate on our carbon neutral islands initiative, which is strongly supported by the Scottish Liberal Democrats. I reaffirm my congratulations to the six islands selected, including Hoy in my Orkney constituency.

As Liam Kerr said, the motion—and, indeed, much of the progress report—is a bit thin on detail. That might reflect where we are in the process. The cabinet secretary may reasonably observe that this is an opportunity for MSPs with experience of different island communities to contribute ideas and proposals. In that spirit, all three amendments have embraced that invitation.

I will offer some thoughts on some of the points made in the other amendments and in the progress report itself, but I will start by reflecting on the issue that forms the basis of my amendment, namely the compelling case for ministers to ensure that lifeline transport links serving our islands are fully factored into helping

our islands to achieve carbon neutral status. Indeed, ClimateXChange’s research for the project underscores the importance of cutting emissions from ferry travel to, from and between our islands. Self-evidently, none of the six islands selected, or any others seeking to follow in their path, have any hope of achieving their ambitions without investment in new low-emissions ferries and, where relevant, air services.

Denmark and Norway demonstrate that the technology already exists for low-emissions ferries, and Orkney itself is leading the way in the development of the technology for low-emissions air travel. However, while the carbon neutral islands project is commendably and very correctly a community-driven endeavour, the transition that we need to see in lifeline transport links will need sustained investment, from both the Scottish Government and the UK Government. Some of that investment has been forthcoming, but it has been glaringly and, I would say, shamefully absent when it comes to addressing the desperately needed replacement of Orkney’s internal ferry services, upon which Hoy and other islands in my constituency depend.

A ferries task force has been established with a view to feeding into the budget process later this year. That is welcome, although it must deliver real, tangible and—to be blunt—ferry-shaped results. The financial and environmental costs of operating the current fleet are no longer sustainable. The lack of reliability threatens the viability of island communities in Orkney every bit as much as the better publicised disruption on CalMac routes on the west coast.

I turn to the housing issue, to which Liam Kerr and Rhoda Grant both referred.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Before the member moves on from ferries, would he agree that there are opportunities in the northern isles and perhaps further afield for fixed links instead of ferries? Would he support that option where it is suitable?

Liam McArthur: I welcome that intervention. The member will be well aware of the work that my colleague Beatrice Wishart has been doing in relation to Shetland. The debate is perhaps further advanced there, but I have absolutely no doubt that, in the coming years, we will be having that debate in Orkney, too.

With regard to housing, Orkney has—as we have heard—some of the highest levels of fuel poverty in the country. Fuel poverty is too often a feature of island life, and the situation is currently being exacerbated by the cost of living crisis and an energy market that simply does not work for island communities. Improving the standard of new housing is essential, but so, too, is the task of retrofitting existing housing stock. The

Government talks of stepping up investment in retrofitting measures to improve energy efficiency, with £1.8 billion of allocated public funding, but its own estimates suggest that it will take around £33 billion to achieve what is needed. That is an awfully big gap to fill.

ClimateXChange identifies that off-gas-grid communities are affected by an insufficiency of financial incentives, and it calls for climate financial investments to be more readily available. That seems to make sense, certainly from my experience of the innovative ReFLEX Orkney project, of which I am a member. There seems to be a need to look at more creative funding models. Perhaps the Scottish National Investment Bank could be encouraged to look at working with local partners to develop, for example, a carbon transition fund.

Where sources of funding have been identified, notably in respect of community turbine projects, they have been exceptionally helpful in supporting a range of community-based initiatives. Hoy is a perfect illustration of that: the community turbine operated by Hoy Energy Ltd has fed money in through the Island of Hoy Development Trust to support a bus service, welfare officer and community centre. There are ambitions to go much further in retrofitting houses on the island and putting in more renewable sources of energy. However, I have to say that that has not been helped by the cap introduced in the Energy Prices Act 2022, which has certainly stymied the ambitions of Hoy and similar communities to go further in developing revenue streams of that sort.

I finish by welcoming the local focus of the approach. Every island is different, as the cabinet secretary has acknowledged and as those of us who live on islands would readily recognise. I therefore welcome the more local island approach that has been taken, and I welcome the appointment of community development officers, including Aisling Phillips in Hoy.

The cabinet secretary is absolutely right to point to the opportunities that that provides for young people to return to those communities, bringing their energy and enthusiasm and their talent to that initiative, which commands broad support. However, there needs to be on-going long-term financial and broader Government support if it is to be a success.

The Government needs to stay the course over the long term in order to properly empower not only these six islands but other islands that have similar ambitions to meet their net zero targets. In that, it will have the support of the Scottish Liberal Democrats and, I suspect, of members on all sides of the chamber. I look forward to the remainder of the debate.

I move amendment S6M-07558.1, to insert at end:

“, which it believes must also be underpinned by a commitment to decarbonise lifeline ferry services across all routes that serve Scotland’s island communities.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate, with speeches of six minutes.

15:33

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Scotland’s 93 inhabited islands are all radically different from one another, not just in their landscapes, histories and locations but in their cultural traditions, economic contributions and needs for the future.

What all our islands have in common, however, is their shared appreciation of global environmental threats, the most obvious of those being rising sea levels and increasingly chaotic weather events. As the cabinet secretary pointed out, each of those things is already having a measurable impact on our lives in island communities. It is only natural, therefore, that islands would want to make their own distinctive contributions towards our collective efforts to decarbonise Scotland.

In my constituency, I can point to the long-running efforts to develop more wind power. I say “long-running” because it is only now, after decades of negotiation, that the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets has finally made the commitments that are needed before an interconnector can be built to export much of the islands’ renewable potential.

Scotland’s islands hold immeasurable reserves of other types of potential energy, too—there is not just wind, which is certainly abundant, but also tidal and wave power, the latter of which is, as yet, completely untapped.

Meanwhile, efforts continue to decarbonise transport and housing, against a backdrop of challenges, including extremely high rates of fuel poverty and poor energy efficiency in many Western Isles homes. I know that the Government and the local authority are working together at present to re-establish area-based insulation schemes, which are certainly a key part of addressing that problem.

Across my constituency, however, people are already taking their own steps towards reducing the islands’ carbon footprint. Last year, the Scottish Government’s island communities fund assisted local businesses and community groups with sustainability projects, including Tagasa Uibhist, Clan MacQuarrie community centre, Gàradh a’ Bhàgh a’ Tuath, Maclean’s Bakery and the Leverhulme community hub, while the

regeneration capital grant fund made awards to initiatives such as Cnoc Soilleir and Ionad Hiort. I mention all this to put our current debate about six specific islands into the context of the wider work that is already under way in many of our islands to tackle climate change.

The Scottish Government's very welcome commitment is to ensure that six islands become entirely carbon neutral by 2040. In my constituency, the community concerned is the linked islands of Barra and Vatersay. The definition of a carbon-neutral island in the context of this project means an island that has got to a point where its local greenhouse gas emissions, captured as CO₂ equivalent, are in balance with carbon sinks.

Setting out to achieve that aim in Barra and Vatersay is, from the outset, going to be a community-led initiative. The local carbon-neutral islands anchor organisation, Voluntary Action Barra & Vatersay, is working closely with other community groups, businesses and island residents to fully explore their islands' potential, because the experts on their communities are, of course, the islanders themselves. The journey to decarbonisation must be led by them, in order to ensure that local knowledge shapes local solutions.

I am sure that that outlook will shape the projects elsewhere, too. The on-going, fortnightly project group meetings provide an excellent opportunity for the community development officers and steering groups from all six islands to meet with Community Energy Scotland to exchange knowledge and support. That collaborative approach will help to ensure that Barra and Vatersay, along with Yell, Raasay, Hoy, Great Cumbrae and Islay, act as catalysts for decarbonisation across all of Scotland's islands.

Liam Kerr: I am listening intently to the member's speech because he knows an awful lot more than I do about islands. To go back to the question that Jamie Greene posed earlier, can the member help me understand what it is in my amendment that he will be objecting to at decision time? I am struggling to understand that.

Alasdair Allan: As, I think, the Government has set out, although there might have been things that could have been agreed with, the amendment does not address all the needs of islands that this side of the chamber has identified as important.

I am certain that, going forward, the six islands will influence what is taking place in other islands, too.

On 30 November 2022, a project showcase was held in Castlebay. This was an opportunity for the community to learn more about the carbon neutral islands project from members of the Scottish

Government's islands team. The carbon neutral islands team then met with a range of local businesses to discuss the numerous potential opportunities for collaboration within the project.

