



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 2 March 2023

Session 6



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 2 March 2023

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

## General Question Time

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good morning. The first item of business is general question time. I would appreciate short and concise questions and responses because, as ever, there is much interest.

### Cladding Remediation

**1. Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its progress on cladding remediation. (S6O-01956)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** The safety of residents and home owners is our absolute priority. The 27 buildings that were in the initial pilot programme have all started the single building assessment process, which is a comprehensive and technical assessment of fire risk and required actions. We have now expanded that pilot to 105 buildings, and a regional breakdown of that list has been published.

I have always been clear that, if immediate action is needed to safeguard residents, the Government will not hesitate to take action. On the basis of advice from fire safety engineers, we have established a waking watch at two buildings, as a precautionary measure to safeguard residents.

**Kaukab Stewart:** What discussions have taken place with developers, whose responsibility it is to ensure that their buildings are compliant with fire safety regulations? Can the cabinet secretary offer any reassurances to people who live in the properties that are affected, including those in my Glasgow Kelvin constituency, who are, understandably, concerned and frustrated?

**Shona Robison:** On a general point, we have continued to work with Homes for Scotland and some of the country's largest housing developers to develop an accord to address cladding issues.

At Lancefield Quay in Glasgow in particular, a number of positive discussions have taken place between the Scottish Government and the developers, and I am pleased to confirm that the developers have agreed to meet the costs of the waking watch that is currently in place at Lancefield Quay.

I appreciate that the residents want to quickly move to a situation in which there is no longer a need for a waking watch. Technical experts are working at pace to design a longer-term solution, which the developers will then deliver.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** I have been contacted by constituents who are currently unable to secure a remortgage because they live in such properties. Those individuals are complaining of radio silence from the Government on the issue, and a lack of urgency and leadership. What advice is being provided to individual householders who are trying to remortgage and who live in those 105 properties?

**Shona Robison:** Communication is important. If Miles Briggs will give me more information in writing about the circumstances, I will make sure that there is more regular communication, because regular communication is important.

Miles Briggs talked specifically about lending. We are pleased to hear that, for the first time since the crisis started, banks are willing to lend on properties that have dangerous cladding. As I am sure Miles Briggs is aware, mortgage lending is a reserved matter, and we expect that the position will therefore be extended to all nations of the United Kingdom. We are working with UK Finance to formalise a process that works for lenders as well as home owners in Scotland. I am happy to keep him informed of that.

However, I do not recognise Miles Briggs's characterisation regarding urgency and leadership, which we are providing in very difficult circumstances. We want to provide assurance to home owners that we are working at pace with developers to get to a situation in which the buildings that need remediation have that done at speed.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** The residents in a number of the buildings in Glasgow are seriously worried about the situation, and they have not yet seen the reports that have been made available to the Government. Will the cabinet secretary set out when those reports will be available, so that the residents can have some safety in understanding what the problem is?

**Shona Robison:** I appreciate the point that Pam Duncan-Glancy makes about this being a worrying time for residents. The Scottish Government wrote to all residents notifying them of the decision on 31 January and the factor disseminated that letter to them on the morning of 1 February. On 6 February, Scottish Government officials, together with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the firm that is providing the waking watch, held a briefing session for the residents committee. We have been working with Homes for Scotland and the developers to

address some of the wider issues with the development of an accord.

I hope that that provides Pam Duncan-Glancy with a sense of some of the communication that we have had with residents. However, if we can do more, we will.

### Homelessness

**2. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to tackle homelessness, in light of reports that the number of people classified as homeless has reached a record high. (S6O-01957)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** Our ending homelessness together action plan is the right long-term strategy for preventing and tackling homelessness and is strongly supported by Scotland's homelessness sector. Aligned with the plan, I have commissioned an expert group to bring forward innovative ways to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation and I am meeting housing conveners to inform our approach. In the meantime, we continue to lead the way on delivering affordable homes in the United Kingdom, having delivered 115,558 affordable homes since 2007 and started work towards our target of delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032.

**Pam Gosal:** Thirty-six people have needlessly died while in temporary accommodation in six hotels across Glasgow. Campaigners argue that hotels are not equipped to support people who are in a crisis, so vulnerable individuals are missing out on access to potentially life-saving drug and alcohol treatment and mental health services. However, as expected, the Scottish National Party Government has no shame. Will the cabinet secretary commit to establishing a public inquiry and declare a housing emergency immediately, as Conservative members have repeatedly called for?

**Shona Robison:** First, we will continue with our massive investment of £3.5 billion in affordable homes, which is not replicated anywhere in these islands, because we recognise that affordable housing is a key lever in tackling poverty.

Pam Gosal referred to a difficult situation with vulnerable residents in hotels in Glasgow. I am sure that she understands the complexity of some of the issues that are facing the people concerned. Any death in those circumstances is a tragedy. She will also be aware, I hope, of all the work that is going on to try to ensure that people are supported. Issues such as addiction and mental health problems require to be addressed, along

with trying to get people into settled accommodation.

Our housing first programme is working to support people with wraparound support. We will continue to work with Glasgow City Council and any other local authority to ensure that we can support people in the way that they require.

### Scottish Child Payment (Glasgow Anniesland)

**3. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many payments of the Scottish child payment have been made in the Glasgow Anniesland constituency since it was introduced. (S6O-01958)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** Social Security Scotland routinely publishes official statistics for the Scottish child payment, including application and payment data. Although those statistics include information by local authority area, they do not currently include information by Scottish Parliament constituency. The latest statistics, which were published earlier this week, show that a total of 331,180 payments were made to clients living in the Glasgow City local authority area between February 2021 and the end of December 2022.

The Scottish child payment is putting money into the pockets of low-income families at a crucial time and more families than ever are eligible for support.

**Bill Kidd:** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said:

"The full rollout of the Scottish Child Payment is a watershed moment for tackling poverty in Scotland, and the rest of the UK should take notice."

Will the cabinet secretary provide further detail about the impact that the SCP is projected to have on poverty levels in Scotland and what more could be achieved if the United Kingdom Government stepped up and matched that ambition?

**Shona Robison:** In March 2022, we published analysis that suggests that the Scottish child payment could reduce relative child poverty by an estimated 5 percentage points in 2023-24, lifting 50,000 children out of relative poverty in Scotland.

Of course, the United Kingdom Government could use its powers to tackle child poverty and the cost of living crisis by—just to name a few measures—introducing a £25-a-week uplift for universal credit and means-tested legacy benefits and by ending the benefit cap and the two-child limit. Reversing key UK Government welfare reforms that have occurred since 2015 could bring an estimated 70,000 people in Scotland out of poverty, including 30,000 children. That is

something that I think that we would all want the UK Government to do.

#### **Clyde Metro Project (Milngavie Rail Services)**

4. **Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government how the Clyde metro project will improve rail services on the existing Milngavie line. (S6O-01959)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** Although it is currently too early in the process to advise exactly how the Clyde metro will impact rail services on the Milngavie line, I can say that the metro will complement and integrate with the region's existing rail and bus networks.

The system might include wholly new track, the reuse of former rail routes or the conversion of existing lines. That will lead to more reliable public transport, increase travel choices to key employment, education and healthcare destinations and help to address inequalities. It will be truly transformational for Glasgow and its surrounding communities.

**Ross Greer:** I share the minister's enthusiasm for the transformational Clyde metro project. Despite recent improvements, the Milngavie line continues to be one of the worst-performing lines in Scotland, with regular delays, cancellations and issues with capacity, all tied to the limitations of it being a single-track line.

Does the minister agree that the only way to resolve those issues and achieve the Clyde metro's ambition for frequent services on the Milngavie line is to re-dual the line and build the long-mooted Allander station?

**Jenny Gilruth:** For trains terminating at Milngavie, ScotRail has advised that performance is comparable to that of the suburban west service group and, indeed, ScotRail as a whole. However, if there are issues with specific services, such as those that the member has alluded to, I am more than happy to raise those with ScotRail. I know that it was in Parliament only yesterday for a drop-in session with MSPs.

With respect to the metro, obviously, it will be for the design development process to look at what impact, if any, it will have on rail. I am sure that it will have an extensive impact in relation to the delivery of services locally, but I also note that work that the local council, East Dunbartonshire Council, did with regard to its local transport strategy in 2019 concluded that having a standalone station at Allander, in combination with double tracking, which the member mentioned, offered poor value for money. Instead, the council preferred a bus-based option to improve access to existing rail services.

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly, minister.

**Jenny Gilruth:** However, if the council has changed its view in the interim, I am happy to ask my officials in Transport Scotland to re-engage with it on this matter.

#### **Medical Centre for Lochgelly**

5. **Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the new medical centre for Lochgelly. (S6O-01960)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** The Scottish Government's capital investment group considered the outline business case for the Lochgelly health centre project at its meeting in June 2022.

In response to the feedback provided, the NHS Fife project team is currently updating the business case. We do not have a date for when the updated business case will be resubmitted to the Scottish Government for approval.

**Annabelle Ewing:** The minister will know, from her preparations for this question session, that, on 28 October 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care gave me "an absolute confirmation" that, when the business case for the new Lochgelly medical centre was in place, the funding would be found.

Can the minister also confirm that, and give that assurance to my constituents? Can she also advise my constituents in Lochgelly when they can expect finally to get their new medical centre?

**Maree Todd:** Absolutely—I am happy to provide that assurance. I recognise that the current health centre and much of the national health service estate needs replacement. That is why the Scottish Government is committed to investing £10 billion in health infrastructure over the next 10 years. That will include funding for a replacement health centre in Lochgelly, because we remain absolutely committed to that project.

Our planning assumption is that the phasing of the funding is likely to be in the second half of the decade, and NHS Fife will align the update of the business case to that expected timeline.

#### **Aberdeen to Central Belt Enhancement Project**

6. **Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the £200 million Aberdeen to central belt enhancement project, which aims to reduce travel times between Aberdeen and the central belt by 20 minutes by 2026. (S6O-01961)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** The ministerial commitment to spend £200 million

on enhancing the Aberdeen to central belt rail corridor was made alongside, but not as part of, the Aberdeen city region deal, for delivery within the same 10-year timescale.

Some concerns were expressed at a relatively late stage by the Network Rail operations team last year. Those concerns, which have since been resolved, have led to a delay in Network Rail formally signing off the option selection process. Nonetheless, good progress is now being made, and the project remains on track.

**Douglas Lumsden:** The Scottish National Party has been in power for 16 years, and the people of the north-east are still having to put up with a second-class rail service. The new trains for the north-east are 40-year-old diesel 125 cast-offs. There is no chance of electrification to Aberdeen, of dualling at Usan, or of reducing journey times to the central belt by 20 minutes by 2026. The local chamber of commerce has said that that is vital to economic growth in the area. Does the minister agree that rail services to Aberdeen and the north-east are being neglected by the SNP Government?

**Jenny Gilruth:** No, I do not agree with Mr Lumsden's characterisation of investment from the Government in relation to the north-east. I remind him that the Scottish Government is investing £379 million in the Aberdeen city region deal, compared with just £125 million from the United Kingdom Government.

Aberdeen and the north-east have, of course, benefited from significant rail enhancements in recent years. That includes £330 million of investment to support the redoubling of the line to Inverurie, which allows a half-hourly service to Aberdeen and an hourly crossrail service to Montrose; the opening of the new Kintore station between Inverurie station and Dyce station in October 2020, which features the largest electric vehicle charging facility in the north-east and which was backed by £15 million of investment from the Government; and Aberdeen station's refurbishment, which is being supported by over £8 million of Scottish Government support.

In relation to the rail enhancement programmes—

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly, minister.

**Jenny Gilruth:** It is worth reflecting that Network Rail raised some concerns last year, as I have mentioned. That set progress back. Nonetheless, good progress is now being made, and I am sure that Mr Lumsden will welcome that progress.

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** I was going to say, "Let's examine the facts about the investment that the Scottish Government has

made." However, Jenny Gilruth has just listed everything that I was going to say. There is the Kintore station work, the dualling of the Aberdeen to Inverness line in time, and the completion of the Aberdeen western peripheral route. Meanwhile, the Tory United Kingdom Government pulled the plug on £1 billion of carbon capture investment for Peterhead in 2015, and it is contributing only £125 million to the city region deal as opposed to the Scottish Government's contribution of £370 million—

**The Presiding Officer:** Ms Martin, do you have a question?

**Gillian Martin:** My question is: will the minister take the opportunity to further describe how the UK Tory Government should be stepping up for the people of the north-east rather than letting them down?

**The Presiding Officer:** The minister must, of course, answer the question in relation to matters for which the Scottish Government has general responsibility. I ask her to do so briefly.

**Jenny Gilruth:** Ms Martin has distinctly outlined the record investment coming from the Scottish Government to rail services in the north-east of Scotland and to her constituency. Additionally, since ScotRail came into public ownership, we have made significant investment of over £11 billion in rail infrastructure, including in the refurbishment of Glasgow Queen Street station and Edinburgh Haymarket station, and invested £1 billion in the past 10 years to electrify over 400km of track.

### Mobility as a Service

**7. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to roll out mobility as a service across Scotland. (S6O-01962)

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** Mobility as a service provides people with better travel information, ticket booking and payment services so that they can decide how to undertake their journey.

Back in 2018, the Scottish Government made a programme for government commitment to establish a £2 million fund to support innovative, digital data-driven solutions to test mobility as a service in Scotland. Five projects, covering the Highlands and Islands, Tayside and the south-east of Scotland, were awarded funding, and they will complete later this year.

**Graham Simpson:** I welcome the pilot projects, but we do not want to see those suddenly stopping. Can the minister assure us that funding will continue? Will we see the results of those pilots published?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I very much recognise the value of the Scottish Government's investment in mobility as a service. Indeed, last month, I was in Inverness seeing for myself how that investment is being used to support the development of the Go-Hi app. Last Thursday, I was in Dundee visiting Dundee and Angus College to see the approach that it has used in the local area to join up transport providers for college students and national service health workers, and even for use in Loch Lomond national park.

Having invested that £2 million from the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland is now required to evaluate the outputs from the investment in the projects to assess the viability of the concept across Scotland. That evaluation will look at a number of different factors. The projects are, of course, yet to complete, and I do not want to arrive at a view before they have completed. However, I recognise Mr Simpson's interest in the subject. That is a really important piece of work in relation to joining up transport across Scotland, and I hope that we will be able to learn lessons from those investments from the Scottish Government.

### Rent Controls

**8. Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making towards fulfilling its commitment to introduce a national system of rent controls by the end of 2025. (S6O-01963)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** Long-term rent control measures will be included in the forthcoming housing bill, which is expected to be introduced as soon as possible after the 2023 summer recess. That will enable the Scottish Government to meet our commitment to deliver rent control by 2025.

**Katy Clark:** I appreciate that there is litigation in relation to the rent cap and the eviction ban but, as the minister knows, the cost of living crisis continues. Therefore, can he reassure tenants that the Government remains committed to providing protection against unfair rent increases and to introducing the national system of rent controls?

**Patrick Harvie:** Yes, I can. The member is correct that we cannot comment on current legal proceedings. However, the Scottish Government has led on housing over the long term, whether that is through the abolition of the right-to-buy investment in social housing or, most recently, the emergency rent freeze in the face of the cost of living crisis, as well as our long-term commitment to a national system of rent controls. I know that many Labour colleagues share great enthusiasm for seeing us continue with that work.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Deposit Return Scheme

**1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** By midnight on Tuesday, businesses in Scotland were legally required to sign up to the Scottish National Party-Green deposit return scheme. Thousands of producers rightly decided not to, because the scheme is an absolute shambles. Lorna Slater, the minister in charge, said that just 664 businesses had registered, but she refused six times in the chamber yesterday to say how many businesses should have signed up.

Will the First Minister give us that answer now—how many businesses should have signed up to her Government's deposit return scheme?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** First, when a big change is introduced, it is understandable that there will be concerns about it. I have deep respect for the concerns that have been raised by business, and the Government will continue to work with business to address those concerns, but, frankly, the sheer opportunism of some Opposition parties that have rightly supported a deposit—[*Interruption.*]

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

**The First Minister:** They have rightly supported a deposit return scheme and have previously criticised the Government for taking too long to introduce one, so their opportunism in now indulging in knee-jerk opposition is frankly breathtaking. So, too—I will use a parliamentary term that I believe is polite enough—is the blatant distortion of some Opposition politicians. Yes, I am talking about Alister Jack in particular.

To come back to the point—this is an important point—the number of companies in the drinks industry inevitably changes over time. At the outset of introducing the scheme, it was estimated that there were about 4,500 companies—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Members, let us hear the First Minister. Thank you.

**The First Minister:** However, significantly fewer than that will have to register because, once groups of companies registering under one registration are identified, the estimated number of individual producers and importers will be less than 2,000. However, that is not actually the most relevant statistic. The most relevant statistic is the share of the market—the percentage of products that are included—and more than 90 per cent are now included in the scheme. [*Interruption.*]

Finally, if I were to state that in the opposite way—if I were to stand here and say that 90 per cent of producers were registered but that that covered only about 20 per cent of the market—that would be a problem, because that would be a seriously problematic way of approaching this.

We will continue to progress with the scheme—

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly, please.

**The First Minister:** —because it is for the benefit of our environment, and we will do that responsibly, because that is what people across Scotland have a right to expect.

**Douglas Ross:** First Minister, when you are in a hole, stop digging. Surely, either you or some of your many, many officials watched Lorna Slater—

**The Presiding Officer:** Please speak through the chair.

**Douglas Ross:** —being absolutely unable to answer a basic, but very important, question yesterday. We need to know how many businesses and producers the First Minister's Government expected to sign up to the scheme, given that we know that only 664 did so by the deadline. It is a very simple number. Either the First Minister knows it but is refusing to tell members in the chamber, or she does not know, and I think that members deserve an answer.

The First Minister says that she has “deep respect” for businesses across Scotland. Well, businesses are giving the Government a message, loud and clear: the Scottish Government's deposit return scheme is a complete disaster. The Scottish Wholesale Association said that it could be a “car crash”; UKHospitality Scotland says that the scheme is “flawed”; Innis & Gunn says that it is “unworkable”; and, last night, after listening to the minister's statement, the Scottish Chambers of Commerce stated that businesses' concerns have been “completely ignored”—a “car crash”, “flawed” and “unworkable”, with the voice of businesses across Scotland “ignored”.

Even at this late stage, will the First Minister finally, just once, listen to Scottish businesses and pause the scheme?

**The First Minister:** The last time that the Government announced a delay to the scheme, necessitated by the pandemic, Conservatives were among the first to criticise it. That is what I mean when I talk about sheer opportunism and knee-jerk opposition. However, that is what we have come to expect from the Conservatives. We will continue to act responsibly.

I come back to the central point in Douglas Ross's question, because it is important. I gave him an answer in my first response, and I also

pointed out that anyone who looks at this rationally will see that it is the number of bottles or the percentage of products that are covered that matters the most. The vast majority of products are produced by a relatively small number of producers. As of yesterday, more than 90 per cent of the market share was covered—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you.

**The First Minister:** That is the crucial point. If it were the reverse, that would be a problem.

We will continue to do as we have been doing. A range of concerns have already been responded to in order to reduce costs. Producer fees are 8 per cent, 30 per cent or 40 per cent lower than originally planned for glass, plastic or metal containers. Day 1 payments for producers have been reduced, and we will continue to liaise with business responsibly and sensibly.

Let us not lose sight of the central point, which is the scheme's purpose and objectives. It will reduce littering by a third, increase recycling rates of single-use drinks containers towards 90 per cent and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 4 million tonnes over 25 years, which is the equivalent of taking 83,000 cars off the road. This is about the environment. It used to be the case that the Conservatives pretended to care about the environment—

**The Presiding Officer:** Briefly, please.

**The First Minister:** —but it seems that those days are long gone.

**Douglas Ross:** It is very clear that the First Minister is ignoring Scottish businesses again. She says that the opposition to the scheme and the calls to pause it are sheer political opportunism, so I would hate to be the health secretary sat next to her—there is going to be some more finger wagging coming in a minute. We know that Humza Yousaf, Ash Regan and Kate Forbes have all said that the deposit return scheme should be delayed—that is political opportunism at the heart of the Scottish Government. *[Interruption.]*

Fuck's sake.

**The Presiding Officer:** I suspend business.

12:08

*Meeting suspended.*

12:09

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We will recommence. I call Douglas Ross for his third question.

**Douglas Ross:** Thank you very much, Presiding Officer. I have to say that these constant interruptions to First Minister's question time are getting very tiresome. We are here, as democratically elected MSPs, to put questions to the First Minister. The people who are watching and who want to hear the questions and answers are getting pretty fed up with this childish behaviour, which means that questions get disrupted like that.

I was kind of on a roll, explaining the total political opportunism of the SNP. We spoke about Humza Yousaf. We spoke about Ash Regan. Let us now speak about Kate Forbes.

Kate Forbes said that the deposit return scheme, which the First Minister has just defended over the past two questions, could create "economic carnage"—and that is, in fact, one of the more tame things that Kate Forbes has said about the SNP's record. There is just one wee problem: Kate Forbes is the SNP's Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy. The SNP's record is Kate Forbes's record.

When the SNP Government was slow in paying out Covid grants to businesses, Kate Forbes was running the schemes; when companies demanded that the SNP reset its anti-business agenda, Kate Forbes was the minister who was not listening; and when the ferry scandal ran even further aground, Kate Forbes was fully on board.

The new Kate Forbes seems to be saying that the old Kate Forbes is not up to the job. So, I ask the First Minister: which one does she agree with—the Kate Forbes with a terrible record in government or the Kate Forbes who says that this Government has a terrible record?

**The First Minister:** First, Douglas Ross said that he was "on a roll". I am not sure whether he meant rolling down the hill, but that seems to be what that question was. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, First Minister. We will hear the First Minister.

