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Thursday 23 February 2023

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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 23 February 2023

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

General Question Time

Deposit Return Scheme

1. Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the deposit return scheme. (S6O-01924)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): Circularity Scotland is now at an advanced stage of building the infrastructure and logistics network that will underpin the scheme. Sites have been secured across Scotland to handle and process material. Counting equipment and vehicle fleets are arriving. Recruitment is under way to create 500 new jobs in Scotland in processing and logistics.

Likewise, businesses of all sizes are continuing to make good progress as they prepare for launch in August this year. The deposit return scheme is a transformational step change on our road to net zero, and businesses here in Scotland have the necessary momentum to get us there.

Donald Cameron: Small producers in the Highlands and Islands, especially craft brewers, including Fyne Ales and Glen Spean Brewing, are deeply concerned about the many unanswered questions that remain about the DRS, including how the contractor, Biffa, will collect materials from rural and remote locations that are hard to reach.

Given those legitimate concerns, why will the minister not pause the introduction of the DRS until those matters have been fully resolved or, at the very least, grant smaller producers a grace period before joining the scheme?

Lorna Slater: I take the concerns of small producers seriously, and, this week, Circularity Scotland announced a package of measures to specifically answer some of the concerns that have been raised by small producers in terms of cash flow and labelling.

The process of organisation and logistics is a matter of co-design between businesses and Biffa, the logistics partner, to ensure that the system works for everybody, and that will continue. This afternoon, I will meet small producers to find out what else we can do to support them.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Although I welcome recent changes on fees for small drinks producers and other improvements to the planned roll-out of the DRS, some businesses in my constituency are still concerned about implementation at a time of other serious economic pressures, and have practical concerns about storage space and cost pressures.

Although the aims of the DRS are understood, with widespread acknowledgement of the need for it, does the minister recognise that continued uncertainty, and how does she plan to address it? What practical changes have her recent meetings with industry produced?

Lorna Slater: I understand that implementing the DRS is a big change to manage, particularly for small businesses. I have been regularly meeting industry stakeholders throughout the process. As a result of feedback from retailers, we have simplified the return-point exemption process, particularly in relation to concerns around storage, and Circularity Scotland this week announced a package of support to improve cash flow for producers, which equates to £22 million of support. That was in direct response to specific asks from small producers.

I will continue to meet businesses and listen to them, and, later today, I will meet with a group of small producers.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Some MSPs have claimed that operating kerbside collections alongside the DRS would make Scotland unlike any other country in the world. Are those claims accurate? How would the minister like councils to respond to the DRS?

Lorna Slater: Those claims are inaccurate. Many countries that operate a deposit return scheme also have kerbside collections, including Norway, Germany, Croatia and Iceland. Our scheme will mean that local authorities will have less waste to handle, as well as reduced litter and associated clean-up costs, which is good for residents and good for council budgets.

We are supporting local authorities to prepare for the introduction of the scheme and our £70 million recycling improvement fund is supporting councils to modernise recycling services.

Free Bicycles for Children (Glasgow)

2. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how many free bicycles it has issued to children in Glasgow. (S6O-01925)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): Our commitment to encourage our youngest citizens to make active travel choices by

providing free bikes for all children of school age who cannot afford them was initially met through nine pilots that have operated since summer 2021. An independent evaluation of the pilots was published on 27 January 2023, and the total number of bikes issued is 3,650, including 52 adapted bikes.

The free bikes activity has taken place in 20 local authority areas, including Glasgow, although we do not record data at a local authority level.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Roads in Glasgow are in disrepair, with potholes so big that some may be asking for submarines, not bikes. In addition, the avenues project, which was designed for cycling, wheeling, walking and driving, also has safety concerns. In all, the safety of our roads for cyclists is found wanting, to say the least.

Given the variation in approaches and the flexibility that is given to pilot schemes, what steps will be taken to ensure that a minimum level of safety equipment or training is provided to children who receive bikes as part of the future national roll-out?

Patrick Harvie: In order to ensure safety for everyone who travels actively, we need to reduce the barriers to active travel. We also need to continue to invest in safe infrastructure. The Government is doing that on a scale beyond anything that Scotland has ever seen.

However, as Pam Duncan-Glancy rightly says, we also need to ensure that there is a wider package of support. All the pilots issue safety equipment to the children who have been provided with a bicycle, and the range of models used in the pilots also needs to inform the design of the national scheme. That is why the evaluation of those pilots will be important in providing useful information to make sure that our national scheme is as successful as possible.

Local Authority Funding (Swimming Pools)

3. Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what additional funding it will provide to local authorities in response to reported concerns about swimming pool closures. (S6O-01926)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): The Scottish Government recognises the importance of ensuring that community hubs such as swimming pools are accessible to the people of Scotland. Access to swimming pools can give children the opportunity to learn to swim, which is a life skill that can save lives.

However, we also understand the challenging financial circumstances that are faced by local authorities, largely due to the cost of living crisis.

Our settlements from the United Kingdom Government have suffered a decade of austerity. In the most challenging budget settlement since devolution, we are providing more than £13.3 billion in the local government settlement for 2023-24.

Foyso Choudhury: My constituent Lewis Condy lodged petition PE1891, which sought to make swimming lessons a statutory requirement in the primary school curriculum. It was very disappointing that that petition was closed in January 2023, and now potential swimming pool closures present further obstacles to providing crucial swimming lessons to children across Scotland.

Swimming pools are vital community hubs for the population of Scotland. They provide crucial water safety skills, each week teaching more than 100,000 children the essential life skill of learning how to swim.

Swimming pools also act as part of Scotland's natural health service by safeguarding the mental and physical wellbeing of people of all ages and abilities, saving the national health service an essential £357 million every year. Will the minister support swimming pool operators to keep those vital community hubs open to provide what is an essential service?

Tom Arthur: I agree with Foyso Choudhury about the power of the preventative impact on health of swimming and, indeed, all physical exercise.

The Scottish Government has been working with Scottish Swimming, Education Scotland, sportscotland and Scottish Water to develop interventions and approaches to provide opportunities for children to become confident, safer and competent swimmers.

On that point, under the provisions of the curriculum for excellence, schools and education authorities have the flexibility to decide on the content of their lessons at local authority level, taking into account local needs and the circumstances of all children and young people.

In addition, the Scottish Government will continue to work with sportscotland, our national agency for sport, to accurately understand current swimming pool provision and life cycle and to predict a landscape in the short, medium and long term to ensure that current and future generations have the opportunity to realise the benefits of swimming.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Fifty-seven people—predominantly young people—accidentally drowned in Scotland last year. The Scottish Government's plan to halve accidental drownings by 2026 was announced four years

ago, but deaths last year rose to their highest level since 2015. What impact does the minister think the closure of swimming pools across Scotland will have on that?

Tom Arthur: I absolutely recognise the importance of doing all that we can to ensure that we promote water safety and that all people have the opportunity to be equipped with the vital life-saving skill of swimming.

Ultimately, decisions on local authority pools are a matter for local authorities. In an exceptionally challenging fiscal settlement, we are providing £13.3 billion for local government in the coming financial year. We have now passed the budget. However, as was made clear numerous times in the budget process, if members wish to see additional resource and funding for local authorities, it is incumbent on them to identify where that funding should come from. As I think members of Parliament realise, no credible alternative proposals were put forward, and Parliament subsequently passed the budget.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you. Concise questions and responses would be appreciated, as ever.

Scottish Prison Service (Lifting of Covid-19 Restrictions)

4. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the Scottish Prison Service regarding the lifting of all Covid-19-related restrictions in prisons. (S6O-01927)

The Minister for Community Safety (Elena Whitham): The Scottish Government receives regular updates from the Scottish Prison Service on Covid-19 recovery within prisons. The only remaining restrictions are testing pathways and isolation for those who are symptomatic or who test positive, as set out in the SPS Covid-19 transition plan. In the event of an outbreak, further restrictions can be reinstated.

The Prison Service is prioritising restoration to fuller rehabilitative regimes while balancing the need to protect the health and wellbeing of those living, visiting and working in our prisons.

Pauline McNeill: I raised the question because, in November 2022, His Majesty's chief inspector of prisons in Scotland, Wendy Sinclair-Gieben, noted in an annual report that there was no reason why prisons could not return to regimes at least as open as they were before the pandemic.

I know that the minister supports the view that that is particularly important in relation to routine access to fresh air. Today, the Scottish Prison Service website still refers to a transition plan from July 2022 that was due to be reviewed in October

2022. No statement has since been made about lifting all the restrictions, and there is no way of knowing which regimes have remained and which have reverted to pre-pandemic status. In the interest of transparency and in view of human rights concerns, does the minister agree that it is time for the Scottish Prison Service to make absolutely clear when it plans to lift all restrictions?

Elena Whitham: Despite the caution that is required around the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, given the closed nature of prisons, we are aware of the reports that the member references. The SPS operations directorate is in the process of collating information to establish whether any further support may be required to maximise purposeful activity within each establishment, and we will seek to keep members informed.

Rail Journey Improvements (Fife)

5. **Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on improvements to rail journeys in Fife. (S6O-01928)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): As a frequent user of ScotRail's Fife rail services, I am aware of the challenges with the operation of the current timetable, which have been compounded by the poor performance and availability of diesel trains in ScotRail's fleet, on which Fife services are dependent.

ScotRail will review Fife service provision in the next phase of the "Fit for the Future" timetable exercise, to make sure that lessons are learned from the current performance. As part of the review, the member has been invited to a meeting that I am hosting with Fife members of the Scottish Parliament and ScotRail to discuss these matters in more detail.

Annabelle Ewing: I very much welcome the minister's commitment to include Fife rail service provision within the next timetable review, and I look forward to the meeting offered by the minister. However, can the minister say to my constituents who might be listening today when my constituents, such as those in North Queensferry, will be able to get direct trains around Fife during the day and when their commute to Edinburgh will be on trains in which they are not packed in like sardines?

Jenny Gilruth: I advise members that, on my train to work this morning, we were not packed in like sardines. It had three carriages and plenty of seats. Nonetheless, the member and I had a useful conversation with my officials and Transport Scotland last year—[*Interruption.*]—I am being heckled from a sedentary position. [*Interruption.*] I use our nationalised rail services regularly, and I

would encourage other members to do likewise. [Interruption.]

The Presiding Officer: Members—let us hear the minister. Thank you.

Jenny Gilruth: That conversation has, in part, led to the review of Fife service provision, and I welcome the input that the member has had on behalf of her constituents.

Since the member and I met Transport Scotland, there have been some improvements to service provision. For example, ScotRail has advised that, in period 11, which ended on 7 January, 91.7 per cent of trains arriving at or terminating at Inverkeithing met the public performance measure, compared with 90.9 per cent of Fife circle trains as a whole. Notwithstanding that, I am sympathetic to the specific issue for Ms Ewing's constituents in relation to the Fife circle line timetabling—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, minister.

Jenny Gilruth: I will ensure that ScotRail provides Ms Ewing with an update on that point when we meet next month.

“Hydrogen Action Plan” (Local Authority Role)

6. Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its “Hydrogen Action Plan”, including regarding the role that local authorities can play in defining demand. (S6O-01929)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): In December 2022, we published our finalised “Hydrogen Action Plan”, which set out the actions that it will be necessary to take over the course of this parliamentary session to support the development of the hydrogen economy in Scotland. The development of a domestic hydrogen sector and hydrogen production for export, supported by a strong supply chain, will play an important role in supporting a just transition to net zero by 2045, and it also presents significant long-term economic opportunities. We continue to work with our agency partners and local authorities to deliver those actions.

Paul McLennan: What role will the support agencies that the cabinet secretary referenced, such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, and South of Scotland Enterprise, together with our universities sector, play alongside local authorities in developing supply chain capacity?

Michael Matheson: Our enterprise agencies and our universities sector will play an important part in building and supporting our hydrogen supply chain and capacity within that sector. We work collaboratively to bring together all parts of

the sector—public, private and academic—to support the development of the hydrogen economy. Our agencies can provide grants, loans and advice to organisations that seek to develop proposals for hydrogen projects. Our enterprise agencies work with our universities to progress key aspects of research that are critical to supporting the development of such projects.

Borders Railway (Hawick to Carlisle Extension)

7. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the possible extension of the Borders railway through Hawick to Carlisle. (S6O-01930)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): In October 2022, the Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise and I met Borderlands inclusive growth deal partners to discuss the growth deal commitment. The partners had separately asked for a meeting with the United Kingdom Government, but I understand that that did not happen. It was agreed that the failure of UK Government ministers to engage at that stage was hampering progress. [Interruption.] Scottish ministers subsequently wrote to our UK counterparts on 21 October, urging them to make progress on their side, and a response was received from Lord Offord of Garvel and Huw Merriman MP on 26 January—some three months later.

Regional partners are now working to prepare costed proposals for scoping work to move forward on the possible extension of the Borders railway to Carlisle. My officials in Transport Scotland will continue to provide support as needed, and the Scottish Government's commitment of up to £5 million towards that work remains.

Rachael Hamilton: Campaigners are keen to see the railway being extended to improve transport links to the Borders and beyond, to improve our economy and to give it a much-needed boost. Would the minister agree to meet me and members of the Campaign for Borders Rail, to provide us with timetables for the possible extension of the railway and for the feasibility study?

Jenny Gilruth: I have already met the campaign group on a number of occasions. The member needs to reflect on the fact that the work is for regional and local partners to progress and to lead on. It is also worth remembering that the delay in progressing the commitment itself was directly impacted by the political turbulence within the United Kingdom Government during 2022. In practice, that meant that Department for Transport officials could not engage with Transport Scotland as they normally would. That is perhaps the

reason why no DFT officials attended our meeting in October, at which other partners, including Scottish ministers, were present.

Notwithstanding that, I recognise the significant interest in the matter in Ms Hamilton's constituency and I would be more than happy to meet the campaign group again. However, I cannot commit to a timescale, because the work is being led by local and regional partners, so it is for them to dictate the timescale.

Brexit (Impact on Investment in Scotland)

8. Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of Brexit on investment in Scotland, in light of reports that Brexit has cost the UK economy £29 billion in lost investment. (S6O-01931)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): It is not surprising that investment has underperformed since the Brexit referendum. Many businesses in Scotland continue to report additional challenges, barriers and trade costs due to Brexit, which will inevitably act as a constraint on business investment in Scotland. Previous Scottish Government analysis has shown that Scotland's business investment could be 7.7 per cent lower in the long run due to Brexit.

Evelyn Tweed: Can the cabinet secretary name one benefit of Brexit to Scotland? I cannot.

Angus Robertson: No—I cannot think of any advantages, either. Before the European Union referendum, the Scottish Government warned that Brexit would cause significant economic and social harm to Scotland, and so it has proved. The fact is that there are no benefits to be had from Brexit, which was imposed on us against our democratic will. That is one reason why Scotland needs to be able to choose its own future in an independence referendum.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Accident and Emergency Departments (Waiting Times)

1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Tomorrow marks one year since Russia invaded Ukraine, starting a horrific war that has so far cost so many innocent lives. I pay tribute to the people of Ukraine for their courage in standing up against Vladimir Putin, and I know that we will all continue to support the people and the Government of Ukraine in their fight against this evil dictator. [*Applause.*]

Since we were last in the chamber, the First Minister has announced her resignation, and the front runner to succeed her is Humza Yousaf. During his time as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Scotland's national health service has lurched further and further into crisis. The Scottish Conservatives have received a response to a freedom of information request that has uncovered just how awful things have become at accident and emergency departments in the past few months. This new information, which we will publish today, reveals that a patient in the Borders waited for 49 hours to be treated in accident and emergency. Someone in Lanarkshire waited for 54 hours. A patient in Ayrshire waited for 60 hours at accident and emergency—that is two and a half days at accident and emergency. Surely no one can defend that. Does that not confirm that Humza Yousaf is not even up to the job that he has at the moment?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I take the opportunity to mark the first anniversary tomorrow of Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, and to express my solidarity and that of the Scottish Government and, I am sure, of everyone in Scotland with the people of Ukraine as they continue to defend and protect their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. This afternoon, the Parliament will debate this issue and, this evening, I will host a reception in Bute house for Ukrainians in Scotland. Our thoughts remain with them at this difficult time for them and their country.

I should say, first, that it is for members of my party to elect a new leader of the Scottish National Party and, in effect, a new First Minister for Scotland, subject to the approval of the Parliament.

First, on the issues of the NHS and the health secretary, he is the only health secretary anywhere in the United Kingdom who has

managed to avoid a single day of strikes in the national health service during this last period.

Secondly, notwithstanding the significant challenges in accident and emergency—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you, members. I would be grateful if we could hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: I understand why the Conservatives are feeling uncomfortable, because the Conservative Government in England has not managed to avoid strikes in the NHS.

The Conservatives also get uncomfortable when they hear me point out again that, despite the significant challenges in our national health service, which I will come on to in a moment, Scotland's accident and emergency departments remain the best performing anywhere in the UK. If I may say so to the health secretary, that is not down to him—it is down to the hard work of staff across our national health service each and every day.

Our health service faces significant issues, and we see that in the Audit Scotland report that was published today. In that report, however, we also see important context that Douglas Ross always seeks to deny. Let me quote from page 7:

“The Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect the delivery of NHS services.”

If someone was to listen to Douglas Ross and others, they would be forgiven for thinking that the pandemic had not even happened.

The report also states:

“Scotland's NHS is not alone in facing these issues ... Many of the factors contributing to the extremely difficult situation facing the NHS in Scotland are not specific to health services, and many are not within the control of the Scottish Government”.

Notwithstanding that, we continue to support our health service to ensure record funding, record staffing, a record pay deal for agenda for change staff in Scotland and progress in reducing the longest waits in our national health service.

Douglas Ross: Shameful—that is the only way to describe that answer from the First Minister, because she made no mention of a patient in Ayrshire who, at the tail end of last year, waited for two and a half days in accident and emergency. The clue is in the name. They went there for emergency treatment and sat for two and a half days, but the First Minister's answer to that patient is that Scotland's health service is the best performing health service anywhere in the United Kingdom. That is little comfort to people who are waiting hours or days for treatment.

The First Minister might not have noticed that, when I sat down after mentioning those shocking statistics, Humza Yousaf smiled and smirked. The health secretary thinks that it is funny that people are waiting for days to be seen in A and E in Scotland.

The First Minister mentioned and quoted from the Audit Scotland report on the NHS. Let us remember that, this morning, the British Medical Association Scotland said that the report is “damning” of the current state of the NHS. The report outlines that Nicola Sturgeon's chosen successor will not meet NHS job targets and says that

“performance declined further in 2022.”

In addition, the report says that

“The number of people experiencing an extremely long wait ... increased in 2022”

and that performance on cancer waiting times “is getting worse”.

Every part of Scotland's NHS is in crisis because of Humza Yousaf. Can the First Minister tell us whether the useless health secretary is really the best that the SNP has to offer?

The First Minister: In relation to individual cases, it is always unacceptable if someone waits too long for treatment in the national health service. The

“tail end of last year”—

which was Douglas Ross's phrase—was during the winter peak of pressure. Since then, although I stress that there is still considerable progress to be made, eight-hour and 12-hour waits in accident and emergency departments have reduced, and we continue to support them to make further progress.

Douglas Ross mentioned recruitment. We have record numbers of staff in our NHS right now. Since this Government took office, we have increased NHS staffing by 28,800 people. We have higher staffing per head of population than in England or other parts of the UK.

Funding has doubled in our national health service. We have higher funding proportionately than anywhere else in the UK—to the tune, proportionately, of about £1.8 billion, which is equivalent to 44,000 nurses in our national health service.

Yes, we have significant work to do to reduce waiting times, but we are focused, first, on the longest waits, and we have seen significant progress in reducing them.

I make the comparison with other parts of the UK because Douglas Ross stands here and asks people to believe that those problems are unique

to Scotland and, somehow, down to the health secretary in Scotland. That is where the Audit Scotland report is instructive, because it says that those issues are not unique to Scotland. On page 7, it says that

“Scotland’s NHS is not alone in facing these issues”

and that

“many of the factors”

are outwith

“the control of the Scottish Government”.

We will continue to do our job, working with and supporting the national health service. We will do that despite Douglas Ross’s determination to turn it into a political weapon, which we have just seen all too clearly.

Douglas Ross: Wow! The First Minister thinks that Opposition MSPs raising cases of people waiting two and a half days in A and E in Scotland is somehow using the issue as a political weapon. No, it is not; it is about the reality for people across Scotland just now.

The First Minister loves to make the comparison between Scotland and the rest of the UK, but let us remember that the UK Statistics Authority said that Public Health Scotland’s figures—and the statistics that Nicola Sturgeon uses for comparison—could be misleading for patients.

We know that Humza Yousaf released a recovery plan that everybody could see was just a flimsy pamphlet. The First Minister has now quoted from page 7 of the Audit Scotland report twice. Let us go a bit further; I have gone through the whole report. It says of Humza Yousaf’s recovery plan that it lacked detailed actions. Audit Scotland said that he did not do “detailed and robust modelling” and that he did not

“engage fully with NHS boards”.

It also said that information on key patient aims “is missing”.

Humza Yousaf has made the crisis in Scotland’s health service much worse. First Minister, why should a health secretary who has failed our NHS now get to fail the whole of Scotland?

The First Minister: First, I did not suggest that any MSP who raises patient experience is using it as a political weapon; what I said—and what I will say again—is that anyone who tries to suggest that these issues are unique to Scotland’s NHS is seeking to use our NHS as a political weapon. To use Douglas Ross’s phrase, I think that that is shameful on the part of the Conservatives.

On the recovery plan, it is the case that we have considerable work still to do. However, let us look at the progress on eight-hour and 12-hour A and E waits. Earlier, I said that those have dropped

significantly since the peak over the winter period. Eight-hour waits are down by 54.9 per cent, and 12-hour waits are down by 61.6 per cent. That is because of the support that we are giving to the NHS and the work of staff on the front line.

On waiting time targets more generally, the numbers waiting the longest for treatment have reduced by almost a quarter for both in-patient and day-case treatment and also for out-patient treatment. There are significant challenges—more significant than at any point in the history of the NHS—but we are supporting our NHS with record funding, record staffing and the wider support that it needs to address those challenges. That is what this Government will continue to do.

Douglas Ross: Oh dear. Eight years ago, a failed SNP health secretary became First Minister. Now, it looks as though history is repeating itself. Why would anybody risk Scotland’s future by giving a man with Humza Yousaf’s record more power? Let us look at his time in office while the First Minister gets more intel from the Deputy First Minister—I do not know what is coming there.

Humza Yousaf was the transport minister who drove without a licence, delayed the dualling of the A9 and clapped like a seal when Nicola Sturgeon launched a ferry with painted-on windows. He was the justice secretary who did nothing while violent crime rose, who got duped by a hoax video into calling on the police to investigate Rangers players and who damaged free speech with his hate crime act. Now, Humza Yousaf is the worst health secretary since devolution, but it looks like he is going to fail upwards. In any other line of work, Humza Yousaf would have been sacked, not promoted. Forget being SNP leader—why is he even still in the Government?

The First Minister: I do not know about anybody else, but it sounds to me as though Douglas Ross is pretty scared of Humza Yousaf—*[Interruption.]*—as, I am sure, he will be scared of whoever is elected to succeed me as SNP leader. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

The First Minister: Douglas Ross referred to the fact that I was health secretary before becoming First Minister, which I am extremely proud of.

Let me just reflect on this fact: in the eight years that I have been First Minister, the people of Scotland have had no fewer than eight opportunities to cast a verdict on me, my party and my Government. With every single one of those eight opportunities, the people of Scotland have rejected the Conservatives and put their trust in me, my party and my Government. I have every confidence that whoever succeeds me as leader of the SNP will continue that record of success.