Although the deadline of 31 March for this part of the project is not far off, after that, the community in Barra and Vatersay will be in a position to create a specific local climate change action plan, again led by the community at every stage. In successfully achieving the project's aims, there will, of course, be challenges along the way, some of which will be unique to Barra and Vatersay and some of which will be experienced elsewhere. However, Barra and Vatersay will be playing their part, as will other islands, to ensure that Scotland meets its aims of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

15:39

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I thank members for their contributions thus far. It is fair to say that since I first came to the chamber in 2016, I have sought to bring up numerous issues about island life and some of the struggles that our islanders face in any way that I can. I should say that I represent two of Scotland's most beautiful islands, Arran and Cumbrae, and it is good news that Cumbrae is on the list of six islands that we are talking about today. In the previous parliamentary session, I sat on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, which passed numerous pieces of legislation, including the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019 and the so-called flagship Islands (Scotland) Act 2018—I have yet to meet anyone who actually knows what that piece of legislation has done for islands, but that is a debate for another day. I was also my party's digital spokesperson and transport spokesperson for many years, and I took part in many debates on issues such as connectivity, energy, transport, housing, net zero and ferries—members should not worry; I will come on to ferries. Many of those issues form the substance of the motion that we are debating, and that is why our amendment focuses on some of those areas.

It is no secret that I have been critical of the Government where I believe that it has failed our islanders and our island communities, not least in relation to the many grand promises that have been made in various programmes for government and manifestos. However, I have also given credit where credit is due.

My comments today will be a bit of a mixed bag. That is partly because of my deep disappointment in the cabinet secretary for not supporting our amendment. I ask back benchers to read the amendment, not just their whip sheet. They should look at the content and the words. We specifically went out of our way not to directly attack or

criticise the Government in the amendment, for good reason. However, what the amendment does is point out that there is welcome resource coming from both Scotland's Governments—that is a fact, whether members like it or not. It also says that, in the interests of Scotland's islands, there must be a common approach across all Government departments and agencies—that is also a fact, with which it is difficult to disagree. Further, it points out that islanders themselves will play a part and are already doing much good work—I will address that in a moment.

I mentioned that the Isle of Cumbrae, in the west of Scotland, is one of the six islands that we hope will achieve net zero. That is an ambitious and difficult target, but I hope that everyone on Cumbrae is on board with that goal. That will be achieved through well-publicised communication from the Government and through making quite clear to the islanders—in the most jargon-free way possible—what is required of them, because it is not about what we do but about what we ask them to do. Each islander has a part to play.

Good work is being done. I was impressed when I visited the Field Studies Council's centre in Millport, which has reduced its carbon emissions by 34 per cent in the past decade and has saved 389 tonnes of carbon dioxide through interventions such as solar panels, mini wind turbines and better insulation in its buildings. I have spoken previously in the chamber about a cracking new business that I recently visited on Cumbrae: Jack's Alt-Stays, which might be described as a posh glamping business, but it is better than that. It is eco-friendly, and that is what is really important. It is run by two young lads who are entrepreneurial and commercially astute but also socially aware, and who put the environment at the heart of what they are doing. That is what the project that we are discussing is about: role models on the ground in our island communities setting up businesses. However, they need Government help and support.

Our problem is that transportation is letting many of those people down—that is why it is important that we talk about that issue. I am afraid that 2022 was probably the worst year on record for connectivity to Arran and Cumbrae. More than half of the vessels in Caledonian MacBrayne's fleet are way beyond their life cycle, and we know all the problems that come with that—not only the physical, logistical issues but the financial cost, which we heard about from CalMac this week.

I mention that issue not simply to bash the Government about ferries, which we do quite often, but because the issue is important. There is no point having a carbon-free island if the waters around it are polluted by ageing vessels. Much more could be done. Many countries have done a

lot of good and ambitious work in that regard—if I had time, I would talk about them.

I want to touch on the issue of how we measure carbon reduction. Carbon audits are the first point in the minister's implementation strategy—it goes on to talk about action plans, and then investment and strategy, and I think that that is the right and logical order. Carbon audits are important, but the problem is that there is no consistent approach to how we account for greenhouse gas and carbon emissions across our islands. That is not my point of view; it is the point of view of ClimateXChange, which is the think tank that the Government is clearly engaging with. If we cannot adequately and properly quantify carbon reduction, we do not know where the interventions need to happen, and if we do not know where the interventions need to happen, the Government will not know where the funding needs to go. Therefore, there has to be that logical flow.

However, I say to the Government that that data should already be available. The report is a nice progress report, but it is 16 pages—that includes the front page and the last page—there are lots of pictures and maps, and there are lots of spaces between words. I wanted to see data in it. If the Government does not have that data, it needs to get it quickly. The next progress report must tell us where we are at in the six islands.

I take on board the points that Liam McArthur made about the report being a starting point and that we have an opportunity to raise concerns through this debate, and I am raising them.

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

Jamie Greene: I am in my closing seconds, but I will happily take an intervention if I get my time back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There should be a brief intervention and a brief response.

Màiri McAllan: Does Jamie Greene appreciate that some of the data that he is talking about is currently being collected on the ground by some of the development officers who are sitting behind him?

Jamie Greene: I am very pleased to hear that, and I welcome them to the chamber.

The report is a progress report. I am afraid that, if I was going to be unkind, I would call it a lack of progress report, because there is not much in it for us to go on in this debate. I welcome everything that is in it, but I want to see some real action plans. It is all very well talking about an implementation strategy, but what are the strategies, what is the investment, and where is the investment coming from? As far as I can see,

much of it is coming from the private sector or public-private partnerships, and not from the Government itself. That was the point of our amendment.

I will finish. Our islands need action now, because we are not far away from the target. We need to get the basics right, and the Government can deliver the basics on housing, transport, insulation and energy. Those are things that the Government can already do and should be doing—only then we will stand a chance of getting the six islands fully carbon neutral. That means all of us pulling together, all of Government pulling together, and Government accepting its own responsibilities in delivering the outcomes that we all want.

15:46

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It gives me great pleasure to speak in this debate.

I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I have a personal investment in Islay Energy Community Benefit Society, which is the owner of Islay's community wind turbine. I am a member of Islay Energy Trust, and Islay is, of course, my home.

Islay Energy Trust is the anchor organisation for Islay's carbon neutral island steering group. I will focus on its work.

I thank George Dean of Islay Energy Trust and Tom Skinner for the information that they gave me for my speech, and I thank all the other steering group volunteers on Islay, and those who support them, for providing their time, knowledge and ideas to the project.

There is evidence that there has been human life on Islay for 12,000 years. Its fertility attracted mesolithic hunter-gatherers, followed by neolithic farmers. Well before its reputation as a whisky producer, Islay was famous as the green island. Now, as one of Scotland's carbon neutral islands, Islay is once again set to become green Islay.

Currently, more than 80 per cent of Islay's energy comes from fossil fuels, and its electricity network capacity—via subsea cables to Jura and then to Islay—is severely constrained. That makes decarbonisation extremely challenging.

Demand for electricity is growing. Existing distilleries are increasing output, more are being built, more housing is planned, and the use of electric vehicles is expanding. Islay needs action.

Over the years, Islay has frequently been at the forefront of testing new renewable energy technology, and projects that utilise heat exchange, photovoltaics, wave and wind power have all been developed. For example, Bowmore's

community swimming pool uses waste heat from Bowmore distillery. Those projects are great, but now is the time for Islay, Scotland and the world to change. As Greta Thunberg said,

“Once we start to act, hope is everywhere. So instead of looking for hope, look for action. Then, and only then, hope will come.”

That action is starting on Islay. There are 23 volunteers, who represent a broad spectrum of the community, and three working groups have been created to cover energy and transport, land use and waste.

As the cabinet secretary has said, the baseline carbon audit is currently being carried out. That is a considerable exercise on Islay, due to the island's industrialisation through distilling and farming.

Liam Kerr: I presume that Jenni Minto will know better than I do that the nature and population of the islands changes significantly, and the emissions from them will also change significantly, depending on when the audit is done—whether it is done during the tourist season in the summer or in the winter, for example. Over what period is the carbon audit being conducted? How does the Government intend to ensure that it is authoritative for all times of the year?

Jenni Minto: The carbon audit is being done just now. People in the group on Islay are working with farmers—who are also having to do carbon audits—and with the distilleries to look at what the developments will be. It is a small island—people talk, they understand what is going on and they know about development. That is the joy of this project—it is pulling together people with different experiences and different knowledge to find out what situation we are in and, we hope, to make a projection into the future.