**The First Minister:** I said last week that Douglas Ross was seeming awful scared of Humza Yousaf. This week, it seems that he is also very scared of Kate Forbes, which says to me that whoever is standing here in my place in a few weeks' time will keep the Conservatives firmly where they belong: in opposition in Scottish politics.

To go back to the deposit return scheme, this Government—and I, for as long as I am First Minister—will continue to work to introduce sensible schemes that protect the interests of business but that also protect our environment, because we have a deep responsibility to do that.

I also point out, again, that the introduction of a deposit return scheme is in no way unprecedented. Similar schemes are already operational in many countries and territories around the world. Indeed, I understand that some of the companies that are raising concerns—as they have a right to do here in Scotland—are part of the schemes in other countries around the world. I read in the newspaper today that the Conservative United Kingdom Government is about to announce its own scheme, perhaps as soon as tomorrow, which no doubt will have Douglas Ross squirming, as he often does when his colleagues in London make life difficult for him.

We will continue to be responsible. We will liaise and engage with business, but we will also take steps to protect our environment and make sure that the cost of dealing with waste—which, of course, has to be met—is dealt with fairly. That is what this is all about.

**Douglas Ross:** May I begin this question with an apology, Presiding Officer? It has been brought to my attention that I perhaps used industrial language in response to the protesters who interrupted the session earlier. To you, to members and to everyone listening—including, probably, my mother—I apologise for that. *[Interruption.]* Christine Grahame is asking what I said, but I promise that I will not repeat it. I just wanted to apologise to you, Presiding Officer, and to members.

Let us get back to where we were. I was asking the First Minister about the leadership election and the SNP candidates, which the First Minister does not seem to want to talk about. That is no wonder, because the contest is an absolute bin fire. The SNP is so split and divided that it even tried to ban the media from watching the hustings. The only thing that unites the candidates who are seeking to replace Nicola Sturgeon is independence, and the candidates' plans are even more reckless than Nicola Sturgeon's de facto referendum.

Last night, Kate Forbes revealed that she wants to hold a referendum just three months after the next general election—three months—when there are so many bigger issues facing the country. Kate Forbes thinks that a deposit return scheme would cause "economic carnage" but that holding another referendum to break up a 300-year-old union would be a breeze. Does the First Minister really think that anybody in Scotland will find Kate Forbes's plans credible?

**The First Minister:** What we found out in that question from Douglas Ross is that his so-called "roll" came to a crashing halt pretty quickly.

I will share some news with Douglas Ross, the chamber and, indeed, the country, although I am not sure that it will come as any surprise to the

country. The SNP is united in favouring Scottish independence, and I think that we are going to see the country increasingly united behind independence as the best way to free ourselves from the impact of Tory Governments—or, indeed, from the impact of Labour Governments, which are often indistinguishable from Tory Governments—and be in charge of our own affairs and destiny, for example, by getting back into the European Union. I very much look forward to the vigour of that debate in the years to come. I am also confident that whoever stands here in my place in just a few weeks' time will continue the SNP's outstanding record of success. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, members.

**The First Minister:** Whoever stands here in my place will make sure that the SNP continues to occupy these benches and take forward decisions for the good of the people of Scotland, even when those are tough decisions. Douglas Ross and his colleagues will stay where they are, or—who knows?—perhaps, in years to come, they will be over there.

### Scottish National Party Leadership Election

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** We are in the midst of a cost of living crisis that is hitting people hard; a national health service crisis that is pushing staff to breaking point and putting patients' lives at risk; and a wider economic crisis that is leading to business closures across Scotland. That crisis has been made worse by a flawed and chaotic deposit return scheme, which is led by an incompetent Government. At the same time, the SNP has turned in on itself, because its members are more interested in scoring political points against each other than in focusing on the people's priorities. At this time of crisis for business, families and patients, why is it that people in Scotland see only a Government that is divided and in chaos?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Maybe somebody here can help me, but I have lost count of the number of leadership elections that have taken place in the Conservative and Labour parties in the years that I have stood here as First Minister.

I think that people in Scotland will welcome seeing a robust debate about the future of our country, covering all of the things that Anas Sarwar has just talked about. They will appreciate seeing candidates for leadership setting out proposals to build on the actions that this Government has taken in recent years.

Anas Sarwar talks about the cost of living crisis. One of the things that I am proudest of—and always will be proud of—in my time as First

Minister is the game-changing Scottish child payment, which is transformational for families and children across the country and is doing more than anything across these islands to lift children out of poverty. I am proud of that, and I am confident that whoever succeeds me as First Minister will continue with that record of success.

**Anas Sarwar:** It will be interesting to hear whether Nicola Sturgeon is proud of the candidates, over the past couple of weeks, trashing her record in Government. The choice that the SNP is offering to the people of Scotland to replace Nicola Sturgeon is woeful. We have a health secretary who is closing an intensive care unit in Ayr, after promising to save it just a few weeks ago; a finance secretary who repeatedly blocked £15 an hour for care workers, but is now miraculously calling for it; and Ash Regan, who thinks that Scotland could set up a central bank within weeks. Three candidates are falling over each other to distance themselves from their Government's policies. They are all U-turning on the flawed deposit return scheme; they all want to hit the brakes on a national care service; and all of them are all over the place on independence.

Nicola Sturgeon gave all of those candidates their first steps up in politics. With the benefit of hindsight, which candidate does the First Minister most regret appointing?

**The First Minister:** I am proud of all of the Governments that I have led and I am proud of those who have served in them.

With regard to the record of Government, I said on the day that I announced that I would be stepping down as First Minister that nobody would entice me into expressing a preference for my successor, and Anas Sarwar will not manage to do that, either. However, I am confident that whoever succeeds me will continue with that record of success. Ultimately, my record—and that of my ministerial team—in Government will be judged not by Anas Sarwar or Douglas Ross but by the people of Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear the First Minister.

**The First Minister:** In my time as First Minister, that record has been judged by the people of Scotland on no fewer than eight occasions, and we have had eight landslide election victories. That is the vote of confidence in my record as First Minister that I will continue to be proud of.

**Anas Sarwar:** At the start of this contest, Nicola Sturgeon told us that it would be a chance for Scotland to see the best talent that the SNP has to offer. Here we are with the top three: Ash Regan, backed by Alex Salmond; Kate Forbes, backed by Jacob Rees-Mogg; and the Scottish Greens'

candidate, Humza Yousaf, backed by Peter Murrell.

It might be funny, but this is really serious. We have 770,000 on an NHS waiting list, we have families struggling to put food on the table and pay their bills, and businesses are shutting down because of this Government's incompetence and anti-business agenda. At this time of national crisis, when people need a competent Government that is on their side, is this really the best that the SNP has to offer?

**The First Minister:** It is quite hard for me to imagine this but, if I was in the shoes of Anas Sarwar or Douglas Ross, what I would be more worried about than whatever is happening in the SNP leadership election campaign is why the only political game in town remains the SNP, and why I was lagging so far behind after 16 years of an SNP Government. That says that the people of Scotland continue to put their trust in us.

Why do they do that? Employment in Scotland is at its highest level, I think, on record, and unemployment is at its lowest level. In a very challenging time for our national health service, we are seeing an increase in the number of patients who are being treated and the longest waits are falling. We are seeing—

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** No strikes.

**The First Minister:** I hear Christine Grahame saying that there have been no strikes in our national health service, which makes us the only nation in the United Kingdom to have achieved that.

We continue to be the best-performing part of the UK outside of London when it comes to attracting inward investment into our country. We are lifting more children out of poverty than any other part of the UK is. That is why the Scottish people continue to trust the SNP in government. That is true today, and I believe that, no matter who succeeds me as First Minister, it will continue to be true for a long time to come, as we continue and complete the journey to Scotland becoming an independent country.

### Cabinet (Meetings)

**3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S6F-01855)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Tuesday.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** I am very grateful for that reply.

St Andrews Wine Company champions small and local producers. Its mission is to offer

interesting and lesser-known brands to its customers. Its owner, Peter, estimates that, because so few producers have signed up to the deposit return scheme, three quarters of his stock will become unavailable. All that the company will have left is what can be bought in a supermarket. It is a family-run business that is being thrown under the bus, and there are thousands more businesses like it. Jobs are on the line, and the scheme is starting to cause real harm.

Fergus Ewing, a loyalist of 50 years, has called the DRS "wilfully reckless". The First Minister's finance secretary, Kate Forbes, has called it "economic carnage". Government incompetence is undermining the very case for the DRS, which could massively reduce our waste and emissions, but only if it works.

This is a moment of real jeopardy. It cannot wait for the next First Minister, because irreversible business decisions are being made right now. Nicola Sturgeon calls it "opportunism"; I call it scrutiny, backed up by an avalanche of industry concerns. If the First Minister can halt the chaos of the national care service, why can she not pause this?

**The First Minister:** We are not halting progress on the national care service; we are taking time to receive the report from the lead committee in the Parliament and consider it. If we did anything else, Alex Cole-Hamilton and others would rightly be the first to criticise us for that.

As First Minister, I will continue to take all of my responsibilities very seriously for as long as I am in this job. One of those responsibilities is to ensure that my Government continues to engage with businesses on their concerns about the deposit return scheme or anything else, to address those concerns and to allay fears that businesses such as the one that was cited by Alex Cole-Hamilton have put forward. We will do that sensibly, responsibly and in a way that ensures that we can introduce a scheme that is necessary for and beneficial to our environment, just as many other countries have already done, and as the United Kingdom Government is about to do.

I think that that is what people expect from their Government on tough issues as well as on less tough issues. That is the approach that I have always taken to being First Minister, and I will continue to do so.

### Food Shortages

**4. Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask First Minister whether she will provide an update on the Scottish Government's response to on-going food shortages currently affecting Scotland. (S6F-01851)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We engage regularly with all the main retailers. We are aware that some are currently experiencing temporary disruption to certain off-season fresh vegetables. Some retailers have introduced a buying limit as a short-term preventative measure to avoid bulk buying and ensure that customers can get what they need. Retailers have provided assurances that there is currently enough stock available for customers if everyone continues to shop responsibly and that the situation is expected to improve week on week. Of course we are monitoring this closely.

Given the pressure on food and drinks supply chains that have been caused by Covid, Brexit and war in Ukraine, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands wrote to the United Kingdom Government last year to raise the cumulative impact of labour and skills shortages and rising costs. No response was received to that, so the cabinet secretary has written again, as recent events have clearly highlighted the vulnerability and importance of supply chains.

**Karen Adam:** Former chief executive of Sainsbury's Justin King has said:

"I hate to say it ... but it's a sector that has been hurt horribly by Brexit".

Liz Webster, chair of Save British Farming, said:

"The reason we have food shortages in Britain—and they don't have food shortages in Spain or anywhere else in the EU—is because of Brexit".

The views from industry are clear. The shortage of basic nutritional necessities is attributable to a deliberate act of Tory policy. Does the First Minister share my utter dismay that the Tories refuse to acknowledge and apologise for the fundamental harms they have visited on people?

**The First Minister:** Karen Adam is absolutely right, and the voices that she has quoted underline that. The food and drinks sector in Scotland, and indeed across the whole of the UK, has borne the brunt not just of Brexit but of the very hard Brexit that has been pursued by the UK Government, particularly through the loss of free trade and free movement.

Although it is the case that poor harvest conditions in Spain and Morocco are a key factor in some shortages, the situation is not helped by the UK Government's approach to Brexit, because of which our food and drinks sector has lost many of the benefits that it had when trading with the European Union. The loss of free trade has, for example, increased the additional paperwork that is required to import to the UK, and thus increased the cost of trade. I think that anybody who denies that is, frankly, not living in the real world.

Brexit was a mistake, and the way in which it has been pursued by the UK Government has compounded that error. It is, of course, one of the many reasons why the sooner Scotland is independent and able to rejoin the European Union, the better it will be for everyone.

### Schools (Bullying and Harassment)

**5. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister whether she will provide an update on what discussions she has had with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in relation to bullying and harassment in schools. (S6F-01869)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I am very clear—and I am sure that this view is shared by everyone across the chamber—that bullying and harassment anywhere, but particularly in schools, is completely unacceptable. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and I are committed to further work to help address that.

Just last week, Education Scotland published a thematic inspection report that we commissioned on the recording and monitoring of bullying in schools. We have since announced and commenced a review of the national anti-bullying guidance. Respectme, Scotland's anti-bullying service, is part of that work, and we have invited teachers, parents and young people's representatives to be involved in it as well.

Later this month, we will seek the advice of the teacher panel and the advisory group on relationships and behaviour in schools, to further inform our approach.

**Pam Gosal:** A pupil in my region has been subjected to repeated instances of bullying and violence, sometimes even involving weapons. The parents have complained to the school, the police, the council and even the ombudsman. They are running out of options.

On further investigation, the parents were appalled to find out that incidents of bullying had not been recorded. The response to a freedom of information request shows that underrecording of bullying is commonplace in our schools. This neglectful Scottish National Party Government is throwing pupils to the wolves. Does the First Minister acknowledge that underreporting of bullying incidents in schools is an issue, and will she act on the desperate pleas from parents and pupils by implementing an enforcement mechanism to ensure that schools are accurately reporting incidents?

**The First Minister:** First, it is important that instances of bullying are recorded properly and comprehensively, and that bullying is monitored. That is why, as I said in my initial answer, we commissioned a report on the recording and

monitoring of bullying in schools. Education Scotland published the report that was the result of that thematic inspection just last week. It is an important point, but one on which, as I have said, action is being taken.

Secondly, it is important to say that, although, obviously, I cannot comment on individual cases, the experience that was recounted by the member is unacceptable. It will also be the case that that will be repeated many times over in schools across the country. Bullying is unacceptable wherever it occurs, but we are talking here about schools and, given that it is young people who are in schools, it is particularly unacceptable there. We should have zero tolerance to it. I think that all of us would accept that it is not a new issue in our schools. However, the modern world, particularly the role of social media in the modern world, means that bullying often takes different forms, and very pernicious forms, today compared with some years ago.

The Scottish Government will continue to work closely with local government, recognising the lead responsibility of government, but we all have a responsibility. The *Daily Record* campaign, which I applaud, is very clear about that and the fact there is a role for social media companies. Frankly, there is a role for all of us, as adults in our own communities, to make sure that children and young people are safeguarded and respected.

This is a serious issue and one that I want to assure people in the chamber and the country that the Scottish Government takes extremely seriously.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Schools do not take responsibility for what happens to young people on their journeys to and from school, so what steps will the First Minister take to make sure that children are protected at that time, and what steps are the police taking to track down the videos of incidents—they are videoed from before the start of the attack, so they are obviously pre-planned—and hold everyone who is responsible to account?

**The First Minister:** Rhoda Grant is right and she gets to the heart of what is a societal problem, which therefore has to be addressed on a societal basis. Obviously, we are focusing a lot, rightly, on what happens in schools. It is important that we do that and that local government and individual schools focus on that, but of course schools cannot be responsible—certainly not solely responsible—for what happens outside schools.

The police, of course, have a key role to play and I know that they take that role very seriously. As I said in my previous answer, all of us, as adults in communities, have a responsibility and a role to play to make sure that children are properly

cared for and safeguarded. It is, in some ways, a complex problem, but we should not allow that to take us away from the collective responsibility that we have to tackle it. Government—national and local—has to be in the lead in that, but we all have a part to play and I am sure that all of us take that seriously.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The First Minister knows that I have deep concerns about the increase in violence in schools. It has always been there, but it has certainly increased since the pandemic. There is a lot of distressed behaviour in schools. However, teachers report that they are sick and fed up with having to pick up the pieces of that. They do not think that there are sufficient resources to be able to manage it, so, as part of the reviews that the First Minister has set out, will additional resources be available to help schools to cope with the crisis?

**The First Minister:** I pay tribute to Willie Rennie for the work that he has done on the issue. It has been very good and very important. I will give him a commitment that resources will be part of the consideration. The *Daily Record* has drawn attention to the need for funding to make sure that there are places for young people to go, but I know that Willie Rennie is particularly talking about resources in schools.

Teachers are often at the front line of the situation, particularly when bullying is happening in schools, and we must take account of that. However, that should not take away from the fact that this is not just about what happens in our schools; it is a wider issue about how young people are coping with the pressures of modern life, particularly over the past few years. Mental health support—another issue that Willie Rennie has raised often in the chamber—is an important part of that. However, making sure that those who work most closely with young people, which obviously includes teachers, have the right support and resources to do that job is an important part of it, and I will have further discussions with the education secretary, over my remaining few weeks in this post, about exactly that issue.

### **Hospital Discharge (Capacity in Care Homes)**

6. **Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking, in light of reports that individuals are unable to be discharged from hospital due to a lack of available spaces in care homes. (S6F-01864)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We have provided an additional £8 million to health and social care partnerships to secure provision of 300 extra interim care home beds so that places can be purchased above the national care home contract rate. That has resulted so far in 331

people being able to be discharged from hospitals to those placements, with a total of 581 people currently benefiting from an interim care placement.

As part of the work of our ministerial advisory group on health and social care pressures, we are supporting local systems to gain a better understanding of care homes data, and supporting partnerships to understand local availability and the suitability of care home places for people in their care.

Our plans for a national care service, to which I alluded earlier, represent the biggest public sector reform in Scotland since the Parliament was established. They will help to ensure consistency and fairness at a national level, with services being designed and delivered locally.

**Foysoyl Choudhury:** Last week, the Scottish Government issued refreshed guidance on hospital discharge to care homes. The “Guidance on Choosing a Care Home on Discharge from Hospital” policy states:

“Where the preferred choice(s) of care home is not immediately available the person will be required to make a temporary ... move to another home with a suitable vacancy to wait.”

My constituent John Findlay has progressive multiple sclerosis. He has been in hospital for seven months, and is desperate to get out and into a suitable care home. John is 58 years old, and many care homes will not admit people of that age, so the pool of places that he can go to is significantly reduced. The new guidance could see him forced into accepting a place either in a home that is very far away from his community and support network, or in a home with a very poor track record of care. Will the First Minister tell us how that is putting patients at the centre, and why people like John are denied their rights because of the Scottish Government’s failure to deal with social care?

**The First Minister:** Foysoyl Choudhury raises an important issue. I am happy to respond in more detail if he wants to send me the details of that individual case, but what I am about to say has general applicability.

First, no one should be denied their rights or forced into a place that is inappropriate for their needs. What the guidance seeks to do is, first, recognise that hospital is not the best place for any patient who is a delayed discharge, so being in another setting is better for them. Although partnerships obviously want to meet preferences, they also need to consider what the best place, relative to a hospital, for somebody would be. Individual preferences are important. However, the case that has been raised with me is about not just preference but need, given the condition involved.

That takes me on to another point. I referred to the work that is under way to gain a better understanding of care homes data. This is not just about the total number of places that are available but about the type of care that individual care homes are offering. These issues are complex but important and, as we continue to reform health and social care and better integrate it to ensure that people get the care that they need in the best place, we need to continue to grapple with those issues to get the right outcome.

That is a general response, but I am happy to amplify some of that in relation to the individual case of John—I think that that is the member’s constituent’s name—in order, I hope, to give some reassurance about the matters that have been raised with me.

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

### Benefits (Standard of Living)

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands (SNP):** The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the food bank network the Trussell Trust have stated that inadequate benefits are the main reason for a sharp increase in destitution and food bank use in recent months. Research has reportedly revealed that basic benefits that are given to low-income households are at least £140 a month below the real cost of food, energy and everyday items.

Does the First Minister share my view that history will record with shame how the Tories’ inaction and indifference has caused people in one of the richest countries in the world to face that dire standard of living?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I agree very much with Emma Roddick. I think that the Conservatives should be deeply ashamed of the impact of their welfare policies. We have known for a long time that the current United Kingdom Government benefits system is not fit for purpose. People across the country are paying the price for that every day in ways that Emma Roddick has pointed out.

Over many years, we have called for improvements. For example, there should be an immediate uplift to universal credit and other means-tested benefits, and we should see the scrapping of the unjust and cruel two-child limit and benefit cap. The latter two policies alone were singled out in a recent report by the Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe. The report said that the policies

“continue to exacerbate child poverty.”

For our part, we will continue to seek to do the right things through our social security system

and, in particular, the Scottish child payment, which is lifting children out of poverty at the same time as the policies of the UK Government push them deeper into poverty. If we were able to join up all those approaches and have all social security powers under the ambit of this Parliament, we could do so much more for the people who need our help most.

### Sex Offenders

**Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** A year ago, I asked about dozens of registered sex offenders being allowed to change their names. It turns out that it is not dozens but hundreds of sex offenders who are hiding their identities. People have no idea whether the person next door is a dangerous predator. Does Nicola Sturgeon agree that that is wrong, and will she outline what her Government intends to do about it?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I am happy to write to Russell Findlay or ask the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans to write to him again to provide details of the arrangements that are in place. We have well-established arrangements—not least the multi-agency public protection arrangements, or MAPPA, system—to ensure that the public have protections from registered sex offenders. There are requirements on people who change their name to give notification that they have done so, so it is not about people being able to hide.

I will, of course, happily remind Russell Findlay of the arrangements in a letter that I will arrange to have written to him.

### Legal Age of Marriage

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** This week, the legal age of marriage in England and Wales has increased to 18. The rise aims to prevent vulnerable children and young people from being forced into marriage. Scotland retains the legal age of marriage of 16. What evaluation has the Scottish Government made of the appropriateness of that age, in the light of concerns about forced marriage and coercion? Does the First Minister agree with the comments this week of Dr Marsha Scott of Scottish Women's Aid that marriage under 18 is a mechanism for abuse in the worst-case scenarios?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I have not seen Dr Marsha Scott's comments on that, but I have huge respect for her, and I always pay close attention to anything that she says. We are, of course, aware of the change of law in England and will continue to consider the implications for Scotland and the case for change. The relevant minister will keep the Parliament updated as those considerations progress.