National Health Service (Audit Scotland Report)

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I start by echoing the comments of both Douglas Ross and Nicola Sturgeon on the on-going war in Ukraine, and I send the solidarity of everyone in my party to the people of Ukraine against the tyranny of Vladimir Putin.

Nicola Sturgeon and I disagree on many things. It is fair to say that we have had our fair share of stooshies over the years, and I am sure that we will have many more in the years to come, but it is important to note that she has been at the forefront of politics for 20 years, she has served in government for 15 years, and she has been First Minister for eight years. In that time, she has led our country through a global pandemic—a challenge for any leader, anywhere in the world—and, for that, she deserves our recognition and our respect. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

Anas Sarwar: The Audit Scotland report—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members, can we please do Mr Sarwar the courtesy of listening? Thank you.

Anas Sarwar: The Audit Scotland report on the national health service that was published today makes grim reading for the Government. It supports what patients and staff have been saying about waiting times, and it concludes:

“Before the Covid-19 pandemic, NHS boards were already struggling to meet waiting times standards for planned care, and performance has deteriorated further since”.

The report confirms that Covid did not cause the problems. They were there before Covid but were, of course, exacerbated by Covid. After nearly 16 years of Scottish National Party Government, what went wrong?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I thank Anas Sarwar for his generous comments. I fear that it might be damning him with faint praise to say that he has more grace in his wee finger than all the Tories combined—*[Interruption.]*—although I am sure that he will balance it out over the course of these exchanges. I am definitely showing my age when I reflect on the fact that, in one of my earlier election contests, I stood against Anas Sarwar’s father. In my most recent electoral contest, of course, I stood against Anas Sarwar himself, and I will spare his blushes by not pointing out the result of that latter one, even though his father beat me fairly and squarely back in the day.

Let me turn to the important matter of the NHS. Our NHS faces the most significant challenges that it has faced at any point in its history. That is

largely because of the pandemic, but, as I have reflected before, there were challenges in our health service before the pandemic. Changing demographics and ever-increasing expectations of what health services can deliver are, in themselves, positive trends but ones that nevertheless pose challenges for the health service.

What has changed over the years that we have been in Government? Funding for the national health service has doubled and is higher, proportionately, than in any other part of the United Kingdom. Staffing in our health service has increased significantly. As the Auditor General recognises in this morning’s report, we are also seeing the signs of reform and innovation so that we can equip our health service to cope with the challenges.

I do not deny the challenges. However, what the NHS needs and has is a Government that will continue to support it and focus on addressing those challenges. That is the responsibility of Government, and that is what I believe the people of Scotland deserve and want to see continue.

Anas Sarwar: I should say, lightly, that Nicola Sturgeon does not need to remind me of the difference between the 1997 result and the 2021 result—my dad does that often enough for both of us. *[Laughter.]*

The truth is that this Government took its eye off the ball when it came to the NHS. It did not prioritise the NHS as it should have done. It was not prepared, and it still has not caught up.

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care launched his NHS recovery plan in August 2021, but, according to Audit Scotland,

“current activity is running well below NHS Recovery Plan targets”,

“More people are being added to waiting lists than are being removed from them, and people are waiting longer for treatment”,

“performance against cancer waiting times standards is getting worse”,

longer waiting times

“are negatively impacting people’s health”,

and, finally,

“The number of people dying each year is still higher than average”.

Things are getting worse, not better. The report is damning, and it is clear that Humza Yousaf has failed. He published a recovery plan that was more about spin than about substance. As a result, patient outcomes are getting worse, staff are burnt out and the NHS is going backwards.

Does the First Minister finally accept the conclusions in Audit Scotland's report?

The First Minister: I do accept the conclusions in Audit Scotland's report. The challenges for our national health service are significant. The recommendations in the report are important, and we will seriously consider each and every one of them.

Staff have been working incredibly hard, and I recognise the description of the burnout that many NHS staff will feel. That is why it has been so important to give them the fairest possible pay increase and to ensure that, unlike the situation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, NHS staff in Scotland have not had to go on strike to get the decent, set pay offer that has now been made.

As an aside on that issue, to bring pay for NHS agenda for change nurses in England up to the level of pay for those in Scotland, the United Kingdom Government would have to offer them a 14 per cent pay increase. That is the gap that now exists.

In terms of our focus on the national health service, we have doubled funding for the NHS since coming to office; the budget that was passed this week in Parliament increases NHS funding by a further £1 billion; front-line spending in Scotland is 10 per cent higher than in England; and we have more staff, including more staff per head of population, than other parts of the UK.

On waiting times, yes, there is much to do, but we have seen a reduction in the longest waits; we have a number of national treatment centres opening this year, which will see an additional 12,000 procedures able to be undertaken in the NHS; and, although cancer waiting times are challenged, as all waiting times are, we are seeing more patients being treated on the key cancer pathways.

There is much work to do, but this Government has a real focus on supporting our national health service, because that is our responsibility.

Anas Sarwar: It is important that we look at the facts. The number of people who were waiting for more than a year for in-patient treatment when Humza Yousaf became health secretary was 22,000. That number was already too high, but, according to Audit Scotland, it now stands at more than 35,000 people. When he took charge of the NHS, 84.1 per cent of people were seen within the 62-day cancer standard; now, the figure is just 74.7 per cent. More than one in four cancer patients are not being seen in time. In the week that Humza Yousaf was appointed health secretary, 3,448 people waited for more than four hours in accident and emergency; this week, the number is 7,572—it has more than doubled, even though fewer people are going to A and E.

On every single measure, this health secretary has failed to get the NHS back on track. In fact, this is the worst it has ever been. Does the First Minister really believe that the man responsible for failing Scotland's NHS should be responsible for our country?

The First Minister: That is a decision for members in my party.

Since Humza Yousaf became health secretary—this is what Anas Sarwar never wants to mention—there have been, I think, three further waves of a global pandemic that have affected health services all across the UK, Europe and the world. That is not something that can just be ignored. We, in common with other countries, have also just come through one of the most challenging winters that any of us can remember. That is the context for the challenges in our national health service—a context that is recognised and, indeed, pointed out by the Audit Scotland report today, which—I repeat—says:

"The ... pandemic continues to affect the delivery of NHS services. ... Scotland's NHS is not alone in facing these issues."

It also says:

"Many of the factors ... are not within the control of the Scottish Government".

We continue to support the NHS in the ways that I have set out: record funding, record staffing, a record pay rise for agenda for change staff, reform and innovation to change how patients go through the national health service, and action to reduce waiting times. It is going to take time to properly recover the NHS from the pandemic. That is true in Scotland and in other countries, but the focus of this Government will not waver. It never will waver in supporting our national health service and all those who depend upon it.

Emissions Reduction (Climate Change Committee Report)

3. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will provide an update on how it is responding to the Climate Change Committee's report on progress in reducing emissions in Scotland. (S6F-01844)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Scotland is taking action to secure a net zero and climate-resilient future, and we are doing so in a way that is fair and just for everyone. Our focus remains very firmly on delivering the updated climate change plan, delivering on our adaptation outcomes through the 2019 adaptation programme, and planning for a just transition across the economy. We are also carefully considering the Climate Change Committee's

latest advice, and we plan to respond in the spring.

Gillian Mackay: In recent years, Scotland has shown real climate leadership on the global stage. I am proud that the Scottish Government is currently consulting on a position that would see a presumption against exploration for yet more oil and gas in the North Sea while taking real action to build more solar, wind and marine renewables. That action must add up to a plan that delivers on our climate commitments and delivers a just transition for our communities. Does the First Minister agree that Scotland's new climate plan will be one of the most important plans that this Government will ever produce, and will she join me in calling on all parties to rise to the challenge, come together and take the climate emergency seriously?

The First Minister: Yes, I agree. Addressing the climate emergency, for the sake of this generation but also generations to come, is a massive obligation. I think that it is a moral obligation for all of us, and I hope that everybody across the chamber will have the same conviction in tackling climate change as I do and the Government does.

Gillian Mackay is right to point out the need for all countries to accelerate the move away from fossil fuels. There is an added reason to do so in Scotland, which is the maturity of the North Sea basin. Even if there was not a climate emergency—which there is—we would need to make that just transition.

Investing in that transition and in alternative sources of energy is really important. In Scotland, we are blessed to have an abundance of those alternative sources of energy, which is why ScotWind and our green hydrogen ambitions are so important. They allow us to make the transition for energy needs in a way that is just and fair and that supports those people who currently work in oil and gas into alternative employment.

That just transition is one of the most important obligations of Government, and the updated climate change plan will be one of the most important documents to be published over the period ahead.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): Creating a circular economy is a key component in reducing emissions. A series of reports by Circle Economy assessed the circularity metric of different countries: the Netherlands scored almost 25 per cent and Northern Ireland scored almost 8 per cent. After 16 years of Scottish National Party rule, Scotland came last, scoring just 1.3 per cent—why?

The First Minister: We are taking many initiatives to make our economy more circular and

to reduce waste, and it is important that we continue with them. There is much more to do, which is why we are committed to a circular economy bill.

The Conservatives would be more credible on these issues if they did not oppose, in a knee-jerk way, everything that we bring forward in trying to improve performance around the circular economy, such as the deposit return scheme. Let us focus on what we need to do better, but let us try to find a bit of consensus so that the country can do exactly that and live up to the obligation that we all have.

Women in Entrepreneurship

4. **Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's position is on the future role of women in driving entrepreneurial activity and economic growth, in light of the publication of the report, "Pathways: A New Approach for Women in Entrepreneurship". (S6F-01832)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): On Monday, I had the pleasure of visiting the Roslin innovation centre, where I was able to welcome Ana Stewart and Mark Logan's outstanding report. The report sets out a range of detailed and ambitious recommendations that consider how to close the gender gap for women in enterprise across Government, the education system, enterprise support networks and wider society.

First and foremost, it is an issue of fairness—women face clear barriers in realising their business ambitions, including in getting access to start-up and growth finance—but it is also important for our economy. If women started businesses at anything like the rate at which men do, it would deliver a significant boost to our economy.

The report is an important piece of work and I look forward to seeing its recommendations implemented.

Fiona Hyslop: I thank the First Minister for the strong leadership that she has shown to women throughout her tenure.

The report is an important milestone for women in business. It notes that

"only 2% of institutional investment"

goes to women-led companies in Scotland. Does the First Minister agree that we must increase the support for women entrepreneurs, as tapping into that latent pool of talent is not only the right thing to do but has the potential to significantly boost Scotland's economic activity and growth?

The First Minister: I completely agree and thank Fiona Hyslop for that question. Supporting

women into enterprise and closing the gender gap is, as I said in my initial answer, more than an issue of fairness, important though that is; it is one of economic necessity.

Women are slightly more than half the population, but only around one in five businesses in Scotland are led by women—we need to change that. The recommendations in the report, which span a whole range of factors, from some of the cultural barriers that women face, to systemic barriers, to things such as access to finance, will all be important in helping us do so. From a different place to the one that I am standing in now, I look forward to continuing to support the full implementation of the recommendations in Parliament.

Again, I thank Ana Stewart and Mark Logan for all the work that they have done to produce the report.

General Practices

5. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):

To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to research by the Royal College of General Practitioners reportedly showing that a third of Scotland's GP staff who were surveyed said their practice was at risk of closing in the next few months. (S6F-01828)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I well understand the difficulties that general practice is facing right now, particularly during what has been—and, in some respects, continues to be—a challenging winter period. I put on record my thanks to general practitioners and their teams across the country.

A record number of GPs are working in Scotland. We have also recruited more than 3,000 healthcare professionals since 2018 as part of wider primary care multidisciplinary teams.

I very much value the work of the Royal College of General Practitioners, which is a very important partner. The survey is important, albeit that I should point out that the survey sample size is relatively small, as there were just 181 Scottish respondents from the many thousands of general practice staff who work here. Nevertheless, we pay close attention to the findings of the survey. We must encourage more trainee doctors and healthcare professionals to work in general practice, and we will keep working with the RCGP and others to ensure that that is an attractive proposition.

Tess White: This week, GPs in the north-east have sounded the alarm that general practice will become an extinct profession. They point the finger at a

“blatant and shameful lack of support”

from the Scottish Government—that is a direct quote. In the north-east, Frioekheim medical centre, Invergowrie medical centre, Wallacetown health centre, Burghead and Hopeman GP surgeries and Fyvie Oldmeldrum Medical Group either have closed, will close or have handed back their contract.

Audit Scotland has warned again today that the key target to increase the GP workforce by 2027 is “not on track”. Can the First Minister explain why the action that her Government is taking to address GP recruitment and retention is failing miserably? It is putting patient safety at risk.

The First Minister: General practice is an important part of primary care, and primary care is an increasingly important part of our entire national health service, so we will continue to support general practices as part of wider teams. As I said earlier, since 2018, we have recruited more than 3,000 healthcare professionals to work in wider multidisciplinary teams, and we will continue to do that.

We are on track to meet the GP recruitment target for 2027, although, as Audit Scotland rightly says, that will be challenging. We will continue to focus on that so that we meet the target, and we will continue to ensure that we are making general practice an attractive proposition for people who wish to pursue medical careers.

These are extremely important issues, and these are challenging times for all parts of our national health service. However, the hypocrisy of Conservative members in the chamber is breathtaking at times. I will end my answer with this statistic: in Scotland, where the Scottish National Party is in office, the number of GPs per 100,000 of population is 95, but, in England, where the Conservatives are in office, the number is not 95 but just 78. These are challenging times, but this Government can evidence how we show support for general practice and the NHS as a whole.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I am afraid that the First Minister's Government is not on track, and Audit Scotland has said that the Government will miss the target of increasing GP head count by 800. However, it is worse than that, because whole-time equivalent GP numbers have decreased by 200 since 2013, which poses a serious threat to the recovery of primary care. At the same time, the number of patients who are registered with GPs has risen by more than 300,000, yet the SNP has cut £75 million from primary care and GP budgets this year. Does the First Minister not agree that, by slashing funding and failing to increase the number of GPs, the SNP is compounding the crisis in primary care and, ultimately, failing GPs and their patients?

The First Minister: I do not agree with that. I agree that these are extremely challenging times for GPs and everybody who works in our national health service. The target for GP recruitment is for 2027, and we will of course have to focus and work to meet that. I say, with the greatest respect to Audit Scotland—I take everything that it says very seriously—that I am not sure that anybody can look to 2027 and predict what is going to happen. It rightly points out that meeting the target will be challenging, but it is important that we remain on track.

The GP head count has already increased by 277, and the head count among the wider multidisciplinary teams has increased by more than 3,000. Of course, that is increasingly important, because GPs rely on other health professionals to help them to do the excellent job that they do.

To come back to the final point that I made in response to the previous question, we have more GPs, proportionately, than other parts of the UK do. Earlier, I mentioned England; we also have more GPs per head of population than Labour-run Wales does and more than Northern Ireland does. Therefore, there is much work to do in Scotland, but we do it from a position of relative strength.

The Promise

6. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what recent action the Scottish Government has been taking to keep the Promise to young people in care. (S6F-01829)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): It is the ambition of this Government that every child in Scotland grows up loved, safe and respected so that they have the opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of the circumstances in which they are born. As well as being a commitment of the Scottish Government, that is a personal commitment of mine, which I will take with me as I leave the Government over the next few weeks.

The budget that was passed on Tuesday commits almost £80 million to the Promise and £50 million to the whole family wellbeing fund. Back in December, we introduced the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill, which seeks to put an end to under-18s spending time in young offenders institutions and to ensure that children who come into contact with the care and justice system are treated with trauma-informed and age-appropriate support.

Last Friday, I was delighted to visit East Renfrewshire to celebrate care day. I always value the opportunity to hear what matters directly from children and young people across Scotland as we work together to keep the Promise, which, as I

said, is a commitment that I hold personally, as well as—for the time being—as First Minister.

Martin Whitfield: I am very grateful for that answer, but as the First Minister demits office, many in the care sector are deeply concerned about whether the Government will follow through with its pledge to uphold the Promise. I absolutely welcome the First Minister's personal assurance that, for her, that will be a lifelong commitment.

Nearly two years after the launch, and with only three years to go, there are serious questions about progress. Does the First Minister agree that any failure to deliver the Promise would be nothing less than an abject betrayal of some of the most vulnerable children in our society? Would it be her or her successor as First Minister who would be held responsible for that?

The First Minister: I will always feel responsibility for the Promise, whether I am in government, in this Parliament, or wherever I happen to be in future stages of my life.

I have absolute confidence that whoever succeeds me as First Minister will share my commitment to keeping the Promise and delivering on that, but let me make this promise of my own: if, at any point, I think that the current Government or any future Government is not doing that, there will be somebody on the back benches being very loud and very vocal about it. Mr Whitfield can hold me to that.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): I welcome the Scottish Government's on-going commitment to keeping the Promise to our care-experienced young people. How will the allocation in next year's budget of £50 million to the whole family wellbeing fund, which the First Minister mentioned, support families who are in need?

The First Minister: The whole family wellbeing fund is really important, and I am extremely committed to it and will want it to continue to be delivered.

We talk about young people in care. It is really important that any young person in care is loved and supported, and that they are safe and secure and nurtured. However, one of our biggest responsibilities is to try to prevent the need for young people to go into care, by supporting families and keeping families together, where we can. That is the purpose and the objective of the whole family wellbeing fund. We want to transform services so that families can access the support that they need when they need it and in the way that they need to do so. When I was in East Renfrewshire on Friday, one mother in particular told me about the importance of that early intervention approach in ensuring that her daughter was able to stay with her and did not have to go into care.

The fund will focus on the system changes that are required to shift investment towards early intervention and prevention, which is a critical part of how we keep the Promise in practice. The £58 million investment in this year's budget includes the provision of £32 million directly to children's services planning partnerships to support work at a local level. Further details of the programme proposals will be confirmed in due course.

Many things have been important to me during my years as First Minister; I am sure that I will get the opportunity to speak about some of them in the next few weeks. Few, if any, of those things have been more important to me than the Promise to care-experienced young people. Our society should be judged on how we care for and love the most vulnerable children that we have and I think that this Parliament as a whole—not just this Government—should be committed to ensuring that every young person is loved and nurtured. If we do that, we will have something to be genuinely and really proud of.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I note the First Minister's personal commitment.

Fiona McLean of The Promise Scotland said:

"For so many care-experienced children, young people and care-experienced adults, their lives won't have improved over the last two years and things will have been really, really hard and may even have got worse.

That's heartbreaking and shameful, and it shouldn't be the case."

Does the First Minister agree that, two years into the Promise, it is simply unacceptable that the lives of care-experienced people are still no better?

The First Minister: I thank the member for her question. Forgive me if I am getting this wrong—I am not sure if she was referring to Fiona Duncan of The Promise. Fiona has said many things and has done fantastic work with the care review and with The Promise. I know that she is someone who seeks to hold all policy makers and Government ministers to account.

Of course there is much to do. The experience of the pandemic has been tough for everyone, but it has been particularly tough for those who were already vulnerable and marginalised. There will be many respects in which that has been the experience of the past two years for young people in care.

We talk about the Promise—we have been talking about it and I have been talking about it today—in the abstract. We have already done so many things to improve the experience of young people in care. When I speak to young people, those are often the things that they cite to me. The care-experienced bursary is one example. I have

spoken to many care-experienced young people who have had the opportunity to go to university only because of the bursary that we introduced. We have taken away some of the other costs, whether those are dental charges or the burden of council tax. Those practical measures are important because they are about levelling the playing field and giving opportunity.

Do we have more to do? We absolutely have more to do. We will absolutely have to rise to the challenge of keeping the Promise. I hope that everyone across the chamber is as committed to that as I am. I will continue to be a very loud and, I hope, powerful advocate for care-experienced young people as we, collectively and as a society, keep the Promise. It came much later than it should have done and we now all have a responsibility to deliver it in full.

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

Cancer Strategy (Place-based Research)

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): We know about the Scottish Government's commitment to the excellent research and science in universities across Scotland and the impact that that has on the patients and communities most in need. Given the decision by Cancer Research UK to withdraw funding from the administrative base of Scotland's only clinical trial unit, the Beatson Institute for Cancer Research in my constituency, will the First Minister say whether the new cancer strategy will reflect the importance of place-based research in addressing regional inequality in cancer in Scotland, particularly in the west of Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The cancer strategy will be published in the spring and will set out our 10-year vision for cancer in Scotland, which will include building on Scotland's significant strengths in research. We have recently published an independent report on improving equity of access to cancer clinical trials and will be working with the cancer research community to prioritise the recommendations in that report and to take forward as many as is feasible.

I take the opportunity to absolutely recognise the very high quality of research in the west of Scotland and the collaboration between the Beatson institute, the University of Glasgow and the national health service. To support that, we have recently increased our contribution to Glasgow's Experimental Cancer Medicine Centre, which will receive more than £2.25 million this year. We are also committed to supporting the NHS Research Scotland cancer research network in running innovative, high-quality research studies across Scotland.

Paediatric Audiology Services (NHS Lothian)

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): There are well-documented issues with paediatric audiology services in NHS Lothian. Constituents of mine have a four-year-old daughter who suffers from progressive hearing loss and has been waiting for more than 20 weeks for an assessment at the paediatric audiology service at Edinburgh's Royal Hospital for Children and Young People. To my dismay, the family have now been told that they must wait a further 11 months for any assessment for their daughter, who is currently 778th on the waiting list. I hope that that is not too uncomfortable for either the First Minister or the health secretary to hear.

With progressive hearing loss, a quicker assessment can mean a much better outcome and life for Annika and other children like her. What will the First Minister say to Annika and her family while they wait—and wait—for what would be almost a quarter of Annika's life?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): In relation to Annika's case, I would of course be very willing to look into the particular circumstances. I do not want to see any child wait that length of time for access to care and treatment. The member is right to say that that is so important to their quality of life.

More generally, and as has been alluded to, there have been issues with the service in Lothian, and the vast majority of the recommendations that came out about some of those issues have already been accepted and the work has been completed. We will continue to work with NHS Lothian to ensure that the quality of the service that everybody relies on is as they have a right to expect it to be.

On the individual case, I will of course be willing to look into the matter if the details can be provided to my office.

Edinburgh Eye Pavilion

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The First Minister will be aware of reports that the projected costs of the new Edinburgh eye pavilion have jumped by £10.5 million to £123 million. Given her Government's shaky commitment to this vital project in the past, can she reassure patients across the Lothians and south-east Scotland that the new eye pavilion will be a priority for the Scottish Government, and that it will be delivered by 2027?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I gave that commitment during the most recent Scottish election campaign, I think, and I am happy to repeat it today. The commitment of this Government is not "shaky"; it is rock solid.

The construction costs and the business case will obviously be interrogated, as is normal for all business cases. There is inflation in the costs of construction right now, which is impacting on the cost of many capital projects. However, we have a strong capital programme in the NHS and more generally, and we are committed to delivering it.

Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (Industrial Action)

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Strike action across the Highlands and Islands network has resulted in airports including Sumburgh being closed since Tuesday. Shetland patients with hospital appointments on the Scottish mainland this week have had to have them rearranged, resulting in delays to treatment and using up precious time and resource within the NHS. Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd is wholly owned by Scottish ministers, so what is the First Minister going to do to secure a resolution and end the disruption to what are lifeline air services?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will answer that question in two parts. First, in relation to patients whose treatment has been delayed because of the industrial action, health boards will be working to ensure that any delays are minimised. Secondly, there is on-going dialogue to resolve the underlying issue, and I would expect HIAL to do everything possible to reach a resolution to ensure that any further disruption is completely avoided, or certainly minimised.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's questions.