It is possible that Islay's greenhouse gases will exceed the total of the other five carbon neutral islands put together. The analysis phase is due to be finalised in the next four weeks, so Liam Kerr will be able to find out more about it after then. It will be followed by the development, with the wider community, of options and timescales to decarbonise.

The waste working group is looking at current arrangements and considering what might work better, and the land use group, as I said, is working with farmers. Farming on Islay is more intensive than on other islands, so the land use group is looking at practices to see what can be improved.

The Scottish Government's further investment of £3 million into the project is welcome and I hope that it will enable other investment to be levered into the project. I hope, too, that each island will

receive a share that reflects the scale and nature of the challenges that it faces.

An important element of Argyll and Bute's rural growth deal is around supporting Islay towards a low-carbon economy. It is likely that that support will focus on domestic properties. As has been mentioned in relation to other islands, the age profile of Islay's homes means that 50 per cent have no energy performance certificate and are likely to fall below modern standards. Therefore, the rural growth deal, alongside other support schemes, will aim to improve insulation and to introduce small-scale renewables. However, there is another capacity issue here: although the Institution of Engineering and Technology continues to provide training for local tradespeople, there are simply not enough of them. I could go down the route of mentioning the lack of housing and the impact of second homes, but that is a debate for another day.

ScotWind provides Islay with longer-term options to address its electricity requirements. Scottish Power Renewables has the option to build a 2GW wind farm north-west of Islay and has signed a memorandum of understanding with the IET. There is an ambition to land a proportion of the wind farm's output directly on to Islay, which could revolutionise energy use on the island, giving local control and involving improved infrastructure. In my view, it is important that such discussions with the distribution network operator, SSE, occur.

Carbon neutral Islay aims to establish itself at the heart of Islay's net zero journey, one that will demonstrate the island's spirit, tenacity, innovation and forward thinking—exactly the traits that we need to take the transformational action that is desperately needed.

15:52

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I rise to speak to the Labour amendment. Although we welcome the progress that the Scottish Government is making in supporting the six islands in the carbon neutral islands project to become fully carbon neutral by 2040, we must not lose sight of the needs of people living on islands that are not included in the project.

As has already been said today, the cost of living crisis is hitting some island communities hardest, with extreme fuel poverty being highest on some of the islands that are not included in the project and, as we know, fuel poverty—or any other aspect of poverty—requires action on incomes.

Although employment law remains reserved, this Government could demonstrate a greater commitment to addressing the systemic failures in

our economy that suppress wages and widen wealth inequality. That is why it is so disappointing that the motion does not commit the Government to investing in island services or to prioritising job creation and retention on islands, and it is why the Labour amendment calls for guarantees that a just transition for workers is included in all areas of the carbon neutral islands strategy.

This is just one debate, and I expect that we will hear constructive ideas from members across the chamber. I hope that the Scottish Government will integrate those ideas into all aspects of upcoming legislation, because in the application of every bill that we pass in this Parliament, islands can be understood as a microcosm for the rest of Scotland. If something works for our islands, with all the pressures and difficulties that islanders face, making it work for the mainland must surely be achievable.

For example, the circular economy bill presents us with an opportunity to shorten supply chains, which will lead to improvements in areas such as food, energy and workforce security, among others. In turn, those improvements will only increase the resilience of our islands, counteract depopulation and ensure that islands are places where people thrive and live well. However, that will take planning, investment and the prioritisation of people over profit, democracy over diktat and workforce investment over short-termist outsourcing.

I have listened with interest to the speeches in the debate because, unlike many—if not all—of the members who have spoken, I do not live on one of Scotland's islands and nor do my constituents. However, it is important to stress the importance of sustainable island life to the rest of the country. As has already been highlighted, islands provide Scotland with significant opportunities for renewable energy and economic development. They are also home to thousands of Scots whose history and culture are intrinsic to life in the rest of Scotland.

I have benefited from the opportunity to visit some of Scotland's islands. Last summer, as part of my research into community land ownership, I visited Gigha and Colonsay, where I heard about the difficulty of maintaining schools and other services in areas with declining populations, and about the difficulty of building communities when so many people are experiencing homelessness. Despite those difficulties, I saw incredible determination and resilience, yet that resilience does not relieve us of our duty. That is why I urge all members to support Labour's amendment, which reminds us all of our responsibility to islanders and our path to net zero.

15:56

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Scotland's islands have so much to offer in the delivery of net zero. We can learn from them as they lead the way in offering solutions to current and future challenges. I will address the debate not as an MSP for an island constituency but from my perspective as a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. I will talk more widely about our islands, rather than just about the six that have been selected for the project, as others will have more local knowledge about them.

We know that our island communities are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, that they face particular cost of living issues and that they are trying to recover from the pandemic and the continuing repercussions of Brexit. It is ironic that—there is outright anger about this—according to figures for last year from Energy Action Scotland, 40 per cent of the people who live in the Western Isles live in fuel poverty, compared with the Scottish average of 24 per cent among all households. Neither of those figures is acceptable.

There are many examples of islands leading the way in renewables. On Orkney, surf 'n' turf is an innovative community project that uses surplus electricity that is generated from renewable energy to split water and make hydrogen gas as a fuel. The project has resulted from islanders thinking out of the box regarding energy. In relation to renewable energy generation from wind, wave and tide, Orkney is in the lead in many regards. On storage, I am pleased that vanadium batteries, an alternative to lithium batteries, are being used to store hydrogen on Orkney and that those are manufactured at Invinity Energy System's site in Bathgate, which is in my constituency.

Another example is construction for the improvements to the Scapa Flow harbour, which is the largest natural deep-water harbour in the northern hemisphere. Construction is due to start in 2024, and the improvements have the potential to create an international shipping route through the north-west passage in the Arctic, which will save many kilometres and reduce carbon emissions. It is not out of the realms of possibility that that will have a global impact.

At the end of last year, the Western Isles was named by the Scottish Government as one of the potential sites for hydrogen hubs, due to the area's abundant onshore and offshore wind resources, which could produce enough renewable hydrogen to power the islands and to export to the UK's domestic and international markets. Improved transmission of electricity off the isles from the growing offshore wind sector is essential in order to power local businesses and tackle the fuel poverty that I referred to earlier. Proper interconnected grid connections and tackling

excessive transmission costs will be vital if that potential to export electricity and green hydrogen is to be realised not just for the Western Isles but for other islands. Innovative storage solutions, which I referred to earlier, will also be key.

On Barra, the electrification of airplanes using, I assume, its beach will be part of the carbon neutral project. Shetland is already home to world-leading wind farms such as Burradale, which generates 3.68MW—enough to power more than 2,000 homes—and Garth wind farm, operated by the North Yell Development Council, which boasts five 900kW wind turbines that generate clean electricity for the local grid, with profits being reinvested back into the local community.

On Tuesday evening, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee heard from stakeholders that fixed transport links for Unst and Yell could be the preferred longer-term route to interisland carbon neutrality by supporting electric car use. Foula is already generating its own electricity and has ambitions to power electric ferries. Shetland will also be home to the UK's most productive onshore wind farm in terms of electricity output, as SSE-owned Viking Energy wind farm is due to become operational in 2024-25.

My family have reliably informed me about the sustainable carbon-saving initiatives from Islay's whisky businesses, where Bruichladdich leads the way. I think that extensive research was done as part of that inquiry.

There is great entrepreneurship and innovation on Raasay. I met members of the Raasay community at the Arctic Circle conference in Reykjavik, where they gave a presentation on their local sustainable water project. Their entrepreneurialism lends itself to Raasay being one of the six selected islands.

The message from the debate is that islanders are the experts in their own communities, and the journey to decarbonisation must be led by island communities to ensure that local knowledge shapes local solutions. There is a strong message for the Government and mainland local authorities about strategic support with local island leadership and innovation.

Scotland is a world leader in the deployment of floating offshore wind projects. We have the world's two largest operational floating wind farms, and a third that is under development will supersede those two wind farms to become the world's largest project. Tidal and wave energy are also being led from the islands, and the European Marine Energy Centre project is testament to that.

The islands can be world leaders in sustainable tourism, and I am encouraged by VisitScotland's work on that. Sensible promotion of electric car hire can ease ferry loads and cost.

A further benefit comes from developing peer learning among islands around the world, which leads to strengthened international relationships. I am keen for the Government to support that.