### Energy Price Cap

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** Households across Scotland continue to face an incredibly challenging time at the moment. They will be rightly baffled as to why their energy bills are set to go up, despite energy prices falling. Does the First Minister agree that the Tory United Kingdom Government must now pass on the reduction in wholesale gas prices to consumers, bring down Westminster's cap on bills to £2,000 a year and devolve energy regulation powers to this Parliament? *[Interruption.]*

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I am bemused that Conservative members seem to think that it is not appropriate for the Parliament to consider issues such as the energy costs that the people of Scotland are having to pay right now. That is exactly the kind of issue that we should be discussing, and Paul McLennan is right to raise it.

The new price cap strengthens the case for the UK Government to reverse its plan to increase the guarantee for an average household from April. We estimate that such an increase would result in there being around 980,000 fuel-poor households in Scotland, which is a significant increase compared with estimates for this winter with the price cap set at £2,500. We have called on the UK Government to provide additional support, and we will continue to do so, because people need that support and they need it now.

### School Health and Wellbeing Surveys

**Meaghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** Yesterday, the results of the controversial school sex survey were released. The total participation rate for children and young people was 58.3 per cent in the local authorities that took part. Of those who were eligible to answer the questions relating to sexual activity, only a tiny fraction of school pupils answered. The data proves what I and other members said all along: our children and young people do not feel comfortable answering such invasive questions. Will the First Minister finally agree that those inappropriate questions should be removed from all future health and wellbeing surveys in our schools?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I think that those surveys are really important. We have just had exchanges in the chamber about the need to record and monitor instances of bullying. Because the—in my view, manufactured—controversy around the survey led to some local authorities pulling out of it, we did not get as much information on bullying from the survey as we might have wanted to.

We all need to be responsible and make sure that we gather information about the real-life experiences of young people that allows local

authorities, schools and national Government to take decisions about protecting their welfare and wellbeing. It is really important that we do that, and that we do it in a way—frankly—that avoids any temptation to get dragged into another Conservative culture war.

The member talks about “controversial” questions. Questions of that nature—which relate to smoking, alcohol, substance use and, yes, sexual health—have been included in health and wellbeing surveys for years. It is only recently that they have become politicised.

Questions about sexual health are asked in the equivalent surveys in England, where—in case the member has not noticed it—the Scottish National Party is not in government; another party is.

### Historical Forced Adoption

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** People affected by historical forced adoption have been campaigning for recognition, support and a formal apology for a very long time, and they have support from MSPs in every party in the Parliament. Is the First Minister—having heard their calls—considering making a formal apology and, if so, when?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I thank Monica Lennon for raising the issue, which I have commented on before in the chamber. I have expressed my huge sympathy with the calls for a formal apology. I have also—rightly—talked about the legal complexities that Government has to work through. We are actively considering a conclusion of that work right now. Although it is, of course, for the business bureau to timetable such matters, I am very hopeful that I will be able to give an indication of the outcome of that work while I am still First Minister.

### Shore Recycling Centre (Fire)

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I am sure that the First Minister will join me in offering the Parliament’s sincere condolences to the family and friends of all those impacted by the tragic fire at the Shore Recycling centre in Perth early on Tuesday morning. That devastating incident is deeply concerning, not least because it is the second fire in six months at the site.

In the days to come, our emergency services will attempt to establish the facts of the situation. Does the First Minister agree that, following Tuesday’s incident, there must be an investigation into the circumstances of the fire to ensure that such a tragedy does not happen again?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I extend my deepest sympathies to the family of the

individual who, sadly, passed away following the fire at the Shore Recycling plant in Perth.

Early on 28 February, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was alerted to reports of a large fire within the plant. It mobilised six fire appliances and specialist resources to tackle the fire, which involved approximately 200 tonnes of scrap material. It worked alongside partners to maintain safety on and off the site. The last appliance left at 9 pm last night, and the fire service will return for a routine check today.

I put on record my gratitude to our fire service and all who worked at the scene of the fire. The fire service confirmed that previous incidents resulted in on-site fire safety measures being reviewed. It initiated a joint investigation with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and Police Scotland. It would be inappropriate for me to comment further until that investigation has been concluded, but it is important that investigations take place.

### Public Libraries (Closures)

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Today is world book day. The First Minister is well known as a self-identified avid reader so, as she leaves office, how does she feel about being responsible for closing more public libraries than any of her predecessors?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I am proud of the support that the Scottish Government gives to libraries. Many libraries in my constituency and across the country had to close during the pandemic, but I have watched them reopen and become vital parts of local communities.

I will continue to support libraries, and I will continue to support everything associated with the wonderful world of books. Perhaps I even look forward to having a bit more time to read books in future.

## Point of Order

12:49

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance. Yesterday, Lorna Slater said that there were 2 billion containers in the deposit return scheme, representing 95 per cent of volume. Circularity Scotland, the scheme administrator, says that there are 3 billion containers. If the 2 billion figure is correct, is Biffa being paid to collect 1 billion containers that do not exist? If the 3 billion figure is correct, the volume registered would not be even close to 95 per cent.

Presiding Officer, are you willing to invite Lorna Slater to correct the *Official Report*, or to come to the chamber to explain where the missing 1 billion containers have gone?

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** In general, the content of members' contributions is a matter for members. However, I do expect that ministers should strive to respond to the specific detail of questions, wherever possible. It is certainly the case that a mechanism exists whereby members who become aware of an inaccuracy in any comment can correct the *Official Report* in that regard.

We will now move to members' business. There will be a brief pause to allow members to leave the chamber and to allow those in the public gallery who also wish to leave to do so.

## Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2023

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so quickly and quietly. I also ask those who are in the public gallery to leave quietly.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-07887, in the name of Kenneth Gibson, on eating disorders awareness week 2023. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. Members who wish to speak in the debate should press their request-to-speak buttons.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that Eating Disorders Awareness Week 2023 will take place from 27 February to 5 March; recognises that the focus of this year's Eating Disorders Awareness week is eating disorders in males; understands that around 1.25 million people in the UK of all ages, genders, and backgrounds have these illnesses, and that around one in four people with eating disorders are male; acknowledges the work of the organisation, Beat, which is the UK's Eating Disorder charity whose mission is to end the pain and suffering caused by eating disorders; notes that the work of this organisation through its national helpline, which is supported by funding from the Scottish Government as per the recommendations of the National Review of Eating Disorder Services, exists to encourage and empower people to get help quickly; recognises the work that has been undertaken by the National Review of Eating Disorder Services Implementation Group to develop an approach for taking forward the recommendations of the review; understands that the review will pave the way to more equitable, accessible and supportive services in Scotland; encourages the Scottish Government to continue to work with NHS boards and Beat to ensure that people needing treatment in the Cunninghame North constituency, and elsewhere, have the support that they require, and wishes Beat and all those involved in this year's awareness week every success in their efforts to heighten awareness of eating disorders and their impact on society.

12:55

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I am pleased to open this debate on eating disorders awareness week 2023, which takes place from 27 February to 5 March. I thank colleagues who supported my motion, allowing this important matter to be discussed in the chamber, and I thank those who will contribute, along with Beat, the United Kingdom's leading eating disorder charity. I also apologise for being unable to stay beyond the next speech, having completely forgotten a long-standing engagement relating to the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

Today, I honour the continued campaigning of my former MSP colleague Dennis Robertson, who tragically lost his daughter Caroline to anorexia nervosa in 2011, when she was only 18. Dennis co-chairs the Scottish Government's national

review of eating disorder services implementation group with Dr Charlotte Oakley. I am delighted to say that Charlotte is in the gallery today. That group was established to ensure that those suffering from eating disorders receive equitable, accessible and supportive care. Lived experience is invaluable as the group reviews current service provision in Scotland and implements new strategies to ensure that fast and effective treatment is available to all who suffer from eating disorders.

Eating disorders are often endured in secret and do not discriminate by age, gender or background. Of the 100,000 people in Scotland who suffer from eating disorders, one in four is male. Their symptoms often go unnoticed. It can be easy to assume that changes in eating habits or weight, or a fixation with body shape, happen because, “He loves working out,” or, “He is just a picky eater.” However, it is important to recognise that eating disorders are complex mental illnesses.

Raising awareness about the number of men who suffer from eating disorders is a central theme of this year’s awareness week. Beat hopes to shine a light on the differing experiences that men face—breaking gendered stereotypes to encourage males to obtain the support that is needed in order to recover.

In conjunction with this week’s theme, Beat launched the United Kingdom’s biggest survey to date on men’s experiences with eating disorders. Of those who took part, one in three had never accessed treatment, one in five had never spoken about their struggles, and four in five felt that raising awareness would help more men to get treatment sooner. Those results highlight the importance of encouraging men to seek support and, equally, the importance of high-quality treatment so that, when people find the courage to take vital steps towards recovery, the right help is available.

A supporter of Beat, Andy, has shared his route to understanding and overcoming his eating disorder. In his conversation with the charity, Andy said:

“the eating disorder does not discriminate ... it doesn’t care for intellect, qualifications or logic.”

Despite having a psychology degree, counselling qualifications and a robust understanding of mental health, Andy silently suffered from an eating disorder for 25 years. The disorder stayed with him through marriage, career progression and becoming a father. He revealed that, at its peak, it had cost him his

“mental health, confidence, self-esteem, employment”

and

“friendships”.

Andy contacted Beat last year, after looking into the support that was available. He said:

“I was heard. I was understood. I felt accepted, and human, the shame left me and the edge was taken off this huge burden.”

Since reaching out, Andy has joined an online support group that is supervised by Beat. Understanding that other men face the same burdens has been a key revelation in his recovery process and has allowed him to begin rebuilding and enjoying his life.

Dan, despite his love of football and boxing, developed anorexia nervosa in his late 20s. He has now shared his experience of overcoming societal stigmas to reach recovery. Due to stereotypes that are placed on eating disorders, he believes, he was undiagnosed for a long time, and he admitted that thoughts of having an eating disorder had never crossed his mind. While he was ill, Dan said, as far as he was concerned,

“men don’t get eating disorders, especially straight men and especially not anorexia”.

He did not know anyone else who had an eating disorder, so he knew of no reference point that might lead him to believe or accept that he needed help.

Due to family persistence, Dan visited his general practice, where he was listened to without judgment and given a referral to a specialist out-patient eating disorder service, which he reluctantly accepted. Throughout the years that he spent within that service, Dan met regularly with a therapist, a dietician and a doctor, who provided the highest level of support. Dan learned that he was not alone in battling anorexia. Speaking of the experience, he said:

“They genuinely celebrated my wins, picked me back up when I fell and even gave me that supportive kick up the backside when I needed it”.

Dan is now more than four years into recovery and, despite admitting that it was not an easy process, he has developed new hobbies and interests without the burden of his eating disorder overshadowing him.

Andy and Dan highlight how valuable our recovery services are. Denial and reluctance to seek help are feelings shared by both men and, no doubt, many other men whose health has been destroyed—like that of a far greater number of women—by an eating disorder. I hope that today’s debate and the campaigning that takes place throughout this week and the rest of the year will inspire others to seek assistance.

I am heartened by the Scottish Government’s commitment to delivering high-quality eating disorder recovery services, as is highlighted in its

“Mental Health Strategy: 2017-2027”. Its ambition to

“prevent and treat mental health problems with the same commitment, passion and drive”

as we all have for

“physical ... problems”

is key to building public confidence in our services and encouraging more people to use the help that is available.

Mental health spending has almost doubled since 2007, with Scottish ministers investing £290.2 million this year to tackle mental health, deliver psychological therapies, reduce waiting times and improve community-based mental health and wellbeing support for children, young people and adults. That funding will help to ensure that people who have an eating disorder receive the treatment and support that they need, when they need it, regardless of who they are, where they live or what type of eating disorder they have. I encourage anyone in Scotland who suffers from an eating disorder, or who knows someone with an eating disorder, to reach out for help.

I will end by returning to Andy’s story. He poignantly said:

“Eating Disorders do not discriminate, but neither do Beat ... and I know which one I’d rather have in my corner.”

Whether through opening up to a family member or friend, making an appointment with your GP or calling Beat’s helpline, support is available. Please reach out and grab it if you need it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Members will be aware that business resumes at 2 pm. A number of members wish to speak in the debate—there is a lot of interest—therefore, I ask members to limit their speeches to the four minutes that they have been allocated. That would be really helpful.

13:00

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the debate, which allows us again to raise awareness of eating disorders. I congratulate Kenneth Gibson on securing it. He highlighted well the issues that surround eating disorders. Around 1.25 million people across the UK and about one in 50 people in Scotland live with an eating disorder, and the number increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated the situation, with a reported increase of 86 per cent in referrals to specialists between 2019 and 2020.

There is much discussion about what causes a person to have an eating disorder. Eating disorders affect people of any age, gender, ethnicity or background. Research has shown that there is a link between eating disorders and

depression, low confidence and low self-esteem. It is important to remember that such disorders are not all about food but are about feelings as well. One of Beat’s key asks concerns social media. We know that social media can be the cause of eating disorders, and we need to ensure that people use it safely. I thank Beat for the work that it is doing on that, and I encourage everyone to look at its website, which is easy to navigate and comprehensive.

In March 2021, the Scottish Government completed a national eating disorder services review. The review’s report includes a total of 15 ambitious recommendations that are focused on ensuring that everyone affected by eating disorders receives timely and appropriate care and support. The recommendations include establishing a lived experience panel; better co-ordination of national activity and data collection; ensuring the national availability of self-help resources, which should be available to everyone at any stage in life; and a focus on early diagnosis with the aim of prevention. It is welcome that an implementation group was set up to review timescales and the cost of implementing the recommendations and that three sub-groups have been created within the implementation group. I would welcome an update from the minister on the implementation of those recommendations.

I contacted the dietetic team from NHS Dumfries and Galloway. The team has a dietician who works specifically with patients who are living with, or at risk of developing, an eating disorder. I heard that, because of the rurality of Dumfries and Galloway, some people who are at risk of developing an eating disorder might not be picked up as early or as easily as they could be and might be reluctant to access support because of the travel involved in attending appointments. Although that situation has improved with virtual appointments, there still exists an issue for people in rural areas with accessing eating disorder support services, so I ask the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care to ensure that rural areas are included in the approach moving forward.

I welcome the Scottish Government’s investment of £120 million in the mental health recovery and renewal fund with a focus on improved support for mental health in primary care settings and enhanced community support. I also welcome its increased investment in Beat, which has received more than £400,000 from the Scottish Government to support carers, adults and young people across Scotland who are coping with eating disorders. The funding follows the national review of eating disorder services in Scotland, which generated recommendations for treatment across the country. Those recommendations will be taken forward by the

eating disorder services implementation group, which is responsible for planning and delivering improvements to eating disorder services.

I am conscious of the time, and I know that there are other speakers. I welcome the debate and thank the minister for the work that has been done so far and Kenneth Gibson for bringing the debate to the chamber.

13:04

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate and congratulate Kenneth Gibson on securing it.

I apologise to you, Deputy Presiding Officer, the members and the minister, as I will not be able to stay for the full debate because I have a pressing engagement to attend to.

As we have heard, 2023's eating disorders awareness week goes from 27 February to 5 March. Eating disorders in males, on which this year's week focuses, are underreported. As the motion rightly highlights, although there are approximately 1.25 million people living with an eating disorder in the United Kingdom, around 25 per cent of them are male, which equates to around 300,000 individuals. Indeed, the National Centre for Eating Disorders confirms that it is hard to know just how many men are suffering from the condition at any one time. It is also hard to know what proportion of newly reported cases are male related. There could be many reasons for that. Perhaps, over the years, we have been overly sensitised by the media in relation to weight loss in individuals. Indeed, there are many who are likely to talk about the complexities of age. When it comes to dealing with the complexities and anxieties about shape, size and weight, those issues come into the equation.

Women often talk about food and dieting much more in relation to weight loss than men do, whereas men with eating problems often hide their difficulties by exercising—or over-exercising—when they visit the gym. Men are more likely to avoid seeking help, because of peer pressure. It is also widely known that, historically and across many cultures, men have been celebrated for how active they are and what they can conquer, while women have been valued for their appearance. That has changed as the culture has changed, and it is no longer the case, but there is still a complexity around media involvement and the shift that relates to all ages and genders.

Taking health orientation as a benchmark, it would seem that men are becoming increasingly involved in this area. The number of men with gym memberships has greatly increased, and cosmetic surgery has even become more apparent in

males, along with dieting. There are changes that are taking place, and we all acknowledge that.

I have spoken about eating disorders previously in the chamber, and I have talked about Beat's campaign, sock it to eating disorders. I also spoke in a similar debate last year, which was secured by Emma Harper, as I have an awareness of what is taking place and how it is managed. We have to understand and acknowledge conditions such as anorexia, bulimia, binge eating and other disorders.

In recent years, the support of MSPs has helped to increase the political profile of eating disorders. However, there is still much work to do to ensure that we encapsulate what is going on. I pay tribute to organisations such as the Scottish Eating Disorders Interest Group, Diabetes Scotland, Beat and our national health service, all of which provide vital support and ensure that vulnerable individuals are supported and looked after.

We must encourage and empower people to take action, no matter how long their symptoms have been present or what they have dealt with.

In conclusion, eating disorders are a terrible affliction for many individuals, male and female, and I encourage everyone to get the message out about them, whether or not a campaign is taking place, to ensure that as many people as possible, as often as possible and wherever possible, get that message.

13:08

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I start by thanking the member for Cunninghame North for bringing this important issue to the chamber.

There is often a tendency to focus on anorexia or bulimia in discussions about eating disorders, but it is important to stress that there is a broad spectrum of these illnesses, which can impact on anyone, of any background. That is why I welcome that, this year, the focus of eating disorder awareness week is on eating disorders among men. Issues around eating disorders are often discussed in relation to women, but the reality is that approximately one in four people with eating disorders are men—increasingly, young men.

A recent UK survey on men with eating disorders, which was undertaken by the excellent charity Beat, found that half of those who responded did not realise that someone like them could develop a disorder of that kind, with 76 per cent of respondents indicating that access to specialist services must be improved. That has only been exacerbated by the tendency of social media to be curated in such a way that men and boys are increasingly feeling peer pressure with regard to their body image. Perhaps the minister

could respond to that specifically in his reply, particularly with regard to how we encourage positive role models and the use of social media in a positive way to reinforce messages that will provide greater reassurance to young men about how they can manage their diet and their body. We should be pursuing that as a public health policy.

In 2021, the Scottish Government published its national eating disorder services review, which included recommendations that could go some way to improving access to those services in Scotland. However, I understand that, regrettably, those recommendations remain to be fully implemented, despite increasing demand for specialist help. Indeed, the number of people in Scotland with an eating disorder who were reaching a stage of their diagnosis at which they required admission for in-patient treatment rose to 233 in 2020, compared with 125 in 2019. That was a stark increase.

However, it is likely that the reality of eating disorders in Scotland is, sadly, even more bleak than the picture that is painted by that statistic on hospital admissions alone. The data that we collect on the prevalence of eating disorders in Scotland is poor. Only data on people with eating disorders who have been admitted as in-patients to hospitals is collected centrally. That is another symptom of our hospital-centric national health system. We need to push more of that activity out into communities and focus much more on prevention.

If we had central data on every person in Scotland who has received an eating disorder diagnosis, we could have an even clearer understanding of how many people are impacted by disordered eating, which could inform the structure, capacity and design of NHS services so that they could be scaled and adjusted accordingly.

Eating disorders are deadly illnesses. Indeed, eating disorders such as anorexia claim the most lives of any mental illnesses, so we must ensure that the health service is adequately resourced to treat them as such. It is estimated that, at present, people can wait as long as three and a half years to start treatment after their illness begins. That delay is potentially fatal for many, as recovery is much more likely for patients who receive medical intervention early, when behaviour can be adapted before it becomes too ingrained.

The pandemic has, of course, had an undeniable impact on the efficiency of our national health service. However, as is often said, politics is about choices. I urge the Government to reconsider its freeze on mental health service funding so that eating disorder services can meet the growing demand for specialist support.

This is the third year running in which we have rightly debated in the Parliament eating disorder awareness week. We must ensure that we do not just talk about why people with eating disorders deserve better; we must deliver clear and measurable solutions to that major public health concern.

13:12

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I, too, thank Kenneth Gibson for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

As the motion highlights—and as other members have highlighted—approximately 1.25 million people in the UK suffer from some form of eating disorder. However, despite the widespread nature of the issue, there is still a lack of understanding among the public of how prevalent those illnesses are, how to spot signs that someone is suffering and how to help.

The prevalence of eating disorders among males is even less understood. It comes as a surprise to many that males account for one in four of all those who suffer from an eating disorder. Therefore, it is positive that the focus of this year's eating disorder awareness week is on breaking the taboo of male eating disorders.

The importance of breaking that taboo is clear. George, who is a young man with an eating disorder, described that importance. He said:

"Finding out I had an eating disorder was actually a relief. I'd spent five years being incredibly unwell. Because I was a man, no one even considered it."

Across Scotland, the impact of eating disorders is only growing, and the problem has been exacerbated by the mental and emotional impact of the pandemic. That is borne out by the alarming increase in the number of children suffering with the condition who are admitted to Scottish hospitals. Between 2019 and 2021, that number increased by a staggering 86 per cent. It is clear that cases of eating disorders are on the rise, and the impact on children and young people in particular must be recognised and addressed.