12:48

Meeting suspended.

12:49

On resuming—

Chinese State Surveillance

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-07832, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, on Chinese state surveillance.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the reported shooting down of a Chinese state surveillance balloon over the United States on 5 February 2022; understands that this is not the first occasion that such a balloon has been deployed over the sovereign territory of another state; considers this to be a worrying expansion of attempts by the People's Republic of China to monitor and gather information in a covert way; expresses concern about the reported implications of China's National Intelligence Law regarding the ability of the state to gather private data and information from within the UK, including through those companies required to cooperate; notes the reported call by Alicia Kearns MP, Chair of the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, for UK citizens to delete the TikTok app from their phones; further notes the reported remarks of the UK Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner, who likened the use of Hikvision technology in public surveillance infrastructure to "digital asbestos"; understands that such technology is used by public bodies across Scotland, including in Edinburgh; notes the reports of the intimidation of dissidents, challenges to freedom of expression and the existence of unofficial so-called "Chinese police stations", including in Glasgow, and notes the calls for both the Scottish and UK governments to undertake a comprehensive investigation into the reach of Chinese surveillance in Scotland.

12:49

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am pleased to rise for my party to speak in this members' business debate in my name.

The People's Republic of China is a huge player on the world stage. It is the second-largest economy in the world. Although its belt and road initiative has funded massive infrastructure projects in more than 150 countries around the globe, China has projected its influence in an unprecedented fashion. Its huge economic clout means that we, too, are heavily reliant on China as a trading partner and as a supplier of the tech that we increasingly rely on to help run our lives. However, there are serious question marks over the influence that China, in the coming months and years, might seek to exert over the many countries that rely on it. Recent events suggest that its intentions might not be entirely benign.

A fortnight ago, a Chinese spy balloon, which was fitted with an array of cameras and solar panels, was shot down over America. The incident took social media by storm, but it should give us all pause and should be treated with the utmost

seriousness. It was just one of several surveillance balloons that US officials say have been spotted over no fewer than five continents. That represents an alarming development by a Chinese state whose rhetoric, particularly in relation to Taiwan, has become increasingly concerning.

There is also reason to be concerned about matters much closer to home. It is a point of fact that Chinese national intelligence law requires every Chinese company to co-operate with state intelligence services. That is a fact. That raises huge questions about potential intrusion and misuse of the data that Chinese companies collect through domestic technology that we readily deploy. Many companies operating in the United Kingdom, some of them household names, fall into that category.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): That disparity of data protection also includes things that we add to our mobile phones and computers. There are very serious questions to be asked about how that data is handled and—as Alex Cole-Hamilton said—who has access to it.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful to Martin Whitfield for paving the way to the point that I am about to make.

In recent weeks, the chair of the House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Select Committee advised UK citizens to delete the app TikTok from their phones, given the weight of evidence showing that the Chinese Communist Party could use it, and has used it, to harvest private information. There is even evidence to suggest that people working for TikTok in China have hacked into European data to track down journalists' sources. That is deeply worrying, and should perhaps prompt us all to consider whether the continued use of TikTok is prudent. That is just the tip of the iceberg.

Hikvision is a Chinese state-owned manufacturer that supplies video surveillance equipment for civilian and military purposes. Last year, Liberal Democrat research revealed that at least 11 local authorities in Scotland are using Hikvision cameras. Those cameras, which are used in the detention centres holding Uyghur Muslims against their will in Xinjiang, are also used by Police Scotland.

Just last week, the UK Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner, Fraser Sampson, spoke of our having created a network of dependencies on Chinese surveillance technology without sufficient regard to risk. He also likened Hikvision in particular to "digital asbestos".

Not only are those cameras a threat to our privacy and security, their continued use across Scotland flies in the face of the liberal principles

and human rights that we as a nation claim to champion. I have raised the alarm on this numerous times, but little action has been taken. Indeed, Scottish Liberal Democrats have led the way in identifying the threat that those devices pose. Liberal Democrat councillors in Edinburgh in particular have been successful in their calls to have Hikvision removed from the capital's local government estate.

It is time that the Scottish Government showed some leadership, too. It should echo the warnings of experts and issue an alert advising local authorities and public bodies against the use of such surveillance equipment, particularly equipment that is manufactured by companies linked to the Chinese state and in the orbit of its intelligence legislation. That would be a positive step forward, but Chinese state surveillance runs worryingly deeper than that.

The United Kingdom shares a proud history with the people of Hong Kong, and I led the first debate in this Parliament on the plight of the people of Hong Kong. It is why the former leader of my party, Paddy Ashdown, was the first politician to seek and secure British passports for the Hong Kong Chinese. International solidarity with people who we may never meet is the core liberal principle, and we have offered the people of Hong Kong, who are threatened by the ever-increasing authoritarianism of the Chinese state, safe harbour on our shores.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): We should all reflect on the words of the Sino-British joint declaration back in 1984. However, Scotland's obligation to the people of Hong Kong runs deeper than that, given this country's shameful legacy with regard to the opium wars. Does the member agree with me that we have a deep sense of duty and obligation to the people of Hong Kong that runs back many decades and centuries?

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful to Daniel Johnson for that excellent reminder of Britain's historical complicity with regard to the plight of the people of Hong Kong and our duty of care to them. That is why I am proud that we have offered them safe harbour on our shores, and visas to get here if they need them. However, the reach of Chinese Communist Party intelligence services touches them even here, under the auspices of, again, that national intelligence law. There are even reports of a secret Chinese police station operating out of a restaurant in Glasgow. I have had direct discussions with Hong Kongers living in Edinburgh who say that their public meetings and events are often disrupted by agents of the Chinese state right here in Scotland.

We have a duty to take that issue seriously and to safeguard Hong Kongers and their allies and

supporters from such interference. The danger that is posed by those covert activities is real. Unaddressed, those actions threaten to undermine our liberty, our privacy and even our national security.

We are about to commemorate the anniversary of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and I fear that, in the near future, we will look back on this time with an understanding that we were living in the early years of a new cold war. That is also grimly evident in the Chinese Communist Party's apparent friendship with Vladimir Putin and its aggressive posture towards Taiwan.

The US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken has even warned that China could be on the brink of supplying weapons to Russia for use in Ukraine. We must take a stand now. We must be firmly on the side of human rights and international law. As a Parliament and as a country, we cannot and must not be complicit in human rights violations, nor can we be complacent in the face of such a national security threat. That is why the Scottish Government and the UK Government must now undertake an immediate and comprehensive investigation into the reach of Chinese surveillance in Scotland.

There might be some people who think that I am being alarmist or who believe that the surveillance that I am describing is benign. However, I ask them to consider how they would view the situation if companies such as Hikvision and TikTok were run by the Kremlin or if Russian operatives were operating unchecked in our largest cities. If 2022 has taught us anything, it is that we must not take for granted the peace, stability and security that we have been fortunate to enjoy for the better part of the century.

12:58

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing this debate to the chamber. It offers us a real opportunity to discuss an issue that we should be debating a lot more: our national security. I want to reflect on what the Chinese balloon incident means for us all going about our daily lives and enjoying the freedom of living in a democracy.

There has been much commentary about that recent incident in the context of the wider threat that is posed to the west by China. Last summer, General Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned that China is

"increasing in their aggressiveness in their rhetoric, but also in their activity",

noting that Chinese intercepts in the air and at sea have increased drastically over the past five years.

Further, John Bolton, former US security adviser, recently described China as

“the existential threat in the 21st century”.

Other observers acknowledge that surveillance in the 21st century is an expected and everyday part of international relations. A recent commentary piece by the Royal United Services Institute described the event itself as

“neither new nor particularly notable”,

although it accepted that the balloon

“stayed in the country’s airspace for a longer period of time than its predecessors.”

Scotland is a safe place to live in, but the United Kingdom is not immune from the threat that is posed by bad actors. Many of us will recall the tragic terrorist murders of Jo Cox MP and David Amess MP, and the radicalisation of British citizens and their recruitment to Daesh during the Syrian conflict.

The current threat level for the UK is “substantial”, which means that an attack is likely. In his recent annual threat update, the director general of the Security Service, Ken McCallum, reiterated that

“No-one should be under any illusion about the breadth and variety of the threats we face”.

He said that those threats include

“Putin’s illegal invasion of Ukraine bringing war to Europe”

and

“an increasingly assertive Chinese Communist Party using overt and covert pressure to bend other countries to its will.”

He described how the

“Chinese authorities use all the means at their disposal to monitor ... and ... intimidate ... the Chinese diaspora”,

“from ... forcibly repatriating Chinese nationals to harassment and assault.”

Recent media coverage has focused on so-called overseas Chinese police stations, including one that was reported in Glasgow—a matter that Ross Greer raised with the First Minister late last year. I also note Alex Cole-Hamilton’s comments on his interaction with local students on their experiences.

The reach of the Chinese state also extends to using organisations such as the United Front Work Department to apply pressure on anyone who challenges the regime’s core interests, whether on democracy or human rights abuses. According to the director general,

“We can expect it to increase further as President Xi consolidates power on an indefinite basis.”

I welcome the establishment of the UK Government’s defending democracy task force,

which will focus on protecting the democratic integrity of the UK from threats from foreign interference, including that of China. I ask the minister to provide an update on the task force’s engagement with the Scottish Government on its work.

In the meantime, I value and cherish the fact that we live in a nation in which police officers are not routinely armed; in which we can walk around our communities safely; and in which we can speak freely on the things that matter to us. We will not and must not be complacent as we maintain our focus on China’s growing sphere of influence in a volatile international environment, while defending our freedom and democracy.

I again thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing forward an important motion for debate today.

13:02

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I, too, thank my friend Alex Cole-Hamilton for bringing this debate to the chamber. I also thank the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation for the briefing that it has provided. I have worked closely with the committee over the past year to ensure that those who have come to Scotland from Hong Kong are safe and free to live their lives without fear of persecution. I look forward to taking that initiative forward and I encourage colleagues from all parties to join those efforts.

Deputy Presiding Officer, I know that I will not be alone among members in saying that I have found the events in North America over the past couple of weeks very disturbing. It is extremely worrying to see a nation’s sovereignty being so blatantly challenged—and there are worrying signs at home as well as abroad.

I will refer to three areas that cause me concern: Taiwan, illegal police stations and the infiltration of churches in Scotland.

I hope that all members will stand with Taiwan over its independence. I am proud to be a member of the cross-party group on Taiwan, and I visited that country a few years ago. I am interested in whether the minister—either in her summing up or, perhaps, in writing to me after the debate—could let me know what engagement the Scottish Government has had with Taiwan over the past number of months.

As Alex Cole-Hamilton and Audrey Nicoll have alluded to, all of us were shocked to hear of the existence of a secret Chinese police station in Glasgow last year. A report from civil liberties group Safeguard Defenders goes into detail about the working of such stations, which are found around the world. The group found that local

Chinese residents are used to do the bidding of the Chinese police.

The situation has caused a great deal of stress to Hong Kongers who live in Glasgow after fleeing their home for fear of persecution. I have spoken to people who say that they do not feel safe walking the streets in case they are accosted by someone representing the regime from which they have fled.

I hope that all parties in the Parliament can commit to ensuring that no foreign nation is unlawfully policing people in Scotland and to doing everything in our power to make those who have chosen to settle in Scotland feel welcome and safe.

Finally, I want to refer to something that I have a special interest in—the apparent infiltration of CCP propaganda in some churches in Chinese communities. On one occasion, a Hong Konger expressed his pro-democracy view in church. That immediately led to a heated debate between him and other churchgoers who were pro-CCP. In the sermon that the priest gave a few days after the incident, he said:

“Hong Kongers should be grateful for what China has done for them and should not be ‘rebellious’. It is great to be Chinese and we should be proud of it. Even ... here in Scotland, we will always be Chinese and should support the country’s policies.”

I call on all church leaders across Scotland to honour their positions, foregoing political allegiances in church and simply pointing people to Jesus, rather than to any earthly authority.

We must stand strong against foreign operations in our country. I hope that members of this Parliament can come together and agree to stand against tyranny and for those in our country who are fleeing persecution.

13:07

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I, too, thank Alex Cole-Hamilton. It is really important that we use the events of recent weeks and months, in terms of the obvious and explicit use of Chinese state surveillance apparatus over North America, to reflect on what that means and the actions that we should take.

Some of those actions will be very much geopolitical, but some of them are practical and immediate and that is what I want to talk about. As Alex Cole-Hamilton was speaking, I remembered that I had been advised to install a Hikvision camera in my constituency office. I did not install one, because I thought that the quote was too high but, in retrospect, I am quite pleased that I did not.

I also thank Jeremy Balfour for organising the meeting that took place in the Parliament with

Hong Kong refugees. I was really struck by their experiences. We are in danger of forgetting the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, which took place just a couple of years ago and are the reason why we are seeing an influx of people from Hong Kong seeking refuge in this country.

The events of Covid and subsequently the events in Ukraine have overshadowed the fact that people in Hong Kong have been persecuted by the Chinese authorities. They were protesting against an extradition law that would have seen people from Hong Kong extradited for trial in mainland China, in direct contravention of the Sino-British agreement in 1984. Article 13 of that joint declaration stated explicitly that the rights of civil liberty and freedom of speech would be upheld in Hong Kong in the future.

The protests resulted in 10,000 arrests of protestors and there are now 1,200 political prisoners, according to the White House, which announced the figure on 26 January as it extended the ability of people to seek refuge in the US. Let us just understand the scale of that figure of 1,200 political prisoners. In 2019, there were less than 8,000 prisoners in totality in Hong Kong’s jails, meaning that more than 10 per cent of those in Hong Kong’s jails are political prisoners. I find that statistic horrific and I think that we must seek to fulfil our duties and obligations both through that agreement in 1984 and through our more historical ones that I alluded to in my earlier intervention, because we should have a real sense of obligation and duty.

As a nation, we should not be proud of Scots’ role in Hong Kong, and I do not think that enough Scots are fully aware of that. Our role in the opium wars and the unfair treaty ports system was shameful. In reflection of that, we in this country should have a deep sense of duty to welcome people from Hong Kong.

The main point that I took away from the meeting that Jeremy Balfour organised was just how scared people were to speak in an open forum. They were prepared to speak about their experiences only one to one, because they were not sure who they were speaking to and who else was in the room. They were scared to speak their minds and their truth in this building, which struck me quite profoundly. When they spoke privately, they told stories of having been followed, watched, approached and questioned by people acting on behalf of the Chinese state and others holding academic positions at institutions in this country.

I draw three points from my experience. First, as members of this Parliament, we have a role to ensure that people feel safe, that they can approach us and that if they do so they will be treated with integrity and confidentiality.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am sorry to interrupt Daniel Johnson's raising of his three important points, which are excellent. Would he agree that there are Chinese citizens living here in Scotland for whom the Chinese state and the Chinese Communist Party do not speak, and who share our revulsion and concern about the outreach and the efforts to surveil peaceful activities, particularly those of Hong Kong Chinese people here in Edinburgh?

Daniel Johnson: It is extremely important to make the point that, as China is such a huge country, its people will hold a diversity of views. Anyone who thinks that the Chinese state acts and speaks for all Chinese people is severely mistaken. We should defend people who hold different views to those of the Chinese state, whether they be Chinese or otherwise.

I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for saying that all three of my points are excellent, given that by that point I had stated only one of them. I will continue with the remaining two.

Secondly, we need to recognise the role that our institutions might have had in facilitating such situations. We should note that Australia and Canada recently reviewed their academic relationships, particularly those with the Confucius institutes. Some aspects of such relationships are welcome, but we need to review those that we have in Scotland.

Finally, we should reflect on the role of other countries and the actions that they might be taking. For example, MI5's director general disclosed that Iran has made 10 attempts to either kidnap or kill its own citizens in the UK. In March 2022, the Turkish embassy was found to have been carrying out surveillance on its citizens here.

Above all else, we must ensure that Scotland is a safe haven for people who seek refuge from despotic and oppressive regimes, whether they be in China or anywhere else in the world.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite Elena Whitham to respond to the debate.

13:12

The Minister for Community Safety (Elena Whitham): I, too, am grateful to Alex Cole-Hamilton for providing the Parliament with an opportunity to debate such an important and wide-ranging topic. I am devastated that there are not more members here in the chamber to discuss it.

As members will appreciate, national security and data protection are reserved matters, so we are constrained in the laws that we can make on them. However, as the motion highlights, recent activities are timely reminders of the many continuing threats that we face. As has been

mentioned, such developments are further signs of how the global threat picture is changing. Ensuring the security of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom and of their data is a priority for the Scottish and UK Governments.

As members raised earlier, although such matters are reserved, their impacts can be felt across the devolved sectors in Scotland. Ministers take security matters extremely seriously, and the Scottish Government keeps all such policies under review. Members will also be aware that Police Scotland is currently inquiring into reports of an undeclared Chinese police station in Glasgow. It is upsetting to hear about people's experiences that they have reported to parliamentarians. However, as the inquiry is an operational matter for Police Scotland, it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on it in the debate.

In addition, we expect our institutions and businesses to be fully aware of the risks of any international engagement, do proper due diligence and take steps to protect their assets and people. I hope that in my contribution I will be able to provide assurance on those matters.

Daniel Johnson: One of the most key ways in which we in Scotland have an explicit relationship with China is through our academic institutions. Although we would not want that to be treated in a binary fashion, does the minister think that we need to review our academic institutional links with China?

Elena Whitham: It is important that we always look to other countries around the world where such reviews have been carried out. Our educational institutions have close relationships with China, but we must bear in mind that a review of those should not be off the table.

Turning first to what happened in the United States, as Alex Cole-Hamilton will be aware, the US assessment points to a deliberate violation of its sovereign territory and airspace. We stand four-square behind the decisive action taken by the United States and are following the investigation into the incident closely.

The UK Government has indicated that it will conduct a security review to assess the dangers posed by the balloons, and we support its review to protect UK airspace from that type of intrusion. The review will be used to decide whether any changes need to be made to the surveillance of British airspace, and the Scottish Government stands ready to engage in the process when appropriate.

The Parliament will be aware of the efforts of the Chinese Central Government to strengthen its security legislation, as referred to in today's motion. According to that legislation, everyone is responsible for state security, which is in line with

China's state security legal structure as a whole. The legislation includes articles that could compel businesses that are registered in China, including those that operate overseas or that have operations in China, to hand over information to Chinese intelligence agencies. That has data protection and data security implications in Scotland, as it does globally. Data protection is reserved. The UK Government will continue to monitor the threats to our data and it will not hesitate to take further action if it is necessary to protect our national security.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I understand entirely the landscape of reserved and devolved competence in this complex issue, which is why I have called on the Government to conduct an audit of the reach and influence of Chinese surveillance potential in our daily lives here in Scotland, and to make local authorities and public bodies such as Police Scotland, which is still using Hikvision surveillance cameras, aware of the potential danger of data breaches that could result from so doing.

Elena Whitham: I am going to come on to that issue in a moment.

As highlighted in today's debate, the UK Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner's recent report provides an insight into the extent and potential reach of the national intelligence law of the People's Republic of China. In response, the UK Government announced that companies that are subject to that legislation should not be able to supply surveillance systems to sensitive UK Government sites.

I repeat the assurances that have been given through recent parliamentary answers to Alex Cole-Hamilton that the Scottish Government takes seriously the threats that this situation poses and is taking action within its powers to expose those issues. The Scottish Government is in the process of a multiyear improvement programme that commenced in 2018, and all existing CCTV kit and equipment is being replaced with a new integrated system, which will have data protection and security keenly at the forefront of our minds.

We are also aware that the CCTV systems in local authorities and Police Scotland include equipment that was supplied by Chinese-owned companies. The document "A National Strategy for Public Space CCTV in Scotland", which was published in March 2011, is not quite up to date on the world that we live in today and the "digital asbestos" that is in front of us. We must look to improve on that in future, and I will keep the Parliament up to date on how we do that.

The Scottish Government continues to keep in close contact with the UK Government on developments in response to the Foreign Affairs

Committee's recent recommendations, and we will act accordingly, including consulting with Police Scotland and local authorities on what measures they might take in response to these steps.

Next week marks the start of cyber Scotland week, which is a series of events to make people and organisations more cyberaware and resilient. I encourage all members to consider attending events, to tell their constituents about the week, to visit the CyberScotland.com portal and to share it on their social media channels. That will give people a chance to pause and think about what apps they might have on their phones and computers. Both the National Cyber Security Centre and CyberScotland.com websites are useful sources of information, advice and guidance. The NCSC also has social media guidance that covers most major platforms, including advice on digital footprints and privacy settings.

Before I close, I want to comment on human rights and China. We have heard a lot about that today. The Scottish Government's China policy supports the economic, cultural, educational and social relationships with the people of China in keeping with the values of Scotland. We cannot forget that the majority of people in China want to foster good relations around the world. That means working constructively on global priorities such as tackling climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as challenging China in areas of grave concern such as human rights.

I echo concerns that we have heard around the chamber. We have particular concerns regarding the situation in Xinjiang. There are other situations that we need to raise, such as that of people in China who are being persecuted for their religious beliefs. Perhaps we should also keep at the forefront of our minds the situation in Taiwan and in Hong Kong.

We are clear eyed about our international engagement, including with China. As I previously stated, we expect our institutions and businesses to understand and manage the reputational, ethical and security risks that are associated with their international partnerships.

13:20

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is portfolio questions on social justice, housing and local government.

Members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question, or type "R" in the chat function. As ever, I make a plea for succinct questions and answers, to allow me to get in as many members as possible.

Winter Heating Payment

1. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of any benefits of paying the winter heating payment in November rather than February. (S6O-01916)

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): As I made clear to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee on 15 December, and alluded to again this morning, some responses to our consultation suggested that winter heating payments should be made earlier, and I am open to reviewing the bringing forward of payments in future years.

For the first year of the payment, which is being paid today and in the days and weeks ahead, it was not possible to make payments earlier, because the Department for Work and Pensions was unable to provide the required data prior to 31 January.

I remind Parliament that, through the payment, we will ensure that 400,000 low-income people are given a guaranteed £50 to help with their heating costs, no matter where they live or what the weather is.

Jeremy Balfour: I thank the minister for his answer but, this year, the winter heating payment has missed the mark. It has come far too late, after the worst of the weather has passed, and has missed a number of people, including many who are on disability benefits.

In the review that the minister mentioned, will he look at bringing the timetable forward? Will he also look at expanding the criteria so that the payment is made to all people who are on adult disability benefits, whatever level they are on?

Ben Macpherson: I disagree with the sentiment in Mr Balfour's questions. The winter heating payment is a huge expansion in support. On average, in the past seven years, only around 185,000 people in Scotland received the United Kingdom equivalent—the cold weather payment—before it was replaced with the winter heating payment. Today, through our benefit, 400,000 people are receiving guaranteed support, no matter where they live. People who would not in all likelihood, or in most winters, have got a cold weather payment, are now guaranteed a reliable payment from the Scottish Government.

We will continue to look at how we can improve the benefit, as we do with all of our benefits, and we will do so in good faith. With regard to exploring the feasibility of moving payments forward in future years, I confirm that engagement between the Scottish Government and DWP officials on that matter has already started.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): As the minister has just outlined, the winter heating payment will pay out around £20 million to 400,000 people, which is more than double the £8.3 million that the DWP provided to only 185,000 households in each of the past seven years. Given that, last year, no cold weather payments were triggered in Shetland, Orkney, Wick, Glasgow, Edinburgh or Fife, does the minister agree that the new system will ensure that more people receive reliable support, regardless of the weather, and that it is, therefore, fairer?