There will be challenges ahead and, as we have heard, there can be criticism of the scale, scope and remit of the project, but it is clear that there is a massive opportunity for our island communities to lead the way in realising Scotland's climate change ambitions. They are well placed and highly motivated to be hubs of innovation in renewable energy and climate change resilience. Our islands are profoundly important to Scotland and are known around the world, and I have no doubt that the world will be watching and learning from the carbon neutral islands project.

16:02

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for providing advance sight of the progress report. Clarity on the outputs of the carbon neutral islands project is welcome and gives assurance that the project can produce useful outcomes for the six lighthouse communities and all our islands. I welcome the progress that is being made in those communities, but it cannot be forgotten that, as has been said, we have 87 other inhabited island communities that face challenges to achieving carbon neutrality. Lack of resources and expertise and financial constraints are significant barriers to island communities taking ownership of projects and long-term planning. Likewise, our diverse island communities are at very different stages in the process, and trailblazers such as Eigg require different support from those that are less progressed.

The Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust continues to demonstrate pioneering work on energy decarbonisation, on the development of the forestry sector there and on community ownership. It is celebrating 25 years since its ground-breaking community buyout, and it has proved that community-led decarbonisation can succeed in the long term and contributes to community wealth building, population retention and even population expansion.

The extended period of power cuts and internet outage in Shetland last month emphasised the need to build resilience in island communities. The transition to carbon neutrality offers us an opportunity to do that. We must prioritise reducing the extent to which island households and businesses are at the mercy of market failures. Creating householder resilience through smart storage and small-scale generation will change normal consumers into prosumers who produce, consume and sell energy smartly.

We must do what we can with the inadequate power that we have on energy matters to change the current imbalance in our energy market, which, as fuel poverty indicators show, our islanders bear the brunt of. I am keen to hear whether the cabinet secretary thinks that we have adequate powers in Scotland to truly tackle the energy crisis and move to carbon neutrality for our islands.

I strongly agree with Zoe Holliday, chief executive officer of Community Energy Scotland, who emphasised that communities are not just key beneficiaries of the recently published energy strategy but key actors in its realisation. To achieve that vision, a joined-up approach is essential. I look forward to the delayed island energy strategy, which must bring together plans that are already in place and integrate them with the carbon neutral islands project.

Island communities face not one single barrier to decarbonisation but an array of barriers across portfolio areas. That is why I am pleased that the six islands that have been selected for the project represent a diversity of circumstances and stages on the path to decarbonisation. It is vital that the experience and knowledge gained through the project is shared, to maximise the support that we can give and to inform the work in all our island communities.

Carbon neutrality for all our island communities will not be achieved without emphasis on our natural environment. Island communities have long histories of economies based on the natural environment. Kelp harvesting, forestry and peat extraction have, at points, dominated island economies, and farming and fishing still play a crucial role. If we are to achieve carbon neutrality for our islands, there must be direct support for new nature-based economies and for the decarbonisation of existing sectors, where possible.

The 2021-22 programme for government included a commitment to support new green and nature-based skills activity, particularly on the islands, and the carbon neutral islands project should be an opportunity to deliver on that promise. The blue carbon economy and nature restoration provide exciting opportunities for doing exactly that.

I stress how pleased I am that the plans that are being developed with host communities will be community led, community owned and community actioned. I am also delighted that almost all of the community development officers are graduate returning islanders, and I welcome them to the chamber.

The wider social impact and the opportunities for communities to build social resilience must not be forgotten in our efforts towards carbon

neutrality. I hope that the cabinet secretary can provide some assurance that the plans that are being created will take into account the wider role of social resilience, and that on-going funding for the development officers who are charged with delivering the plans can be secured for the long term.

There are no silver bullets in relation to the challenges that our island communities face. The Government must recognise that a diverse, cross-cutting approach is essential. The move to carbon neutrality offers an exciting opportunity not only for our climate and biodiversity but, most of all, for our communities. I am excited to see how the communities harness that opportunity and to see the future work of the carbon neutral islands project.

16:08

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I begin by dwelling on the point about the amendments. I am astonished that the Scottish Government does not feel that it can support the amendment in Liam Kerr's name. I have yet to hear any Scottish National Party member give any proper justification for that position. The amendment is a detailed one.

Fiona Hyslop: Opposition members always accuse the Government of having motherhood and apple pie and everything including the kitchen sink in its motions. I suspect that that is the problem with the amendment: it is not as specific as it should be on the specific carbon neutral islands project, which is for six specific islands.

Donald Cameron: That proves my point: no justification has been offered. The amendment is a detailed one that lists a number of different issues, many of which have been covered by SNP speakers. I hope that the reason why the SNP is not supporting it is not the fact that the amendment includes the four words "welcomes UK Government investment", because that would be utterly depressing.

Let us move on. When we last debated the issue, in May, it was clear that the Scottish Government needed to provide more detail as to how it would achieve success for this ambitious scheme, which, as we have already said, enjoys broad support across the chamber.

All too often, when we have heard about various projects that are aimed at reducing our carbon output and meeting Scotland's net zero targets, the Scottish Government has been found wanting when it comes to moving beyond general principles—which we support—to practical and sometimes technical change.

Liam Kerr has already quoted the chairman of the CCC, Lord Deben, who said that Scotland's climate goals

"are increasingly at risk without real progress towards the milestones that Scottish Ministers have previously laid out."

He told the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee that

"unless there is a clear movement towards those targets, they will be without meaning."—[*Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee*, 20 December 2022; c 10.]

I remain to be convinced that significant progress on the carbon neutral islands plan has taken place since it was first announced, in September 2021. I welcome the report, but there is a lack of detail in it.

Màiri McAllan: Will the member take an intervention?

Donald Cameron: I am sorry—I have already taken one intervention and I have only a few minutes left.

The report references the six islands that were announced last May, the criteria by which each island was selected and some of the measures that the Scottish Government is looking to take. However, there is still a lot that we do not know: what the project really means in practice; how it will affect islanders in their everyday lives; what measures communities will need to take to achieve carbon neutral status; and what investment the Scottish Government will need to make. I hope that the minister might be able to address those concerns in summing up, because although we support the project and will work constructively to ensure that it can be realised, we think that a number of questions remain unanswered.

I know, too, that there is support from the communities on the islands that have been selected in principle. In August, I visited Barra and had the pleasure of meeting members of the Barra and Vatersay community council—Alasdair Allan has already mentioned them—who were enthusiastic about the project. They told me that Voluntary Action Barra and Vatersay, which is the local anchor organisation, has already taken the initiative by developing local projects that will help to meet the island's carbon neutral goals.

My colleague Jamie Halcro Johnston organised the most recent meeting of the cross-party group on islands, at which we heard that Orkney is driving forward the green agenda through projects such as ReFLEX Orkney, which our amendment specifically mentions. Liam McArthur has spoken about Orkney, too.

I was encouraged to hear about the work of the Islands Centre for Net Zero, which brings together

partners from Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles to work towards decarbonisation. The centre has been backed by the islands growth deal and has received £16.5 million of investment. That is another example of the positive things that can happen when the UK and Scottish Governments work together. Collaborative working—not just between the Scottish Government and the UK Government but between local authorities and the communities that have been selected to deliver the project—is vital.

However, there are some issues, which other members have touched on and which I will repeat. There needs to be more mention of island depopulation and the associated issues that contribute to it. It is the single biggest threat to island life, and we have to tackle it and its causes head on if we are to achieve well-intentioned aims, such as carbon neutral status. We have debated that issue many times in the chamber.

There has to be a renewed focus on the need for more affordable, energy-efficient housing on our islands. In addition, as others have mentioned, there is the—again, much debated—on-going crisis engulfing Scotland’s ferry network. We have to move forward and deliver new ferries that not only meet the needs of island communities but are as carbon neutral as possible. The use of fixed links, which has been mentioned, is imperative to develop the project, and I welcome the call from Beatrice Wishart yesterday for a debate on that issue.

We support the aims and ambitions of the Scottish Government’s carbon neutral islands project, although we are frustrated by the lack of detail. How will we help those islands to achieve carbon neutral status? We need more clarity on the role that transport will play, with a focus on ferries, and on the role that housing will play, with a focus on energy efficiency. I hope that, when we next debate the issue, we will know more about those questions and about how the Scottish Government will bring together those different components to achieve meaningful and lasting change.