A key part of tackling the rise of eating disorders and supporting those who suffer from them is ensuring that we do not do anything to inadvertently make things more difficult for those who are already affected. The Scottish Liberal Democrats have concerns about the impact of the Scottish Government's plans to make calorie labelling on menus mandatory in food outlets, such as businesses, takeaways, restaurants and hospitals, as part of Scotland's obesity strategy. A survey by Beat, which is the UK's eating disorder charity, found that 95 per cent of people affected by eating disorders feel that calories on menus will negatively impact them. Many expressed concerns

that calorie labelling would increase feelings of fear and guilt for those who are currently unwell, encourage behaviours such as restrictive eating, and make recovery more difficult.

**Emma Harper:** My understanding is that some restaurants are making non-caloried menus available for people if they book a table, for instance. That might help to counter the issue of calories on menus.

**Beatrice Wishart:** I thank the member for that helpful information. However, more than half of the survey respondents said that they would go out to eat less frequently if such legislation was introduced in Scotland. Elsie, who suffers from an eating disorder, said:

“It took me years to unlearn calorie counting and to find joy in food again—to have it displayed so openly, to potentially hear friends discuss it right in front of me, would be very triggering and harmful.”

Dr Stephen Anderson, a consultant psychiatrist in eating disorders, has said:

“There is no good evidence that this kind of calorie labelling is effective in reducing obesity.”

The Liberal Democrats are therefore calling on the Government to scrap those plans.

Good work is being done to support those struggling with eating disorders. Just yesterday, I read about a young woman, Molly Smith, who has started her own podcast exploring disordered eating, in the hope that it can break down stigmas and misconceptions. Molly says that she wishes that she had had access to something similar when she was younger. Work such as hers is vital in helping those who are struggling and helping others to realise when they need help.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent work of Beat in raising awareness and providing much needed advice and support to those suffering from an eating disorder and those close to them. I also echo the calls for the Scottish Government to work closely with NHS boards around the country to ensure that no one is left without the help and support that they need.

13:16

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I, too, thank Kenny Gibson for bringing this important annual debate to the chamber.

Eating disorders are serious mental health issues that affect an estimated 1.25 million people in the UK. Eating disorders can affect anyone, of any age, gender, ethnicity or background. They have severe impacts on individuals and their families. Types of eating disorders include binge eating disorder, bulimia, anorexia, other specified feeding or eating disorder and avoidant-restrictive food intake disorder. Eating disorders have high

mortality rates, with anorexia having the highest, and with one in six people with binge eating disorder attempting to end their life.

The theme of this year’s eating disorder awareness week is eating disorders among men. Unfortunately, there has not been a lot of research on that. However, an estimate based on the existing research suggests that about one in four of those with an eating disorder are men.

Men face increased stigma when it comes to eating disorders, and the current research is not representative enough, as it focuses mainly on white, cisgender men, so the true number might be much higher. Stigma is undoubtedly a factor in the low representation of men in such studies. For many, the perception that eating disorders affect only women and girls will undoubtedly prevent people from recognising their symptoms in the first instance.

Many of the signs and symptoms that we have spoken about in recent years or those that are reported do not align with the symptoms that many men might suffer. Not knowing that their symptoms are a problem, let alone that they might be a sign of an eating disorder, will prevent people from seeking help. Those who know that they might have an issue might not seek help for fear of perceptions of their problems and the associated stigma.

Beat’s website has this quote from a man sharing his experience:

“I feel like eating disorders are often spoken about in relation to women. I didn’t expect that this would happen to me. When I initially developed an eating disorder, I didn’t know I had one. I didn’t exactly fit the common stereotype, and even if I did, I was in complete denial”.

As Emma Harper and others have said, social media is one of Beat’s areas of focus. Social media has a huge part to play in this and, as someone who loves a good TikTok scroll before bed, I know that the sheer number of videos—often sponsored videos or adverts—that promote different diets, weight loss and fitness regimes is enormous. That is not to say that such videos in and of themselves are harmful, but what strikes me is the number of them and the often conflicting information.

**Paul Sweeney:** The member makes an important point about the pervasiveness of social media among young people in particular, including boys. Does she agree that the Government could consider a measure such as accreditation for certain social media content creators that reassure young people and provide them with good-quality advice, so that young people can be assured that they are getting good-quality, evidenced information?

**Gillian Mackay:** That could certainly be looked at.

As members on all sides of the chamber have acknowledged, eating disorders are a societal problem. I would like us to look at all the different places where we could provide young people with nutritional information. We could certainly look at including such information as part of personal and social education, so that young people develop those habits early in life and cannot be influenced by the misinformation that we see on social media.

However, there is no easy solution to the issue. I remember growing up in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when diet culture was at its height. To a certain extent, even though attitudes move on and there is now more of a mainstream focus on being body positive, we have not got rid of that toxic diet culture. In a way, it rolls around every new year, when the goal—I have done this myself—is to lose weight rather than eat better and look after yourself. I cannot imagine how triggering that must be for people who have an eating disorder.

I realise that I am rapidly running out of time. Once again, I thank Kenny Gibson for bringing this important debate to the chamber, and I thank Beat for its continuing work.

13:21

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I congratulate my colleague Kenny Gibson on his motion and on securing time today for us to debate eating disorders. This afternoon's discussion of how eating disorders can affect men and boys has already been valuable.

When I was listening to Beatrice Wishart, I was thinking that 25 per cent of 1.2 million is significant enough, but if there are men and boys who are not being diagnosed or who do not consider that they might have an eating disorder, the true number could, as Gillian Mackay said, be even higher. The expectations that are placed on young women and girls, of which I have experience, will also have a negative impact on men and boys, as they may think that body image is a female issue.

I am grateful to Beat for providing a briefing ahead of the debate. I am aware that Beat recently actively supported a steering group in Shetland, in my region of the Highlands and Islands, that was aimed at supporting sufferers in the isles, following the recommendations from the Scottish Government's national review of eating disorder services. Eating disorders can affect people of any gender at any age, wherever they live. However, Beat's research into men and eating disorders showed that half of the respondents to its survey did not think that someone like them could develop an eating disorder.

It is quite hard—as I know, because I tried in preparation for the debate—to find support groups and specific information for people living in many of the communities, especially island communities, that I represent. I hope that the minister will be able to provide an update on the timescale for implementing the review recommendations, in particular on the creation of the national network.

As with so many things, it all comes back to understanding and acceptance. I have heard so many stories from friends and constituents about the specific incident that they call to mind when they talk about a time when their disorder developed or resurfaced. They talk about a family member calling them fat, or praising them for being skinny, sometimes when they were really young bairns. They talk about being bullied at school or even as an adult, and dismissed or mocked for their size—not understood or accepted, just othered.

We know that malicious actors online can target people who have mental health issues with posts and adverts that are aimed at creating eating disorders or making them worse. Although dealing with much of that is not in the gift of the Scottish Government, I question whether it is ever appropriate for people to be able to pay to target folk with online advertising based on protected characteristics. I am aware that those who run gambling adverts, adverts that take advantage of impulsive spending and adverts that aim to trigger suicidal feelings, harmful eating or other feelings relating to mental health issues can pay to target people whom algorithms have identified as possibly having a mental health issue.

However, it is not just anonymous accounts online that can cause people such distress and harm. We could all do with being more aware of how commenting on someone's weight, even if we mean it in a nice way, can trigger dangerous feelings and habits. There is no need to tell people that you think they are too fat or that they look a lot better now that they have lost weight. They might not have lost it in a healthy way, or they might be really struggling with the weight loss. They might have lost it because of illness, stress or bereavement, or something else that they could do without a reminder of.

The fact that many people developed eating disorders over lockdown, or their eating disorders became more of a problem for them, demonstrates the link between eating disorders and anxiety, trauma and co-morbidities with other mental health issues. Those are all situations that any of us could find ourselves in, and we never know when that might be, so being considerate of how our words and actions may affect people with eating disorders benefits everyone.

In the meantime, if anyone has been listening to the debate and has found it difficult, I encourage them to contact Beat, which can be contacted on a live web chat. Beat's phone number is 0808 801 0432, and it also has an email address.

13:25

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):**

I thank Kenneth Gibson for securing this important debate on eating disorders awareness week. I take this opportunity to thank Beat, which has representatives in the public gallery, for its exceptional work raising awareness around eating disorders and offering vital services to those who are suffering.

I will also take this opportunity to thank those who take the courageous steps to speak about their experiences, raising awareness and informing decision makers across the chamber of this cruel, devastating and complex mental illness, so that we can work together on improving services and lives for those who are suffering.

When it comes to supporting those with eating disorders, I believe that we are largely on the same page across the chamber. Today, given the time, I will focus my remarks on calorie labelling on menus, given the Scottish Government's ambition to incorporate calorie content into menus in restaurants, cafes and takeaways across Scotland.

Having formerly worked with the healthy living award, I am aware that the benefits of a balanced diet cannot be overestimated. From our fruit and vegetable intake to high-fibre foods and protein, nutritional value is paramount. Take the humble avocado. About 60 per cent of its fat is monosaturated fats, which research suggests help to protect against heart disease and lower blood pressure. Avocados provide an excellent source of potassium, folate and fibre, all of which benefit the heart and the cardiovascular system. However, having calories on menus ignores all of that vital nutritional information, instead focusing on that one metric—calories. As the minister is aware, there is very little evidence that having calories on menus manages obesity in the long term.

There is much that we agree on in this area. I welcome the views from the Scottish National Party benches at Westminster earlier this week. Carol Monaghan, the SNP MP for Glasgow North West, stated:

"We also need the removal of calories from menus; their inclusion was aimed at tackling obesity, but unfortunately the message is hitting the wrong people."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 28 February 2023; Vol 728, c 235WH.]

That view was echoed by her colleague, Patricia Gibson, SNP MP for North Ayrshire and Arran.

Calories on menus are a blunt instrument. I am aware that, in December, representatives of Beat met the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport, Maree Todd, to hand over an open letter with 3,500 signatures. I would like to hear clarity from the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care in his response, explaining why the Scottish Government is so resistant to taking an evidence-based approach to the policy. It feels like the Scottish Government is sidelining the views of those with lived experience of an eating disorder. The minister knows that, for individuals suffering or recovering from eating disorders, the policy could cause immense harm.

A 2017 study found that, when calorie labelling was on menus, participants with anorexia nervosa ordered significantly fewer calories for hypothetical meal choices, while participants with bulimia nervosa ordered significantly more calories. We also know that calorie labelling on menus is very likely to be ineffective in improving public health.

I urge the Scottish Government to halt the policy, or at the very least pause the legislation, until further research is released. For all those who suffer with eating disorders, I urge the minister to listen to the 3,500 signatories and put a stop to calories on menus.

13:29

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** In the interests of time, I will try not to repeat points that other members have made. As my colleague Paul Sweeney stated, Scottish Labour supports the aims and objectives of eating disorders awareness week 2023, with this year's focus on eating disorders in men.

To better understand these complex mental illnesses and put gender stereotypes to bed, it is right that we applaud Beat for launching the UK's biggest survey to date on men's experiences with eating disorders. I acknowledge the work that has been undertaken on raising awareness and bringing people with lived experience together, and on advancing the care of people with eating disorders.

As we heard, the statistics are stark. I will not go over them again, but we know that, tragically, one in four people who experience an eating disorder are men, and one in five of those men report never having discussed those struggles, which is shocking. That acts as a reminder to us all that eating disorders are prominent and serious. Eating disorders still have a taboo around them that means that men in particular feel that they cannot speak out.

As Beat has indicated, it is essential that we take seriously our role as members in raising awareness, fighting for funding for research and

scrutinising the Government in delivering the full implementation of the 2021 national review of eating disorder services, which includes 15 ambitious recommendations. Like other members, I would be interested to hear the minister's response to the review. I hope that the minister will answer some of those points in his closing remarks, particularly the group's conclusions from September 2022, which recommended a national eating disorder network. When will he oversee the implementation of those recommendations?

Furthermore, the 2021 national review of eating disorder services highlighted a lack of training and education on eating disorders for healthcare workers in Scotland. I spent many years working in the NHS as a dietician as part of the allied health professions team, so I know only too well the importance of raising awareness of those conditions and disorders and of training future healthcare professionals.

It is clear from members' speeches that we all take the issue very seriously. The research work and contributions made by charities, experts and others are important, but there is more to do. With cross-party support, which we seem to have in the chamber today, we can work together and address the concerns of individuals, charities and others across the country. I look forward to hearing the minister's remarks on the issue.

13:33

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** I welcome the annual debate to mark eating disorders awareness week. We have been having the debate for many more than three years now, Mr Sweeney, and I pay tribute to Dennis Robertson, who kicked off these debates. It allows us to raise awareness about eating disorders and the terrible impact that they can have on those who are diagnosed and on their family and friends.

I thank Kenny Gibson for lodging the motion this year, and Emma Harper, who lodged the motion a couple of years in a row before that. The debate focuses our minds on how significant the subject is. We know that the past few years have been incredibly difficult for everyone, including for people with disordered eating and those diagnosed with an eating disorder.

I assure all members in the chamber this afternoon that the Scottish Government continues to work closely with NHS boards, local authorities and third sector organisations such as Beat to ensure that people who require support for an eating disorder have access to the right care and treatment. I extend my thanks and appreciation to everyone across the country who works day in and

day out to support the recovery of people with an eating disorder and their families.

As we have heard, the theme of this year's awareness week is eating disorders in men. Beat believes that around one in four people who develop an eating disorder are men. It is clear from its recent survey that more needs to be done in that regard. Mr Gibson mentioned Andy and Dan. The reality is that we probably all know an Andy or a Dan, but we do not know that they are suffering from an eating disorder. We need to get awareness right, we need to change attitudes and we need to reduce stigma further, so that no one is afraid to come forward for help.

Over the past three years, we have taken significant actions to ensure that those who require support for an eating disorder can receive timely access to appropriate treatment. That has included providing further funding to NHS services and the third sector, working with those at the heart of our services to deliver the recommendations from the national review of eating disorder services.

Since the publication of the report of the national review in 2021, we have made positive progress in delivering the review's short-term recommendations and in the planning to deliver the remaining recommendations.

In 2021, in response to the national review, I established an implementation group to support us in delivering the recommendations. That group of dedicated individuals has worked hard to identify priority areas on which we should focus our resources. That has included developing quality standards for eating disorders and mapping out the delivery of longer-term improvements to services through a national eating disorder network.

The group will be publishing its final report in the coming weeks, providing an update on the progress that we have made so far in delivering the national review's 15 recommendations. The report will also outline our next steps and the actions that we are taking this year.

Over the next year, key progress will be made to support improvements to eating disorder services. The quality standards will be consulted on this spring, with the intention to publish those by the end of 2023. Recruitment for a national eating disorder lived experience panel has already started, with panel meetings commencing in mid-April.

To improve data around eating disorders, we will be undertaking an NHS benchmarking deep dive on eating disorder services, which will provide us with an up-to-date baseline position on services across NHS boards to inform future policy development and resourcing.

An absolute priority over the next six months is the establishment of a national eating disorders network, which will support the delivery of the work that I have outlined and the remaining recommendations from the national review.

Additionally, we will continue to provide funding to NHS boards to ensure that those accessing specialist support for an eating disorder can access the support that they require. This year, we allocated £46 million via the mental health outcomes framework to continue delivering improvements in child and adolescent mental health services—CAMHS—psychological therapies, eating disorders and neurodevelopmental services for children and young people.

I turn now to some of the most important issues that members have brought up in the debate. I start with calorie counting, which was mentioned by Beatrice Wishart, Maurice Golden and Emma Harper. The Scottish Government takes eating disorders extremely seriously, and we will take the views that have been expressed fully into account. We have been engaging with Beat and other organisations, and we will continue to do so. We have been engaging with a wider range of key stakeholders on this work so that we get it absolutely right. I want to ensure that we do our best here. We will soon publish an independent analysis of responses to the consultation on the issue. We need to take that evidence-based approach that Mr Golden mentioned.

Social media was a feature of most speeches, including those of Ms Mackay, Mr Sweeney and Ms Harper. There is a great opportunity in the UK Government's Online Safety Bill but, unfortunately, it keeps clawing back on all of that. That is, quite frankly, not good enough. As a Government, we have been investing, particularly in young people's organisations, to highlight the difficulties with using social media and talk about avoiding them. However, we need the UK Government to move further on the Online Safety Bill in relation to not just eating disorders but suicide prevention and self-harm prevention.

**Paul Sweeney:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Kevin Stewart:** I will take Mr Sweeney's intervention if I am allowed to, Presiding Officer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please be brief, Mr Sweeney.

**Paul Sweeney:** I remember the iconic Health Education Board for Scotland adverts in the 1990s and 2000s, when I was young. They were very effective in pushing public health messages, but that approach has, sadly, fallen away in recent years. Will the minister consider using targeted

social media advertising by the Government to reinforce positive messages?

**Kevin Stewart:** We have been doing that but not necessarily through the Government. For example, we have provided resources to the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Scottish Children's Parliament for the Mind Yer Time web resource, which goes into the subject of social media in depth, highlighting the issues and giving young folk advice on screen time and sleep, and the impacts on body image and mental wellbeing. I think that having young people speaking to young people is probably better than having Government speaking to young people, but I am willing to consider all of that as we move forward.

Emma Harper made a very important point about rural services, and Beatrice Wishart and Emma Roddick mentioned rural and island communities. We have commissioned directors of e-health to work with others, including Public Health Scotland, to improve data from all over Scotland, but we are also looking at how we can deliver better in our rural and island communities. We have to make sure that the services that we provide are for all of Scotland.

Presiding Officer, I know that I have gone over my time, so I will finish. I again thank Kenneth Gibson for lodging his motion and I reiterate my support for and thanks to the staff across Scotland who have been working tirelessly to care for those with an eating disorder. I pay tribute to Dennis Robertson for the work that he has done and to Charlotte Oakley for her work in jointly chairing the implementation group with him.

We all still have work to do to deliver on recommendations from the national review. I assure all members in the chamber that ensuring that we improve support for those with an eating disorder is a top priority for me and for the Government.

13:42

*Meeting suspended.*

14:00

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Education and Skills

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

#### Swimming Lessons

1. **Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it has taken to encourage local authorities to provide all primary school children with the opportunity to access swimming lessons. (S6O-01948)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** We have been working with Scottish Swimming, Education Scotland, sportscotland and Scottish Water to pilot bespoke interventions and approaches within local areas to provide opportunities for more children to become confident, safer and competent swimmers. I recognise the importance of ensuring that all children have equal opportunities to access swimming lessons, regardless of their families’ social or economic circumstances. Therefore, inclusion is central to our approach, and there will be a specific focus on targeting areas within quintile 1 of the Scottish index of multiple deprivation.

**Fulton MacGregor:** In a recent poll of more than 1,000 people in Scotland, 93 per cent of respondents agreed that all children should learn to swim, and 90 per cent agreed that learning to swim is an important part of every child’s education. What further action does the cabinet secretary think that local authorities—including mine, North Lanarkshire Council—can take to ensure that every primary school pupil goes to secondary school having had the opportunity to learn to swim?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** A number of local initiatives are in place across Scotland that help to promote learning to swim. The Scottish Swimming learn to swim framework, which seeks to help children become safe and competent swimmers by developing a consistent structure and set of quality standards for lesson providers, is delivered by 37 partners in 162 pools across Scotland. The framework is already delivered by the main community learn to swim providers in 25 out of 32 local authority areas, and it is also provided in a further two local authority areas, albeit not by the

main community learn to swim providers. Progress is being made within two further local authority areas towards delivering the framework in 2023. The active schools network also plays an important role in supporting local swimming clubs to link to schools.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There are a couple of supplementary questions. They will need to be brief, as will the responses.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** According to Scottish Swimming, more than four in 10 children leave primary school in Scotland unable to swim. We all know the positive impact that swimming can have on physical and mental health. We all understand about the ability to swim promoting inclusion, about learning away from the classroom and about swimming being an important life skill. In fact, I would include the ability to swim in relation to the attainment gap. Councils are at breaking point and are being forced to consider the most extreme budget cuts, including cuts to free swimming. Does the cabinet secretary agree that ensuring that our children can swim is an investment? What more will the Scottish Government do to make sure that all children get that opportunity?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Mr Whittle raises an important point about the physical and mental health benefits of swimming. In my original answer to Fulton MacGregor, I pointed out the importance that the learn to swim programme places on ensuring that children who are from the most deprived communities in Scotland in particular are able to take swimming lessons. We are determined to continue to work on promoting equality of access.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** My constituents, the Spiers family, have been campaigning for better water safety in Scotland for the past seven years, following the tragic death of their son Christopher in the River Clyde in 2016. Even competent swimmers can be vulnerable to injury or death in the water. Does the Scottish Government agree that more engagement with local authorities is required in order to establish easy access to water safety training and education across Scotland?

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

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I thank the member for bringing up that important expansion of the topic. Water safety education and drowning prevention are exceptionally important. It is not just about having confident swimmers but about the dangers of cold water shock, for example. That is also included in the work that Water Safety Scotland and Education Scotland are continuing to do.

### Colleges and Universities (Funding)

#### 2. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether current funding for colleges is fair, when compared to the funding received by universities. (S6O-01949)

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** The Scottish Government values the tertiary education sector, with each part making a crucial and unique contribution to Scotland. The 2023-24 budget allocates nearly £2 billion to colleges and universities, which continues the trend of a year-on-year increase of that budget in cash terms.

The college sector has been allocated an increased resource and capital budget of more than £30 million for 2023-24, at a time when public finances are significantly constrained, which demonstrates our commitment to the sector. The college sector resource budget will be increased by 3.8 per cent compared to this financial year, and as compared to a 2.5 per cent uplift for universities.

**John Mason:** I agree that both colleges and universities are very important. However, some—not all—universities are sitting on considerable reserves of money, while some colleges are really struggling and are trying to reach the hardest-to-reach people, both younger and older, in our communities. Does the minister not think that we should perhaps be reskewing the funding a little bit away from universities and towards colleges?