Ben Macpherson: Emma Roddick highlights really important matters, because cold weather payments provide no guaranteed support, and there are years when no one will receive anything. For example, last year, only 11,000 people received a payment, and in 2019-20 as few as 4,000 people received support. That is why we have made the changes with the winter heating payment, to make sure that it is more reliable and not contingent on the location of weather stations, which often do not reflect the conditions that people are experiencing.

Our £20 million investment ensures that all the 400,000 low-income individuals who are entitled to the benefit will automatically receive a payment, regardless of the temperature or their location. I am really glad that those payments are going out to people today and in the days and weeks ahead.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): One thing that the minister has omitted to say is that nearly 100,000 people will lose money as a result of this, because the weather has already dropped below the temperatures at which they would get some money. What will the minister do to ensure that those people's shortfalls are caught, and can he guarantee that enough data will be transferred in time to ensure that the winter heating payments

next year are paid in winter rather than closer to spring, as is the case this year?

Ben Macpherson: I am not sure what assessment is behind the statements that Pam Duncan-Glancy has made, and the figure of 100,000. As far as I am aware, unless I am mistaken, the cold weather payments would have been triggered only once this winter to date, and only in certain places where weather stations recorded a temperature of zero degrees for seven consecutive days. Of course, that one trigger would only have initiated a payment of £25 for those people in those places, whereas, today and in the days and weeks ahead, people will be receiving £50 from the Scottish Government. More people, more money on average and a better system—that is what we are delivering, and we are very proud to do so.

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Delivery of Local Services in 2023-24)

2. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what discussions it has had with COSLA about the delivery of local services over the next financial year. (S6O-01917)

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): Ministers and officials regularly meet representatives from COSLA—indeed, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government and I had a meeting with the COSLA presidential team yesterday. Ministers and officials also regularly meet individual local authorities to discuss a range of issues as part of our commitment to working in partnership with local government, as two spheres of government, to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland.

The impact of the settlement will depend on how local authorities allocate the total resources available to them, as was agreed in the budget earlier this week, and the level of service that they then provide over the next financial year.

The Scottish Government recognises the crucial role that councils and their employees play in our communities across Scotland and the challenging financial circumstances that they, and the Scottish Government, face.

Tess White: COSLA's cries of "SOS—save our services" have been ignored by this Scottish National Party Government. That will have a massive bearing on the ability of councils in North East Scotland to properly fund even statutory public services. Now there are also question marks over the Big Noise project in Torry and the Sistema Scotland equivalent in Dundee. Aberdeen City Council and Dundee City Council are struggling to find even the meagre resources that

are required to support those transformational music projects for disadvantaged young people.

Will the minister commit to discussing with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy whether fair funding for councils can be enshrined in law to help to protect services in the future?

Ben Macpherson: In 2023-24, local authorities in North East Scotland will receive more than £1.7 billion to fund local services, which equates to an extra £124.7 million—or an additional 7.4 per cent—compared with 2022-23 to support vital day-to-day services. I commend the member, in her representation of her constituents, for raising important points around important projects in her region, and I encourage her to continue to engage with the local authorities in her region and finance ministers on behalf of those organisations.

As the member knows, the Scottish Government has a largely fixed budget. We have used our taxation powers progressively, which the member's party opposes, and we have made allocations to significant social security payments, including those referred to in my previous answer.

If they are serious about representing their constituents in the challenging financial circumstances that we face, the Scottish Conservatives need to bring to the chamber proposals and solutions for the reallocation of resources. They cannot ask for more money without citing where that money will come from in a largely fixed financial envelope.

We did not hear suggestions in this budget process, which concluded earlier this week. I encourage the Scottish Conservatives to raise their game in the financial year ahead.

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): In the budget on Tuesday, the Deputy First Minister announced an extra £100 million to cover 2.5 per cent of the pay award to non-teaching staff. However, the cost of that 2.5 per cent is £155 million. When is the Government likely to announce the additional funding to meet the Government's commitments?

Ben Macpherson: I thank the member for his question and encourage his further engagement with finance ministers, who are the principal ministers with regard to local government finance.

As the member alluded to, we are increasing the resource that is available to local government by over £793 million. That includes the £570 million from the budget announcement in December, plus, as Mr Griffin referred to, an additional £100 million for non-teaching pay in 2023-24, and £123 million to support the teachers pay negotiation, which was announced during stage 3 of the budget bill by the Deputy First Minister and

Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery on Tuesday.

We have announced what I have referred to. We have concluded the budget process. Of course, there are on-going considerations around teachers pay, and ministers are very focused on finding solutions, working with our local government colleagues to help resolve these matters.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the next member seeking to ask a supplementary, I say to the minister that we need to have a bit shorter responses, otherwise we will not get in all the members who are seeking to ask questions.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Does the minister share my appreciation for the work of Scottish National Party councillors on Glasgow City Council, who last week passed their budget, which protected vital services in the face of some of the most difficult times for Scottish public finances in living memory? Given that Labour councillors not only failed to present an alternative budget but failed to turn up at all, what does he think their actions say about their respect for democracy?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I perhaps should have added that we should have shorter questions as well.

Ben Macpherson: I will not respond in depth to what has been said. I think that in these times, it is important that all elected members act in a responsible way, which involves making sure that they are present for important decisions.

Domestic Violence (Support for Women with No Recourse to Public Funds)

3. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding support that can be provided for women living in Scotland who are fleeing domestic violence and have no recourse to public funds. (S6O-01918)

The Minister for Equalities and Older People (Christina McKelvie): The Scottish Government is working to protect all women who flee abuse. We are clear that women with no recourse to public funds should be offered the same level of support as other women in Scotland and should not face disadvantage.

We continue to engage with the UK Government to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse are afforded the same protections and support. Our ending destitution together strategy urges the UK Government to immediately remove, and cease to apply, no recourse to public funds conditions in relation to people in vulnerable circumstances,

including women who are experiencing domestic abuse.

Rona Mackay: I am very heartened to hear that the Scottish Government will continue to press the UK Government for those powers and for powers over immigration. Can the minister confirm that, when Scotland is independent, all women living in Scotland who flee domestic abuse will have access to public funds?

Christina McKelvie: Yes. It is clear that we need our own immigration system to address Scotland's distinct demographic, labour market and economic challenges. We have set out how the devolution of migration powers would work. Everyone in our communities, including people in the UK asylum and immigration systems, should have the right to access support in times of need.

We have written to the UK Government urging it to reverse the policy of restricting applications for indefinite leave to remain for survivors of domestic abuse or violence, and to widen eligibility to include migrant survivors who are excluded from the concession simply because they are not in the UK on a spousal visa. It is not acceptable that people, including those who are fleeing domestic abuse, face destitution or are forced to remain in unsafe conditions because of their immigration status.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): It is, disproportionately, women who are left without recourse to public funds after having fled an abuser. We know that the complex and inhumane system is almost impossible to navigate without support from outside organisations and legal assistance. I recognise the work of the Scottish Women's Rights Centre in that regard. What asks of the UK Government are being made to secure support and funding to help women in that situation?

Christina McKelvie: I join Beatrice Wishart in praising the work of the Scottish Women's Rights Centre. It does immense work that we are incredibly proud of.

During my time in the Parliament, which is now more than 15 years, Scottish ministers have repeatedly and consistently raised the issue of no recourse to public funds. The impact on people living in Scotland of not having recourse to public funds because of the UK Government—particularly the Home Office and its disgraceful actions against women—is absolutely disgraceful. Any member, particularly Conservatives, who comes to the chamber to ask me to do more for women in those situations should look at the system that creates those situations.

I echo Beatrice Wishart's sentiments and reassure her that we take every opportunity to

press the UK Government to change the disgraceful system that it currently operates.

Ukraine Longer-term Resettlement Fund

4. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what progress has been made toward increasing the availability of longer-term housing options for displaced people from Ukraine using the £50 million Ukraine longer-term resettlement fund. (S6O-01919)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): When including the pilot in North Lanarkshire, a total of four projects providing 754 homes have so far been approved through the Ukraine longer-term resettlement fund. Those are supported by almost £13 million of Scottish Government grant funding. To date, more than 400 homes have been brought back into use, and work is under way to deliver the remaining homes as quickly as possible. We continue to work with councils and registered social landlords on a pipeline of further applications to bring more homes back into use at a time when they are needed most.

Mark Ruskell: Having somewhere safe to live is an absolute necessity for every displaced person who is rebuilding their life here in Scotland, free from war, persecution and violence. However, over recent weeks, we have seen horrific racist attacks on people seeking asylum who are living in hotels, which have been whipped up by far-right agitators and hostile language in Westminster. Will the cabinet secretary update me on what the Scottish Government is doing to protect people seeking refuge from far-right attacks?

Shona Robison: I share Mark Ruskell's concerns. The Scottish Government unequivocally condemns any form of hatred or prejudice—indeed, it condemns hostile language, too. It is not acceptable that people who have fled war and persecution are being targeted in that way. Such attacks will not be tolerated, and we must all play our part in challenging dangerous rhetoric that seeks to divide our communities. People seeking asylum should be treated with dignity and respect at all stages of the asylum process, with suitable accommodation provided based in communities. The Home Office is, of course, responsible for asylum accommodation, so it must ensure that people are safe and can access the support and services that they need.

Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The MS Ambition and the MS Victoria are temporary homes to thousands of Ukrainian refugees. The lease on those boats will soon come to an end and those on the boats will need to be rehoused in suitable accommodation. Many individuals on

those boats have formed communities and begun to put down roots where they have been docked. What action is being taken to ensure the safe and suitable rehousing of every individual who is currently residing on those boats?

Shona Robison: It is very important that the people on the cruise ships, which have provided important temporary accommodation, are supported into settled accommodation, whether that is through hosts, in social rented accommodation or even in private accommodation when that is appropriate. I know that my colleague Neil Gray is working hard with agencies to make that happen at pace, and I will ask him to write to the member with an update.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The Scottish Government and local authorities have exceeded expectations by providing £200 million in this financial year to safely accommodate 23,000 displaced Ukrainians. It is clear, though, that to maintain the current level of support the United Kingdom Government must commit to funding, too. Will the Scottish Government continue to urge its Westminster counterparts not to slash the tariff funding for local authorities, so that Scottish councils can continue to meet the housing and public service needs of displaced Ukrainians, who are welcome in our country?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government is proud to work in partnership with local authorities to support displaced Ukrainian people. The UK Government's decision to reduce the tariff funding that is available to local authorities from £10,500 to £5,900 per arrival in the first year, to replace year 2 funding with a UK-wide fund, which could be as low as £1,500 per arrival, and to discontinue the education tariff completely will make the task of supporting displaced Ukrainians that much harder. We will continue to press the UK Government to increase, not decrease, the support that is available to perform that vital long-term work.

Housing Associations (Independence)

5. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether housing associations should remain independent where possible, rather than being subsumed by larger organisations. (S6O-01920)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government values the diversity of the housing association sector in Scotland, which is one of its strengths. If a housing association decides that it is in the best interests of its tenants to transfer to another association, that is a matter for the independent governing body to consider.

An association must also consult its tenants about its proposal to pursue a transfer to another registered social landlord, and any transfer will not proceed unless it is supported by tenants in an independent ballot. Therefore, tenants will have the final say.

John Mason: I recently met the management of Reidvale Housing Association in my constituency, which the cabinet secretary might have heard of. It is one of the best-known housing associations in Scotland as a result of protecting the area when it was threatened with demolition some years ago.

The problem is that the housing association's rents were too low, so it has not built up reserves for maintenance. However, it has little or no debt, and there seems to be no need for a transfer of engagements, but it could be attractive to a larger organisation to strengthen its balance sheets.

Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the management and the Scottish Housing Regulator should encourage tenants of the association that it should stand alone if that is financially sustainable?

Shona Robison: Ultimately, that is a matter for Reidvale Housing Association to make a judgement on, in consultation with its tenants. The regulator has been engaging with Reidvale about some serious weaknesses in its compliance with regulatory requirements, some of which John Mason identified in his question.

Reidvale carried out an independent review to consider how it can best address those weaknesses and deliver services for its tenants. It will consult with its tenants and, if they are in favour of a transfer being taken forward to the next stage, a business case and a tenant ballot will follow.

The regulator continues to seek assurance that the interests of Reidvale's tenants are protected. I emphasise again that it is the tenants who will have the final say.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Being able to provide mid-market rent sustainably is crucial to meeting affordable housing targets. Will the Scottish Government commit to have mid-market rents that registered social landlords or their subsidiaries provide redesignated so that they come under social rent regulations instead of private rent regulations?

Shona Robison: There are good reasons why the position is what it is. Miles Briggs will understand the required criteria with regard to funding social housing and mid-market rent; I am keen to see an expansion of both. We will continue to consider whether there are things that we can do to encourage that work and to make it easier.

We have our commitment to make available £3.5 billion in this parliamentary session for the delivery of more affordable and social homes. We want to grow that pot, working with partners in local authorities, registered social landlords and others.

Child Poverty (Impact of Reduction in Local Government Funding)

6. **Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the potential impact on its on-going targets to tackle child poverty of any reduction in local government funding. (S6O-01921)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): There has been an increase in local government funding of £793 million compared to last year, which means that we are providing nearly £13.5 billion in the 2023-24 local government settlement.

The Scottish budget sets out the planned investments, including through local authorities, which are key to tackling child poverty. Those investments include almost £70 million to scale up parental employability support and around £1 billion in early learning and childcare provision.

Decisions on the spending of the rest of the local government budget are devolved to local authorities. We would encourage local authorities to make the investments that they are making to add to those initiatives to help tackle child poverty.

Carol Mochan: How can the Government justify leaving Midlothian Council—the council area in Scotland with the fastest-growing population of people, many of whom are families who are struggling with the serious increases in the cost of living—with a budget shortfall of nearly £14 million? How does the cabinet secretary imagine that, with that burden, that council and many others like it will be able to meet wider anti-poverty targets?

Shona Robison: The Scottish Government has made tackling the cost of living crisis a key priority. We are doing what we can within our powers. In the previous financial year, we allocated around £3 billion to support families, including with our major investment in the Scottish child payment, which is literally helping to keep food on the table with £25 per week per child for eligible families. We are investing more than £84 million in discretionary housing payments to provide direct financial support to people who are struggling with housing costs, in order to mitigate United Kingdom Government welfare policies such as the benefit cap.

We are doing what we can. Many of those initiatives are delivered through local government,

but it would not be fair to say that this Government has not done absolutely everything within its power to help families at this difficult time.

Rural Housing Fund

7. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the rural housing fund. (S6O-01922)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): Since 2016, the £30 million demanded rural and islands housing fund has provided an additional delivery route for community organisations, development trusts, private landowners and developers. To September 2022, the fund delivered 164 homes and provided funding of £16.7 million. It supplements the considerable mainstream activity in rural and island areas that delivered almost 8,000 affordable homes between 2016-17 and 2021-22.

Liam Kerr: Although £25 million was promised to be spent on rural housing by 2021, less than half of that has been spent. What was spent led to a mere 300 homes being built or approved. The north-east got only 12 of those, all of which are in Angus. The Government promised 110,000 affordable homes across Scotland by 2032. Will that promise be met? If so, how many of the 110,000 homes will be in the north-east?

Shona Robison: We are committed to delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which 10 per cent will be in our remote, rural and island communities. We are making available £3.5 billion during this parliamentary session for affordable housing across Scotland. That builds on the delivery of 115,000 affordable homes that have been built since 2007. We have a track record of delivering that scale of affordable housing, and we will continue to deliver on that scale.

The rural and islands housing fund is demand led. We want to see more projects coming forward, and we are doing what we can to encourage that, including through the development of our new rural and islands action plan, which will be published in the coming weeks.

National Health Service Dental Care Provision

8. Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the social justice secretary has had with the health secretary regarding any disproportionate impact on households experiencing poverty, and any other social justice impacts, of the reported lack of NHS dental care provision in some parts of Scotland. (S6O-01923)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): We are aware of the hardship that people are facing right now, and we continue to urge the United Kingdom Government to take action to support people through the cost of living crisis. This Government has allocated £3 billion to help households through a range of measures.

On dental care, the Government has already introduced free dental care for young people between the ages of 18 and 25, and we have made a commitment to abolish all national health service dental charges in this parliamentary session. We continue to support health boards to deliver NHS dental services, and we have put in place additional recruitment and retention incentives in remote and rural areas.

Oliver Mundell: Those commitments count for nothing in places where there is no NHS dental provision. I am really worried about young people and, in particular, pregnant women in parts of my constituency who cannot access an NHS dentist. The advice from the health board is that they should try to find a private dentist. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is wrong, and will she approach NHS Dumfries and Galloway and ask it to think again?

Shona Robison: I will, of course, get the health minister responsible to reply in some detail on the issue, but I can say that there is a framework of support to encourage more dentists to remote and rural areas, including the whole of the NHS Dumfries and Galloway health board area. I understand that golden hello payments of up to £37,500 are being made available to trainee dentists who wish to start their career by providing NHS dental services. That incentive has been instrumental in attracting vocational trainees to the board. I think that there are six vocational trainee placements, and it is hoped that at least the same number will be recruited later this year. Action is being taken.

In addition, I understand that unregistered patients will continue to be able to access emergency and urgent care via the public dental service clinics in Dumfries and Stranraer, and that the board has agreed to recruit additional dental helpline staff in response to the increase in call volumes, in order to help to get people to the right place.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio question time. I apologise to the few members whom I could not manage to squeeze in.

There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business, to allow front-bench teams to change positions, should they wish to do so.

Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-07997, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill, which is a piece of United Kingdom legislation.

14:32

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Today's debate is timely, because today is also the day on which the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill begins its committee stage in the House of Lords. I thank the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee for its report on the bill. It is clear that the committee shares the significant concerns that the Scottish Government has raised since the bill's introduction. There is simply not enough time for me to list those concerns in full, but I will highlight three.

First, the bill includes a cliff-edge sunset provision. The inclusion of such a provision is a deeply irresponsible way to manage the statute book.

Secondly, the bill risks deregulation and divergence from the high standards that the people of Scotland experienced and benefited from when the United Kingdom was a European Union member state. That will introduce unwelcome uncertainty for business and for trade.

Thirdly, the bill includes powers for UK ministers to act in areas of devolved responsibility without the consent of the Scottish ministers and without the consent of the Scottish Parliament. I make it clear that conferring powers on UK ministers in devolved areas without requiring the consent of the Scottish ministers or the Scottish Parliament for the exercise of those powers strikes at the heart of the Scotland Act 1998. Democratic oversight and good governance are clearly at risk if UK ministers sideline in that way the Scottish ministers, who are accountable to this Parliament.

The combined assessment of the committee's 18 expert witnesses was overwhelmingly negative and reflects the astonishing level of opposition to the bill across sectoral and political boundaries. Despite that, the UK Government refuses to withdraw the bill or—as it should do, at the very least—amend it. I again call on the UK Government, as I did in November, when the Parliament previously debated the bill, to see sense and to withdraw the bill.

I will restate the position of the Scottish Government: the only way to eradicate the dangers that are posed by the bill is for it to be scrapped. That remains our position. Nothing during the bill's parliamentary passage so far has alleviated my initial grave concerns. Indeed, those concerns have been compounded following my conversations with Welsh Government ministers and with peers in the House of Lords.

I am alarmed that the hard Brexit negotiated by the UK Government could become harder, with signals from Europe that the trade and co-operation agreement could itself be at risk because of the divergent and deregulatory UK agenda that informs the bill.

It is highly regrettable that our proposed amendments were not considered by two previous secretaries of state. A third is now in post and two weeks ago, I wrote to her to urge her to respect devolution and the role of the Scottish Parliament. I am yet to receive a reply. The amendments to the bill that we have proposed to the Secretary of State for Business and Trade would ensure that this Parliament would be given its proper scrutinising role. I will continue to urge the secretary of state to consider those amendments.

Much will depend on the further passage of the bill. I have instructed my officials to work closely with the parliamentary clerks here to find an agreeable way forward and I commit to keeping the Parliament updated on our proposals. We must be under no illusion that either devolution or the Sewel convention will be respected in connection with this legislation. Since 2018, the Parliament has withheld consent for a UK Government bill on seven occasions—six times, the UK Government has ignored that. Should this Parliament express a similar view today, I can offer no comfort that the UK Government will listen.

I conclude by drawing members' attention to just some of the continued opposition to the bill. The House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee criticised it as being “hyper-skeletal” in allowing ministers to act with little parliamentary scrutiny. The UK Government's own watchdog, the Regulatory Policy Committee, called the impact assessment for the bill “not fit for purpose,” and Wildlife and Countryside Link described the bill as

“an economic and environmental wrecking ball”

that could cost the UK £82 billion over 30 years.

A clear swathe of informed observers understand the danger of the bill. The Welsh Government understands it; the Scottish Government understands it; this Parliament's constitution committee understands it. I urge the

Parliament as a whole to join that list today and to vote in favour of the motion to withhold consent.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees with the recommendation in the Scottish Government's Legislative Consent Memorandum to withhold consent for the UK Government's Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Clare Adamson to speak on behalf of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee.

14:37

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank members of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, the committee clerks and all those who submitted evidence and attended meetings during our deliberations on this important bill.

The bill is a profound concern. The committee believes, as a point of constitutional principle, in the simple, democratic imperative that the Scottish Parliament should have the opportunity to effectively scrutinise the exercise of all legislative powers within its devolved competence. In its current form, the bill neither protects nor promotes that principle, nor does it encourage confidence about the potential impacts on policy areas as crucial and wide-ranging as food standards, animal health, safeguarding the environment, consumer protection, business practices and employment.

There was a consistency in stakeholder evidence that is rarely found during parliamentary scrutiny. Even those witnesses who have historically favoured diversion from EU policy, such as the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, said:

"It is more important to get it right than to get it fast."—*[Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, 24 November 2022; c 33.]*

The bill, in its current form, contains a sunset clause: if a law is not specifically retained by either the UK or the Scottish Government, it will automatically fall by the end of this year. Kirsty Hood of the Faculty of Advocates said of that deadline:

"That would mean that—to put it plainly—we would end up with gaps in the law."—*[Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, 10 November 2022; c 9.]*

The Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland, among many others, shared those concerns. Scottish Environment LINK noted a much harsher cliff edge in devolved areas than in reserved ones.

The Delegated Powers and Legislative Reform Committee also expressed serious concerns about the bill. Its House of Lords equivalent, the

Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, stated that:

"There is no certainty about the sunset provision itself because UK ministers can extend it under delegated powers in clause 2 ... There is no certainty about which policy areas will be affected and there is no certainty about what will replace revoked rule."

Seafood Scotland said that the

"legal 'cliff edge' ... will force businesses and representatives to divert considerable resource to understanding and responding to proposed changes."

NFU Scotland suggested that the sunset of retained EU food law could well return us to a time when little in the way of standards was applied.

Let me be clear: witnesses were not opposed to the principle of reviewing retained EU law, but considered that any review should not be driven by what Seafood Scotland called "arbitrary cut-off dates".

The Soil Association Scotland said that it had

"no objection to a sensible process that examines, updates or improves existing environmental laws, but we do not think this Bill delivers that."

Given inflation, energy prices, post-pandemic recovery and the post-Brexit economic impact, we can but sympathise with the view of the Institute of Directors that the bill is

"the last thing that business needs in such a fragile economic environment."