16:14

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. I have enjoyed listening to the speeches of colleagues from right across the chamber. We have heard about some challenges and concerns, but overall we are optimistic about our island communities and islanders, and about the talent and ideas that they bring to the debate. I hope that island communities feel that their voices are being heard.

As a member who represents the Central Scotland region, I am a bit of an outsider in the debate. However, many of my constituents in Lanarkshire and Falkirk are from island communities and have family, social and business connections to our islands. I have come to appreciate and understand that more as a member of the Parliament’s Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

Similar to Fiona Hyslop and Liam Kerr, who are colleagues on that committee, I take the issues of the debate seriously. We are looking for innovative ways to ensure that island communities are heard in the Parliament. I have in recent months enjoyed the opportunity to spend time in Orkney and the Western Isles in order to hear directly from islanders. We had online engagement this week—including with young people, in order to ensure that they are represented. I am glad that the cabinet secretary touched on that important point in her opening speech.

The diversity of Scotland’s islands enriches our culture. Alasdair Allan touched on that point well.

My interest in the carbon neutral islands project and the decarbonisation journey is in relation to transport. Liam McArthur, in his amendment and speech, touched on a vital point about the decarbonisation of

“lifeline ferry services across all routes that serve Scotland’s island communities”,

which Labour members feel strongly about, too.

I welcome the progress report. The very first sentence, which is in the cabinet secretary’s name, says that

“Climate change and nature loss are the greatest threats facing our planet.”

I hope that we all focus on that during the debate. I agree with the cabinet secretary that island communities should be

“front and centre in the journey to net zero.”

The report talks about “net zero gap skills”. I think that it should be “skills gap”—Liam Kerr made that point. In our work in the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, we hear about the need for more training, more investment and more joined-up working and partnership working. Those are issues that the Government cannot fix alone. We need collaboration and partnership, but investment is absolutely key. I have not yet met anyone who is resistant to the net zero agenda, but we require more practical support and sustainable investment, including for third sector organisations, which bring many skills to the table.

I mentioned young people; the Young Islanders Network is clearly important. It is good that we have visitors from it in the public gallery today.

As for all such debates, the publication of a strategy and report is welcome, but it is through actions and in delivery that change really happens. I understand why there is some concern from Conservative members about that; Liam Kerr made some important points, as did Jamie Greene. I know that the action plans will be published later in the year, but that work is crucial.

As a citizen of Scotland, I do not particularly like to hear the UK Climate Change Committee, when it comes to the Parliament, warning us of the danger of “magical thinking”. We must pay attention and wake up to that. I am not sure that Lord Deben was saying that Scotland has been overambitious. I am not sure whether that was exactly what he said—perhaps Liam Kerr got that a little bit muddled. However, the point is well made that we can be ambitious and have targets, but we need the delivery plan to ensure that we deliver and work at pace. It is a warning to us all that there is no room for complacency on this issue.

The Labour amendment is really important because we must frame the debate in the context of what is happening in the here and now—the cost of living crisis and our efforts to achieve a just transition. Mercedes Villalba made important points about the need to have the right investment and the right job creation so that we can tackle wealth inequalities and the fuel poverty that many colleagues have mentioned. When I visited Orkney and spoke to some of the constituents whom Liam McArthur talked about, I was extremely concerned to hear about the high levels of fuel poverty there. We must grapple with such issues.

It is worth repeating Rhoda Grant's point about the fact that the carbon emissions from interisland ferry services will not be included in the audits. Other colleagues are more familiar with the issue than I am, but I recognise the frustration and disappointment around that. Ministers say that the reason for that is that local authorities, not the Government, have responsibility for those services, but we know that four of the six islands in question are served by CalMac. More credible responses are required.

I agree with colleagues who are optimistic and who can see the opportunities, but we must ensure that the delivery plan and investment are up to scratch.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jackie Dunbar, who will be the final speaker in the open debate.

16:20

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): As a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport

Committee, I am happy to speak in this afternoon's debate. As the member for Aberdeen Donside, I want the innovative work of the carbon neutral islands project because I believe that supporting our island communities on their journey to net zero is crucial for Scotland as a whole.

Carbon neutral islands will be in the vanguard in our reaching our net zero emissions targets by 2045: they will lead the way on the journey to net zero while supporting other areas across Scotland. Islands can lead the way in offering solutions for current and future challenges. Scotland's islands have been leaders in renewable energy development and innovation, so the Scottish Government is determined to harness that potential and build on that success to meet Scotland's 2045 net zero ambitions.

The carbon neutral islands project will embrace the opportunity for island communities to lead the way in realising Scotland's climate change ambitions. In directly supporting six islands on their journey to be carbon neutral by 2040, the project will not only benefit the environment but will support local economies, facilities and general wellbeing through investment in communities.

Liam Kerr: I am enjoying Jackie Dunbar's comments. Does she welcome the UK Government's investment in carbon-reducing initiatives on Scotland's islands?

Jackie Dunbar: I am an Aberdonian: money is money, as far as I am concerned. As long as it is new money and there are no strings attached, I welcome it.

The innovative carbon neutral islands project highlights islands as hubs of innovation in our move towards becoming carbon neutral. The project is underpinned by three key principles: alignment, fairness and replicability. First, the project aims to align with existing island-based climate change efforts and to avoid duplication of those efforts. Secondly, the project will support islands to become carbon neutral in a just and fair way. Thirdly, the project will provide opportunities for all Scottish islands through an effective process of learning and sharing good practice related to net zero and climate resilience.

The project also provides an opportunity to demonstrate the low-carbon energy potential of islands as hubs of innovation in relation to renewable energy and climate change resilience, which will positively impact on island economies, facilities and general wellbeing by allowing for reinvestment in the communities.

Our island communities are directly benefiting Aberdeen and the north-east of Scotland by bringing in a new era of renewable energy potential while sustainably transitioning away from traditional oil and gas mineral extraction. The six

islands in the project will act as catalysts for decarbonisation across all Scottish islands.

The Scottish Government is working closely with Community Energy Scotland to deliver the project. For each of the islands, the Scottish Government is developing in-depth carbon audits, community climate change action plans and climate change investment strategies. On each carbon neutral island, the Scottish Government's delivery partner, Community Energy Scotland, is working closely with a steering group that is made up of key members of the island community.

Although we must acknowledge that our island communities face unique challenges, we must also acknowledge that the Scottish Government is committed to supporting those communities. The Scottish budget for 2023-24 commits overall funding of £3 million for carbon neutral islands for creating jobs, protecting our island environments from the impact of climate change and contributing to delivery of Scotland's statutory climate change targets. In September 2022, the Government announced that

"Six island local authorities will receive a share of £4.45 million to assist critical projects on climate change, population retention and tourism.

A total of 11 projects, spread across 31 islands, have received funding for the current financial year as part of the Islands Programme."

On 9 December 2022, the Scottish Government announced a £1.4 million islands cost crisis emergency fund that targets immediate support at those who are struggling with the cost of living crisis, with the money to be shared either through existing schemes or as new support. The successful roll-out of the £30 million islands programme is funding projects that will encourage people to live healthier lifestyles and improve their resilience. I welcome that.

Scotland is delivering lasting action to secure a net zero future in a way that is fair and just for everyone. Scotland can rightly be proud of the action that it has taken so far to respond to the climate crisis. The Scottish Government has committed to reaching net zero emissions by 2045, with an ambitious interim target of a 75 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030. Those targets, including one to decarbonise the north-east, form the heart of the Scottish Government's indicative nationally determined contribution to the Paris agreement, which was published ahead of COP26. Scotland's emissions are down by 51.5 per cent since the 1990 baseline, and Scotland continues to outperform the UK as a whole in delivering long-term reductions.

I again welcome the debate and the steps that are being taken in the face of the global climate emergency.

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

16:27

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): This has been a genuinely good debate that has shown what debates should be about: the exchange of ideas. We may not necessarily agree on all the ideas, but the debate has served a useful purpose. I welcome the cabinet secretary's confirmation that she will support my amendment and the amendment in the name of Rhoda Grant. I find her reason for not supporting Liam Kerr's amendment rather strange.

As I said in my opening remarks, it is absolutely right that the Government is taking a local, islands-based approach, looking at the six islands as lighthouse communities. Anchoring the initiatives in each island with a single organisation, supported by Community Energy Scotland, and taking the collaborative approach that Alasdair Allan referred to seems to me to be absolutely right.

Mercedes Villalba was right to ask how any learning will be extended beyond those six islands. As well as exchanging ideas about good practice, it is important to learn lessons from things that do not work.