**Jamie Hepburn:** As John Mason recognised in his question, the position across universities is not entirely uniform, so we must make sure that we continue to support our universities to be sustainable.

In relation to the core of John Mason's question, I refer back to the figures that I just gave. We have given the tertiary sector a £46 million resource uplift this year, which we have weighted towards colleges: there is £26 million for colleges and £20 million for universities. If we consider the capital allocation, the increase for colleges is a direct result of our taking the decision to shift some of that resource from universities. We are undertaking what we can to make sure that we sustain the sector.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is a lot of interest in the question and a number of members wish to ask supplementaries. I want to get them all in, but they will need to be brief, as will the responses.

**Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** The minister talked about additional funding for colleges but failed to mention that colleges need

that money to support additional rounds of voluntary severance or to potentially reduce the risk of compulsory severance—the situation is that bad. Can the minister guarantee that any additional funding will be flexible and for colleges to use at their discretion? If he cannot do that, will he tell the chamber what his spending priorities for the funding are?

**Jamie Hepburn:** Pam Gosal referred to the additional resource. We are in a period where we need to look ahead and ensure that our college sector is responding to the priorities of our society and economy. That is what that resource is there to do. We are also engaged in a wider discussion about how we can empower and provide more flexibilities to the college sector more generally, so that colleges can continue to respond within the resource that they have already been allocated. That is my key priority for college resource.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** College principals are acting today on the basis of a real-terms cut, because the £26 million in funding that the minister is talking about is not available to them and they do not know what they are allowed to use it for. It is caught between the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government, and there is no clarity. Can the minister today provide clarity on what that money can be spent on?

**Jamie Hepburn:** That money will be spent on exactly what I have just said—on making sure that the college sector is able to continue to be responsive to the needs of local communities, our economy and society. The precise application is a matter of discussion with the SFC, and I expect it to be engaging fully with colleges in that regard.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The minister is talking rubbish. That money is not available for colleges. The reality is that, 20 months on from when the Funding Council did its review on the future of the sector, he and the Government still cannot decide what they want from the sector. When is he gonnae make his mind up about the colleges?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I do not even understand what the basis of that question was.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** You are kidding! You do know.

**Jamie Hepburn:** I have set out quite clearly what our priorities are in relation to that resource. I will leave it to others to decide who is talking rubbish.

### Curriculum for Excellence

3. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an

update on the continuation of the curriculum for excellence. (S6O-01950)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Curriculum for excellence continues to help equip pupils with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for learning, life and work, as demonstrated by the fact that a record high number of young people were in work, training or further study after leaving school last year. Moreover, the gap between school leavers from the most and least deprived areas who are in work, training or further study is down to a record low.

However, we are not complacent, and every curriculum should seek to evolve and improve. That is why we are progressing an ambitious package of education reform, including taking forward curriculum-related recommendations made by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Professor Louise Hayward's work and the national discussion.

**Annie Wells:** New research conducted by the University of Stirling found that, under curriculum for excellence, there has been a decrease in the number of national qualification entries in secondary 4. Curriculum for excellence was meant to broaden a child's education, not narrow it. What has gone wrong? Is the cabinet secretary concerned that a child's educational experiences have significantly narrowed?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Curriculum for excellence is about broadening the experience in schools. Although we will give the findings in the Stirling report detailed consideration, it is encouraging to see, for example, how many young people have taken advantage of the breadth of choice that is now available in the senior phase, such as qualifications to do with skills for work and foundation apprenticeships. It is not just a matter of comparing the data that relates to qualifications and qualification structures, but a matter of looking at the widened opportunities that we have outside Scottish Qualifications Authority exams, as well as foundation apprenticeships, as I said.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Karen Adam, who joins us remotely, has a brief supplementary question.

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** I welcome the update from the cabinet secretary. Just this week, new statistics have shown that attainment numbers for positive destinations are at a record high, with more than 95 per cent of school leavers in education, employment or further training three months after leaving school. Although that is testament to the hard work of our teachers and young people, does the cabinet secretary agree that the figures also

prove that this Government is delivering in education?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** As Karen Adam rightly points out in her question, there was exceptionally good news in the statistics around positive destinations that came out earlier this week. I think that that is testament to the exceptionally hard work of our teachers, support staff and young people, and it very much demonstrates their record and our continued focus on delivering for Scotland's children and young people through education.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is from Pauline McNeill, who also joins us remotely.

#### **Student Rental Accommodation (University of Glasgow)**

4. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support Glasgow students in student rental accommodation, in light of the reported proposed rent increases by the University of Glasgow. (S6O-01951)

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** As autonomous institutions, universities are responsible for their operational matters, including the rental costs of student accommodation. However, I expect them to take into account the current cost of living crisis and to set rents accordingly.

In addition to tuition fees and a range of living costs support, we are supporting students directly by providing £16.8 million in hardship funding in the current academic year for higher education students who are experiencing financial hardship. We are currently exploring options to further support students in the 2023-24 academic year.

**Pauline McNeill:** The minister will be aware that, in a report by the National Union of Students Scotland, purpose-built student accommodation has been described as "appalling" by the president, Ellie Gomersall. The report found that the average rent for that accommodation

"has increased by 34% since 2018",

and that a quarter of students who were sampled in the report could not pay their full rent on one or more occasions.

This has become a real problem, and rent increases of 9.5 per cent by the University of Glasgow seem incredibly harsh. If I have understood the minister's answer, he is hinting very strongly that he also thinks that that is wrong.

In view of that, and in view of the fact that private landlords can increase rents by only up to

6 per cent, does the minister believe that the 9.5 per cent increase is unfair to students, that the Scottish Government should legislate to cap high rents in student accommodation in the private sector, and that a modern, fair Scotland would do that?

**Jamie Hepburn:** We are undertaking a review of purpose-built student accommodation right now to consider a range of questions, and the issue can be considered as part of that activity. Fundamentally, I very much agree that it is incumbent on every institution, whether it is a private provider or an academic institution, to consider the position of students and the affordability of rents, particularly in the context of the current cost of living crisis.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** In Scotland, 12 per cent of students have experienced homelessness and others have been forced to live in makeshift accommodation. At the beginning of this academic year, the University of Edinburgh converted a common room into makeshift accommodation to house students on a short-term basis.

What guarantee will the minister give to first-year students enrolling in Scottish universities that they will be able to access student accommodation?

**Jamie Hepburn:** The Scottish Government is not a direct provider of student accommodation but, again, I expect every institution, when it offers a place to a student, to take very serious account of the ability of that person to accommodate themselves adequately for the coming year. It is incumbent on institutions to do that.

#### **Budget 2023-24 (Education and Skills Provision in Glasgow)**

**5. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what impact the Scottish Budget 2023-24 will have on education and skills provision in Glasgow. (S6O-01952)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Scottish Government's education and skills portfolio will provide more than £4.2 billion in 2023-24 to help to improve the life chances of our children, young people and learners of all ages and to support everybody to reach their full potential.

Through the local government settlement, we will provide Glasgow City Council with £1.54 billion of revenue to fund local services, which is an important contribution that we can make to its delivery of education.

As part of this settlement, Glasgow City Council will receive nearly £16.5 million to at least maintain the numbers of teachers and support staff at

current levels and to continue to ensure that there are places available on the teacher induction scheme for probationer teachers who need them.

Glasgow City Council is due to receive more than £7.5 million of strategic equity funding to support education recovery and tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. Schools in Glasgow will receive more than £23 million in pupil equity funding, which will empower Glasgow's headteachers to improve the educational outcomes and wellbeing of children affected by poverty in their schools.

**James Dornan:** As we approach Scottish apprenticeship week, will the cabinet secretary join me in recognising the crucial role that apprenticeship schemes play in providing positive destinations for young people, in my constituency and across Glasgow? As we celebrate this year's achievements, can she say what progress has been made in aligning work-based learning opportunities to support the important transition to net zero for future generations?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Supporting Scottish apprenticeship week is very important. It is an annual celebration of the success of the Scottish apprenticeship scheme. Our priority is to ensure that apprenticeships are of high quality and lead to sustainable employment opportunities.

We know that the climate emergency will require enormous societal change, and we are exploring how we can effectively integrate sustainability and green skills into the apprenticeships programme through climate emergency skills action plans.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am going to take a supplementary question, but in doing so, I remind members that this is a question about education and skills in Glasgow.

**Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am looking at it from the point of view of the Scottish budget proposal. Last week, in the Education, Children and Young People Committee, the cabinet secretary revealed that £123 million would be taken from the education and skills budget for 2023-24 to pay for the teachers' deal. What will be cut from the education budget, and how might that apply to Glasgow?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Here we go. Day, in day out, we get a demand—normally in a point of order from Stephen Kerr—that I do more to solve the teaching pay dispute—

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Would you like a point of order?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** However, when we say that we are making progress—which, I have to say to Roz McCall, will actually require funding—we are criticised for doing that.

As the Scottish Conservatives keep demanding that we solve the pay dispute, they must bear in mind the reality that it will cost money, which will have to come from somewhere in the Scottish education budget. If they start to have a serious discussion about that, I will start to take their questions and proposals on the teachers' dispute more seriously.

**Stephen Kerr:** What? Oh!

### Baby Box Scheme

**6. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the number of baby boxes—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Excuse me, Ms Roddick; could you resume your seat, please?

Mr Kerr, please refrain from shouting across the front benches; cabinet secretary, please do not respond.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the number of baby boxes that have been distributed since the scheme began. (S6O-01953)

**The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey):** At its heart, Scotland's baby box scheme strongly signals our determination that every child, regardless of their circumstances, should get the best start in life. Our universal baby box programme, the only one in the United Kingdom, opened for registration on 15 June 2017, and delivery of baby boxes nationwide began on 15 August 2017 for all babies born and resident in Scotland.

I am delighted to say that, since then, we have distributed a total of 250,560 baby boxes to families across Scotland, providing essential items for the first six months of a newborn's life.

**Emma Roddick:** I thank the minister for her response. I welcomed the news of a few days ago that a quarter of a million baby boxes have now been delivered across Scotland. Will the minister outline what she sees as the benefits of ensuring that all expectant parents across Scotland have access to essentials for their newborn, regardless of their circumstances?

**Clare Haughey:** Preparing for a baby's arrival can be one of the most exciting but also one of the most nervous times for a family. Scotland's baby box supports parents by giving them access to essential items, as well as important practical information on how to support their new arrival.

As well as practical support and items that are designed to have a positive impact on parent and child interaction, our baby box provides a financial

saving of over £400 per family through the items provided. In the current cost of living crisis, that is making a huge difference to families across Scotland.

### Curriculum for Excellence (Subject Choice)

**7. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recent study by the University of Stirling, published on 20 February 2023, which showed that the curriculum is narrowing under the curriculum for excellence, with a reduction in the choice of school subjects. (S6O-01954)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Scottish Government welcomes the publication of the report. It states that, under the curriculum for excellence, a growing proportion of school leavers are arriving at positive destinations within three months of leaving school, which suggests that the implementation of the curriculum for excellence is having a positive effect on student outcomes.

In terms of curriculum choice, the senior phase is designed as a three-year experience, in order to offer greater personalisation and choice for learners. What matters most is the collection of qualifications, awards, skills and experiences that a young person leaves school with, not the subset of qualifications that they achieve in one year of the senior phase. The record high number of young people who were in work, training or further study after leaving school last year is a reflection of the success of the curriculum for excellence, which continues to equip young people with the knowledge, skills and attributes that are needed for learning, life and work.

**Martin Whitfield:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer and for her previous comments and her continued focus on education.

Marina Shapira and Mark Priestley's report, "Choice, Attainment and Positive Destinations: Exploring the impact of curriculum policy change on young people", might have made difficult reading. I quote their blog post on its findings, which says:

"the research provides ample evidence that a great deal of curriculum making is driven by a need to fulfil external demands for the right kinds of data, particularly relating to attainment."

Further on, they say:

"It is a cause for concern that some curriculum making practices have negative consequences on subsequent attainment and transitions, predominantly affecting young people from less-advantaged backgrounds. These social justice issues are particularly ironic—and alarming—given the government's policy focus on closing the gap."

Does the cabinet secretary agree that by narrowing the choices that are available to our

young people, we are doing a disservice to efforts to close the poverty-related attainment gap?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** It is a very welcome report. I met Professor Priestley to discuss it recently, and I also had the pleasure of attending a lecture that he gave on it in Glasgow.

He raises a number of challenging points, not just for the Government but for our agencies and local authorities, and we are taking those very seriously.

One item that I will touch on in some detail, if I can, Presiding Officer, is around data. It is important that we collect data, but as I have discussed with Professor Priestley, we are at one with him about the importance of gathering it for the right reasons. We collect data, for example, on why children are not attending school to ensure that we are providing the support to schools to provide the support to the young people to get them back in. It is done not in order to hold them to account, but to support them.

That is a very important point, and there is a lot more that we can do on that within the national improvement framework. I give it as an example of the work that we are taking forward very seriously with Professor Priestley, who of course sits on our Scottish education council.

Mr Whitfield read out some quotes, but there are several positive comments in the report. For the sake of time, I will not go into them in detail, but I am sure that the member is well aware of them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am very grateful. There are a number of supplementaries. I will try to get all of them in, but they will need to be brief, as will the responses.

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I note the absence of data in this study on any impact on neurodivergent pupils. Does the minister agree with me that it is extremely important to collect that data, to ensure that we include and understand the experiences of pupils with additional support needs?

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

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Absolutely. When it comes to the collection of data, it is important to ensure that we are genuinely appreciating the needs of pupils with additional support needs—Stephanie Callaghan mentions neurodivergent pupils, but of course there are other pupils within the additional support needs category. We are absolutely determined to collect that data, for example, through the pupil census.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Deputy Presiding Officer, first, let me apologise for my outburst earlier. I never thought that I would

see the day when a minister, in any Parliament, would say that they were not going to answer a question seriously—that they were not going to give the matter in hand serious attention—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could you turn to your question please, Mr Kerr?

**Stephen Kerr:** That is contempt of this place. Deputy Presiding Officer, let me make it clear—*[Interruption.]* It is contempt of this place, if a minister says—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Kerr, do you have a question?

**Stephen Kerr:** I do have a question, Deputy Presiding Officer, but I want to make it clear that that sort of comment from a minister is surely not acceptable.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Kerr, could you ask your question?

**Stephen Kerr:** The University of Stirling report is, indeed, uncomfortable reading. It ought to be very uncomfortable reading for the Scottish National Party Government, because in essence, the report says that we are letting down pupils by narrowing their subject choice—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question, please.

**Stephen Kerr:** —and limiting their opportunities in life. Therefore, I say to the cabinet secretary, teachers are working hard—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question, please, Mr Kerr.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am coming to the question. Our teachers are working as hard as they can. They cannot work miracles. The cabinet secretary and her predecessors have failed a whole generation of Scots. Should not the cabinet secretary apologise for the SNP's—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary.

**Stephen Kerr:** —appalling record on education?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I am more than happy to check the *Official Report*, but I think that what I said was that I was not taking Mr Kerr seriously in some of his retorts on the teachers' pay dispute. When he comes to discuss the report that has been produced by Professor Priestley, he is quite right: it should be challenging reading. The entire point of us having a reform process is to ensure that we celebrate the successes that we have—something that Mr Kerr does not do—but also challenge ourselves to improve, which is something that Mr Kerr can also have a think about.

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** We know that delivering a robust curriculum is key to providing our young people with opportunities as they move forward in life. With that in mind, how will the Scottish Government continue to deliver on its commitments to raise attainment and substantially eliminate the poverty-related attainment gap?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Our commitment to the substantial reduction and elimination of the poverty-related attainment gap stands strong. That is exactly why we have more than £1 billion-worth of expenditure going into the Scottish attainment challenge over the current parliamentary session. As the results have shown, attainment is now showing a real improvement, particularly in our primary years.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 8 was not lodged, so that concludes portfolio question time. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business.

## Policing

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a statement by Keith Brown on policing in Scotland—10 years on from reform. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of his statement and therefore there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:27

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** As we approach the 10th anniversary of our national police service, I am pleased to make this statement to the chamber with my reflections on the police reform journey that has been continuing since 2013.

I will also offer my thoughts on Sir Iain Livingstone's recent announcement that he intends to retire as chief constable of Scotland later this year. Sir Iain will be greatly missed—of that there is no doubt. His contribution to the success of policing in Scotland has been immense and he leaves Scottish policing in excellent health, with the service having been completely transformed over the past 10 years.

Eight local legacy forces have been replaced by one national service, providing a more strategic and consistent approach to policing than there was under the previous system. It is one of the most significant public sector reforms since devolution and it has been a success, which I believe is recognised across the chamber, if not in every part of it.

In 2019, the Justice Committee, which was the Criminal Justice Committee's predecessor committee, stated its belief that the policy intention to create more equal access to national capacity had been met and should be considered a success story for policing in Scotland. That success has been demonstrated by the successful policing of the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in 2021 and operation unicorn in 2022, and by the policing of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Since reform in 2013, £11.6 billion has been invested in policing, and that investment continues. In the most recent budget, the Scottish Government has recognised the importance of policing by investing £1.45 billion in 2023-24. That is an increase of 6.3 per cent—around £80 million—to the Scottish Police Authority resource budget. It provides a stable basis from which to improve the delivery of policing and enhance the safety and security of communities across Scotland.

Despite the United Kingdom Government making cuts to the Scottish Government's capital budget, we have maintained the police capital budget, which has more than doubled since 2017-18, supporting investment in police assets such as estate, fleet, specialist equipment and information and communications technology.

The money that we put into the police continues to be invested in the workforce. Our officers are the best paid police officers in the UK, with starting salaries for constables at around £5,000 per year more than in England and Wales. There are more officers too: as of 30 September, there were 30 officers per 10,000 of the population in Scotland in comparison with 24 officers per 10,000 in England and Wales.

Our investment has also paid dividends in terms of crime. Sir Iain rightly highlighted Police Scotland's murder clear-up rate as one of the strengths of the service in recent years. I also point to Police Scotland's significant role in ensuring that this week's statistics show that Scotland has one of the lowest levels of recorded crime for any 12-month period since comparable records began in 1974. I believe that those statistics are a credit to the hard-working officers and staff of Police Scotland.

Before I look to the future, it is worth reflecting on the legacy of the longest-serving chief constable of the UK's second biggest force. No operation was bigger than COP26, when the eyes of the world were on Glasgow. We hosted hundreds of world leaders and dignitaries, among thousands of delegates who descended on the city. Under Sir Iain's leadership, demonstrations were policed in the traditions of Scotland's policing, ensuring that legitimate protest could be undertaken fully and safely.

Scotland's rights-based system of policing, coupled with Police Scotland's engagement with activist groups and an overriding commonsense approach, resulted in fewer than 100 arrests linked with the event. Those are staggering numbers, given the scale of COP26.

More recently, Sir Iain can rightly be proud of the sensitive and effective operation that was put in place following the death of Queen Elizabeth. Perhaps above all, it is Police Scotland's response to the Covid-19 pandemic that has rightly been praised, as officers took a measured and proportionate rights-based approach to their handling of an unprecedented crisis. As with our health professionals, police were at the forefront in keeping us all safe, and we owe them our gratitude.

I sincerely hope that members will join me in paying tribute to Sir Iain's legacy. I was grateful to Sir Iain for his agreement to extend his contract

when his initial period of appointment concluded last year. That ensured continuity and stability as we emerged from the pandemic. I think that it has always been clear that, at some point, he would decide to step away from his role. As he himself said last week, he will have been an officer for 31 years by the time he retires. Therefore, although last week's news is obviously disappointing, it was not necessarily unexpected.

It will be for the Scottish Police Authority to conduct the process of finding Sir Iain's replacement, but ministers will of course be asked to approve the appointment of his successor. Sitting at Sir Iain's side has been an executive team that is brimming with talent. Just a few weeks ago, Deputy Chief Constable Jane Connors took up post, bringing with her a wealth of experience from her time with the Metropolitan Police. Several new assistant chief constables have also been appointed as the team continues to evolve. Sir Iain has paid tribute to the stability and leadership of his senior team, and I express my confidence in that continuity as we move towards the final months of Sir Iain's time in office.

In the meantime, Sir Iain will continue to set Police Scotland's strategic direction. Last week, the Scottish Police Authority considered a draft revised "Joint Strategy for Policing 2023: Policing for a safe, protected and resilient Scotland". It builds on the principles in the existing "Joint Strategy for Policing (2020)", while ensuring that policing in Scotland keeps pace with the challenges and opportunities of modern society.

It is right that, 10 years on, we continue to reflect on what the next steps in the reform journey should look like. In the past decade, we have seen significant changes in the profile of crime and demand, including increasing cybercrime and greater vulnerability. At the same time, there has been an increasing focus on how police respond to important societal issues such as violence against women and girls. We have also seen significant changes in digital technology and in the public's expectations for how they access services, and those trends are likely to continue and accelerate. We need to plan for the future and ensure that policing reflects those trends and changes and is able to respond to future challenges.

Our national vision for justice in Scotland, which was published last year, sets out a transformative vision of the future justice system for Scotland in which Police Scotland will play a vital role. However, I recognise that the public sector faces a challenging budgetary environment, combined with the cost of living crisis and the resultant impact on communities—that is hardly surprising after 13 years of austerity budgeting by the UK Government. Our plan for the future must

therefore demonstrate the necessary efficiency and value for money, while continuing to keep the people of Scotland safe and secure.

For policing, that will mean an even greater emphasis on collaboration with other criminal justice agencies—in particular, and where possible, the other blue light services—to ensure that the public receive the most effective and efficient care and protection. It will require a relentless focus on ensuring that police are deployed where they add most value and work efficiently with other agencies.