The sunset clause as it stands cannot deliver appropriate levels of consultation, scrutiny or debate, and the scale of the task ahead cannot be overestimated in respect of the additional administrative burden and the challenge of conducting scrutiny within the time constraints. That applies to stakeholders, Governments and the Parliament's committees.

I have already thanked my committee colleagues. It is to their credit that we have been able to work in such a productive and collegiate way in this session. However, I note that we were unable to agree unanimous support for the report with Conservative colleagues on this occasion.

We cannot do justice to the report this afternoon, and we have asked the Conveners Group for a committee-led debate to allow further discussion across committee interests, as the bill will impact on many subject committees of the Parliament. We have also highlighted the potential impact on the workload of the parliamentary committees. We have written to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee on the requirement for a legislative consent motion in this specific circumstance, when consent is not to be laid by the Government through a legislative consent motion. Our standing orders are currently silent on that, so we have requested a review of

procedures, given the number of times that that has happened, as the cabinet secretary laid out. That is indeed of concern to the committee.

We recommend the report to our fellow committee members and members across the chamber.

14:42

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a member of the Faculty of Advocates.

This is, of course, the second time that I have risen to speak in a Scottish Government debate on the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill—this time for an LCM debate. As the cabinet secretary has already mentioned, the Scottish Government held a debate on the bill in November 2022. As I argued at the time, the timing of that debate was unprecedented, given that the two parliamentary committees that were looking at the bill had not yet reported. As the convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee has just mentioned, our committee has agreed to write to the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to recommend that it consider undertaking a review of the relevant provisions of the standing orders.

To move on from that issue, it is arguable that the debate that we are having today is likewise premature because, as the cabinet secretary noted, the bill is not in its final form. It was robustly debated in the House of Lords at the beginning of the month, it is entering the committee stage, and there are reports that it will possibly be amended. In my view, it would have been preferable to have waited until we could at least see a finalised version of the bill before debating it again and considering the issue of consent. However, we are where we are.

The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee and the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee have published their reports on the bill.

Although I am not speaking for the committee on this occasion, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the constitution committee clerks for all their work during the scrutiny of the LCM and the drafting of the final report. Although my Scottish Conservative colleague Maurice Golden and I did not, ultimately, support the conclusions of that report, I acknowledge the hard work of MSP colleagues and the clerking team of our committee.

Let me briefly lay out our position on the bill. I acknowledge that there are several concerns about the REUL bill, especially around timeframes.

I retain some personal misgivings about various aspects of the bill, but, in principle, I do not believe that the Scottish Parliament should refuse to consent to the bill. The bill, in our view, rightly seeks to end the inertia that currently exists when it comes to retained EU law on the statute book.

Although there are concerns, my belief is that we cannot maintain a kind of statutory stasis forever and ever. We temporarily kept EU laws in place to smooth the process of the UK's exit from the EU, but that was always envisaged as a short-term bridging measure.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Donald Cameron: Very briefly.

Jenni Minto: I am interested in the definition of "EU law", because all these laws were looked at by the Parliaments of the United Kingdom during the time of our membership and so are, in fact, included on our statute. It could therefore be argued that they are already UK and Scottish law and so on.

Donald Cameron: I am not sure that they were all on the statute book. That is a question of legal interpretation. I certainly acknowledge that a lot of EU law was either directly effective or had been enshrined in UK law, but we are talking retained EU law, and it is my belief that those laws cannot now sit inert ad infinitum.

We have to move forward, taking the laws that we want to keep, amending and updating them where necessary, and jettisoning those that are not relevant, or that are contrary, to the needs of either the UK or Scotland.

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

Donald Cameron: I will not. I have very little time.

Otherwise, there will be two separate statute books, with completely different interpretive principles and case law.

In addition, the so-called dangers of the bill have, in my view, been overplayed. The UK Government has repeated its commitment across a number of sectors, including those of our international obligations, employment rights and environmental protections.

In contrast, the opportunities for the Scottish Government have been downplayed. It is Scottish Government policy to keep pace with EU law and the bill facilitates that. It allows the Scottish Government to maintain alignment with EU law. The Scottish Government can now choose to adopt any EU laws that it sees fit as either primary or secondary legislation. To that end, I understand that UK Government officials have offered to help

the Scottish Government with the task of identifying which retained EU law is devolved or reserved. I hope that the cabinet secretary will take up that offer, because Scotland is of course best served when our two Governments work together.

We retain some misgivings with regard to the timeframes in the bill, but we also believe that the Scottish Parliament should give consent to the bill. It offers Scotland an opportunity to remove outdated EU law that is no longer right for us and replace it with Scotland-specific legislation. For those reasons, we will vote against the motion.

14:48

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Scottish Labour has been clear that we do not support the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill. I start by thanking all those who gave evidence to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee on the bill's implications, and our clerks for their hard work in helping us pull together our report.

My view is that the bill joins a long list of mistakes made by the UK Conservative Government over the Brexit process, demonstrating an obsession with deregulation and destroying our relationships with our nearest neighbours without thinking through the damaging consequences.

The bill delivers a legal cliff edge. Its impact has not been thought through and it would mean that the UK Government would have to consider literally thousands of pieces of legislation and identify the ones that it wants to keep. That would be a massive diversion from the current issues facing our economy and our people.

I note Donald Cameron's suggestion that our two Governments work together, which I of course agree with, but surely there is a better approach. This bill will create massive uncertainty, and there is a real danger that important legislation will be forgotten about and will disappear overnight.

The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee report, which was published last week, highlights important concerns about disease control and implications for people's health. It was suggested in evidence that we will see the impact of the bill when food standards drop and animal welfare is undermined. As the RSPB has highlighted, the bill puts at risk air and water quality, species and habitats protections and protections around pesticide and chemical levels in food and water. Surely, therefore, it would have been far better to consider which EU laws we would rather not have; consult with stakeholders, so that they were able to get involved; carry out risk assessments; ask lawyers about the legal

implications; speak to producers and businesses; and discuss with campaigners and trade unions.

We should not only have discussed the laws that need to be retained; we should have thought about the global climate crisis that we are in and how we can accelerate our pace of change. I have to say that this is the worst possible time to be deleting legislation that protects the environment.

It is absolutely striking that stakeholders are deeply worried about the bill. Roger Barker, director of policy and governance at the Institute of Directors, said:

"Getting to grips with any resulting regulatory changes will impose a major new burden on business which it could well do without."

The legislation will undermine workers' rights, and the then Trades Union Congress general secretary, Frances O'Grady, described it as "a recipe for chaos". Further, the Confederation of British Industry said that the Government should focus instead on improving its trading relationships with the EU. I totally agree. We should be rebuilding our relations with our nearest neighbours, not trashing them further.

Let us be clear: this bill is bad for business, the economy, trade, workers' rights, health and safety and the environment. Critically, it also undermines devolution. It is another example of the Tory Government riding roughshod over devolution. That is not acceptable.

I hope that, as the bill progresses to the UK Parliament, there will be a rethink. By refusing to give consent, I hope that our Parliament will play a role in bringing about that rethink.

We cannot forget that the transfer of power from the legislature to the executive in this bill also extends to our Parliament. It is absolutely vital that we have parliamentary transparency and accountability. I would therefore be keen for the cabinet secretary to publish his Government's plan for alignment and for ensuring that our stakeholders and our Parliament's committees are consulted. Clare Adamson was absolutely right to say that we needed more comprehensive debate on this issue. Our stakeholders and our communities need certainty, accountability and transparency, not the legal cliff edge and bad government that this bill will deliver.

14:52

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): In many ways, this day was inevitable. As soon as the Brexit referendum was lost and the Conservative Government sought a hard Brexit that cut almost all formal arrangements with the EU, there was always going to be a need to manage the harsh transition. The sheer volume of European law that

is contained in British law is enormous, and to unpick it is a horrendous task.

In passing, I say that that is a lesson for those who argue that independence would be a breeze and could be done within 16 months. More than six years into the Brexit process, we are still disentangling our relationship with the European Union.

Alasdair Allan: For the record, my understanding is that no one in the independence movement would suggest that all laws since 1707 be unpicked or repealed on independence day. However, does the member agree that one of the distressing things about this bill is that it proposes to do exactly that with something in the region of 4,000 pieces of extant law?

Willie Rennie: To be honest, I think that both movements are as bad as each other on this. They both promised far too harsh a transition far too early—the nationalists promised that an independent state would be established within 16 months, and they cannot roll back on that now. Both movements need to learn from each other so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. We were in a formal arrangement with Europe for only a few decades, and we have been in a formal arrangement with the United Kingdom for several centuries, so the task would be enormous.

Although the Brexit issues were wholly predictable, there is no doubt that they could have been handled differently in order to smooth the transition to the new arrangement. A better relationship with Europe and a more pragmatic approach, with an acceptance of necessary co-operation, would have made the process easier, and it would have allowed for a greater involvement of the devolved Administrations.

With the EU retained law bill, we face a steep cliff edge—I agree with the minister on that point. It dangerously and blindly dispenses with thousands of laws without a proper process with the Scottish Parliament.

Instead, we could have had a more deliberative process, engaging all interested parties—as Sarah Boyack has rightly highlighted—and reducing the significant and costly errors that could be forthcoming. As we have witnessed today, the unwise process has also enabled the Scottish Government to indulge sometimes in wild hyperbole, speculating about dire consequences without being able to specifically identify actual harms. It is important that we understand those actual harms.

With that in mind, I am still intrigued as to how and when the Scottish Government has used the keeping pace powers that were granted to it by the Parliament. We worked hard with the Government to agree those measures, so I am slightly

surprised that we still do not know how many times it has deployed them. In fact, when I raised this issue in the previous debate about Brexit, the Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work, Richard Lochhead, did not have a clue what I was talking about. He seemed to think that it was something to do with securing employment for people who had been made redundant. We need a Government that is on top of its game on the keeping pace powers, but it seems to have neglected that power for itself.

We were the strongest voice in the UK against Brexit, and we were right to oppose it. It should not, however, be used as some means to an independence end—it is far too important for that. We need partnership with our neighbours rather than using the issue for some political purpose. Therefore, despite our criticisms of the Scottish Government's handling and its exotic hyperbole at times, we will support the Government's motion to withhold consent.

The Conservative Government has made an absolute hash of Brexit. It has damaged our economy and weakened our country. If only we had two Governments that could work together. If only we had Governments that would seek pragmatic solutions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary, Angus Robertson, to wind up on behalf of the Scottish Government.

14:56

Angus Robertson: I sincerely thank everybody who took part in this short debate. I will briefly feed back on those contributions.

Clare Adamson, the convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, highlighted the overwhelming strength of evidence to the committee about how damaging the bill is.

Donald Cameron, from the Conservative front bench, suggested that it was premature to decline legislative consent. I have to say to him, however, that, given everything that we know about the bill so far, and the evidence that has been presented to the committee, I do not agree with him that the Parliament should give the UK Government a blank cheque to continue.

He called on the UK and Scottish Governments to work together, ignoring the fact that the UK Government has ignored all amendments that were supported by the Scottish and Welsh Governments. Again, that is a reason why, even at this late stage, the Conservatives should reconsider their opposition to granting legislative consent.

Sarah Boyack began by pointing out, in an eminently sensible way, how an alternative course of action could have been proceeded with, were there pieces of retained EU law on the statute book that needed to be sunsetted in any way. That was perfectly possible; however, the UK Government has turned the whole process on its head, forcing every piece of European legislation—devolved, reserved and in between—to face sunsetting. I very much welcome the Labour Party's opposition to the giving of legislative consent.

To Willie Rennie and the Liberal Democrats—a party that now accepts and is prepared to live with Brexit—I say, as I have said to him before when he has appealed for the Scottish Government to work with the UK Government, that I have done so. I have written repeatedly to the UK Government on this issue. We have published amendments that were supported by colleagues in the Welsh Government, but none of those has been accepted. I reject his suggestion that there is an issue of equidistance in critique. Notwithstanding that, I welcome the support of the Scottish Liberal Democrats for the withholding of legislative consent.

In the short time that I have left, I will draw attention to a number of things. One question that has been raised is whether, given that the Scottish ministers will get powers to preserve and amend retained EU law, the concern about UK ministers acting in devolved areas without consent is overstated. No—it is not overstated. The bill gives devolved ministers powers to preserve, revoke and amend REUL, but UK ministers are able to revoke REUL in devolved areas at any time, prior to and after the 2023 sunset, with no requirement for consent. How can we possibly grant a blank cheque to the UK Government in those circumstances? Moreover, only UK ministers have powers to extend the sunset date to 2026. The balance of power is unequal.

All that could have been solved in the House of Commons or the House of Lords, where the bill is at present, if the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party was prepared to make the case to the UK Government. Who knows? Perhaps it would be listened to. However, we have heard none of that from the Conservative members today.

Sarah Boyack has repeatedly raised the issue of timescale and decision making, and she is absolutely right on that. No preservation or other instruments can be made under the bill unless and until it has received royal assent and is in force, which is expected to be around May 2023. Once that has happened, the Scottish Government would intend to lay secondary legislation to seek to ensure that laws are not lost at the end of 2023.

I would be content to come back, in a further and extended debate, to talk through how that may work and, I hope, to provide the assurances that Sarah Boyack requires.

Sarah Boyack: It is important that we can get that as soon as possible. If the cabinet secretary could refer to the references in the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee's report, that would be very helpful.

Angus Robertson: Absolutely—I am happy to—but I am sure that Sarah Boyack understands that we are still in the middle of a process of trying to understand the course of action that is being pursued by the UK Government. We are trying to work with the UK Government to understand how things will proceed. As soon as we have clarity on that, we will be able to come back to Parliament. I wish to be able to do that as soon as possible.

In my opening speech, I mentioned that, since 2018, the Parliament has been ignored on six occasions when voting to withhold consent to a UK Government bill. Regardless, I urge members to vote in favour of the motion that is before us and to agree with the recommendation to withhold consent for the bill. The UK Government may not be listening, but the people of Scotland are: workers whose employment rights are at risk because of the bill will hear; consumers who want higher food standards will hear; those who benefit from and value the high quality of the Scottish environment will hear; and businesses wanting to avoid even more barriers to accessing the European market will hear, too.

I urge the Parliament to add its voice to the already loud chorus from those across Scotland and the United Kingdom who are opposed to the bill, and to vote in favour of the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill.

Marking One Year of War against Ukraine

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Before we move on to the next item of business, a debate marking one year of war against Ukraine, I am sure that colleagues will wish to join me in welcoming Mr Andrii Kuschii, the consul of Ukraine in Edinburgh. [*Applause.*]

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-07998, in the name of Neil Gray, on marking one year of war against Ukraine.

15:03

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): I join you, Presiding Officer, in welcoming my friend Andrii Kuschii to the public gallery. It is a pleasure to have him here to hear the Parliament express its solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

It is now almost a year since Russian troops swarmed across Ukraine's borders in what was a brutal, unprovoked invasion against a peaceful neighbour. Today's debate gives us the opportunity to stand together, united, as we pause and reflect on the impact that the past year has had on the people of Ukraine, including the brave soldiers who continue to fight daily for their country, their people, their culture and their heritage; those who have sadly lost their lives in the conflict; and those who have had to leave their homes and flee to other countries to find sanctuary.

The Scottish Government has repeatedly condemned Russia's unprovoked and illegal war against Ukraine, which stretches back to the invasion of Crimea in 2014. More broadly, we continue to stand for democracy, human rights and the rule of law at home and abroad, and we reject wholeheartedly the premise that Russia was somehow provoked into its latest aggression by the democratic decisions made by sovereign nations in central Europe to join NATO.

Putin's propaganda does not cover up the fact that his army has invaded a member state of the United Nations. As the UN secretary general said on 24 February 2022, Russia's actions conflict directly with the charter of the United Nations. Everyone in Scotland and the international community is appalled by the atrocities that are being inflicted upon the people of Ukraine day after day. Actions that intentionally direct missile attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure constitute war crimes. The Scottish Government agrees that those responsible for atrocities

committed in Ukraine, including military commanders and other individuals in the Putin regime, must be held accountable. The courage that has been shown by the Ukrainian people has been extraordinary. Ukraine's armed forces have shown that, if they are given the tools to do the job, they can defeat Russia.

However, in praising Ukraine's armed forces for their bravery and successes, we cannot become complacent. Russia is not giving up in its aim to take as much Ukrainian territory as possible, as we have seen from the fact that fighting has intensified along much of the front line in recent weeks. An insight into the warped minds of those prosecuting the war against Ukraine was provided when the leader of the shady Wagner group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, recently said that

"the meat grinder is working".

That chilling comment, which refers to the fierce battles around Bakhmut, shows not only that the Russian leadership is content to see large numbers of its troops perish on the battlefield, but that their deaths are part of its strategy.

In his state-of-the-nation address earlier this week, Putin laid bare the rambling depravity of his world view. One person is responsible for the invasion of Ukraine, and that is Putin himself. We condemn his announcement to suspend Russia's participation in the new START treaty. There is no justification for threatening the use of nuclear weapons. During his visit to Kyiv on Monday, President Biden said that Putin believed Ukraine to be weak and the west to be divided, that he counted on NATO not maintaining unity, and that he thought he would outlast us. The international community has shown great resolve in maintaining its support for Ukraine, as we have seen through the provision of support for displaced Ukrainians across Europe, ever-tightening sanctions and the increasing quantity and sophistication of military aid. However, again, we cannot take that for granted. It is now vital that the international community provides further support for Ukraine. That is essential both for Ukraine itself and for longer-term peace and stability in Europe.

I would like to emphasise Scotland's continued support for all those affected. The Scottish Government has provided £4 million in financial aid to help to provide basic humanitarian assistance, including health, water and sanitation supplies and shelter for those fleeing Ukraine. So far we have sent five consignments of medical supplies to Poland for onward transport to Ukraine, totalling 156 pallets worth almost £3 million. We have also committed £300,000 to the Halo Trust, a Dumfries and Galloway-based charity that specialises in removing landmines and other dangerous explosive devices. Today, I am pleased to announce to Parliament that we will

provide an additional £1 million in funding to be allocated between the British Red Cross, Christian Aid and the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund—organisations that we all know are key in providing much-needed humanitarian aid and support to the people of Ukraine. *[Applause.]*

This week, the First Minister wrote an open letter to Ukrainians both in Scotland and around the world, in which she condemned Russia's illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. The letter highlights the extraordinary resilience shown by the Ukrainian people and makes it clear that they are welcome in Scotland for as long as they want to be here.

The international solidarity with Ukraine among democratic nations has, of course, only been strengthened by the outpouring of generosity and compassion by people across the world who have welcomed those displaced by the war in Ukraine into their communities and their homes. Since the conflict began, more than 23,000 people with a Scottish sponsor have arrived in the United Kingdom. That is the equivalent of welcoming the population of Arbroath to resettle here and represents around 20 per cent, or one fifth, of all UK arrivals—the most per head in any of the four nations of the UK.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful to the minister for giving way, and I congratulate the Scottish Government on bringing so many Ukrainians here. One slight problem with that is that, at this time, only 18 per cent of those who have arrived on our shores seeking safe harbour have found any kind of long-term accommodation. The minister will be aware of my call to extend the free discretionary bus travel scheme to refugees on all schemes who are finding safe harbour in Scotland, so that they might take up opportunities of accommodation beyond the central belt.

Neil Gray: I thank Alex Cole-Hamilton for his question and pay tribute to him for his involvement and steadfast support for the people of Ukraine in Scotland. We are looking at all that we can do in terms of concessionary travel and the accommodation that we can provide through the £50 million long-term resettlement fund, which allows properties to be brought back into use. That has already been done for 750 properties, and more projects are in the pipeline.

More than 19,000 of the arrivals in Scotland have come through the Scottish Government's successful supersponsor scheme. When we compare the numbers to other schemes, such as the Syrian resettlement scheme, under which we welcomed 3,000 arrivals over a period of five years, we can appreciate the scale of the current challenge and the herculean effort of all our key

partners in ensuring that displaced people receive a warm Scottish welcome.

We have been assisted in welcoming vast numbers to our country by the consular corps staff from Ukraine, Poland, Romania and many other countries. I take this opportunity to thank Andrii Kuslii and Yevhen Mankovsky for working with us in the past year. I am hugely grateful to them for the expertise that they have shared on issues such as schooling, housing, culture and community integration. Their input has been invaluable to our response.

I also take the opportunity to thank all those who have opened their homes and welcomed displaced people from Ukraine into their families. They have acted with kindness and in recognition of a shared humanity with our friends from Ukraine. It is our shared mission to ensure that our friends from Ukraine can call Scotland their home for as long as they need it to be, and we are seeking to ensure access to sustainable, longer-term accommodation for displaced people.

When the war broke out, we acted swiftly to ensure that welcome accommodation was available. As well as mobilising hotels, we chartered two passenger ships to temporarily house arrivals from Ukraine. They provided a safe place, at pace, in a time of need for large numbers of people who were fleeing war, but it was always our intention that those measures would and should be temporary.

In September, we launched our Ukraine longer-term resettlement fund, making up to £50 million available to bring empty council and rented social landlords' properties into use and to increase the housing supply. The homes provided will be good, affordable and quality homes, and they will be available for rent for up to three years, after which some will continue to be available as social rented homes.

Work is already under way in Aberdeen, Glasgow, North Lanarkshire and North Ayrshire to bring more than 750 void properties into use for the benefit of displaced people. I visited the homes in North Lanarkshire and was delighted to see the efforts that have been implemented to ensure that displaced people have a suitable home to live in while they are here, in Scotland, and also to see the support from the community for those people being here.

The Scottish Government has provided significant funding of around £200 million during the past year and it is set to invest more than £70 million next year to ensure that those who have been displaced by the illegal war in Ukraine are supported to rebuild their lives in our communities. However, our commitments need to be matched by the UK Government. With UK funding set to fall

from £10,500 to £5,900 for each of those who arrive after 1 January 2023, we urge the UK Government to do more to support displaced Ukrainians across the UK.

There is clearly a wealth of activity to help displaced people from Ukraine to settle well across the country. That would not have been possible without the continued help, support and collaboration of our local authority partners, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and third sector organisations and volunteers. The truth is that fully integrating displaced people from Ukraine into our society goes beyond securing a visa and finding accommodation. It is a commitment to ensuring that those who have come from Ukraine can enjoy the same rights and opportunities as those who are already living in Scotland.

Local authorities, third sector organisations and volunteers have been instrumental in providing displaced people with support and advice to help them to access a wide array of services and opportunities. Unfortunately, I do not have the time to thank all those organisations for their valued contributions, but they should be assured that the important contributions that they have made and continue to make are being felt up and down the country. They are literally changing lives.

I also thank those Ukrainians who have decided to make Scotland their temporary home. They are making a fantastic contribution to the communities that they are becoming an integral part of. They bring skills, culture and diversity, which we welcome with open arms. Many of our guests have taken up employment and are settling well into communities across Scotland. Children and young adults are also settling well into schools, colleges and universities across the country.

As we solemnly recognise that a year has passed since the illegal invasion of Ukraine, we all hope that Ukraine will soon have peace restored. Our message remains one of strong support and solidarity, and I say once again to the Ukrainian community in Scotland—you are welcome here for as long as you choose to make Scotland your home.

On Tuesday night, the Presiding Officer and I hosted the postcards for Ukraine event in the Parliament building. A number of powerful speeches were made that evening, but what struck me—they stick with me still—were the words of Artem, an injured soldier from Ukraine who is receiving treatment in Scotland. He said:

“May your hearts never give up on Ukraine.”