I share some of the surprise expressed by Donald Cameron and Jamie Greene that the Government cannot support the Conservative amendment. The local activity that we are talking about cannot be disconnected from on-going action and support from both the Scottish and UK Governments. I talked in my opening speech about the imperative to develop creative financial mechanisms and models to support the work on the ground. That will require Government intervention at both Scottish and UK levels. In an excellent speech, Fiona Hyslop talked about strategic support and local leadership. That is the symbiotic relationship that we are looking for.

Liam Kerr opened the debate by talking about the challenges that we face in meeting our climate targets. There is no lack of ambition. We have regularly congratulated ourselves on what are seen as world-leading targets, but I think that we are all seized of the concerns that the UK Climate Change Committee has been expressing for some time about the absence of detailed plans and pathways to the achievement of those targets. Monica Lennon was right to pull up Liam Kerr in relation to Lord Deben's comments, which were not a criticism of the ambition but more a plea for detail to be put forward on how it could be met.

That has been reflected in some of the debate that we have heard today in relation to the progress report. A key aspect of that has been fuel

poverty, which was very much a feature of Rhoda Grant's comments. We know that the situation in islands is bad, but it is legitimate to say that we do not necessarily know quite how bad it is, which impedes our efforts to tackle it.

Rhoda Grant and Alasdair Allan echoed concerns that I have expressed about the fact that the way in which the energy market is currently regulated hinders our ability to tackle fuel poverty and works against the interests of island communities more generally. It certainly stands in the way of innovation that could enable us to achieve some of the ambitions that we have talked about today.

I echo the comments that a number of speakers made about transport—notably Liam Kerr's comments on the EV charging network. However, it is not just about the numbers; it is about making sure that the maintenance of that network is sustained in a way that we are not necessarily seeing at the moment.

I will not repeat what I said earlier about lifeline ferries, although I very much welcome Monica Lennon's endorsement of that. I cannot avoid feeling that the laudable ambition of creating carbon neutral islands will lack credibility for as long as that fundamental issue remains unaddressed. I think that it was Jamie Greene who talked about having carbon neutral islands with polluting ferries ploughing back and forth delivering vital services and the population back and forth. To me, that does not feel terribly sustainable.

We are not moving from a standing start here, and Alasdair Allan reminded us that islands have not waited to be invited to take action to tackle the climate emergency. They have taken action to deliver a degree of self-sufficiency and climate mitigation. Each will have different challenges, but there are common issues as well. The solutions will need to be tailored to meet the needs and circumstances in each island.

Jenni Minto, as usual, advocated passionately for what is happening in Islay. I commend her for her personal involvement in a lot of that activity. Slightly more surprising, perhaps, was Fiona Hyslop's position as an evangelist for Shetland, which I very much welcome. It gives me an opportunity to jump on the bandwagon and do likewise for Orkney and our credentials. I would say that we are the energy islands, given our track record on the development of renewables, marine, onshore and, soon, offshore. The ReFLEX project, which many members mentioned, brings together the issues of generation and deployment to meet the challenges of transport and heat.

Our islands have the skills, the incentive and the appetite to embrace what we are trying to achieve

through carbon neutral islands. We need to flesh out the detail and the pathway to achieving that, but I hope that the local development officers who are sitting in the public gallery can take some reassurance from the fact that their endeavours enjoy a degree of cross-party support. I very much look forward to supporting Aisling Phillips and others who are involved in the project in Hoy, not least by getting the lessons from that rolled out elsewhere in Orkney. I also look forward to working with the Government to take the project forward.

16:34

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): It is just under a year since the Scottish Government announced the six islands that would be part of the carbon neutral islands project. As Liam McArthur said, this has been a good debate about that project. I welcome the chance to acknowledge the work in not just those six islands but all 93 of Scotland's inhabited island communities as part of our transition to net zero.

Decarbonising six of those islands with a combined population of less than 7,000 is an important target, albeit a modest one. However, the real benefit of the project could well come from the development of initiatives that can be scaled up and implemented in other communities as part of a Scotland-wide journey to net zero. As Mercedes Villalba said, if something works for our islands, given all the pressures and difficulties that they face, making it work for the mainland must surely be achievable.

The progress report that was published yesterday sets out the framework for the carbon neutral islands project and acknowledges the diversity of the six islands—Barra, Great Cumbrae, Hoy, Islay, Raasay and Yell—and therefore the importance of providing decarbonisation support that suits local needs. However, as Monica Lennon stressed, what will be crucial is the delivery, later this year, of comprehensive and detailed action plans for how the Government and communities will confidently meet the commitment for those islands to be carbon neutral by 2040.

Those plans will need to show how that transition will be just. The Climate Change Committee's recent progress report to the Parliament could not have been clearer. The cabinet secretary said in her opening comments that efforts were being stepped up with legally binding targets; however, as the committee highlighted, the problem is that Scotland lacks a clear plan to deliver on those targets. The publication last week of the Government's "Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan" did little to change that perception. It was very much a

rehash of existing policies, which we know do not go far enough. The further behind we fall, the less likelihood there is that any transition will be just.

Given that families across Scotland face a cost of living crisis, a just transition is particularly crucial for our island communities, who already pay more for basic necessities such as energy and food. An important theme in the debate is the extent to which our island communities suffer from extreme levels of fuel poverty. That is getting worse. Fiona Hyslop said that the latest figures from Energy Action Scotland show that fuel poverty affects a shocking 40 per cent in the Western Isles. The average fuel bill there has increased by 240 per cent. According to the Western Isles poverty action group, it is likely that fuel poverty there could rise as high as 80 per cent. Electricity costs are higher on the islands, and 60 per cent of households have a dependence on oil boilers for domestic heating.

Alasdair Allan: I agree with Colin Smyth's points about fuel poverty in the Western Isles. Would matters be helped if the UK decoupled the price of renewably generated electricity from the arbitrary price of a unit of gas?

Colin Smyth: I absolutely agree with that point, which we constantly stress to the UK Government.

No homes on Orkney or Shetland use mains gas, and 88 per cent of households in the Western Isles are off grid, as Alasdair Allan knows.

As Liam Kerr highlighted, however, there is a lack of clarity on the future heating options for many of those households. If those communities are to achieve a just transition to net zero, we need to support them to properly insulate and retrofit their homes, as Rhoda Grant highlighted—reducing fuel use and, therefore, cutting bills and emissions. It is therefore disappointing that, in last year's budget, the Scottish Government cut the energy efficiency budget by £133 million instead of tackling the reasons why there was not a higher uptake of some of the Government schemes.

A just transition for our island communities needs to be jobs led, as Mercedes Villalba stressed. The proportion of people under the age of 25 on Scotland's islands fell from 28 per cent to 24 per cent between 2001 and 2020, as more and more young people were forced to move away to find jobs. National Records of Scotland statisticians have forecast population reductions for all Scotland's island local authorities over the next 20 years.

I wish all those who are involved in the carbon neutral islands project well, including the community development officers, who are employed by local steering groups and who have joined us in the gallery. I was particularly encouraged to hear the cabinet secretary say that

some of them were young people from the islands who have returned to work on those projects.

We need to learn from the mistakes of the past, when growth in renewable energy production did not translate into growth in jobs. The journey to net zero is an opportunity for job creation and skills development right across Scotland, with our rural and island communities at the heart of the transition to renewable and green energy—not least in what Alasdair Allan described as largely untapped sources of energy, such as tidal.

Meeting that jobs potential will need better, more reliable connectivity. Too often, as Monica Lennon and others highlighted, too many of our island communities are being failed by the current ferry network. Transport remains the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland, being responsible for more than a third. Investment in decarbonising that ferry network is therefore needed more than ever, as Rhoda Grant and Liam McArthur rightly highlighted.

In island communities, a car is often a necessity, not a luxury. Liam Kerr was right to highlight the importance of making electric vehicles and charging points much more accessible and affordable. The Climate Change Committee has said that Scotland needs 30,000 charging points by 2030, but the Government still has no plan to deliver that number.

Labour will support the motion and all the amendments. The carbon neutral islands project is an opportunity for Scotland to demonstrate that we can deliver a truly just transition to net zero, albeit on a modest scale. On our islands and across Scotland, we need to ensure that that transition not only meets our climate targets but is a just transition that tackles fuel poverty and delivers economic security for all our communities.