In setting the budget for the upcoming financial year, the Deputy First Minister was clear on the challenges that lie ahead and that further efficiencies and savings are still required to ensure that Scotland has financially sustainable, person-centred public services.

It will be a time for change—it always is. However, there are a number of constants. As we commemorate the 10th anniversary of our national police service, and as we look forward in the coming months to welcoming a new chief constable of Scotland, we can be sure that the fundamental values of policing—fairness, integrity, respect and human rights—will remain. The purpose of policing that was set out in the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 remains paramount: to improve the safety and wellbeing of people, places and communities in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes, after which we will need to move to the next item of business. I encourage members who wish to ask a question to press their request-to-speak button now or as soon as possible.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of his statement. I, too, place on record my best wishes, and those of members on the Conservative benches, to Chief Constable Sir Iain Livingstone on his retirement. I thank not just him for his three decades of service to the police but all those who have served under him over the years.

It is no coincidence that, on the same day that the chief constable announced his departure, his jointly penned report on the future of policing stated a damning truth that many of us have known for some time. His parting shot of warning to the Government is that, in its current form, policing is “unsustainable”. Why is that? It is because, as everybody knows, policing is picking up the pieces of far too many broken services. It is responding to an ever-increasing volume of mental health problems and situations that are someone else’s responsibility. The problem is that there is

no one else to deal with those issues, which are taking up so much police time and taking officers away from vital policing work, including fighting crime.

When will the cabinet secretary, too, admit that the status quo is unsustainable? It cannot continue—too much is being asked of too few in Police Scotland. Does he think that Sir Iain is right that the current direction of travel in policing in Scotland is unsustainable?

**Keith Brown:** The answer that I am about to give is informed by a number of lengthy conversations that I have had with the chief constable on some of the issues that Jamie Greene has just raised.

Policing is made more sustainable if, for example, we have the best-paid police officers in the UK and if we have more police officers in Scotland per head of population than elsewhere. At the Criminal Justice Committee, I have heard from Jamie Greene and other members that we were about to see a reduction in police numbers to below 14,000. The only way that would happen is if we tried to match the number of police officers per head of population that the Tories have in England and Wales. If we did that, we would be down more than 2,500 police officers—

**Jamie Greene:** Will Keith Brown answer my questions?

**Keith Brown:** Mr Greene will have the answer that I am giving him. If he would listen to it and give me the same courtesy that I gave him when he spoke, I would be grateful.

Challenges remain, of course. The chief constable has been clear about that. I have mentioned two areas of challenge: violence against women and girls, and cybercrime. It is not sustainable to take the same approach that we have taken before, so that has to change. The police and the chief constable are well aware of that.

Another factor that will have to change—the chief constable is very much behind this—is blue-light services, the reform of which I mentioned in my statement. Things have to change and existing challenges have to be met, of course, but we also have to anticipate future challenges.

Jamie Greene talked about fighting crime. I have never heard Tory members offer even one word of congratulation to our police force on its fantastic track record in fighting crime, which has gone down to 1974 levels. This week, we learned of a further reduction of 2 per cent in recorded crime. The Tories have never once congratulated the chief constable or our police service on that record.

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** On behalf of Scottish Labour, I associate my party with the tributes to Chief Constable Iain Livingstone and to the whole of Police Scotland for their work.

As has been said, Chief Constable Iain Livingstone has warned that the proposed cuts that Police Scotland faces are “unsustainable”. The cabinet secretary mentioned the figure of 14,000 police officers. Last year, the Criminal Justice Committee was given projections that showed a frozen budget for police officer and civilian staff numbers. More money has now been made available, but we do not know what the proposed police numbers are.

Could the cabinet secretary share his understanding of the proposed numbers of police officers and civilian staff for the coming year, and outline his strategy for the recruitment and retention of police officers and civilian staff, given that we know that there is a significant problem with officers leaving the service?

**Keith Brown:** The first point to make is that there are no cuts to the police budget. In the budget for the forthcoming year, we are proposing a 6.3 per cent increase in funding for the police. The police budget was not frozen. I realise that a discussion about numbers was necessary because of the resource spending review, but the police budget was not frozen—the money was found.

On the question about the recruitment and retention of police officers, I repeat that paying officers in Scotland £5,000 more per year, on average, than officers elsewhere in the UK when they start to work for the police gives us a better opportunity to recruit and to retain police officers.

However, beyond that, we have more to do. I acknowledge the challenge that exists in relation to diversity in the police force. Although there is increasing gender diversity at senior levels in the police force, ethnic diversity is not yet at the level that it should be at. There is more work to do on that, not just in recruitment but in the retention of people from ethnically diverse backgrounds who have joined the police force.

Therefore, I will not pretend that this is all done and dusted. Challenges remain. That is why I talk to people who are involved in dealing with such issues in the police service, and it is why we have other bodies that do monitoring to check the police’s progress in this area. There is more to do on recruitment and retention more broadly but, with regard to the basic package that is offered to police officers, I think that the fact that they have such a tremendous track record in fighting crime is testament to the fact that we are recruiting and retaining some excellent police officers.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Despite Westminster austerity, the Scottish Government has increased police funding year on year since 2016-17, and I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has further increased the policing budget for the next financial year by £80 million. How will the budget help Police Scotland respond to the changing nature of crime?

**Keith Brown:** As Audrey Nicoll mentioned, the police budget for 2023-24 has been increased by £80 million, which is a 6.3 per cent increase. In my view, that will help to improve the delivery of policing and to support the safety and security of communities across Scotland. It will also provide further opportunities for collaboration and co-location with blue-light services across Scotland. We are ensuring that Police Scotland is sustainable, adaptable and prepared for future challenges.

Jamie Greene made a point about the ability of other services to pick up some of the work that the police service is doing. That is a challenge, not least in relation to health services. We share the view that there has to be reform of the police and other blue-light services and, by doing that work, we will ensure that the people of Scotland receive an improved service. We will, of course, continue to fund the police service to meet the demands on it through Government grant.

**Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** If Keith Brown has never heard praise of policing from Jamie Greene or my colleagues, it is clear that he has not been listening.

On the Scottish National Party’s watch, the health and careers of innocent whistleblowers have been destroyed, millions of pounds of compensation has been paid out while victims have been silenced through non-disclosure agreements and officers in the grip of a suffocating complaints process have even been driven to suicide. For the sake of Scotland’s police officers, will the SNP Government fix the system that it created?

**Keith Brown:** I cannot bring to mind any point at which anyone on the Conservative seats has said, “Well done,” to the police for getting crime down to the level it is at, or to the Scottish Government for ensuring that a police officer here is paid £5,000 more per year or that we have higher numbers of police in Scotland. I have never heard that.

I have heard constant denigration of the police service from the Tories. I can tell them, because I talk regularly to police officers, that the police know that. Even though the Tories tag on the phrase “SNP Government”, the police know what the target is and they know how the Tories

denigrate the police force; they understand that point.

Russell Findlay is also aware that our proposed police complaints bill will address some of the historical issues of how complaints, including those from whistleblowers, have been dealt with. That will be in addition to the means of redress currently available through the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner. We take those issue seriously. We understand the need for reform and that reform is coming.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I was pleased to hear that Police Scotland reflects and represents the diversity of Scotland's population. Does the cabinet secretary think that there is sufficient strategy in Police Scotland for that to continue and to improve?

**Keith Brown:** As I said in my response to Katy Clark, there is more to do in that area. The national service already has detailed plans under way to enhance recruitment, leadership and training in order to develop a culture that reflects its values. I welcome initiatives such as the policing together strategy, which outlines a range of actions that Police Scotland is taking, under the leadership of Deputy Chief Constable Fiona Taylor, to mainstream equality, diversity and inclusion within the service and to attract, retain and promote a diverse workforce.

The more the police service in Scotland looks like the rest of Scotland, the more trust will be built up between the people of Scotland and the police force. I know that the police take that seriously. So does the Scottish Government, so we will continue ensuring that we have a more diverse and inclusive police force.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I, too, wish Sir Iain Livingstone well in his retirement.

The cabinet secretary is aware that Dame Elish Angiolini's report highlighted on-going issues of discrimination within Police Scotland. His previous answer to Katy Clark suggested that the recruitment of ethnic minorities was still a problem. That causes concern for us all, because culture change comes before recruitment. What specific steps has the cabinet secretary taken since the publication of Elish Angiolini's report and what outcomes have been achieved?

**Keith Brown:** I am happy to provide a full breakdown of those of Elish Angiolini's recommendations that do not require legislation and have been implemented. The member will be aware that, in addition to that, we will shortly be bringing forward legislative changes. Members will have a full account of all the changes that we propose.

Regarding the member's particular point about diversity, I meet regularly with Robin Iffla—who is someone I have known for a very long time and who is conducting the review—and with others from within the force whose job it is to ensure that the force becomes more diverse.

We have a challenge, not only in recruiting people from ethnic minorities but in keeping them. That suggests that there is more to be done in ensuring that, as the member said, the culture of the police force must change so that those people feel welcomed and valued.

A lot of work is going on behind the scenes. Regarding our explicit response to Elish Angiolini's recommendations, which we accepted, I am happy to provide a full account of everything that has been taken forward and of what is still to come because of the need for legislation.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** I, too, place on record my thanks to Sir Iain Livingstone for all his work.

Despite the Tories' politicking on the issue, they surely cannot deny that police officer numbers in Scotland remain well above those in England. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the fact that we have more police officers, with higher wages, shows the value placed on the vital role that police officers play and that policing, and the safety of communities, are clearly priorities for the Scottish Government?

**Keith Brown:** I agree with Fulton MacGregor. If someone was to be objective and ask whether the Government values that service, the fact that we pay £5,000 more per year for a person starting in the police force would show that there is a level of priority attached to that in Scotland that is not seen elsewhere. I agree with that point.

We have more police per head of population than is the case in England and Wales. There are 30 officers per 10,000 of the population in Scotland—[*Interruption.*] I know that is difficult for the Conservatives to hear, but they will have to listen to it. We have 30 officers per 10,000 of the population in Scotland, compared to 24 officers per 10,000 of the population in England and Wales.

We have a tremendously well funded and well remunerated police force, although we would always like to pay more. The success of that is shown by the extent to which we now have fewer victims and fewer crimes, because of the effectiveness of our police force in Scotland.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of the statement, and I associate my party with the comments that have been made in tribute to Sir Iain Livingstone as he retires.

In some rural and island areas, there is a sense that the centralisation of Scottish police services has meant a loss of tried and tested local policing, with the imposition of city-style policing, such as that which was seen recently during Lerwick's fire festival. What works in the central belt does not necessarily work in island communities. Ten years on from the formation of Police Scotland, is the legacy not only that millions were spent on a merger but that there has been a distancing of law enforcers from those whom they protect and serve?

**Keith Brown:** It is not just about the money that is spent. I accept that point.

It would be unfair to recount specific details, but I have testimony from senior officers who served in the north of Scotland police forces in the past and who are hugely complimentary about the capacity that they now have because of the national police force.

Most recently, in Stuart McMillan's constituency—I know that he has a question about this—we have seen that services can much more easily be brought to bear by a national police force, as it has the ability to direct them around the country, rather than what was the case with our old eight legacy forces.

Policing should of course reflect the community in which it is undertaken. The points that Beatrice Wishart has made will be taken on board and, I am sure, listened to by the police service, and I am happy to relay them to the police service in order that it can further improve that service.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that I have written to him this week about the issue that I am about to raise.

One of the welcome outcomes of a unified police force was having the flexibility to allocate officers to areas of need because of specific incidents at the time. Will the cabinet secretary provide an assurance that that flexibility will continue, and that it will be utilised in my constituency at present, due to recent serious issues?

**Keith Brown:** I very much agree with the point that Stuart McMillan has made, not least because he refers, I think, to a number of really quite exceptional incidents that have happened at the same time. If the police force were smaller, it would of course be less able to respond to a number of incidents at the same time, some of which require specialist services. That is one reason why the national police service works. A number of the very much smaller police forces in England and Wales struggle with such pressure when it comes to very high profile cases, given the

comms that are required and the specialist nature of some of the expertise.

Stuart McMillan has every right to expect that the full benefits of the national police force should be brought to bear in relation to the incidents that he has mentioned. Once again, I am sure that the police will have heard his message.

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement.

Scottish Greens believe that an effective police service must be community-based, enjoy public support and reflect the people that it is responsible for keeping safe. The cabinet secretary has made some comments about the diversity of the force and the work that is still to be done on that. When it comes to violence against women and girls, will the cabinet secretary provide more information on how people in Scotland can be confident that the police will be part of the solution and never, as we have seen elsewhere, part of the problem?

**Keith Brown:** I know what underlies the very real concern that Maggie Chapman has expressed: some of the high profile cases that we have seen, and not just in the Met—there have been challenges here in Scotland as well.

There are a number of ways in which that can be tackled. As the member knows, some of those are in the bills that we are bringing forward in the area, and we have mentioned Elish Angiolini's recommendations. I am happy to provide the same information to Maggie Chapman that I said that I would provide to Rhoda Grant.

I talk regularly to senior officers, especially in the senior officer team, and I think that they are extremely committed to that. I mentioned in my statement that, along with cybercrime, violence against women and girls is growing. I mentioned that, this week, we have had another indication of a reduction in crimes, but that contains a small increase in violence against women and girls. The police are well seized of that and, given the comments of the chief constable and what I have said in my statement, violence against women and girls will be a huge priority for the police as we go forward.

**Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** There have been many good reforms to policing in Scotland in recent years. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the roll-out of trauma-informed training in the police and how that will benefit members of the public?

**Keith Brown:** On that issue and a number of issues raised in previous questions, such decisions are often for the police to take. Quite rightly, the Government has no operational control over the police—that is written into the legislation.

It is for the police, in concert with the SPA, to take that forward.

However, as the member will know, “The Vision for Justice in Scotland” requires every part, agency and body within the justice system—if it can be called a system—to undertake trauma-informed training, because the response that people get has to be more than criminals being captured and the right verdict being delivered in a courtroom. It has to mean that the victims, witnesses and other people who are affected by crime or who interact with the justice system experience a trauma-informed approach. It is the case that, whatever we think of the issue, most people in prison have a trauma-related background—usually, adverse childhood experiences.

The commitment exists, but it is for the police to ensure that it is implemented throughout the force to the extent that it is not already being done in many parts of it.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Police forces elsewhere in the United Kingdom are already on their second generation of body-worn video cameras, but here in Scotland they have not been rolled out routinely and Police Scotland describes the equipment that has already been issued as basic. Even supermarket workers now have such cameras. Why do not all our police officers?

**Keith Brown:** I know that Murdo Fraser has been in the Parliament a long time, but I am not sure whether he is sufficiently aware of the fact that the purchase of capital equipment and, in fact, any equipment is for the SPA and the police force—the chief constable himself—to undertake according to the priorities that they see.

I do not deny that I would like to see more body-worn cameras among the police, mainly because they can, in the end, reduce costs and crime. I fully support that, but it will be a question of resources and how the police and the SPA prioritise that spend. The fundamental point is that, if we start off with the priority of ensuring that police officers are well remunerated and well supported by having the right number of officers, we start from a good basis.

The SPA is currently considering body-worn cameras, and it will have our support in ensuring that as many officers as possible have the equipment as we move forward.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I add my personal thanks and good wishes to Sir Iain Livingstone on his retirement.

That concludes this item of business.

## Caledonian Sleeper Train

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a statement by Jenny Gilruth on the Caledonian sleeper train. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:57

**The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):** For more than 150 years, a sleeper rail service has run from Scotland to England. The current Caledonian sleeper serves 43 Scottish stations, including the United Kingdom’s most remote rail station, Corrour, which is also the highest in the UK. From Montrose to Kirkcaldy, from Crianlarich to Fort William, the sleeper is about more than just Scotland’s cities; it provides communities across Scotland a service to access London and beyond.

Earlier this year, I undertook to provide Parliament with an update on the successor arrangements for the Caledonian sleeper. That follows my decision last October not to rebase the franchise agreement with Serco. Today, I can announce that, from 25 June this year, the Caledonian sleeper service will be provided by an arm’s-length company of the Scottish Government, in line with our duty as operator of last resort.

That means that, from the expiry of the current franchise, Caledonian sleeper services will be provided within the public sector by an arm’s-length company owned by the Scottish Government. That will provide stability and certainty for passengers and staff and will place the operation of Caledonian sleeper services in public hands from the end of the current contract. I am confident that, under those arrangements, we can build on our experience of public sector operation to ensure that the bright future that we see for the Caledonian sleeper is protected.

My predecessors in this role took the decision to separate sleeper services from the ScotRail franchise, and I stand firmly by that forward thinking. The step forward taken by the Government in how sleeper services were specified allowed that historic service the level of dedicated management that it deserves, which has led to a rejuvenated service and the specification and delivery of an entirely new fleet of trains.

Indeed, the sleeper has surpassed any other train service in the UK in relation to its recovery from the pandemic. Its revenues over the past year outstrip pre-pandemic performance, and its forward bookings are stronger than ever. Even a brief snapshot of bookings in January and

February shows the highest rate for forward bookings at any stage of the franchise.

In the Caledonian sleeper, we see a service that is now thriving. That is testament to the quality and attractiveness of a service that continues to exceed passenger satisfaction targets. It is also testament to the staff who provide a world-class service to those using the sleeper; to the teams of staff in the depots, who ensure the highest quality of operations; to the drivers who ensure that passengers arrive at their destination safely and on time; and to the cleaning staff who take pride in the presentation of all that the sleeper represents.

In recent times, the Caledonian sleeper has adapted in a post-pandemic market to attract a substantial tourism footfall. Indeed, travelling on the Caley sleeper has become an experience in itself, with small Scottish businesses being promoted through the food and drink on board, for example.

As members will recall, late last year, I took a decision not to accept the rebasing proposal that we received from Serco Caledonian Sleepers Ltd. As a consequence of that, the current franchise agreement will end on 25 June 2023. I must repeat that the decision not to rebase was in no way a reflection on the quality of the product that has been developed or the commitment of the staff who deliver the service every day. As I have already stated, the sleeper is a highly valued and iconic rail service with a dedicated management and delivery team that provides excellent customer service and passenger experience. Rather, the decision that I had to take on rebasing was a question of the terms of the rebase offer, and, in the Government's view, those terms did not represent the best value for money.

Since the rebase decision was taken, my officials in Transport Scotland have been analysing the full range of options that are available for the continuation of services once the current franchise comes to an end. As we have undertaken our analysis and considered options, it is right that I remind members that, for the current time, rail powers remain largely reserved to Westminster.

Scottish ministers have made repeated calls for the full devolution of rail powers. That would give ministers in Scotland a much more radical range of powers to enact change and unleash the full potential of Scotland's railways by bringing together track and train in a cohesive and integrated manner and making them fully accountable to Scottish ministers.

Reform of the railway is necessary and long overdue. It is worth saying that that view is held not only by Scottish ministers. Keith Williams, who

led the UK Government's rail review process, has said publicly that

"franchising cannot continue in the way that it is today."

However, the reforms that are proposed by the UK Government do not go far enough. Indeed, there is continued uncertainty regarding the pace and impact of those proposals.

The Williams-Shapps plan for rail was published back in May 2021 and proposes that a new public body called "Great British Rail" be established to run and plan the rail network. That body would replace Network Rail, over which the UK Government retains responsibility, for the current time. However, it is not at all clear how it is intended that that should work in relation to rail services such as the Caley sleeper and ScotRail services, for which Scottish ministers are responsible. Nor is the position clear in relation to rail infrastructure in Scotland, which the Scottish Government funds. Not only that, it is, at present, unclear when any of the proposals set out in the plan are likely to be implemented.

Despite that uncertainty, with the sleeper franchise coming to an end in June this year, I am required to make my decision about successor arrangements in accordance with the current UK legislative framework and the Scottish ministers' franchising policy statement. The detailed consideration of the options that are available to provide Caledonian sleeper services beyond June this year has taken place in accordance with UK railway legislation. The decision is also set against the background of substantial uncertainty about future market conditions, with issues including post-pandemic recovery, the on-going cost of living crisis, wider economic instability and continuing uncertainty regarding the pace and impact of the UK Government's rail reform process.

I have already informed Parliament that I do not consider that the prevailing conditions in the UK rail market and the wider economy would enable the pursuit of a competition for the re-letting of the franchise at this time. I have also carefully considered the possibility of a directly awarded contract to Serco to continue to run services beyond June 2023. In particular, I have considered how that option would align with our revised franchising policy statement and policy objectives. Based on those considerations and against the background conditions that I have set out, I have concluded that a direct award to Serco would not be appropriate.

A key role that is undertaken by my officials at Transport Scotland is to ensure that I can fulfil my duties under section 30 of the Railways Act 1993 and deploy the operator of last resort arrangements, should they be required. I can,

therefore, confirm that, from the expiry of the current franchise, Caledonian sleeper services will be provided by an arm's-length company owned and managed by the Scottish Government.

That is in line with our duty, in the absence of a franchise agreement, to provide or secure the provision of sleeper services, which is referred to as our operator of last resort duty. That decision will provide a stable platform for the provision of sleeper services, and it will provide certainty for staff and the travelling public.

I make it clear that Caledonian sleeper staff will transfer to the Scottish Government-owned entity with their terms and conditions protected. Due to the lack of clarity from the UK Government in relation to rail reform proposals, I am not able, at this stage, to confirm how long I expect operator of last resort arrangements to be in place. That will be considered further as market conditions develop, in respect of both the rail sector and the wider economic conditions that prevail. The pace and impact of UK rail reform, when that becomes clearer, will also have to be taken into account.

I pay tribute to every rail worker across Scotland for the role that they play in making Scotland's railways a success. We cannot make our railways a success without them, and we cannot encourage people back to our railways without their support.