Our hearts will never give up. The people of Scotland, this Government and this Parliament will always hold Ukraine in our hearts, and we will always show solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

I move,

That the Parliament condemns in the strongest possible terms the illegal Russian war against Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022; reiterates its solidarity with the people and government of Ukraine; repeats its concern about the grave threat to the safety and security of Ukrainian citizens, and mourns each and every death caused by Russia’s illegal aggression; asserts the vital importance of Ukraine defeating Russia’s aggression and calls upon the international community to provide Ukraine with the necessary military, financial and humanitarian support; rejects Russia’s illegal attempts to annex the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia via sham referenda; commends all countries who have welcomed displaced Ukrainians and are providing crucial life-saving humanitarian assistance to Ukrainians in need of support; thanks the organisations and people that have supported displaced Ukrainians to settle in Scotland; declares unequivocally that all Ukrainians who have made Scotland their temporary home will be welcome for as long as they need; welcomes the poignant *Postcards from Ukraine* exhibition hosted in the Scottish Parliament, and wishes a speedy and peaceful resolution to the war that ensures Ukrainian sovereignty, democracy, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognised borders.

15:16

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I associate the members on the Conservative benches with the welcome to the consul of Ukraine.

On a visit a few months ago to the MS Victoria ship, which is docked in Leith and on which hundreds of Ukrainians are currently being housed, I saw something that has left an indelible mark on me. There was a gallery of pictures drawn by the many children who are living on that boat, and one of the pictures caught my attention. It was a picture of Ukraine and above it was written: “I will go home”. That revealed so much—not just the honesty and defiance that children sometimes express better than adults but, perhaps more pertinently, the fact that Ukrainians in Scotland do not see themselves as staying here permanently. They do not like to be called refugees, because they are not—we are simply a staging post before they return home.

That is why it is so important that, today of all days, we stand together as a Parliament in solidarity with people in and of Ukraine. We will of course support the motion in the name of Neil Gray this evening. I associate the members on the Conservative benches with his remarks and I thank him for his on-going efforts to keep Opposition MSPs updated on what the Scottish Government is doing to support Ukrainians who are living in Scotland, and on its wider work on that important issue.

It is vital that we have the debate today, to make it clear that Scotland stands with Ukraine during the conflict. The slings and arrows of domestic

politics and the cut and thrust of everyday debate in this chamber do not matter today. Like Parliaments around the world, the Scottish Parliament will send a message of hope to Ukraine, and a robust rejection of Russia's illegal war, which will be a year old tomorrow.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does Mr Cameron agree that one of the issues that faces Ukraine is the fact that it is being given enough weapons to hold off the Russians, but not enough to defeat them? If that war is not to continue year in, year out—with all the difficulties that that will cause for Ukraine—the country should be given the weapons to defeat Russia and fully liberate its territory.

Donald Cameron: I agree with the broad thrust of Kenneth Gibson's comments and I note what the UK Government, among other Governments across the world, has done in that regard.

I will concentrate my comments on our solidarity with our Ukrainian friends and restate some truths, as Neil Gray has just done.

We deplore the illegal invasion of Ukraine by the Putin regime; we condemn the horrific attacks on innocent civilians that have occurred during this past year; we share the revulsion that many have expressed and continue to express about this provocative callous action and the violent horror that it has unleashed; we support the international efforts to supply Ukraine with military assistance and humanitarian aid; we support the sanctions imposed on Russia by the international community; and we recognise the efforts of both the Scottish Government and the UK Government to welcome Ukrainians who are fleeing the war to make their home here for the time being.

I will explore a few of the issues in a bit more detail, because the rapid response of both our Governments to the crisis has been very impressive. Whether through the UK-wide homes for Ukraine scheme or Scotland's supersponsor scheme, we have ensured that many Ukrainians can come to our country for as long as necessary. I do not want to stray too far from the consensual nature of the debate, but one of the concerns that we will raise, because it exists, is around housing and the fact that work is needed, particularly around longer-term accommodation for Ukrainians who are living and working in Scotland. The British Red Cross has stated that there has been

"minimal support available for displaced Ukrainians to access other forms of accommodation if re-matching isn't successful or if they want a longer-term housing solution."

I accept that the Scottish Government has recognised that and has established the resettlement fund, which was referenced by Neil Gray in his comments. However, there are concerns that that might be available only to some

and not others, and I hope that the minister can address that in closing.

Neil Gray: I thank Donald Cameron for his remarks around our support and the UK Government's support for the people of Ukraine. We are working with the British Red Cross on the concerns that it has raised, and we are working very closely on how we can ensure that we are responding to what it has said.

On the longer-term resettlement fund, I want to reiterate that the opportunity is there for all local authorities to come forward with proposals about where they can repurpose buildings and where they can bring void properties back into use. That will be a major contribution in ensuring that people have longer-term resettlement options here in Scotland.

I encourage Donald Cameron, his colleagues and all members in Parliament to speak to local authorities about potential opportunities that might be open.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Donald Cameron, I can give you the time back.

Donald Cameron: Thank you. I am grateful to the minister for clarifying that.

The significant aid contributions of both Governments to help those who remain in Ukraine are noteworthy. In total, the UK has so far contributed £220 million of humanitarian aid to Ukraine. We also welcome the £4 million of humanitarian aid from the Scottish Government, as well as the additional £1 million that was mentioned today, as part of the wider effort.

Sanctions have been in place against Russia since 2014, following its unlawful annexation of Crimea. The UK Government, rightly in my view, legislated to establish an unprecedented package of sanctions. As of last week, some 1,471 Russian individuals and 169 entities are subject to UK sanctions. In addition, we have sanctioned Russian banks and defence sector organisations, banned Russian vessels from UK ports and banned Russian aircraft from flying or landing in the UK.

It is right and proper that that continues at home and abroad, including in the European Union, which has acted with impressive haste on sanctions. We must continue to identify economic measures that exert pressure on Russia to end this war.

It is hard to think that a year has gone past since Russia invaded. It seems a much shorter time than that, but for those Ukrainians affected, it probably seems much, much longer. Even though a year has elapsed, we are as steadfast in our resolve, and as sincere in our support for Ukraine, as we were a year ago.

In Scotland, there has been an heroic response from the public, from those who volunteered to help with organising aid to Ukraine to those who have raised funds and those who have opened their homes and welcomed Ukrainians into their families.

We know that there have been challenges with visas, housing, schools, health and jobs. None of that is simple to organise, but all of it is crucial. Scotland has risen to the occasion, and we will continue to do so until there is a peaceful resolution to this unjustified conflict.

How lucky we are. We can go about life normally; we have that freedom. In Ukraine, they do not. We can never forget that. There, they live in fear every day. Many have no electricity and many are separated from their families.

For many, when they wake up, the first thing that they do is check the news to see where the bombs have hit, which towns and cities have been targeted and whether their families are safe. Some, tragically, do not wake up at all.

The stark, terrible reality is that, on our own continent, war still rages, with all that goes with it—the terror and trauma, the wounded, the dying, the sorrow and the grief.

Let me end on an optimistic note. There is always hope. As Seamus Heaney writes,

“History says
Don't hope on this side of the grave
But then, once in a lifetime
The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up
And hope and history rhyme.”

There is always hope. We will help you win this war. Ukraine, we stand with you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Sarah Boyack. You have around six minutes, Ms Boyack.

15:25

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I refer members to my entry in the register of interests.

I also want to speak in solidarity with the people of Ukraine. It is indeed rare that all of us will support a Scottish Government motion without proposing an amendment to it. That is significant, because, as a democratic institution, we do not always agree on everything—let us just put it like that.

On 24 February 2022, Putin's Russian forces launched an invasion of Ukraine. There are not words to describe the shock, anger and deep sadness as Ukrainians have suffered, and are suffering, the consequences of a cruel, unjustifiable attack, which the whole world

witnessed. I put on record my welcome to the Ukrainian consul who has been able to join us in Parliament during this debate.

As Sir Keir Starmer said on his recent visit to Kyiv, the UK's support for Ukraine is not party political, and a Labour Government would continue support for Ukraine.

It is true to say that Russia could end this war today by withdrawing its troops. Until that happens, we and Ukraine's other democratic allies must continue to support Ukraine as it defends its sovereign territory. That is absolutely crucial.

This is not the only discussion of Ukraine that we have had in Parliament this week; there have been several. We had the incredibly emotional Postcards from Ukraine celebration, when it was heartening to hear the choir. It is difficult to pass on the emotion of the event. We had a round-table meeting on the risks and mitigation of human trafficking of Ukrainian refugees. We have not discussed that issue in today's debate, but we need to acknowledge that vulnerable people who escape the horrors of war potentially face the risks of trafficking, exploitation and abuse. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has spoken about the need to support women and children, as they constitute the overwhelming majority of those who have fled Ukraine for neighbouring countries. They are vulnerable people who have escaped the horrors of war and now face the risk of trafficking, exploitation and abuse.

Like other colleagues have said, it is very rare that I stand up to agree with everything that Neil Gray says, so this is probably a first and it may be a last; I may also be agreeing with Donald Cameron for possibly the first and the last time. That is in line with the principle of standing in solidarity. The war in Ukraine has enabled us to show our compassion and humanity as an international community.

In Scotland, I am proud of the people who have become hosts to Ukrainians, the people who have volunteered for or donated to charities, the organisations that are supporting people in Ukraine, and our local authorities. Last year, representatives from the magnificent medicines to Ukraine campaign briefed MSPs. Their work is impressive. They continue the sourcing of specialist medicines, the logistical work and the safe delivery of those medicines to where they are most needed by Ukrainians who are experiencing health issues as a result of Putin's invasion.

I also thank the Disasters Emergency Committee and all those across the UK who have given generous donations to its fantastic work delivering support to people on the front line.

I also welcome the minister's announcement of additional funding. This is an unfolding crisis, and Scotland has a key role to play.

There are still thousands of people who hold a visa and may still come to Scotland, and there are people arriving from Ukraine every day.

We are a democracy, so I am allowed to ask our Government to go a bit further, to go a bit faster and to do more. That is one of the privileges of being in an elected democracy. You can say what you think without consequence. You do not have to worry about being locked up or about a journalist who reports you being put into jail, so let me use my voice today. There is more that we could be doing.

When we had a presentation from the Ukrainian consul at the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee the other week, we got some incredibly helpful feedback from the front line in Scotland about the things that we could be doing better, in particular providing more support for Ukrainian displaced people with English language classes and childcare. The presentation provoked us to think about the challenges and about the vulnerability that people who have come from Ukraine feel, particularly people who now have jobs and have children in our schools but are potentially not in long-term permanent accommodation, even if it is for three years. Therefore, there is more that we could be doing to support our local authorities and the third sector organisations that have really stepped up to the plate in recent months. That is something that I think we can be utterly proud of, but I would like us to do more.

We need more long-term and, in particular, medium-term planning to support Ukrainians who have come to Scotland. Although I very much welcome the 750 available houses that the minister referred to, I would like to see all of that £50 million fund spent. I would like to see it spent across Scotland and, as an MSP for Lothian, where we have a housing crisis on top of a housing crisis, I am very keen to see that investment coming forward as soon as possible. There are still people living in temporary accommodation and we need to do much more to support them. It is an issue not just for my area of Edinburgh and the Lothians, but across Scotland. I know from talking to colleagues in Glasgow that they are quite nervous about what happens next for people leaving the cruise ship.

There is so much more that we can do. We need to make sure that we step up to the mark, because Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine has left key areas of infrastructure in Ukraine absolutely decimated, so we know that those Ukrainians who have come to Scotland will need our support for the long run. We need to think, at a UK and

Scottish level, about how we can plan and build long-term commercial links with Ukraine to ensure that reconstruction efforts are successful and sustainable. There will be so much more that we can do, so our warm welcome has to be backed up with actions.

As I said at the start of my contribution, we are here to stand together in solidarity and our focus has to be clear—we are here because of Putin's actions. Yesterday, we had another important debate, on the need for a special tribunal to hold Putin, and those who have launched aggression on the people of Ukraine, to account for the estimated 65,000 registered incidents of war crimes. It was an emotional debate and an important one.

We need to continue to support Ukrainians and defend Ukraine's identity and integrity. That means stepping up and making sure that sanctions are effectively implemented and that we send a clear message of solidarity and support. I want our UK and Scottish Governments to do more, to spend more, to give that practical daily support to Ukrainians who have come here.

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

Sarah Boyack: Although we do not agree on many things in this Parliament, let us agree on the motion and let us all wish for a speedy and peaceful resolution to the war that ensures Ukrainian sovereignty, democracy, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. Let us do that together.

15:34

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I rise to offer the full-throated support of Scottish Liberal Democrats for the Government's motion, and I offer our welcome and thanks to the consul of Ukraine.

I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am a host under the homes for Ukraine scheme. It is on that point that I commence my remarks.

Six months ago, my family opened our home to a Ukrainian design graduate. She was born in Mariupol but grew up in Donetsk. She had to flee her home nine years ago, when Russia invaded her town and destroyed her home. She had been a refugee in other parts of Ukraine ever since then, until the bombs started falling a year ago and she and her family realised that it was too late and that they had to move.

The experience has been amazing and has enriched our lives in many ways. She is still with us and will, I hope, be with us for some time to come. She has joined us at many family events. In

the evenings, she sometimes reads to us messages from Sasha, her cousin, who is on the eastern front and is now deployed in a forward position around the defence of Bakhmut—anyone who is following the war will know that that is the worst place on the planet to be right now.

On weekends, she joins other Ukrainians in church halls in Edinburgh to use brown, green and white old clothes for the manufacture of camouflage netting to send to her relatives on the eastern front. Such examples remind us with visceral clarity just how easy we have it here and how close the privations of war for the people of Ukraine are. They are not just the front line for Ukraine's territorial integrity or for securing their freedom from Putin; they are the front line for the free democracies of the west, and they deserve our thanks.

On 24 February 2022, our world shifted on its axis. Russian soldiers, tanks and instruments of war crossed the border and rolled into the sovereign territory of Ukraine. That day, newspapers carried headlines—which we hoped that we would never see again—of war in Europe.

Vladimir Putin has torn up the fabric of global security. He has sanctioned unimaginable atrocities and shattered the long peace that we had all enjoyed. He does not belong in the Kremlin; he belongs in the Hague on indictment for war crimes.

As the invasion commenced, the world watched on with bated breath. Observers and politicians alike, including Putin himself, predicted the imminent fall of Ukraine. A year on, Ukraine is still standing. Putin and, to an extent, the entire world underestimated the resolve of the Ukrainian spirit and its people's defiance. The day after war broke out, President Zelenskyy offered a stark warning to Ukraine's invaders when he told them:

"When you attack us, you will not see our backs, you will see our faces."

That is the perfect encapsulation of Ukrainian resistance.

Even so, the effects of war have been deadly for Ukraine. The UN has estimated that the conflict is responsible for 18,000 civilian casualties, including more than 7,000 deaths. In September, the war hit another grim milestone, with 1,000 children having become casualties of war—nearly 500 of them have died.

One of those children was an eight-year-old boy known as Sasha. According to his parents, he was a very good boy who was always helpful and loving to his younger siblings. In the same week that the UN announced those statistics, Sasha was killed in a shelling attack at his home in

southern Ukraine. Speaking to a journalist, his father said:

"I wish it would take me, not my kid."

That is just one example of the devastation that has taken place over the past year, and it is only right that we take time to commemorate and remember the lives lost, as we are doing now.

Martin Luther King Jnr said:

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

This war may have been an injustice to the people of Ukraine, but it is a threat to the peace and democracy of the world. It is therefore our duty as global citizens to do all that we can, and I am proud to say that Scotland has been doing its part.

More than 20,000 refugees have arrived in Scotland in the past year, and the people of Scotland have opened their homes and their hearts to the Ukrainian people. In my constituency, Volunteer Edinburgh has done an incredible job of meeting displaced Ukrainians arriving at the airport and co-ordinating donations, learning centres and onward travel to the Ukrainian reception hub at Gogar, which is also in my constituency.

However, we must remember that we can and should do more—we have heard some of that today. Figures that were released today show that 6,200 Ukrainians are still in temporary accommodation. They need to know what comes next once their short-term placements end. They cannot be allowed to live their lives in constant limbo, worried about what comes next.

The Government could help today by, as I asked in my intervention on the minister, extending the free bus pass scheme to include refugees on all schemes, whether they are from Ukraine, Syria or Afghanistan. It could provide comprehensive language support and identify the skills of the people arriving. That would help to match them with a job opportunity so that they could make a long-term home here if they so wished.

The vibrant stripes of blue and yellow have been emblazoned into the minds and the hearts of people around the world this past year. The colours of the Ukrainian flag represent the industry of its people, because they symbolise blue skies over corn and golden wheat fields. The flag also harbours a deeper meaning: freedom above bread. On this anniversary, the world comes together to remember everything that has been lost. We also hope that, one day soon, Ukraine will enjoy its blue skies of freedom once more.

15:39

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): I, too, pay tribute to all those who have been injured or died in the year since the illegal Russian invasion of sovereign Ukraine, and I stand in solidarity with Ukrainians, both those who remain in Ukraine and those who have been forced to flee their homeland.

I, too, am on Russia's banned and sanctioned list. Such is the state of the country's intelligence, it has not realised that I ceased to be a Government minister in May 2021. However, I have been insistent and consistent in my resistance to Russia. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine may have started a year ago, but the invasion and annexation by Russia of Crimea took place in 2014, and, as the then Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs, I refused diplomatic access for the Russian consulate in Edinburgh from 2014 to 2021.

In the debate, I will focus on the rights of humanity in the war, the collective European response and longer-term resilience issues.

Mahatma Gandhi said:

"A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people."

Those words are true of the people of Ukraine.

In an eloquent speech last night on the need for a tribunal on Russia's war crimes against humanity, Jenni Minto reminded us that, in times of war, aggressors deliberately destroy culture and cultural assets in order to destroy people's soul and erase them from the memory and mind of the world.

In an article that was published in *The Guardian* in December 2022, the Ukrainian Minister of Culture and Information Policy, Oleksandr Tkachenko, warned that Russia is trying to destroy Ukraine's culture. The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy in Ukraine has reported that Russian forces have severely damaged or destroyed about 1,500 objects of cultural heritage and infrastructure. Ukrainian cultural leaders spoke of that at the Edinburgh international culture summit, which was held in the Parliament last year. I urge the Scottish Government to do what it can to support the culture—the soul—of the people of Ukraine.

Conflict is not limited to physical attacks, and the impacts of the war on women and girls make that clear. UN Women has reported that food insecurity among women-led households in Ukraine has increased, that many school-aged girls are being forced to drop out of school and that instances of gender-based violence have increased.

Despite those harsh challenges, women have been central to the war effort, with women making up 22 per cent of the Ukrainian armed forces and with some fighting on the front line.

Women also play an important role in protecting families fleeing the fighting. The first lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska, has launched a foundation that focuses on rebuilding the human capital of Ukraine and helping the people of Ukraine to build a future in their native country.

The people of Ukraine have shown immense strength in the face of this attack on their country. However, they need the world to not just condemn Russia but prosecute it. Last week, while speaking at the Munich Security Conference, the US Vice-President, Kamala Harris, announced the US formal determination that Russia has committed crimes against humanity.

In September 2022, UN-appointed independent human rights investigators found that war crimes had been committed in this conflict. Evidence was reported of some of the most heinous acts, including executions, torture and sexual violence. Only last week, members of the European Parliament, in co-operation with Ukraine and the international community, pushed for the creation of a special international tribunal to prosecute Russian leadership. It is no longer enough to condemn. We must act, as one international community, to hold Russia to account for the awful crimes that it has committed during this war.

I recognise the swift actions of the UK Government in providing military equipment. What has been remarkable over the course of the conflict has been the united and unwavering show of support from the European Union and NATO to the people of Ukraine, which Putin did not anticipate. He had calculated, in a strategic blunder, that they would divide and let him have a swift victory. Military diplomacy by Europe has never been easy, but, however awkward it can seem, it is working. However, we must go further. Internationally, we have seen sanctions against Russia, humanitarian and military support, and a commitment to support refugees fleeing the war.

The importance of the united, strong and clear support for Ukraine was powerfully recognised by President Zelenskyy in his address to EU leaders in Brussels this month. At the address, the European Parliament President, Roberta Metsola, said to President Zelenskyy:

"We understand that you are fighting not only for your values, but for ours".

The war in Ukraine has also highlighted the need for many in Europe to end reliance on Russian fossil fuels. The Versailles declaration of March 2022 marked the agreement of EU leaders to phase out the EU's dependence on Russian

fossil fuels as soon as possible. Since then, the EU has imposed a ban on Russian crude oil and petroleum products.

In the longer term, Scotland has a role to play. For many years, I advised EU capitals that a switch to green renewable energy, exported from the north of Europe to the south, would remove reliance on Russian gas, and that must now become a reality in order to provide the necessary energy security.

As we mark the one-year anniversary of the horrific war in Ukraine, let us condemn Russia and its illegal war and stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine. To them, we say: although we may have no military equipment might to offer you, we have the might of our care and compassion for the Ukrainian people in our homes, and the might of belief that your culture matters and that your freedom is also our freedom.

15:46

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): In my lifetime, I did not expect to see a war in Europe like the one that we have seen in Ukraine; I do not think that any of us did.

A year ago, Russia stunned the world by invading Ukraine in a horrific act of aggression. Vladimir Putin expected to extinguish a democracy. He believed that Russian forces would quickly overwhelm Ukraine. He thought that their immense firepower would prove decisive. He thought that the spirit of the civilian population could be broken. How wrong he was.

The people of Ukraine stood up in defiance against Russia's tyranny. They have fought so bravely for their freedom. Even in the face of horrendous atrocities, brutal violence against innocent children and wicked acts beyond the usual horrors of war, Ukrainians stood firm. They refused to give in. Their valiant example has been an inspiration. Their courage runs from the top of the country to the ordinary people who have left their normal jobs and set aside their usual lives to pick up arms to stop Putin's army.

President Zelenskyy has quickly become a fabled wartime hero worthy of being spoken of in the same sphere as greats such as Churchill and Montgomery. As well as rallying his own people, his speeches have rallied the nations of the world to help Ukraine. He will go down in history as a bold fighter for freedom and a strong leader who knew that his people could defeat the odds.

The valour of Ukrainian fighters has been awe inspiring to watch, but the tragedy that has unfolded on their streets is truly heartbreaking. War is always tragic, but the unnecessary,

unprovoked and insufferable way in which the war in Ukraine has happened makes it far worse.

People have had their lives turned upside down. They have lost loved ones. Many have been murdered. Millions have fled, and those who remain must contend with a lack of food, clean water and electricity. The devastation across the towns and cities of Ukraine is hard to even put into words. The pictures are seared into our minds.

However, the resolve and resilience of Ukraine's people is remarkable. They do not give up. They have endured. Many have come to this country to start a new life, joining the many Ukrainians who already live in Scotland and the United Kingdom. Last year, one of those inspirational Ukrainians, Zhenya Dove, joined Scottish Conservative members at the Scottish Conservative conference, at which she delivered a powerful emotional speech. She recently told my team this:

"Many Ukrainians have been welcomed to Scotland with open arms. We are deeply thankful for the Scottish hospitality shown to Ukraine and for the kindness of your hearts."

She continued:

"It is important to all of us—to those still in Ukraine and to millions who were forced to flee their homes, because we are united as one by our belief in a brighter future, in our victory. We carry this hope wherever we go because it's the cornerstone of our culture. It is equally important for those who are no longer with us. For entire generations who sacrificed their lives for our freedom and the right to proudly call ourselves Ukrainians today."