16:40

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am delighted to close for the Conservatives. It has been an interesting debate that has highlighted the role that our islands are playing in driving decarbonisation and the ongoing opportunities that islands have to be at the forefront of efforts. Like colleagues, I am still slightly confused by what the SNP has found that it cannot support in our amendment, but we will be supporting all the amendments.

The Scottish Conservatives fully support the ambition to help Scotland's islands to become carbon neutral. However, what we must see, and what islanders will expect, is that ambition being backed up with practical steps and support by the Scottish Government. As my colleague Liam Kerr highlighted, we know that this Government is good at setting targets and talking about climate

change, and not so good at delivering on those targets. As an islander myself, I have seen commitments to islands come and go. The islands bond was hailed by ministers, then dropped. We have seen promises on reduced ferry fares made and forgotten. Even the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, with its commitment to consider the impact of legislation on island communities, is viewed with some scepticism by some in the islands and, of course, by my colleague Jamie Greene.

Five of the six islands that make up the project are in my Highlands and Islands region. One of them, Hoy, sits just across Scapa Flow from my home in Orkney, and I can watch the Hoy Head ferry travel across the water. The ferry is a vital lifeline link for residents of Hoy, but she is also part of the problem, because she is coming up to 30 years old. As Liam McArthur, Liam Kerr, Rhoda Grant, Jamie Greene and others have highlighted, one of the greatest contributors to carbon emissions on the islands is ferries, which use millions of litres of fuel a year. In response to a freedom of information request by Beatrice Wishart, it was shown that, in just three years, on just three routes in Shetland, nearly 18 million litres of fuel were consumed. We know that, nationally, the SNP is further away from its commitment to ensure that 30 per cent of Scotland's state-owned ferries use environmentally friendly technology by 2032 than it was when it made that commitment. Instead of greening Scotland's fleet, the Scottish Government is actually going backwards on low-emissions ferries.

The problem will only get worse as Scotland's fleet—both state owned and that run by local councils—gets older and less efficient. The Scottish Government must ensure that a new, greener fleet is delivered. Although low-emission vessels will have a role to play, other countries, such as Norway, have been operating electric ferries for years. Norway's busiest ferry connection is already served on its 10-mile route by the world's largest electric ferry, which can accommodate 600 passengers and 200 cars. Other countries have ambitions on ferries that we can only dream that the Scottish Government had.

Of course, there is also the opportunity for developing more fixed links, such as bridges and tunnels. Serious consideration should be given by the Scottish Government to fixed links replacing ferries, where suitable. There are communities across our islands where that would work, and where it would improve social and economic connectivity. That should not be seen as a pipe dream. The Faroe Islands are investing in tunnels, which they believe can play a crucial part in building sustainable communities. I hope that the Scottish Government will be more open to opportunities in our own islands.

Alasdair Allan: I have seen the Faroe Islands tunnels that the member refers to. Would he support the Scottish Government having the same kind of borrowing powers that the Faroese Government has to achieve such a thing?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: A point being made by the Faroese is that the tunnels are essentially direct replacements for ferries. The Scottish Government has a commitment to deliver ferries, although, as we have seen in the past few days, the UK Government has, thankfully, stepped in and is providing the community on Fair Isle with a ferry. That is something that we, as a chamber, should welcome.

The motion says that

“the six Carbon Neutral Islands will demonstrate Scotland's climate change ambitions on the international stage.”

However, Scotland's ambition and success is already on the international stage and has been for some years.

Not to be outdone by Liam McArthur on my Orkney credentials, I note that—as he mentioned—Kirkwall airport in Orkney is home to the UK's first operationally based, low-carbon aviation test centre. The UK Government, through its industrial strategy challenge fund, is trialling an electric aircraft on routes in the islands.

Orkney has been at the forefront of marine energy development. The European Marine Energy Centre was established in 2003, following a recommendation by the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee two years earlier. It is now self-sufficient, but it was previously supported by the UK and Scottish Governments as well as by the European Commission and the Carbon Trust.

As Donald Cameron mentioned, there is also the work of the islands centre for net zero, and—as other members have mentioned—the ReFLEX Orkney project. That innovative project, funded by the UK Government, has been doing work that can provide a model for communities on our islands and throughout the country. It is about digitally integrating different types of renewable energy generation in an innovative way that can be managed by the local community and can maximise energy use. It involves co-ordinating and combining multiple energy assets across electricity, transport and heat. If members are not aware of ReFLEX Orkney, I very much suggest that they look it up.

I was delighted to welcome Gareth Davies from ReFLEX Orkney to a recent meeting of the CPG on islands, which I convene. The meeting was focused on decarbonising our islands. It was highlighted that energy usage on the islands differs from that in other places and that the

average island household uses twice as much energy as the average UK household. However, it was noted that, even with the work of ReFLEX Orkney, only 15 per cent of total energy demand was accounted for by electricity, while the other 85 per cent of energy demand was ultimately still sourced from fossil fuels.

The current energy crisis has highlighted that need for change. That is especially true in our islands, where households are affected to a much greater extent by the knock-on effects of the increases in fuel and energy prices.

I turn briefly to the Labour amendment, which Scottish Conservatives will be supporting. We are already energy rich in the northern isles, but—as Rhoda Grant rightly highlighted—too many households are in fuel poverty and are not seeing the benefits of the energy that is generated on their doorstep. That anomaly must be addressed.

The issue is wider than our islands. According to the Renewable Energy Foundation, in 2020, constraint payments to onshore wind in Scotland amounted to some 3,460GWh, costing around £243 million. I do not have the latest figures for that, but it is still happening and it involves public money being spent not to generate energy during an energy crisis.

I turn back to the carbon neutral islands project. I was pleased that the project leads for Yell, Reuben Irvine of North Yell Development Council, and for Raasay, Rosie Macinnes, were able to attend the recent CPG meeting. I wish them, and all the project leads, every success.

There is already much to build on, with Nova Innovations' offshore tidal array off Yell powering local homes and businesses since 2016. The Isle of Raasay distillery is working towards reducing its carbon emissions by 83 per cent to enable the production of net zero whisky products.

Scotland has 93 populated islands, and there is great scope for expansion of the work. Progress is about getting it right, learning from each other and building on experience and work that has been happening for years in our islands. We support the carbon neutral islands project, but our islands are already playing their part in decarbonisation and tackling climate change.

16:48

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): I am pleased to have the chance to wind up the debate for the Scottish Government and to have been able to listen to the exchanges. I will respond to some of what we have heard this afternoon, which has been constructive and varied. Before I do so, however, I will highlight from my portfolio perspective some of

the stand-out points in what I think is an excellent project that the cabinet secretary, her islands team and of course the islanders themselves have been leading.

First, I will touch on our natural environment and its centrality to the challenges that we face. As the cabinet secretary said, the dual crises of climate change and ecological breakdown are the single greatest long-term threat that we collectively face. The scale and pace of that challenge means that we have to work fast to undo damage and, at the same time, build a resilient future.

Owing to the enormity of that challenge, it can feel daunting. In my job, I meet a lot of young activists in particular, who, despite being utterly committed to fighting climate change and so brave in their pursuits, admit to me that they have huge feelings of anxiety. That is only natural when we are confronted with a task of this size, and none of us can be in doubt about the seriousness of the problem.

The point that I want to make is that, amid all that difficulty, there is opportunity. Of course, the first and foremost, and the most fundamental, opportunity is to salvage the equilibrium in our natural world and to deliver an inhabitable planet in the future. However, opportunity is also available in the here and now, at the socioeconomic level, the community level and even the personal level.

For example, we know that we have to replace fossil fuel demand with zero-carbon technology. That means making fundamental changes in how we travel and heat our homes and in many people's employment. Doing that can feel deeply challenging, and to avoid the mistakes of the past, it must be managed fairly. That is something that the Scottish Government is committed to and that the Parliament legislated for when it underpinned our climate targets with a commitment to just transition.

My point is that we know that there is also opportunity. With Scotland's vast capacity for renewables, we are able to build green energy systems of the future. As has been narrated by colleagues around the chamber, much of that already is, and increasingly will be, centred in our rural and island communities. Not only does it tackle climate change, it can create jobs, bring us greater energy security and, if done correctly, help us to tackle fuel poverty. Our recently published energy strategy and just transition plan sets out our vision for that.

Moving away from energy and looking at our natural environment, we similarly know that we have to plant more trees so that they can sequester carbon and support wildlife. The Scottish Government has very stretching targets

for woodland creation, and for the fourth year in a row we have managed to plant over 10,000 hectares of new woodland and exceeded our target for native woodland creation. Likewise, we have to restore degraded peatlands so that they, too, can lock up greenhouse gases, and we are investing a quarter of a billion pounds over 10 years to do that. We must also protect our waters and our coastlines and the vital blue carbon that is in them.