In taking the approach that I have outlined, we will secure the stable delivery of our historic Caledonian sleeper services under Scottish Government ownership, which will give certainty for passengers and our rail staff.

Rail travel is good for our economy. It helps to deliver our net zero ambitions, and it creates a greener Scotland for all. The Scottish Government's vision for rail is of a thriving industry that meets the needs of passengers and is sustainable in the long term. The Caledonian sleeper service is a core part of that vision and will, I am sure, only continue to flourish.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues that she raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions. We will then move on to the next item of business.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

When we debated the future of the Caledonian sleeper service last month, I pointed out how successful the service had become under Serco. The year saw the highest revenue since the start of the franchise, with guest levels back to pre-Covid levels. Performance, guest satisfaction and employee satisfaction were all going up.

The minister has just agreed with all of that. She has just said that the Caledonian sleeper has

“surpassed any other train company in the UK in its recovery from the pandemic.”

She said:

“we see a service that is now thriving.”

She calls it “a world-class service”. There can be no conclusion other than that the decision is ideological.

Jenny Gilruth said nothing about how this world-class service can be improved under the Scottish Government. She has made no case at all for the decision. If it is about value for money, perhaps she can answer this: has she requested or received a costed proposal from Serco for a direct contract award? If she has not—which I suspect is the case—how can she claim or show that she is demonstrating value for money for the Scottish taxpayer?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I will start by setting out the Scottish ministers' limitations in responding to the required legislation, which is, of course, reserved to the UK Government—Mr Simpson's party is in power in the UK. Some of that relates to the ongoing challenges in relation to the detailed assessment of the options that have been considered in the framework. Under the legislation, ministers in Scotland are required to consider a direct award, as Mr Simpson has outlined, but also to rule that out if it is not feasible. A direct award was, of course, considered by my officials, but it was ruled out. Mr Simpson knows that rebasing was similarly ruled out because it was presumed that it was not value for money.

In addition, it is worth noting that the Scottish ministers do not just need to have regard to the reserved legislation that I have outlined; we also need to have regard to the Scottish ministers' “Franchising Policy Statement”. Mr Simpson can access that statement on the Scottish Government's website if he would like to do so. The factors that I, as the minister, am required to consider include the alignment and integration of our rail services. Having ScotRail, for example, and now the Caledonian sleeper under the same umbrella brings that integration. The factors include the ability to respond quickly to rail reform. There is great uncertainty, and I do not know what the UK Government is going to do next in relation to the Williams-Shapps review, because it has not come forward with any legislation as yet. Finally, there is consideration of value for money. On all those factors—this is underlined by the fact that the legislation is reserved—I do not accept the picture that Mr Simpson has painted of how the decision was reached. [*Interruption.*] Mr Simpson should allow me to speak. He is heckling from a sedentary position.

Mr Simpson made a point about the success of the Caledonian sleeper. I absolutely accept that, and I acknowledged that success in my statement. I also acknowledged it in January, I think, when we had a members' business debate on the subject. However, as I have outlined, I am required to consider the necessary legislation, and there is a real opportunity for us in relation to the delivery of sleeper services in the future.

The UK Government is actually a fan of public ownership in the railways these days. In 2021, I think, Southeastern was brought into direct public control. So were London North Eastern Railway and Northern. The UK Government has also offered a stay of execution to Avanti West Coast, which is somewhat bizarre, given the poor service that has been delivered on the west coast. The service that is being delivered by TransPennine Express has, of course, been critiqued by the UK Government's rail minister, who said that its performance is "clearly unacceptable" and that the operator needs to "turn it around".

I hope that Mr Simpson will welcome this news for Caledonian sleeper staff and also for the taxpayer in Scotland. Had we gone down the road of running a competition, I feel that Mr Simpson would have been in the chamber today critiquing the public expense associated with that.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

Over recent weeks, we have become used to hearing a lot of bad news from the transport minister, so it is a relief to hear positive news today. It is welcome that the Caledonian sleeper service is to be publicly run from June and I praise the efforts of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, Unite the union and the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, which have been instrumental in making the case for public ownership.

However, we fundamentally disagree with the minister on the decision to split the ScotRail and sleeper franchises. It was wrong in 2015 when the Scottish National Party made that decision and it remains wrong to split those services now. Does the minister not see the benefits of a unified ScotRail operator delivering both when she says that she is concerned about fragmentation and when current structures are already overly bureaucratic? Does the minister not accept that cross-subsidy is another reason why we need one unified ScotRail operator to make the service more affordable?

Finally, it can cost more than £500 for a family of four to get a return from Glasgow to London, and that is with a family rail card. It is ridiculously expensive for people and for businesses. It

surpasses any other rail service when it comes to fares. To make the most of this positive step, what changes are planned by the Scottish Government to make the service more affordable?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I welcome the collegiate support that Mr Bibby has shown today for this Government's action and indeed for me as transport minister. It was not that long ago—it was back in January—that Mr Bibby's former boss was heckling me, suggesting that this would not be the approach that the Scottish Government would take, so I welcome the Labour Party's warm words today.

The decision to split ScotRail and the sleeper is a historical one that, as Mr Bibby alludes to, dates back to 2015. The most important thing just now is to provide certainty and clarity. That is what operator of last resort arrangements allow us to do and it is important for the staff involved in this that we provide that certainty and clarity.

I would broadly agree with the member's assertion about expense. He will know that, in Scotland, our fares are on average about 10 per cent cheaper than in other parts of the Great Britain network. Also, we will be removing peak fares later this year, which is another thing that is being welcomed by our rail union partners. That step is important because we need to facilitate modal change—we need to get folk out of their cars and on to public transport—and the only way to do that is by making public transport more affordable. The member's point about expense is a fair one and I am keen to work on that issue with the Caledonian sleeper as we move forward with the new arrangements.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** When will the transfer under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations take place, what does this mean for employees and what engagement has taken place with rail unions?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I can provide an absolute assurance to Caledonian sleeper staff that they will be able to transfer to the new entity with their terms and conditions protected. The TUPE transfer will take place on 25 June, which is when the current contract ends, and discussions will begin imminently with staff and unions. As I mentioned in my response to Mr Bibby, I have listened to the calls from our rail trade unions to nationalise the Caledonian sleeper. Of course, the unions campaigned for public ownership of ScotRail. I very much hope that they will welcome this decision today. As transport minister, I meet the rail unions regularly and I look forward to engaging with them on this important decision as we look to make public ownership a success for Scotland.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** In turning the sleeper into the exemplar that the minister has described, Serco made a loss of more than £60 million over the duration of the franchise. How does the minister plan to ensure that the franchise turns a profit, so that the taxpayer is not picking up those £60 million losses? Can she promise that she will not cut jobs, salaries, services, or maintenance, or put up prices, to do so?

**Jenny Gilruth:** The figures that the member has outlined have been widely reported in the press and relate to historical decisions that were taken by Serco. I emphasise that the Scottish Government provides a substantial subsidy to Serco to run the current contract. That is worth putting on the record.

In relation to jobs, as I outlined in my response to Audrey Nicoll, all jobs will transfer under their current terms and conditions. There are no proposals on the table for any job losses today. I want to make that clear.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** The minister has spoken a fair bit about the operator of last resort arrangement and why going for that has been the right decision. Does she want to expand on that and on what the timescale will be? Are we totally dependent on Westminster? Do we have no indication of when that Parliament might legislate?

**Jenny Gilruth:** As I mentioned in an earlier response, the decision regarding successor arrangements for sleeper services has been taken following a detailed analysis, which included the option of a direct award to Serco. As the member has asked, that analysis was conducted in accordance with the current UK legislative framework, which is reserved, and in accordance with our franchising policy in Scotland. That requires me as the minister to look at the process. We had to look at whether a new franchise contract competition was required, which, as members will recall, was ruled out. Then, we needed to consider the option of a direct award of a franchise contract to a suitable contractor, which was ruled out due to market instability. Only when options 1 and 2 have been decided against can an operator of last resort mobilisation be deployed.

To answer the member's further question, we are currently curtailed in relation to the legislation due to the powers being reserved to the UK Government. However, there would be an opportunity to do things differently if those powers were to come back to Scotland—the member and I share that sentiment—and we could have power over all our railways and could have real integration across the network, which we need.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I remind members of my entry in the members' register of interests.

Today is a red-letter day, so can I ask if this is a decision that has been taken to, and ratified by, the whole Cabinet?

Finally, the pay anniversary for staff who work on the Caledonian sleeper is 1 April. The Serco temporary measures agreement does not end until June. The Scottish Government must therefore sign off any pay award for this year. So will the minister commit today to a fair pay award for those staff this year, and will she commit to direct negotiations with the trade unions over pay and conditions once the service is back where it belongs, where it should always have been, in public ownership?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Certainly, the First Minister has signed off the approach and Cabinet members will be aware of it, as I know that it would have been discussed at the Cabinet. As I am a junior minister, I do not attend the Cabinet, but my cabinet secretary will have brought the matter to its attention.

In relation to his question about the pay award, the member knows that I spent the first six months of my time in this job meeting railway unions on a regular basis, which was instrumental to my experience and to my forming good relationships with our railway unions, which is hugely important. Direct negotiations would be a matter for the new entity but, as transport minister, I would be more than happy to meet the railway unions, and I do so regularly. I am sure that we will be meeting in the near future as a result of today's decision.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** I am delighted with the news that the Caley sleeper is to be brought into public ownership and with the overall continued nationalisation of Scotland's railway. I hope that that will provide the opportunity for the sleeper service to be made more attractive to, and more useful for, my constituents in the Highlands and Islands, rather than the sole focus being on Londoners coming to enjoy my region. Given the history of near-empty trains being run on the southbound journey from Inverness, can the minister tell us whether any consideration has been given to how journeys and the opportunities that the service creates can be marketed to Highlanders?

**Jenny Gilruth:** The member makes an important point. The Caley sleeper reaches many different communities. It is not just about the central belt; I have alluded to some of the places that the sleeper reaches—it reaches 43 stations across Scotland. The rail network also reaches parts of the country that roads are not able to reach.

With the current franchise coming to an end at the end of June, we have an opportunity to look again at the delivery of services. However, as a local MSP, the member will know that services to the Highlands are already heavily used and are highly valued by passengers, irrespective of where they come from. If the member has ideas about what more we might be able to do under OLR arrangements to promote the service, I would be happy to meet with her to discuss that. In the meantime, we will continue to promote the Caledonian sleeper's contribution to tourism in the Highlands and as a sustainable form of transport to and from London.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** The Caledonian sleeper is the greener option by miles, but travelling on it has often been significantly more expensive than travelling by plane. Rather than a luxury service, we need cheaper fares and a quality service. Public ownership of the sleeper may be the way forward, but the Scottish Government's nationalisation of ScotRail does not inspire confidence. How is the Scottish Government going to ensure that the sleeper is the greener, credible, competitive way to travel?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am sorry that Ms Wishart is not inspired by public ownership of Scotland's railways. I use those services regularly—I do not know whether she does—and find them to be in the main very efficient. They are among the most efficient railway services in the whole of the United Kingdom.

I am sympathetic Ms Wishart's point about expense, which Mr Bibby also alluded to. Obviously, under the Serco franchise, the approach has been more focused on tourism and luxury products, but that might be different in the future. I do not want to prejudge what it will look like, but that has been Serco's approach.

As I alluded to in my response to Mr Simpson, Serco has been successful in driving an increase in tourism, and it is important that we do not lose the benefits of that approach. However, I am sympathetic to Ms Wishart's overall assessment of expense. We need to make public transport, irrespective of mode, more affordable, so we will require to look at that opportunity in more detail under the new arrangements.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** The minister has highlighted the strong performance of the Caley sleeper. Will she outline how that will continue under the governance arrangements for the operator of last resort?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Jackie Dunbar raises an important point. The sleeper has performed well, as we have discussed, and it is important that we use that success as a barometer to build on under the OLR arrangements. As I mentioned, the new

arrangements will provide stability and certainty for passengers and staff, which is really important, and will allow us to move forward with public ownership from the end of the contract.

The main way that we can build on that success is through staff, because it is the people who are behind our railways who make them successful. I am very confident that, under those arrangements, we can build on our experience of public sector operation to ensure that the bright future that we all want to see for the Caledonian sleeper is protected while we wait for clarity from the UK Government on its rail reform proposals.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I am delighted that the Government is able to deliver an integrated publicly owned ScotRail, now complete with a world-class sleeper service. Alongside the rail unions, we have been clear from the start that a nationalised sleeper service is central to our vision for a people's ScotRail, including delivering that climate-critical shift from plane to rail and better connectivity with our friends in Europe. Does the minister agree that, with a nationalised Caledonian sleeper, we are one step closer to a fully integrated affordable rail route from Scotland to mainland Europe?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Yes, I broadly agree with the member's assertion. This is a real opportunity to take a more joined-up approach to transport—not just within Scotland, of course. The sleeper gives us great opportunities in that respect.

However, nationalising rail services and extending the service to Europe would require the full devolution of rail powers to Scotland. I am sure that Mr Ruskell would support me in calling for those rail powers to come back to Scotland, and in asking people with a genuine interest to get behind the calls for those powers to be devolved to Scotland to allow us to take the opportunities that are presented to us by the OLR arrangements.

**Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** How much has implementing operator-of-last-resort arrangements cost the Scottish taxpayer to date, and can the Scottish Government afford to run and improve the Caledonian sleeper?

**Jenny Gilruth:** As I outlined in my statement, I have instructed officials to proceed with the implementation of OLR arrangements, and the final cost will be published in due course as part of normal Government accounting processes. More broadly, we have made available funding that would be considered appropriate to maintain support for the net cost of running sleeper services.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I am sat here trying to digest that answer. We have a thriving and attractive service that is of

the highest standard and exceeds passenger expectations, so we are nationalising it. We have no idea of the cost, but are taking that action before we find out the cost. We know that ScotRail costs us north of £1.3 billion a year. How can the minister make that move without knowing the cost? Does she at least have an estimate if she does not know the exact cost?

**Jenny Gilruth:** Doom and gloom from Mr Mountain. It is unfortunate that he cannot recognise that I am curtailed by reserved UK railway legislation that I have to adhere to as the Minister for Transport. If Mr Mountain does not like that, I suggest that he gets behind calls to devolve powers back to Scotland to give me full powers over Scotland's railways.

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

I warmly welcome that the Caledonian sleeper will be publicly run and note what the minister said about the length of the arrangement and the UK Government review. The ScotRail contract is for five years, with the option to extend for five more. Does the minister agree that it would be preferable to have certainty on the length of the contract with a Government-owned arms-length company?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I agree with the member's sentiments. In relation to the sleeper service, there is uncertainty in relation to where the Williams-Shapps review will go next. That uncertainty also extends to the delivery of ScotRail services, which will be impacted by any decision that the UK Government takes. I am sure that the member would agree with me that the UK Government needs to come forward with those plans. As minister, I do not feel that I have been adequately consulted in relation to what the plans will mean for Scotland. The way around that is to devolve powers over rail infrastructure back to Scotland to give us the full powers over railways. I do not know whether Mr Bibby supports that, but it would allow for greater accountability of the Scottish Government, so I am sure that Labour members would welcome it.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the decision to take the contract back under Government control incur any compensation or further contractual payments to Serco?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am not aware of any contractual requirements that would allow for that, but I am more than happy to check with Transport Scotland officials and clarify that with the member.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** If Serco loses millions running the service at near capacity, what will a state-run service do differently, so that those losses are not borne by the taxpayer?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I am sure that Mr Lumsden joins me in wanting the service to be a success. We will work very closely with the staff at Serco, who will, of course, be TUPE-ing over to the new OLR arrangements. Fundamentally, making a success of the Caledonian sleeper service depends on the staff who work on our railways, and I very much hope that they will welcome the decision today.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the statement on the Caledonian sleeper train.

There will be a short pause to allow front bench teams to change position, should they wish to do so.

## Scotland's Links with the Arctic

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-08073, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Arctic connections—Scotland's growing links with the Arctic.

I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:27

**The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson):** I signal the Government's acceptance of the amendments that have been lodged both by the Scottish Labour Party and by the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party. I hope that that reflects a positive, cross-party approach to Scotland's relationship with our Arctic and northern neighbours.

Today's debate provides a welcome opportunity to highlight the importance for Scotland of continuing to collaborate with the Arctic region. Scotland is, in fact, the world's most northerly non-Arctic nation. Unst, in Shetland, lies further to the north than Cape Farewell in Greenland, Juno in Alaska and Whitehorse in Yukon. Scottish waters stretch 200 miles into the Norwegian Sea, well into the 63rd parallel north and, similarly, into the North Atlantic Ocean.

Therefore, from an Arctic perspective, Scotland's location at the edge of Europe is far from peripheral—it is quite the opposite. We are in a key strategic position, because we connect the European Arctic with central Europe and North America. There is growing international recognition of the constructive role that Scotland can—and does—play as a close sub-Arctic neighbour.

Although our geographic proximity is a key asset, there is much more to Scotland's developing collaboration with the Arctic region. Indeed, present-day links build on centuries-old ties that remain visible across Scotland in place names, heritage, architecture and culture.

Scotland's compass has long pointed north in search of beneficial partnerships and knowledge to realise opportunities, and increasingly it does so now to collectively address global challenges. Scotland's largely rural profile of sparsely populated regions and abundance of natural resources is akin to that of the Arctic. That creates similar opportunities, such as those concerning the blue economy and green energy production. Shared issues also arise, in particular, from remoteness, for instance, in relation to connectivity, resilience, climate adaptation,

depopulation and public service delivery. Scotland has developed a wealth of expertise on such issues, which is relevant to our Arctic partners. For that reason, Scotland was a valued contributor to the European Union's northern periphery and Arctic programme, and more than 40 per cent of the projects in the 2014 to 2020 round had at least one Scottish partner.

The United Kingdom Government's choice to step away from the NPA and other European programmes is yet another practical example of the harm caused by Brexit. The Scottish Government continues to explore channels to associate with the NPA and other programmes in the future.

To reflect the strategic importance of collaboration with Arctic partners, the Scottish Government published Scotland's first Arctic policy framework back in 2019, and my colleague Fiona Hyslop launched the document in Stromness in recognition of the historical ties between Orkney and the Arctic.

Our framework sets out how we will co-operate and share knowledge with Arctic partners. It is an invitation to pool expertise and unlock wellbeing and prosperity for Scottish and Arctic communities, with a distinctive hands-on approach and strong community focus. Unlike other narratives, which often focus on taking from the Arctic, our framework sets out Scotland's offer to the Arctic, and it focuses on offering and sharing.

Since publishing the framework, we have intensified engagement with domestic and international stakeholders to open new avenues for Scottish-Arctic co-operation. The engagements that I have undertaken recently make it clear that Scotland's expertise is increasingly warmly received and warmly sought after.

Last October, I addressed the Arctic Circle assembly in Reykjavík and was joined by a large Scottish contingent of researchers and third sector and cultural organisations. At the assembly, I opened a session on rural mental health, which was organised by the Scottish Government in partnership with the National Research Council of Canada and the University of the Highland and Islands. Exactly one month ago, I was in Tromsø for the annual Arctic Frontiers conference, where I was invited to join a panel discussion on rural repopulation in a session with the Norwegian prime minister, Jonas Gahr Støre, and US Senator Lisa Murkowski, from Alaska.

Later this month, on 17 March, we will partner with Arctic Frontiers to host a one-day forum on Scottish-Arctic collaboration at the Aberdeen Science Centre. I hope that colleagues from across the chamber will consider attending the event.

Our framework commits us to support Scottish organisations to pursue deeper and broader collaboration with Arctic partners. With that in mind, in 2021, we launched a new Arctic stakeholder fund. To date, the scheme has supported 20 innovative and value-adding projects, and work is now under way on a new round of the fund.

Many of the projects work with indigenous organisations, including to promote and protect indigenous languages. One of the brilliant projects that we have supported this year is led by The Polar Academy, a West Lothian charity that works with young Scots who are experiencing mental health challenges. After a rigorous training programme, the academy takes them on a life-changing polar expedition in Greenland. This year's expedition will set off in the coming days, and I wish all the participants an exciting but safe trip.

Perhaps the best examples of the pace at which Scotland's collaboration with Arctic partners has progressed have come from the academic sector. When our policy framework was published in 2019, Scotland had two members in the University of the Arctic, an international network of institutions that produce research in and about the Arctic. Today, nine Scottish universities are members of UArctic, and I am confident that more will join. We have more members than Sweden and more than any other non-Arctic nation, with the exception of China, which is something of which we should be proud. In recognition of our growing status in the network, UArctic chose the University of St Andrews to host, with Government support, a leadership conference last May.

We have helped to fund the establishment of the Scottish Arctic Network, which brings together academics and researchers from across Scotland with expertise in the Arctic. I am pleased to inform Parliament that, on behalf of the network, the University of Edinburgh will host the Arctic science summit week in 2024. That will be one of the world's largest gatherings of Arctic research organisations.

Supporting research and making best use of available scientific evidence is critical to tackling the dramatic changes that the Arctic is experiencing. Melting glaciers, sea level rises and the escalating pace at which the region is warming are illustrative of the devastating effects of climate change. Those changes do not stay in the Arctic; they reach our islands and coastal communities, too. As a pioneer of renewable energies and decarbonisation, Scotland can offer expertise and help to catalyse international efforts.

Tackling the climate emergency has become the single most important element in Scotland's partnership with Arctic nations. As we know, the

green shift is also an economic opportunity, particularly for our partnership with Arctic nations and Arctic regions, which together represent more than a quarter of our exports. There is ample potential to increase that.