Speaking at the launch of a celebration of Ukrainian culture this evening, she will say:

"Our songs are more powerful than the roar of their sirens. Our tales are more truthful than Russian propaganda. Our music calms us during wartime and our poetry inspires us to fight on. This is how we remain unbroken and undefeatable."

I hope that Scotland will continue being a place where Ukrainians are most welcome and I hope that the United Kingdom continues providing the outstanding support that it has given President Zelenskyy and the people of Ukraine throughout this crisis.

From the outbreak of the war, the UK has been one of Ukraine's staunchest allies. The UK Government delivered £2.3 billion of military support to Ukraine last year, which will be matched or increased this year. That included 10,800 anti-tank missiles, five air defence systems, 120 armoured vehicles, explosive drones and more than 200,000 pieces of non-lethal military equipment. The UK has also helped by providing training for 11,000 Ukrainian troops, run by around 1,050 UK service personnel. Another 20,000 Ukrainian troops are expected to be trained this year.

The UK has issued 218,500 visas to help Ukrainian civilians come to the UK, speeding up support for those fleeing the conflict. More than £1.5 billion of economic and humanitarian support has also been provided to help the Ukrainian people. That figure includes loan guarantees to keep Ukrainian public services running and around £220 million in humanitarian aid for basic necessities. I also welcome the financial support that has been given by the Scottish Government and the further £1 million that it has announced today.

The UK has also led the way with tough sanctions against the Russian regime. On top of phasing out all imports of Russian energy, the Government has imposed the largest and most severe package of sanctions that Russia has ever seen, with more than 1,400 individuals and entities sanctioned and £275 billion of assets frozen.

I am proud of the UK Government's response and the efforts of people across Scotland who have welcomed Ukrainians into their homes and hearts. The courageous reaction from the people of Ukraine has been an incredible inspiration, but this tragic war has come at a terrible cost. We can only hope that it will end soon with a crushing defeat for Russia and Vladimir Putin.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I encourage those in the public gallery to resist the temptation to participate, including by applauding.

15:52

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): We contribute to this debate as an act of solidarity with the people of Ukraine. That includes those living on the war front and the millions displaced abroad, thousands of whom have found refuge in Scotland. This time last year, on the eve of what would become Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we could not have predicted the atrocious actions of the Russian army against the people of Ukraine.

Once war broke out, it quickly became clear that Putin had underestimated the strength and resolve of the Ukrainian people to fight for and maintain their sovereignty and freedom. Putin found that his forces could not force Ukraine to surrender. So, as we mark the one-year anniversary of the invasion, the war continues.

As world leaders marked the anniversary this week, we witnessed renewed commitment to Ukraine in various military and humanitarian forms, with notable support from other former Soviet countries and Russian satellite states, including the Bucharest nine. They hold special solidarity with Ukraine in maintaining their sovereignty as independent states.

Appallingly, Putin commemorated the one-year anniversary by delivering an address that displaced responsibility for his invasion of Ukraine on to the west, claiming that Russia is protecting Ukraine. While he was giving that speech, the Russian military bombed civilian areas of the city of Kherson, including a pharmacy and a nursery. Alongside that, Putin increased his rhetoric of nuclear escalation by announcing Russia's decision to suspend participation in the new strategic arms reduction treaty. That treaty restricts the number of nuclear weapons that can be deployed on long-range missiles based on land or sea that can reach Russia or the US within 30 minutes. It also requires the mutual reporting of the number of nuclear-ready missiles.

As co-president of Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, or PNND, I presented a statement to the United Nations 10th review conference. In that conference, PNND called on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or NPT, states parties, including Russia and the US, to adopt a no-first-use nuclear weapons policy. I remain committed to that recommendation, and I reassert its increasing importance as we reach the one-year anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine.

In the relatively short history of the existence of nuclear weapons, there have been a number of occasions when the world has come too close to nuclear war. The most notable of those instances was, of course, the Cuban missile crisis. At such moments, on the brink of nuclear escalation, nuclear powers have often peered over the cliff edge of nuclear confrontation and foreseen the outcome that nobody wants. Since the outbreak of war, both nuclear powers—the US and Russia, which, together, hold 90 per cent of the world's nuclear weapons—have articulated the position that nuclear war is an outcome that nobody wants. However, President Putin has not acted in that direction. I expect that the suspension of the new strategic arms reduction treaty is nuclear posturing. Nonetheless, it is a worrisome and significant development in Putin's escalation of nuclear rhetoric. That said, there remains the opportunity to de-escalate inflammatory nuclear rhetoric and move back to a realistic negotiating table at which nuclear weapons and the merits of a no-first-use policy can be discussed. That is in the best interests of countries around the world, so we must keep UN channels open for those talks to commence.

I note that the 10th NPT review conference failed to reach agreement by all parties, as Russia's withdrawal from Ukrainian nuclear power stations was unacceptable to Russian diplomats. I have suggested to the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs at the UN the idea of blue

helmets being positioned in Ukraine to create a safety zone around nuclear power stations.

Unfortunately, there are indications of the possible strategic escalation of conventional war. Putin's address on Tuesday doubled down on attempts to legitimise expansionist action. This week, it was announced that the Kremlin revoked a 2012 decree that committed Russia to seek to resolve the separatist issues of Transnistria on the basis of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the republic of Moldova. That sounds incredibly similar to the Kremlin's attitude to Crimea before the 2014 coup and the annexation of that area. The Kremlin went on to explain that revocation of its commitment to Moldova's sovereignty is

"to ensure the national interests of"

Russia

"in connection with profound changes taking place in international relations."

On top of that, Russia is holding joint naval exercises with China and South Africa in the south Indian Ocean. China has stated its intent to help Russia to bring the war to an end through diplomatic routes. The timing of those joint naval exercises with the one-year anniversary makes the assertion difficult to believe. It is in that context that our continued affirmation and support for Ukraine must be as rock solid as it can be.

On Tuesday evening, the cross-party group on human trafficking and UN House Scotland hosted a round-table discussion in which how we can best protect Ukrainians from exploitation was considered, given the vulnerability of displaced Ukrainian refugees. There was a powerful statement by a displaced social work lecturer, Kate Bucho, who insightfully told us about how freedom is fundamental to the Ukrainian people. She referred to the slogan of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution of dignity: "Freedom is our religion."

We cannot give up on Ukraine now; rather, we must strengthen our resolve to help it in all ways possible and protect the fundamental right to a people's sovereignty, freedom and dignity.

15:59

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I begin by expressing my sincere condolences to, and solidarity with, the families of all those who have died or have been gravely injured in this senseless war. Most of us in the chamber are fortunate enough to have never had to experience such brutality and horror, so anything that I describe can come only from a position of utmost respect for what those people have been through.

No one should have to witness those atrocities or lose loved ones in the prime of their life, many

of whom, I am afraid to say, are children. I cannot imagine the horrors of being a parent or grandparent when the bombs are raining down from above. It is truly despicable and we must find a resolution that ends the conflict as soon as possible.

Like many others, I had hoped that the days of all-out war in Europe were behind us. That was a naive hope, perhaps, and one that we now might not realise for generations to come. However, my hopes are not reality, and people who are in desperate need are asking for our help. I cannot cower from that responsibility and turn my back. After all, the freedom of our country was in part secured due to the assistance of others, many of whom laid down their lives to protect us. Ukraine is simply asking for resources and assistance. We have the moral duty to respond.

We must not forget that there were far too many who were complacent about the threat presented by Russia's invasion of the Crimean peninsula back in 2014, believing that it would be limited and contained, that it would never cause us any problems and that, perhaps most hopefully, it would not lead to further bloodshed. Sadly, and perhaps inevitably, that has not been the case, and we cannot imagine that Russia will stop now. That would go against the most common sense.

We have learned a lot since 2014 about the intentions of Putin and those who support him. Unfortunately, at times, the UK and its allies have allowed themselves to be outmanoeuvred by him, perhaps as a consequence of our having a Prime Minister too often obsessed with goings-on at Downing Street or in their own party. The point is that we cannot allow that to happen again.

I have long opposed foreign intervention and the march to war. Whether it be in Iraq or Afghanistan, illegal and knee-jerk wars must be opposed when launched from home or elsewhere. It is clear that Russia's invasion of Ukraine meets that criterion, and that is why I stand with the Ukrainians in their fight against tyranny.

Trade unionists and charities across Ukraine are often the best sources of reasoned opinion in any debate. They have called for us to assist those fighting Russia on the front line, and I believe that we must commit ourselves to doing so. I cannot pretend to be a military expert by any means, but if those on the ground are so clearly telling us that they need particular equipment in order to protect towns, villages, and cities from attack, we must take that seriously and heed their call.

We must also continue to offer asylum and assistance to those fleeing from the war and offer a stable and nourishing home for those who are already here. There are many Ukrainian refugees in my region and across Scotland who could not

have imagined only a year ago that they would end up somewhere such as Dalmellington or Kilmarnock. But they are here, and they have been welcomed, and I hope that they can build a life here for as long as they wish to.

I can barely begin to imagine what it must have been like for them or the worries that they must have had day after day. They must continue to be a primary focus for the Scottish Parliament during a time when far too many other issues are dominating the headlines that, frankly, if we think about it, are of little importance in comparison.

I commend the motion and thank Neil Gray for bringing it to the Parliament. I offer my full support and am committed to supporting the people of Ukraine. Their fight is our fight. We must strive for peace, and we cannot achieve that by allowing Ukraine to fall into the hands of a dictator such as Putin.

16:04

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): No one in the chamber wanted to mark this milestone. It is one year since Putin's illegal invasion of Ukrainian sovereignty. Although that anniversary is testament to the resilience of the Ukrainian people in the face of unprovoked barbarism, we wish we could be marking the end of the conflict.

I have spoken many times on Ukraine in this Parliament, most recently in 2018, when we marked Holodomor remembrance day with a collective reflection in the chamber on the Holodomor genocide.

I thank my colleague Jenni Minto for bringing to the chamber last night her important members' business debate on the special tribunal on Russian aggression in Ukraine. I hope that, when that tribunal is held, we will revisit the Holodomor and that the UK will identify it as a genocide, as many countries, including Canada, have done.

The Holodomor was a systematic man-made famine that was perpetrated by the Stalinist regime in an attempt to crush Ukrainian identity and erase a community of people that was perceived as a threat to Soviet rule, but the Ukrainian people endured, in the face of that most extreme oppression, and it is no surprise that, for the past year, they have resisted Putin.

I recall that, when war broke out last year, I spoke to Phillips O'Brien, professor of strategic studies at the University of St Andrews. He was probably a lone voice in saying that, in his view, it would be a war of attrition as the Ukrainian people would resist and the conflict would be drawn out. He has been proved right, and we have had to adjust our response from one that mainly involves

short-term and immediate humanitarian support to one that involves long-term support.

The supersponsor scheme has supplied a much-needed route to sanctuary for tens of thousands of vulnerable people. More than 23,300 Ukrainians have arrived in Scotland. The UK Government's military support for Ukraine has been considerable, but I reiterate calls for its humanitarian support to be sustained. The devolved and local administrations need to have year-2 funding, not the reduced tariff that we saw in January. We need more support for the Ukrainians we are supporting in this country.

Last summer, I was privileged to host the Ukraine culture leadership dialogue at the Edinburgh International Culture Summit. The event brought together political and cultural leaders from countries that wish to strengthen Ukraine's international standing and support Ukrainian cultural institutions at this time.

This week, I attended the very moving "Postcards from Ukraine" event in the Parliament. The display drove home the reality that Ukrainians are facing. As a picture paints a thousand words, I have brought some of those postcards to the chamber—I acknowledge that this breaks the prop rule, Presiding Officer. We saw images of the Kostiantynivka mosque, the Church of the Ascension of the Lord, Kharkiv National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre and even the memorial to the victims of totalitarianism. It was moving and profound, and I urge everyone to see it.

I also urge people to look to the "Salute Ukraine!" concert in the Usher Hall on Sunday night, which brings together Scotland's culture and that of the Ukrainian people in support of their challenges at this time.

I have been fortunate to connect with Ukrainians in my Motherwell and Wishaw constituency. Our community has shown its spirit, and the Ukrainian families should know that they are welcome. Due to my committee roles, I have also made links with some of the people on the ship at Leith. The importance of those friendships and cultural links cannot be overstated. The cultural connections are essential expressions of our country's solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

I thank the Presiding Officer for her on-going work to ensure that the Parliament stands in unity with Ukraine. Oberig's stirring rendition of the Ukrainian national anthem in our Parliament was a timely reminder of their resolve in the face of oppression.

A few weeks ago at Murrayfield, I was pretty moved by my own national anthem, but I will never forget the atmosphere in our Parliament the other evening when that beautiful choir sang their cultural folk songs and, specifically, their national

anthem. When I reflect on the words of that national anthem, I think that it expresses everything that we need to know about the people of Ukraine.

“Ukraine’s glory has not yet perished, nor her freedom,
Upon us, brother Ukrainians, fate shall smile once more.
Our enemies will vanish like dew in the morning sun,
And we too shall rule, brothers, in a free land of our
own.”

Slava Ukraini!

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Adamson. I think that we can suspend the rule on props just this once.

I call Meghan Gallacher, to be followed by Ross Greer. You have around six minutes, Ms Gallacher.

16:10

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Tomorrow marks a very sombre occasion. It is exactly one year since the invasion of Ukraine began. The twenty-fourth of February 2022 has become a date that will live in infamy. On that day, we first became aware of the tragedy that was unfolding in Europe. News of the invasion was instantly beamed across our television stations, radio airwaves and social media channels.

The shocking way in which wars are reported in our era makes the reality to which we all bear witness very real and accessible. Even so, the decision that was taken by Vladimir Putin to declare war on Ukraine sent shock waves throughout the world. Putin’s remarks were carefully orchestrated and stage managed from Moscow with the sole intention of usurping large swathes of Ukrainian territory. It was a deliberate action that has dangerous consequences for the general peace and security of Europe.

We all know that war comes with a very real human cost. I was roughly six months pregnant when I turned on the news to see a wounded pregnant woman being carried on a stretcher. The maternity hospital in Mariupol had been bombed. The wounded woman held on to her bloodied left abdomen as emergency workers carried her through the rubble. I watched on in horror as videos showed the devastation that was caused by the bombs, and all I could think about was the women and newborn babies who were in the building at the moment that the hospital was attacked. I later learned that the woman who was carried through the rubble was taken to another hospital, where the doctors tried to save her and her baby; however, neither of them made it.

The Russian ministry of defence claimed that the bombing of the hospital was justified by the presence of Ukrainian armed forces. Bombing innocent women and children can never be

justified. It was a war crime, and they knew it. Even now, I cannot get out of my mind the image of that woman holding her unborn baby or the fact that their lives were cruelly ended that day. I do not think that many of us will ever truly understand the horror of the Ukraine war.

As my party’s spokesperson for children and young people, it would be remiss of me not to mention the devastating impact that the war is having on the lives of Ukrainian children. A recent report in *The Daily Telegraph* highlighted the horrendous reality for those attending school in Ukraine. More than 4.7 million children are enrolled to attend lessons. Those lessons are interrupted by air raid sirens instead of school bells; by power outages; and by fear and trauma instead of safety and learning. It cannot be right that those young people are seeing that as their new normal when it comes to their education and their lives.

Even more concerning is the news that has recently come out from a Yale University report, which has indicated that more than 6,000 Ukrainian children are being sent to camps that are specifically designed to expose them to Russian propaganda and are orchestrating forced adoptions into Russian families. In fact, Ukraine’s national information bureau claims that the number of children who have been deported to Russia could be more than 16,000. That is abhorrent. The removal of protected people is prohibited under article 49 of the fourth Geneva convention. Furthermore, under article 50, it is prohibited to change the personal circumstances of any child, including their nationality.

We simply cannot allow Russian aggression to define a new normality for the experiences of Ukrainian children. I therefore hope that members of this Parliament and our colleagues at Westminster and across other devolved Governments will condemn that practice in the strongest possible terms. Ukrainian children must not be forcibly removed from their families.

Just as in relation to the story that I shared earlier, it is important that we pause and reflect that almost 1,000 Ukrainian children have been killed or injured because of the war. That is a travesty, and our thoughts and prayers are with those who have lost a child during the conflict.

By all accounts, the conflict is beginning to pick up pace again as we move out of Ukraine’s harsh winter months. We must continue to do all that we can to support the people of Ukraine as they continue to defend their freedoms.

President Zelenskyy has stated:

“The United Kingdom is marching with us towards the most important victory of our lifetime. It will be a victory over the very idea of war.”

What a wonderful concept that would be for us all to embrace—a world without suffering; a world without conflict; a world where the children of tomorrow will not come to accept the ravages of war as being their new normality. As our most famous wartime Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, said,

“The salvation of the common people of every race and every land from war and servitude must be established on solid foundations”.

That is an outcome that we can all hope and pray for.

16:15

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): When we came together for an emergency debate a year ago tomorrow, a 40-mile-long convoy of Russian troops had crossed the Belarusian border and was headed for Kyiv. As we spoke in the debate, Hostomel airport, just outside the city, was under attack by Russian airborne troops. It was abundantly clear to all of us that the Ukrainian capital and Government could fall in a matter of days.

We watched the footage and saw the photos of the residents of Kyiv—civilians—preparing to fight a desperate last stand with homemade Molotov cocktails against one of the largest militaries on earth. Eighteen-year-old high school students were being handed rifles and given hasty instructions on how to defend the neighbourhoods that they had grown up in. President Zelenskyy was being offered evacuation by the Americans, with the prospect of setting up a Government in exile. His answer was that he needed ammunition, not a ride.

The weeks that followed were horrific, but Kyiv did not fall, that massive Russian convoy collapsed and retreated, and it became clear that Putin’s fantasies of a swift victory would not be realised. As the Russians withdrew, the horrors that they had inflicted on Ukrainian civilians became clear.

The mayor of Hostomel, Yuri Prylypko, was murdered by Russian soldiers while delivering food and medicine to residents. His body was then booby-trapped, almost killing the priest who came to bury him.

In Bucha, north of Kyiv, in Izyum, in the east, and in other towns across liberated areas, torture chambers and mass graves have been discovered. In still-occupied Skadovsk, a local nurse, Tetiana Mudrenko, was executed by hanging in the town square by collaborators. Her crime was telling the Russian occupiers that Skadovsk was, and would remain, part of Ukraine.

The past year has been horrific for the people of Ukraine. They have endured trauma that we can scarcely imagine, but they have not given in. The Kremlin’s plan was for Ukrainian independence to end in 2022 after a three-day invasion. That plan failed. It failed at Hostomel airport, where 300 Ukrainian national guardsmen routed Putin’s elite airborne troops. It failed in Kherson, from where we saw the amazing footage, last November, of Ukrainian soldiers being greeted by cheering, crying crowds as they re-entered the city. And it failed in Mariupol, a city almost completely destroyed and still under Russian occupation today but whose defenders fought one of the most effective defensive operations in modern urban warfare. Without any chance of winning that battle, Ukrainian soldiers and police officers fought on for nearly three months, making their final stand at the Azovstal steel plant. That effort held up Russian divisions many times their size and undoubtedly saved other towns and cities across the south from a similar fate.

The Ukrainian defenders at Mariupol included the Azov Battalion, which I mentioned in my contribution this time last year. The Azov Battalion was founded by neo-Nazis and, although it is a very different organisation years after having been integrated into the Ukrainian army, there is still a fascist presence. It is uncomfortable to see soldiers of a nation whose struggle we absolutely support giving interviews with western media while wearing fascist iconography such as the black sun. I am glad that NATO removed its promotional photo of a Ukrainian soldier whose uniform prominently featured that icon.

That is not remotely close to being the most important issue in this war, and raising it should not be seen for a second as a lack of support for Ukraine’s struggle. As somebody who is on the Kremlin’s sanctions list, I hope that no one would accuse me of that. However, as a key supporter of Ukraine, the UK has a responsibility to speak some truth to our ally, especially when Russia is pushing the utterly disingenuous nonsense of neo-Nazi influence as justification for its wicked invasion. I hope that no one here would tolerate British soldiers wearing such iconography, so we should help those whom we are arming to similarly make it clear that it is unacceptable for their own troops.

Nonsense claims about the influence of the Azov Battalion are being used by Putin’s useful idiots here and elsewhere to undermine public support for Ukraine. Given how long this war is sadly likely to last, we cannot give an inch to those who are seeking to undermine our solidarity. Those same useful idiots often disingenuously claim that some kind of compromise needs to be reached, pretending that their only interest is in a peaceful end to the war. What would such a

compromise look like? Compromise implies giving Russia something that it did not have a year ago—something that it could walk away with. Ukrainians have, rightly, made it clear that they will not cede an inch of their territory to an invading power. What right do outside players have to tell Ukrainian citizens that the price of peace is their continuing to live under an occupying force that tortures and massacres them and that hangs civilian protesters in town squares? Peace is the absence of violence and the presence of justice. Ukrainians will have neither of those things while they live under Russian occupation.

Beyond supplying the equipment needed by Ukraine's armed forces—which Scottish Greens support—European nations must step up our sanctions efforts and dramatically speed up our transition away from fossil fuels, thereby robbing Putin of the geopolitical weapon that he has wielded for 20 years. The UK might have sourced only a small fraction of its gas from Russia before this war, but companies here have played a key role in supporting Russia's oil and gas sector. I hope that other members were as horrified as I was by the revelation that Scottish-based Baker Hughes continued to ship equipment to Russia as late as June 2022—months after the war began. I welcome the Deputy First Minister's robust response to my request that the Scottish Government withhold grant support from a company that was still contributing, however indirectly, to the Russian war machine.

The people of Scotland should be proud of the solidarity that has been shown to our Ukrainian friends. We have welcomed a number of Ukrainian refugees that is far in excess of what our share of the UK population would indicate. Huge sums of money and tonnes of supplies have been collected here. The Scottish Government is straining its limited powers in that area to make the sanctions and economic pressure on Russia as effective as possible.

It is easy for us to take freedom for granted, because there has been no serious threat to our own, here, for decades. However, 30 years after the end of the cold war and the start of what was then claimed by some to be the irreversible forward march of democracy, we can see on our own continent how fragile freedom really is. However peripheral our role is, history will judge all of us on what we did to defend freedom in Ukraine. This afternoon, we will unanimously declare—once again—that Scotland's role is to stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people and to do all that is within our power to aid their victory. Slava Ukraini!

16:21

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): It is difficult to comprehend that a year has passed since Russia launched its illegal war of aggression in Ukraine. We will all remember that day and our sense of outrage and deep worry for the people of Ukraine, but also the unity of purpose as we gathered in the chamber to offer them our solidarity. I join colleagues in paying tribute to that sense of unity across the Parliament and to the work of the minister and the cabinet secretary, which has helped to foster it.

We mourn those who have lost their lives, and we pray for all those who have been victims in Russia's campaign of brutal and indiscriminate attacks. We have all seen evidence of the atrocities that have been committed by the barbaric Russian regime in towns and cities across Ukraine as it has indiscriminately bombed civilians and attacked Ukraine's critical infrastructure. There is a clear sense of anger and injustice about what has been happening to Ukraine and its people, alongside a sense of outrage at Russia's decision to provoke a war that is an unjustifiable act of aggression.