All of that requires land use change. Again, that can be challenging but, as with the energy transition, it poses a huge opportunity for good green jobs in our island and rural areas and for our communities to benefit.

I say all this because, in many ways, I believe that our islands and the people who make them home, although they are diverse among themselves, embody so much of both the risk and the opportunity of the climate challenge. I think that much of that is captured in the carbon neutral islands project.

Liam Kerr: I do not disagree at all with what the minister has just said. However, it strikes me that the preparation of the carbon audit, the action plans and the investment strategy under the report will require professional help. What professional help has been identified as being required, and when will it be available to islanders?

Màiri McAllan: I was just about to talk about some of the detail of the audit process. First, though, I want to reiterate to the Conservatives, who seem to have had a slight issue with this this afternoon, that the project is community led by the islanders themselves. Whether it is to do with the amendment or the detail, which many of the Conservatives have said is lacking in what the cabinet secretary has published, the point is that this is being led by people on the ground right now, and they will provide the detail.

However, yes, they will work with professional organisations. I do not have the detail of that to hand, but I am more than happy to update the member on whom communities are working with.

I was going to go on to say that the audit process is exceptionally valuable. It will provide that accurate local information on a multitude of factors, from energy to transport, housing to waste, and—of particular interest to me—land and blue carbon. It will provide that baseline from which to both mitigate the risk and maximise the opportunity.

Having touched on the environment and what I see as the central role of island communities in a lot of the challenges that we face, I want to turn to the other side of my portfolio, which is land reform and communities. As the cabinet secretary said, we have in the Parliament's public gallery some of

the community development officers who are funded as part of this project and who are passionately working on each carbon neutral island. They are so enthusiastic, skilled and passionate about their homes. They are not only drivers of the project but an invaluable resource for their home islands. Certainly, in the Scottish Government, we know that it is our responsibility to continue to foster their talents and passions so that the islands and the project can continue to benefit and thrive.

As I said, the project is for, with and by the community. As Fiona Hyslop said, islanders are experts on their needs and aspirations. I know that the cabinet secretary and I look forward to seeing the results of the action plans later this year.

Jamie Greene: If we cut away all the jargon, we can see that we will not get carbon neutral islands unless every household and every islander is on board, which requires the Government to be clear with them about what is required of them in their day-to-day lives. I suggest that the Government should do a door-to-door drop informing every person in all of the six islands exactly what is being asked of them. I think that that should be quite simple to deliver and not terribly difficult to do, but it would be helpful.

Màiri McAllan: That is a great suggestion, and I know that door-to-door work has already been done by some of the project officers on some of the islands. That is the granularity that this project seeks to achieve.

Of course, that local community is important. However, I am also speaking of a community that is not limited to Scotland. Climate change is a global issue and we do not have time not to collaborate. The carbon neutral islands project recognises that, continuing Scotland's long tradition of internationalism by actively engaging with partners in Malta, Finland and Ireland, and I am particularly pleased that conversations with Vanuatu have commenced. At COP27, I had the pleasure of meeting Vanuatu's Minister for Climate Change. We held bilateral discussions on the threats that low-lying island communities face, and we both took part in a joint press conference calling for action on loss and damage, which we were pleased to eventually see come to pass.

I will turn to some of the points that were made in today's debate. Transport was obviously a dominant theme. I begin by clarifying something that was said during the debate regarding the inclusion of ferry emissions in the audit process. I confirm that they absolutely will form part of that. The distinction around interisland ferries is that local authorities are responsible for them. However, they will still form part of the audit, and that is why we are working closely with local authorities as part of the project.

Another transport theme was electric vehicles and the need for charging infrastructure. It is already happening. Orkney is leading the way and numbers are steadily increasing. We recently supported two new charging stations on Islay, through the community-led local development fund, and if Cumbrae does not have enough, that will be flagged up by the audit process that will be undertaken.

The cost of living crisis was another important theme, and it is something that the Scottish Government absolutely recognises, particularly with regard to the additional exposure of islanders to it. That is, in part, why we created the £1.4 million islands cost crisis emergency fund, which I must point out is an example of the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 in action. The fund has gone to local authorities, for them to decide how best to help alleviate the cost crisis, and some have used it to double the Scottish welfare fund crisis grant.

Energy efficiency was also, rightly, mentioned, and we are supporting that through our area-based schemes, delivering energy efficiency improvements for households that are living in or are at risk of fuel poverty. That includes an uplift for our island communities.

Liam McArthur: On the specific point about energy efficiency, a concern has been raised about the up-front capital cost, and I reflected in my speech on the need to look at more creative financing models in order to shift away from just private sector or just public sector investment in order to ensure that the gap between the £33 billion that is required and the £1.8 billion that has been committed by the Government can be bridged. Would the minister be prepared to consider that?

Màiri McAllan: I absolutely agree with the member's point. As with so much in the climate crisis, the costs are eye watering—that is not an unreasonable term to use—and the Scottish Government very much recognises that the public purse cannot fund the response alone. I think that it was Jenni Minto who made the point that we have to work to leverage responsible private investment and other methods that we are turning our minds to.

I want to give Rhoda Grant some assurance on a couple of points that she raised. She wants island communities to be at the heart of the approach. That is absolutely what the project is about. I think that Ms Grant also made a point about other islands being able to benefit from the process. It is absolutely our intention that the learning on the islands, which were picked for their diversity, can be replicated in other parts of Scotland.

I realise that time is against me, so I will conclude.

The project is a very exciting one with huge potential. It recognises how close our island communities are to the threats of climate change and to the solutions, and therefore how central islanders are to the biggest issues of our day.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motion S6M-07585, on committee membership, and motion S6M-07586, on substitution on a committee.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Paul Sweeney be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee;

Carol Mochan be appointed to replace Paul Sweeney as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Carol Mochan be appointed to replace Paul Sweeney as a member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.—[*George Adam*]

The Presiding Officer: The questions on those motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are up to five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Liam Kerr is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liam McArthur will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-07558.3, in the name of Liam Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07558, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the carbon neutral islands project: first steps towards decarbonisation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:01

Meeting suspended.

17:04

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Liam Kerr is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liam McArthur will fall.

The question is, that amendment S6M-07558.3, in the name of Liam Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07558, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the carbon neutral islands project: first steps towards decarbonisation, be agreed to. 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: Thank you. We will ensure that that is recorded.

The vote is closed.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My voting platform has been misbehaving. I would have voted no.

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

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not work. I would have voted no.

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

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Mine has not worked either. I would have voted yes.

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

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not work. 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)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)

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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 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)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (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)
 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)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-07558.3, in the name of Liam Kerr, is: For 48, Against 60, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Rhoda Grant is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liam McArthur will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-07558.2, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S6M-07558, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the carbon neutral islands project: first steps towards decarbonisation, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Liam McArthur therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-07558, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the carbon neutral islands project: first steps towards decarbonisation, as amended, be agreed to.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's publication of a progress report on the Carbon Neutral Islands Project; notes that the first steps to support the six islands towards becoming fully carbon neutral by 2040 are underway; recognises that the six islands included in the project will act as lighthouse communities, spreading knowledge and good practices to other Scottish islands; acknowledges that communities are at the heart of the project and that they will be supported to take advantage of the opportunities that the transition to net zero presents; continues to support this initiative and the soon-to-be-published community climate change action plans; acknowledges that the six Carbon Neutral Islands will demonstrate Scotland's climate change ambitions on the international stage; recognises that the cost of living crisis is hitting some of the islands' communities hardest, including fuel poverty being highest among some of the islands that are not included in the Carbon Neutral Islands Project, and therefore awaits Scottish Government plans to assist all islands during the energy crisis; calls for guarantees that a just transition for workers is included in all areas of the strategy, and believes that the Scottish Government, UK Government, local authorities and all other island-related agencies must be involved to truly reach net zero.

The Presiding Officer: Unless any member objects, I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions.

The final question is, that motion S6M-07585, on committee membership, and motion S6M-07586, on substitution on committee, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Paul Sweeney be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee;

Carol Mochan be appointed to replace Paul Sweeney as a member of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee;

Carol Mochan be appointed to replace Paul Sweeney as a member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Rhoda Grant be appointed to replace Carol Mochan as the Scottish Labour Party substitute on the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:09.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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