In Scotland, we have all witnessed generous acts of solidarity as our villages and towns have rallied to support Ukraine. In March 2022, in the early days of the war, the Deanston bakery on the south side of Glasgow, which is owned by Ukrainian baker Yuriy Kachak, organised a bake sale to raise funds to support people in his homeland. The response was overwhelming. People travelled from across the west of Scotland and formed a queue that snaked around the blocks of tenement flats as they willingly waited for more than an hour to donate and show their support for Ukraine. Yuriy raised a staggering total of £25,000 from that bake sale, and funds raised from a JustGiving page started by the bakery increased it to more than £36,000. That amount was more than doubled by an incredibly generous anonymous donation that brought the total amount raised to £72,451, all of which was donated to the Disasters Emergency Committee's Ukraine humanitarian appeal.

That example is reflective of the people of Scotland's response to the early days of the war. They felt powerless to stop the atrocities that were being committed by Russia, but they wanted to do something—anything—to express their solidarity and provide meaningful support to the people of Ukraine.

Since the onset of Russia's war of aggression, Scotland has welcomed more than 20,000 Ukrainian people through the supersponsor and homes for Ukraine schemes. It is right that Scotland should remain their home for as long as

they need or wish to live here, because the war has altered their lives irreversibly.

That is why we must help to provide displaced Ukrainians with stability and security and allow them to make Scotland a safe haven and a place that they can truly call home. In my region, in the west of Scotland, we have been pleased to welcome Ukrainian people to our communities. Indeed, hundreds of people are living on the cruise ship *MS Ambition*, which is berthed at King George V dock, in Renfrew. That has provided much needed safety but, ultimately, a cruise ship must be only a temporary solution; it does not provide the security of tenure that people require.

As we have heard, it is imperative that the Government devise a longer-term strategy for housing displaced people from Ukraine, because it will give them certainty about their future and the opportunity to truly root their lives here, in Scotland, if they wish to do so. That means the Scottish Government providing necessary funding to local government to allow it to meet the needs of the Ukrainian diaspora population.

Ukrainians have become integral members of our communities, and they are now our neighbours and friends. I want to share a few examples of how they have been welcomed in the communities that I represent. In East Renfrewshire, the Park parish church in Giffnock opened its doors as a hub for newly settled Ukrainian families, providing free face-to-face English lessons and access to support services that have allowed families to integrate more easily into the local community. In Inverclyde, pupils at Clydeview academy, in Gourrock, organised a variety of fundraising activities as they aimed to provide Ukrainian refugees who had newly arrived in Inverclyde with bespoke welcome packs to make them feel at home in the area and telling them something about the community and Inverclyde's rich history of welcoming people fleeing war and persecution.

As the war in Ukraine enters its second year, it is important to state that the issue is so much bigger and more important than party politics, as we have seen across the chamber today. That is why Labour has supported the UK Government's approach every step of the way and will continue to work constructively with both of our Governments at the UK level and here, in Scotland, to maximise the resources and support that we provide to Ukraine. Like my colleagues, I was proud to see Keir Starmer visit Kyiv last week to express that solidarity and show our willingness to continue to support the people of Ukraine and defend their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

I was heartened to hear Donald Cameron quote the great Seamus Heaney in his contribution. I

offer members two further quotations today. Seamus Heaney wrote:

"If you have the words, there's always a chance that you'll find the way."

I hope that our words today in the Scottish Parliament have been helpful to the people of Ukraine and have shown that, together, we will work to find a way through this. Heaney also wrote, in "Beowulf":

"Anyone with gumption and a sharp mind will take the measure of two things: what's said and what's done."

That could apply perfectly to President Zelenskyy and the people of Ukraine. We are in awe of their words and their actions. Now, may our actions match our words. Victory to Ukraine!

16:28

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Russia's unprovoked and illegal war on Ukraine seemed to be unthinkable just over a year ago. Sabre rattling and rhetoric from Putin has been turned into a brutal and savage war being waged on the people of Ukraine. I suppose that hindsight is a wonderful thing. Given Russian actions in the Crimea and elsewhere in the world, perhaps we should never have been surprised. There was a naivety there, perhaps. Russia has had no thoughts for the human cost or for the pain, suffering, destruction and death that it has inflicted on the innocent people of Ukraine, or indeed for the families in Russia whose sons are coming back in body bags. It has no respect for Ukraine's territorial integrity or its sovereignty, and no consideration of the potential destabilising impact on the entire world.

I offer my solidarity to the people of Ukraine. Solidarity is just a word if there is no demonstration of that solidarity but, as we have heard from members across the chamber today, people have opened their homes to Ukrainian families and demonstrated that solidarity here in Scotland. Fundraising and humanitarian support, offered by ordinary Scots, as well as financial support from the Scottish Government and the practical efforts of all public bodies and agencies—such as councils, housing associations and the national health service—have demonstrated that solidarity.

Now that so many Ukrainians have made a home—at least for the time being and for as long as they wish—in Scotland, we must always make sure that solidarity remains not just a slogan but a tangible part of our deeds every day. I am confident that that will absolutely remain the case.

Let me provide some local examples. In his opening speech, the minister mentioned young people going to schools in Scotland and making a

success of that, and I have many such examples in Glasgow and in my constituency. I have heard many positive stories about those young people being assets to the schools and communities in which they now live.

I was speaking to Mr Stone, the headteacher of St Roch's secondary school in my constituency. Pupils, staff and the wider community of St Roch's in the Garngad—an area that, in some ways, has been forged by immigrants and immigration—have done a wonderful job of making the young people from Ukraine warmly welcome. They are offering young people quality educational opportunities. There are around 20 Ukrainian students at that school.

Most of those students have accommodation in communities, but two senior school students currently reside on MS Ambition. They are embedded in that school community and have seized the opportunities that are open to them. In the months ahead, I understand that they will sit Scottish Qualifications Authority exams, but they face the disruption of being rehoused from MS Ambition just as they prepare for and sit those exams. It is wholly unclear where they will end up, although I am sure that much good work is taking place to do the best that we can for their families. I very much hope that the families secure suitable accommodation in Glasgow or nearby enough that both students can continue their studies at St Roch's—with minimum disruption to their exams—and retain the friendships and relationships that they have forged. That will be challenging, but we must absolutely try. I have contacted the relevant authorities and corresponded with the minister about that. I hope that such cases will be looked at sympathetically, so that the two students can stay at St Roch's and maintain the friendships that they have forged, and we can build that solidarity.

The other day, I met a gentleman whom I will not name. He stays on MS Ambition with his wife and child, and I met him by accident, when he was trying to contact a local housing association, which is coincidentally located beside my office. He had found a job at a local business and had been working there for some time and wished to ensure that he could retain that job when he was rehoused from MS Ambition. The gentleman was simply trying to secure a local tenancy, and I have no doubt that securing such a tenancy would be of as much benefit to the business that employs him as it would be to him and his family. I have written a letter to the relevant authorities to offer support for that gentleman and his family.

I mention those two very local examples this afternoon because solidarity is not just about the international context and the big, sweeping things that we can do as Parliaments and nations to show solidarity on the international stage. It is also

about day-to-day solidarity for those who, because of adversity, have made Scotland their home. Whether those are the young people who have welcomed Ukrainian students into their community, the people who have fundraised or opened up their homes, the politicians across the parties in this Parliament, or the wider Scottish population, the people of Ukraine have our hearts and solidarity. Slava Ukraini!

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): We move to closing speeches, and I call Foysoil Choudhury to wind up the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour.

16:34

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): As other members have done, I express a warm welcome to the Ukrainian consul, who joins us in Parliament.

Today, the Parliament has come together to stand in solidarity with Ukraine. I echo my colleagues' dismay over the innocent lives that have been lost in the unjustified war, as well as their appreciation of the courage and resolve that the people of Ukraine have shown. Over the past year of this illegal war, we have witnessed barbaric aggression, and Putin has made it clear in the past few days that there is no end on the horizon.

We must remain steadfast in our support for Ukraine. As my colleagues have highlighted, we must continue to provide defensive military support to Ukraine and continue to increase economic and diplomatic pressure. As Sarah Boyack noted, sanctions are still crucial to putting pressure on the Russian regime.

We must make it clear that Scotland will continue to support diplomatic means to end the war. Putin must feel the cost of the continued aggression against a sovereign nation. Still, we must remember the goal of de-escalation. The Russian regime's aggression began this war; we must support any diplomatic means possible to end it.

Solidarity means commitment to Ukraine. We must remember that our efforts are first and foremost for the innocent people affected by Putin's war in Ukraine. Continued support must be given to those who have been, and continue to be, displaced by the war. As Sarah Boyack rightly said, we must take measures to ensure the safety of all refugees in Scotland and ensure that they are protected against forces, such as people traffickers, that might abuse the crisis.

Ukrainian people must have a safe home here in Scotland. I express my thanks to the minister, Neil Gray, for keeping us all updated on the

Scottish Government's efforts to house displaced Ukrainians. I note the minister's comments about local authorities working with the Scottish Government on plans for the long-term housing and resettlement of Ukrainian refugees.

The local authority in Edinburgh has previously approached me on the topic of support from the Scottish Government. I hope that the Scottish Government can continue to work in partnership with local authorities to show solidarity with Ukraine by housing as many Ukrainian people as possible.

As my colleague Donald Cameron mentioned, we need to be prepared with a long-term strategy to house Ukrainian refugees and support their integration into our society. Both the MS *Ambition* in Glasgow and the MS *Victoria* here in Edinburgh are set to disembark in the coming months. They are currently home to around 2,200 Ukrainian refugees. Neither Glasgow nor Edinburgh has the spare housing capacity to accommodate them, so there are fears that they will have to be housed elsewhere.

Many of those individuals have spent almost a year living on those ships. They have built relationships, communities and lives in Glasgow and Edinburgh. It is possible that with the Ukraine longer-term resettlement fund, those individuals might now be further displaced to an unknown place in Scotland. A long-term housing strategy for those individuals is essential—one that provides support to protect the mental health of Ukrainian refugees who have been through trauma that most of us can only imagine.

They need to be able to put down roots, their children need to go to school, and they should be able to build a life here and call Scotland their home for as long as they need to. We would welcome a long-term strategy for the thousands of refugees who are likely to remain in Scotland for at least the next year, and we should be prepared to house them for much longer if Putin's war continues.

That is how we can continue to show solidarity and support to Ukraine, one year on from the beginning of the war.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Sharon Dowe to wind up on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

16:39

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I also welcome the Ukrainian consul to the chamber. I am pleased to bring the debate to a close on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

It has been almost a year since Ukraine was forced to fight to protect its sovereignty, territorial integrity and freedom against the Russian aggressors. Our television screens have been flooded with images of the horrors since the very beginning. There were images of a bombed theatre in Mariupol, where hundreds of children were sheltering, which was attacked despite a clear sign warning that there were children inside. There were images of a missile attack at a rail station in Kramatorsk, where thousands of women and children were waiting to flee the Russian invasion. There were the horrific scenes of civilian carnage and mass graves, and reports of rape and torture, from towns such as Bucha, Chernihiv and Sumy. All those scenes are still fresh in our memories.

Ukraine was forced into a war that it did not choose. Despite these tragic events, the Ukrainian people, led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, have displayed unbelievable levels of courage. I stand here today to reiterate my support for the heroic people of Ukraine.

I know that the road has not been easy, but I also know that Ukraine's spirit and determination have not wavered and that it will continue to fight for its freedom. Ukraine's fight is a just fight. Ukraine has the right to defend itself against foreign aggression, and the international community stands firmly with it in its efforts to do so.

The Russian President warned us away from involvement in Ukraine on the eve of the invasion. The international response denied Vladimir Putin what he wanted. Humanitarian aid continues to support the civilian population that has been suffering, and military assistance has allowed the Ukrainian military to repel Russian aggressors on multiple fronts.

Along with the United States, the United Kingdom played a leading role in driving the international response to Russia's illegal invasion. After the US, the UK is the second-largest donor. It has committed £2.3 billion in military assistance to Ukraine in 2022, and promises to match that amount in 2023. On the ground, western high-tech military technology is making a difference. In addition, the UK is hosting operation Interflex, a training programme with the support of several allies, which aims to train 10,000 new and existing Ukrainian military personnel in just 120 days.

With military aid pouring in and sanctions spearheaded by western democracies, Russia is isolated now more than ever. That is a result of one man's dangerous ambitions, which have cut off Russia from the rest of the world.

Ukraine's struggle is a struggle for the rule of law, democracy and human rights. It is a struggle

against aggression, tyranny and dictatorship. We must remember the sacrifices that the Ukrainian people have made in this war. Thousands of Ukrainian soldiers have died or been wounded defending their country. Hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced, and many have lost their homes, their businesses and their loved ones.

I take this opportunity to thank the UK and Scottish Governments for collaborating on many aspects of this crisis, such as the sponsorship schemes for Ukrainian refugees fleeing a terrible war. I also thank all sponsors who have generously offered their homes during an economically difficult period for our country. Third sector organisations, charities, local authorities, universities and many more have contributed significantly to the support of the Ukrainian people.

The links between Scotland and Ukraine have a long history. Ukrainians first arrived in Scotland in the 1750s, with many studying at the universities in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Since then, we have strengthened those ties, as evidenced by Scotland's response to the situation today.

I will highlight some of the points that have been raised by members from across the chamber.

I associate myself with the remarks of Donald Cameron, who rightly recognised the efforts of both the Scottish and UK Governments to welcome Ukrainians fleeing the war to make their home here for the time being. Whether that was through the establishment of the UK-wide homes for Ukraine scheme, or through Scotland's supersponsor scheme, we have ensured that many Ukrainians could come to our country for as long as it is necessary.

I was pleased to hear my colleague Annie Wells quote the powerful words of the Ukrainian Scot Zhenya Dove, who said:

"Many Ukrainians have been welcomed to Scotland with open arms. We are deeply thankful for the Scottish hospitality shown to Ukraine and for the kindness of your hearts."

My colleague Meghan Gallacher was right to highlight the horrendous reality for those attending school in Ukraine—lessons interrupted by air raid sirens instead of school bells. It is not right that young people are seeing that as their new normal.

Neil Gray mentioned that Putin's army has invaded a country in the United Nations and he mentioned the appalling atrocities committed and the chilling comment,

"the meat grinder is working".

He also talked about the continuing support from Scotland and I thank him for the announcement that he made about the extra funding.

Sarah Boyack said that we must support Ukraine in defence of its country and mentioned all members, on all benches, standing together as one to support the Government motion, because we all support Ukraine.

Alex Cole-Hamilton spoke about the Ukrainian family that he has opened his home to and how they now join in with family events.

Fiona Hyslop spoke of the devastation to culture, the soul of Ukraine.

Bill Kidd again mentioned the atrocious actions of the Russians, but also that they underestimated the resolve of the Ukrainian people.

Carol Mochan said what we all think—that there is a need to find an end to the conflict as soon as possible.

Clare Adamson spoke of the resilience of the Ukrainian people and of her wish to end the war.

Paul O'Kane spoke of the indiscriminate bombings of civilians and the outrage of Russia's act of aggression. He also spoke of the work done in his area to raise funds to support Ukraine and of the local Ukrainian baker who raised a phenomenal amount of money.

Bob Doris spoke of how Russia had no thought for the human cost or the pain and suffering inflicted on the people of Ukraine.

Although she did not speak in today's debate, I also mention Jenni Minto, who led last night's members' business debate on the special tribunal on Russian aggression in Ukraine. She gave a very powerful and moving speech, which I was in the chamber for. I also attended the Postcards from Ukraine event in Parliament, which included very moving images showing the vision of Ukraine before the war and what has happened since Russia invaded.

In 2023, our support for Ukraine is as strong as it has ever been. The support from Scotland, the United Kingdom, the United States and other allies is unwavering. The heroic courage, resilience and determination of the Ukrainian people to repel the Russian invaders is crucial to defeating one man's dangerous ambitions. I repeat what I said a year ago:

"we will support you. Together, we will defeat Putin."—
[*Official Report*, 24 February 2022; c 86.]

16:48

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): It has been a very moving and unified debate that we have heard from all sides of the chamber, particularly redolent for me as the son of a war refugee who came to these shores 76

years ago. I begin by reflecting on the contributions of others.

First, I thought that Donald Cameron made a very powerful and moving contribution. He had very gracious words to say about the Scottish Government. I know that that cannot come easily at the best of times, but he was exceptionally gracious about the Scottish Government in general and my ministerial colleague Neil Gray in particular. That gives me the rare opportunity, in return, to praise the UK Government's commitment to providing the weapons that are needed by Ukraine and for providing the training for Ukrainian personnel. I take the opportunity, in particular, to mention in dispatches the defence secretary and former member of the Scottish Parliament, Ben Wallace, for the role that he is playing in that.

I thank Sarah Boyack, who spoke of solidarity and praised the cross-party, cross-parliamentary agreement that we have been hearing on the issue, for her welcome for the additional support that was announced today, which is targeted at winterisation, resilience and rebuilding in Ukraine. She underlined the constructive role of Opposition in a democracy in making us go further and faster. I invite her to keep up the good work on that front, as well.

Alex Cole-Hamilton, other MSPs, Scottish Government ministers and thousands of people across Scotland are hosting Ukrainians in their homes. Mr Cole-Hamilton powerfully illustrated the human loss and the experience of Russia's invasion, which, we should remember, did not start last year but started in 2014, with the invasion of Crimea and the Donbas region, which includes the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

I commend Fiona Hyslop's long-standing commitment to Ukraine, as I do that of Stewart McDonald MP. Ms Hyslop and a number of us are sanctioned by the Putin regime; we wear that sanction as a badge of honour. Ms Hyslop spoke, too, of the energy security that Scotland and northern Europe could help provide to continental Europe. I hope that that is something that we can develop an understanding of, as Scotland has a lot to offer as we move forward with developing our renewables—our hydrogen potential in particular.

I would like to mention by name Annie Wells, Bill Kidd, Carol Mochan, Clare Adamson, Meghan Gallagher, Ross Greer, Paul O'Kane, Bob Doris, Foysoil Choudhury and Sharon Dowey, whose contributions this afternoon have been exemplary.

If the past year has shown us anything, it has been that not only Scotland but the whole of Europe and the west is united in supporting Ukraine's democracy, its sovereignty and its independence. It has been a year since the full-

scale invasion of Ukraine began. In that time, we have witnessed the brutality of that unprovoked attack on a peaceful nation. This anniversary is a chance for us to stand united, as we are, and reflect on the impact that this past year has had on the people of Ukraine.

I am pleased to see the great many events that have been organised both in this Parliament and across the country to mark the one-year anniversary. The "Postcards from Ukraine" photography exhibit, which is displayed here in the Scottish Parliament, highlights the devastating nature of the war on both the Ukrainian people and the country's cultural heritage.

In Scotland, we have shown our support by welcoming displaced Ukrainians into our homes and communities—they are now our friends, colleagues and neighbours. I am pleased that people have come together across Scotland to find different ways to show their support for Ukraine this week. We have seen a number of events take place across the country to mark the anniversary.

Over the past year, we have been able to show our support by providing financial and practical help from Government and through the incredible generosity in our communities, be it through charitable donations or direct contributions to communities in Ukraine and neighbouring countries.

As we look towards a Ukrainian victory, it is worth considering the opportunities of twinning between Scotland's and Ukraine's villages, towns and cities as we help to rebuild Ukraine in the years to come.

When the time to show our support and solidarity came, we offered it whole-heartedly. The warm Scottish welcome that we have provided has been a collective effort that we can all be proud of. I am proud that Scotland has welcomed more than 23,000 arrivals from Ukraine in the past year and that more than 19,000 have come through our supersponsor scheme.

As this ugly, full-scale war enters its second year, we cannot waiver in our commitment and instead must enhance our efforts and continue to do all that we can to support Ukraine and those people who have been displaced. The additional £1 million that we have announced today has been welcomed by all quarters in the chamber and will go directly to aid organisations that support people on the ground in Ukraine.

As part of our on-going solidarity with Ukraine in the coming weeks and months, our work to support displaced people from Ukraine settle well in Scotland will continue in earnest. Indeed, in a bid to ensure the longer-term sustainability of the supersponsor scheme, the Government initiated a

full review of that scheme, the results of which were published in November last year. The interventions that the review generated ranged from clear information and support to investment in social housing, testing alternatives to short-term accommodation, such as modular housing, and actions to reduce barriers to employment and the private rental sector.

We continue to work closely with local authority matching teams to support people into longer-term accommodation. The scale of demand makes that a challenging process, and it is taking a huge collective effort to deliver it.

Sarah Boyack: Will the cabinet secretary commit to providing us with an update on the conclusions of the review, particularly on issues such as modular housing, co-ordination and delivery on the ground of safe and secure housing?

Angus Robertson: I am happy to do so. Neil Gray has already given that commitment to the committee, and I repeat it now.

As Neil Gray said in his opening remarks, in September 2022 we announced up to £50 million of capital investment to help to bring empty properties back into use. Alongside that, we continue to recruit volunteer hosts, and we have launched a campaign to secure more hosts. We will continue to do all that we can to ensure that the people from Ukraine who come to Scotland are met with a warm welcome and a package of support that allows them to integrate into our communities and build a new life here.

Our close working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, local authorities in general and the third sector has been a key success factor, and we will continue to work in partnership to deliver integrated services that have at their heart dignity and respect for the Ukrainian people.

As we have heard, it is Scottish society and communities the length and breadth of Scotland that have the most to gain from the contributions and experience that displaced people from Ukraine have to offer. Great societies are those that embrace immigration and integration and those that encompass the diversity of humanity within their fabric. Displaced people from Ukraine have already become a mainstay in our communities and have brought with them a wealth of experience in many fields from education and academia to healthcare and business management.

I want to ensure that we do all that we can to make displaced people from Ukraine feel welcome in our communities and that we continue to recognise the contributions that they make.

I reiterate sentiments that have been offered previously on behalf of the Scottish Government. We remain clear that all Ukrainians who have made Scotland their temporary home will be welcome for as long as they need. We stand with you. Slava Ukraini. Heroiam slava.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on marking one year of war against Ukraine. We move to the next item of business.

Motion without Notice

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders, that decision time be brought forward to now.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4 of Standing Orders, Decision Time be brought forward to 4.57 pm.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

16:57

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-07997, in the name of Angus Robertson, on the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill, which is a piece of United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

16:57

Meeting suspended.

17:01

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the division on motion S6M-07997, in the name of Angus Robertson. Members should cast their vote now.

The vote is closed.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app—
[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members for a bit of silence, so that I can hear Mr Ross.

Mr Ross, as we did not hear you, could you please repeat what you said?

Douglas Ross: My app would not work. I would have voted no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Ross. Your vote will be recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)

Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 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)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-07997, in the name of Angus Robertson, is: For 84, Against 30, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees with the recommendation in the Scottish Government's Legislative Consent Memorandum to withhold consent for the UK Government's Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-07998, in the name of Neil Gray, on marking one year of war against Ukraine, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament condemns in the strongest possible terms the illegal Russian war against Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022; reiterates its solidarity with the people and government of Ukraine; repeats its concern about the grave threat to the safety and security of Ukrainian citizens, and mourns each and every death caused by Russia's illegal aggression; asserts the vital importance of Ukraine defeating Russia's aggression and calls upon the international community to provide Ukraine with the necessary military, financial and humanitarian support; rejects Russia's illegal attempts to annex the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia via sham referenda; commends all countries who have welcomed displaced Ukrainians and are providing crucial life-saving humanitarian assistance to Ukrainians in need of support; thanks the organisations and people that have supported displaced Ukrainians to settle in Scotland; declares unequivocally that all Ukrainians who have made Scotland their temporary home will be welcome for as long as they need; welcomes the poignant *Postcards from Ukraine* exhibition hosted in the Scottish Parliament, and wishes a speedy and peaceful resolution to the war

that ensures Ukrainian sovereignty, democracy, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally-recognised borders.

Meeting closed at 17:04.

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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