Our draft energy strategy and just transition plan further underline the opportunities to work with northern neighbours to create shared strategic advantage and establish regional infrastructure to meet domestic and international renewable energy demand. In addition, our Arctic policy framework and the new national planning framework 4 highlight how Scotland can create a near-Arctic marine transport and logistics hub. The University of Strathclyde's hosting of the 27th international conference on port and ocean engineering under Arctic conditions, which is the first time that the conference has been held in the UK, is further evidence of that.

Today's debate has created space to set out all that Scotland is already achieving in our partnership with Arctic nations and to demonstrate our ambitions to grow those powerful links further. We are strategically located and have a wealth of relevant experience to make Scotland not only a key partner in the Arctic, but a shareholder in its future. In moving the motion in my name, I hope that Parliament will support and welcome those ambitions for Scotland and our Arctic neighbours.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges Scotland's strategic role as the world's most northerly non-Arctic nation; agrees on the value of increasing collaboration between Scotland and its Arctic partners; welcomes the distinctive profile and reputation that Scotland has built internationally as an expert contributor to Arctic cooperation; recognises the importance of offering knowledge to promote sustainable development in the region, while learning from best practice developed there; calls for the Arctic to remain safe, stable and peaceful; acknowledges the particular threat posed to the Arctic by the climate crisis, and the need for climate action to be at the heart of Arctic cooperation, and supports the continued engagement with Arctic states, nations and regions to pursue sustainable trade opportunities, develop joint solutions that strengthen community resilience and mark longstanding cultural ties.

15:35

**Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate on how we can continue to enhance our relationship with our Arctic neighbours. Although international relations is, of course, a matter that is reserved to the United Kingdom Government, I would stress that the Scottish Conservatives believe that it is important for Scotland to engage with Arctic nations in order to promote and advance Scotland, both economically and culturally.

Neither Scotland nor the United Kingdom is technically an Arctic nation, but it remains vital that we work alongside the Arctic nations to enhance our own climate goals and to build on our existing security commitments in the region. That latter point is particularly critical, given Russia's on-going illegal invasion of Ukraine and the need for other states to remain united in their condemnation of that conflict.

The Arctic region is a unique and fragile ecosystem that faces a range of challenges, from climate change to resource extraction, and from the aforementioned geopolitical tensions to indigenous rights. As a global power, the United Kingdom clearly has an important role to play in promoting sustainable development, protecting the environment and supporting the people of the wider region.

However, as has already been said, Scotland, too, shares many cultural, environmental and economic ties with Arctic states, and it is evident that we in Scotland also have a unique role to play. I will focus my remarks on that role, and on the need for the Scottish Government and the UK Government to work together on enhancing stability and security in the region.

We welcome, for instance, the publication of the UK Government's updated Arctic policy framework, which we believe should complement the existing work that was detailed in the Scottish Government's 2019 framework. Both Governments rightly place climate change at the heart of their respective frameworks and the need to work in partnership with other nations that face similar challenges to Scotland's.

The need to share best practice on tackling the climate crisis is recognised by both Governments due to the fact that, as a country, the United Kingdom is directly affected by changes in the Arctic region, as we are one of its near neighbours with much shared biodiversity. It is deeply concerning that the Arctic is warming at four times the global average, which is increasing the risk of extreme weather, flooding and environmental degradation. I think it is right to say that, by 2028, Arctic summer sea-ice cover will have declined by 150,000 square miles—an area that is 1.5 times the size of the UK. With that in mind, it is welcome that tackling the climate crisis and halting further biodiversity loss are key tenets of both frameworks.

We also acknowledge the need to promote a prosperous Arctic, where economic and commercial development is achieved in a way that is safe, responsible and sustainable. As we continue to recover from the pandemic and rebuild our economy, it is right that we work with Arctic nations to grow our trade links. The Scottish

Government's 2019 framework noted that, in 2017, Arctic countries accounted

"for around 27.5% of our total exports and five of our top 20 export destinations".

From a Scottish perspective, we know that further development of those links can be achieved through the GlobalScot and trade envoy network, which the Scottish Conservatives recognise the benefit of.

However, as the UK framework notes, we must ensure that any new trade with the Arctic region

"does not damage the Arctic's natural environment, or destabilise peaceful cooperation, which are fundamental to the prosperity of many Arctic communities."

That is vital, particularly when we consider the rights of indigenous groups in the Arctic region, which is something that both Governments' frameworks emphasise.

I turn to the security aspect of the debate. Russia's on-going conflict in Ukraine poses several major challenges for the Arctic region, not least because Russia has held the chairmanship of the Arctic Council since 2021—its term is due to end later this year. In addition to that, it is plain that Russia views the Arctic as strategically vital to its prosperity and security, and it has recently increased its military presence in its Arctic territory.

Other areas of concern include the fact that Russia has established a new northern joint strategic command and has re-opened cold-war era bases above the Arctic Circle. Those are just some of Russia's recent actions and it is vital that the UK Government continues to work closely with our strategic partners in the region to monitor that further.

To that end, I welcome the Ministry of Defence's recent publication of "The UK's Defence Contribution in the High North", which reaffirms the UK Government's commitment to the wider high north region. That includes several key objectives, including:

"Protecting our Critical National Infrastructure ... Ensuring our freedom to navigate and operate across the wider region ... Reinforcing the rules-based international system, particularly UNCLOS"

—the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—and, finally, the need to contest "malign and destabilising behaviours." Those are important objectives, and although defence remains a reserved matter, I hope that, where joint working is possible between the Scottish and UK Governments on the matter, that will come to fruition.

It is clear that Scotland has an important role to play as a non-Arctic nation, alongside the key Arctic states. Whether that be through the joint

working on tackling climate change, growing our economic interests or enhancing the region's security, Scotland and the UK can be major contributors to those shared endeavours. The UK and Scottish Governments clearly share several common goals, something that may be rare but is extremely welcome. To that end, I confirm that we will be supporting the Scottish Government motion, as well as the Labour amendment.

I move amendment S6M-08073.1, to insert at end:

“, and acknowledges the UK Government's updated Arctic Policy Framework, which commits to cooperating with Arctic countries where necessary, as well as protecting their environment and the UK's security.”

15:42

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I welcome the debate and believe that there are two contexts to it: climate security and global security. I very much agree with the general thrust of the motion and, indeed, of the speeches that the cabinet secretary and Donald Cameron made. Climate security has to be a key priority for the Parliament and for legislators across the world.

The past few years have shown us the devastating impact of failing to address the climate emergency. For example, at the January meeting of the cross-party group on Pakistan, we discussed how to support the rebuilding of the Pakistan economy and the country after a third of that country experienced massive floods that would have been unheard of 10 years ago.

Last year, we had excellent discussions in our Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's online seminars, where we shared the work of our Scottish Parliament on sustainable development. There is much more that we could do to share best practice, but it is absolutely central. For example, I thought that it was great that our Presiding Officer led a delegation to the Nordic Council last October.

For our islands, rural communities and coastal regions, in particular, we need to exchange best practice on low-carbon energy production and heat networks, especially now that we are experiencing a cost of living crisis. For our cities, we urgently need to adopt the sort of work that Denmark has done on building municipal low-carbon heat networks in places such as Copenhagen.

We need to reduce our transport and building emissions if we are to deliver on our climate targets, but, much more, we need to work with our neighbouring countries and legislatures to enable the transformational shift that the world needs. Given the climate crisis, work with our Arctic neighbours has to be part of our agenda as a

Parliament, as well as part of the Government's agenda.

The Arctic Council, which has been mentioned, brings together the nations with territory in the Arctic circle: the USA, Canada, Russia, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Norway and Finland. It is worth noting that they have worked together since 1996 to promote co-operation, giving indigenous nations a formal voice and addressing conservation as a key priority. The council has co-ordinated work on addressing biodiversity, conservation, pollution, sustainability, tourism and shipping.

The UK is an observer at the Arctic Council and has contributed to several of the papers that it has published, in particular on biodiversity and pollution. In 2019, the Scottish Government published its “Arctic Connections: Scotland's Arctic Policy Framework” paper, which again highlighted the common challenges and opportunities, and in particular—as the cabinet secretary focused on—the academic links. I agree that we need to strengthen and build those academic links with universities across our regions, but we also need to focus on enabling our students to have more opportunities to study in neighbouring countries and to build our connections for the long run. That is important.

I also highlight one of the key recommendations that Scottish Labour proposed last year, in Gordon Brown's commission on the UK's future, which was to look at Scotland being able to sign international agreements in devolved areas. In the aftermath of the excellent connections that we made at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow, we are very keen to pursue that.

There is an awful lot in the motion with which we in Scottish Labour are able to agree. However, I am seeking to amend it because it does not mention the other issue on which countries in the Arctic circle are currently focused, which is global security. As we debated in Parliament last week, Putin's invasion of Ukraine has shifted global politics, so it is important to acknowledge that, in relation to the Arctic, the Russian Government has decided to make changes to its state Arctic policy that remove reference to co-operation with the Arctic Council and instead prioritise solely Russian national interest. That is deeply concerning, and I want us, as a Parliament, to note that.

Climate change should be our priority, and we cannot afford to delay the radical action that we need to protect our communities. Sea level rise, melting glaciers and extreme weather are becoming increasingly prevalent, and the Arctic region is particularly vulnerable. Given our global climate crisis, we need global and regional co-operation, with Governments working together and Parliaments sharing best practice, rather than

countries pursuing agendas that undermine that collective ambition.

As we debated last week, peace in Ukraine, with Ukraine's sovereignty recognised and a withdrawal of Putin's troops from Ukrainian soil, is critical, but we also need to acknowledge that that invasion has had an impact on wider global security, and work together.

I support the broad thrust of the Government's motion, and I support Donald Cameron's amendment. Nevertheless, I wanted to flag up the damage that is being done by the Russian invasion, which is impacting on global security and diverting the political energy that we all need to work together to address our shared climate emergency.

We should support our Arctic neighbours, given that the temperatures in the Arctic continue to rise way above the global average. We need to promote that joint work across our neighbouring Governments and Parliaments. It is not just in our interests—it is absolutely vital to the interests of our future generations.

I move amendment S6M-08073.2, to leave out from "Scotland's strategic role" to "developed there" and insert:

"the value of Scotland's involvement in multilateral relations with Arctic nations; agrees on the value of increasing collaboration and building stronger relationships between Scotland and Arctic nations; recognises the importance of participation in educational programmes and sharing knowledge to promote sustainable development in the region and learn from best practice developed there; notes with concern Russia's recent changes to its Arctic Policy, which remove reference to cooperation with the Arctic Council and instead prioritise 'the national interests of the Russian Federation'; believes that any framework for Arctic cooperation must respect sovereignty and the rule of law, and that this is incompatible with the invasion and annexation of the sovereign territory of neighbouring states".

15:48

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I warmly welcome the fact that time has been set aside for this debate. It may reflect the Government's desire to keep Parliament's agenda rather uncontroversial over the next few weeks, but if that is the case, today's debate represents the acceptable face of the Scottish National Party leadership contest. I congratulate the members who have spoken so far on both the tone and substance of their contributions.

The islands that I represent are often described in the chamber as remote; they have even been called communities at the edge. When it comes to the Arctic, however, and discussions about what the Scotland and UK strategy should be in that regard, Orkney is smack bang at the heart and the centre of things, and not just geographically.

Orkney's connections to the Arctic circle are long-standing, and we are enormously proud of them.

Orkney and Shetland were a Norwegian province up until 1472. Workers for the Hudson's Bay Company started heading across from Orkney in 1670, and Orcadians made up two thirds of the workforce by the 1800s. The Orcadian explorer Dr John Rae discovered the final link in the north-west passage in 1854, though sadly history has yet to fully afford him the recognition, respect and gratitude that he is due for those astonishing efforts.

During the world wars, the Royal Navy was based in Scapa Flow, and Orkney's strategic location served as an important departure point for the Arctic convoys that delivered vital supplies to north Russia. The names of our people, homes and natural habitat are often unmistakably Nordic.

Little wonder, then, that, as the cabinet secretary reminded us, when the Scottish Government was looking for somewhere to launch its Arctic policy framework back in 2019, Orkney stood out as the perfect location. I pay tribute to Fiona Hyslop, who was Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs at the time and who I know retains a passionate commitment to these issues. Indeed, she and I, along with Mark Ruskell, attended the Arctic Circle assembly late last year, as the cabinet secretary said. The visit reinforced, at least for me, a conviction that we must build and broaden these ties and relationships as a Parliament, through Government and local government, as well as through business, academia and wider civic society.

That model is already proving enormously successful in the development of Scotland's relationships with Malawi, and I see no reason why it cannot be adapted to suit the Arctic context. There is no lack of policy areas in which closer ties are desperately needed at all levels, which could deliver immediate and lasting benefits. Climate change is the obvious example, and that was the focus of much of the discussion in Reykjavík back in October. Temperatures in the Arctic continue to rise at four times the global annual average, and rapid loss of sea ice, melt events on the Greenland ice sheet, wildfires and permafrost thaw all contribute to rising sea levels and extreme temperature events beyond the Arctic.

In fisheries, we have a direct interest in the Arctic region in promoting sustainable use of stocks and responsible science-led management of our respective waters. With vast natural resources and strong expertise in energy innovation, Scotland and the Arctic countries can continue to lead the way in the development of marine energy and green hydrogen. Our Reykjavík visit also underscored for me our shared interest in

finding low-emission solutions to ferry transport and cruise-line traffic.

On my earlier point, those are areas in which Orkney can be in the vanguard on behalf of Scotland and the UK, while acting as a stepping stone for Arctic countries and regions that are looking to develop relationships in the other direction. I urge the cabinet secretary to support Orkney Islands Council and other partners in developing Orkney Research and Innovation Campus in Stromness as a centre of excellence for Arctic and Nordic research and partnership. Will he agree to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor Fiona Hyslop and organise a follow-up to the 2019 conference in Orkney, with a focus on building economic, political and research relationships?

I look forward to a positive response from the cabinet secretary to those suggestions and, indeed, to a consensual debate throughout the afternoon.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. I advise members that we have some time in hand for interventions or any additional points that members wish to make.

15:52

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** I am very pleased that the Parliament is holding this debate. I have a long-standing interest in Scotland's Arctic connections. As the then Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, I published Scotland's first Arctic policy framework, having previously mobilised Scotland's various and many academic, business community, scientific, environmental, transport community and health connections in an Arctic summit in Inverness, which has been referred to. I am delighted that there will now be an international Arctic exchange conference in Aberdeen. I hosted Nordic ministers at the first Nordic Council meeting to be held in Edinburgh, and I have twice attended the Arctic Circle assembly in Reykjavik.

Why Scotland and the Arctic? We all have an interest in protecting and promoting the Arctic, and Scotland has great scientific monitoring of, for example, sea temperatures. Parts of Scotland share the experiences of remote living. Further important strands of connections are those made through our young people and the sharing of digital health expertise, as well as higher education connections that have been made through membership of the virtual University of the Arctic. It is good to hear about the expansion of that membership to more of our universities.

In October, Liam McArthur led our parliamentary delegation to the Arctic Circle assembly, where we met ministers from Iceland and elsewhere and

discussed tunnel links with the Faroe Islands minister. Icelandic MPs were interested in our mission-led Scottish National Investment Bank.

To give a sense of the knowledge that was exchanged more widely by thousands of global delegates at the Arctic Circle assembly, Scottish experts shared our insight on renewable wind energy developments, in which we are seen as world leading, and Inuit knowledge about how to live with the environment and rich culture of the sea and the sky in tough circumstances was powerful testimony.

Arctic countries are interested in our management of wetlands. We shared our bad experience of degrading peatland in the 1980s through inappropriate tree planting, in order to inform their consideration of tree planting. It is profound to hear that, when the tundra thaws in Alaska, houses built with no foundations just collapse while families sit at home watching television.

In January, we were delighted to host the Icelandic Parliament's Environment and Communications Committee—which we met in October—at a joint meeting with the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, at which heat in building standards, onshore wind, wetlands management and carbon capture were on the agenda. Iceland is investigating onshore wind developments and is interested in our experience. It thinks that there is potential to export hydrogen through major grid connections, although, politically, that is contested.

I will touch briefly on more geopolitical and environment interests. The melting of Arctic ice will bring rising sea levels and will allow the reopening of the north-west passage, which will mean that freight shipping will be able to cut many miles and much energy use by using that route to traverse the world. The development in the longer term of deepwater ports en route that have the potential to enable hydrogen-powered ships to be refuelled is a common interest, which I know that Orkney and others are interested in.

The reopening of the north-west passage also raises marine defence issues and issues around mineral exploitation. Many of the governance issues need to be resolved by Arctic nations.

Arctic nations are cautious of many economic and military interests, so countries need to be sensitive in their approaches to having observer status on the Arctic Council. However, as with the Nordic Council, Scotland has insight and experience to offer as a good-faith partner in less controversial areas. There are those in the UK Government who think that Scotland is best placed to represent interests that it has in common with Arctic countries.

The Arctic matters to everyone, and the people of the Arctic are key. Our people-to-people approach can broaden our horizons, but it can also forge partnerships to help us to face an Arctic that is changing, which will affect us all.

15:57

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Scotland has been described as the Arctic's nearest neighbour. As someone who, like Liam McArthur, comes from the northern isles, I assure members that that is not lost on me, particularly when a polar blast hits our islands.

Our islands' connections with the Arctic countries relate to more than just the weather. As Liam McArthur said, we were part of Norway until the 15th century, and many local names, including mine, are of Norse heritage. Stromness was an important recruiting centre for the Hudson's Bay Company, and many Orcadians travelled to Canada and settled there, while others played an important role in that country's development before coming home.

Orphir, where I live, was the home of John Rae. I declare that I am a member of the John Rae Society in Orkney, and I commend its excellent efforts to promote his legacy and to preserve his birthplace, the Hall of Clestrain. By mapping around 1,750 miles of Arctic coast on foot and in small boats, Rae helped to shape our understanding of the Arctic region through his discoveries. I also commend the work of the Orkney Norway Friendship Association and the efforts that it has made since 1978 to promote links between Orkney and Norway. We should continue to celebrate the long-standing cultural and historical ties that we share with our Arctic partners.

However, new relationships are now being forged. Our strategic role as the world's most northerly non-Arctic nation only enhances the value of increasing collaboration between Scotland and our Arctic partners. We are seeing that in a number of fields. Orkney's world-leading European Marine Energy Centre has partners from across the world, including Norway, and many of our coastal and onshore wind turbines are Danish designed and built.

There is much to learn from the shared experiences of Arctic countries about how some of the problems that we face can be solved. A significant challenge for many communities across my Highlands and Islands region and in Arctic countries is depopulation, and connectivity is an important part of combating that. My colleague Douglas Lumsden will talk about ferries, but there is a lot that we could learn from some of the Arctic countries about fixed links. The use of tunnels and

bridges to join our islands and communities is a subject that Fiona Hyslop touched on, and it is one that I have spoken about before. Communities across Scotland want that to be investigated, and the Scottish Government needs to be more active in considering the issue. Broadband is vital for both businesses and the social fabric of society. Although Scotland's R100 programme will be seven years late, leaving many of my Highlands and Islands constituents reliant on slow or non-existent broadband, Space Norway will, next year, provide broadband coverage throughout the Arctic.

There are serious considerations. My home overlooks Scapa Flow, which was the UK's main naval base during both world wars, when our islands played a vital role in the Atlantic convoys that kept the UK supplied. The shadow of another old threat has now returned. Russia's aggression in Ukraine threatens the Arctic region as a place of high co-operation and low tension. Like my colleague Donald Cameron, I welcome the UK Government's publication, last month, of its Arctic policy framework and its commitment to

"work with our Arctic partners and Allies to contest malign and destabilising behaviours and activity in the region."

More positively, in its 2021 integrated review, the UK Government committed to maintaining a significant contribution to Arctic science, with a focus on better understanding the implications of climate change.

The United Kingdom, Scotland and my Highlands and Islands region share many challenges with Arctic countries. As we look to the future, our strategic location and our historical and cultural ties with Arctic countries present a unique opportunity for more collaboration and partnership. I hope that the UK and Scottish Governments will work together to that end.

16:01

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The Latest United Nations "World Investment Report" records

"increased foreign influence in the Arctic".

China has described the Arctic as a "global commons". As it planted a flag on the sea bed two and a half miles below the north pole, the Russian navy declared, "The Arctic is Russian." And, of course, the 45th president of the United States of America, Donald J Trump, even thought that he could buy Greenland, on terms that he described as

"essentially a large real-estate deal".

So, when the Government talks about the Arctic as a "safe, stable and peaceful" region, I hope that it acknowledges that there has been a sharp rise

in economic instability and in militarisation, and that there are concerns about Russian expansionism. With the accession of Sweden and Finland to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, whether we like it or not, I am bound to say that militarism will not come down; it will go up. The Arctic is already viewed by the Tory Government as being as much a region for military activity as one for scientific research. The UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force is about military capability, not scientific collaboration.

The price that is paid for all of that is the repression of indigenous people's rights, the accelerated depletion, commodification and commercialisation of natural assets, the sacking of biodiversity and the wholesale appropriation of land. In short, a new and all-pervasive colonisation is taking place in the Arctic, in which common lands and seas, culture, heritage and even an entire way of life are being put in mortal jeopardy—all for the sake of the insatiable demands of extractive capitalism, corporate greed, the maximisation of profits and the shareholder dividend.

But while that chaos is creating conflict, it is also building resistance. There is resistance from the 4 million people for whom the Arctic is home. There is resistance to the nuclear power plant on the Hanhikivi peninsula in Finland, a project now cancelled after Putin's invasion of Ukraine. There is resistance by the Inuit people, who forced the Canadian federal Government to block the proposed Shandong Gold Mining takeover of Hope Bay goldmine on the grounds of national security. There is resistance, too, to global multinational corporations that are owned and registered here: to Rio Tinto in Canada and to Shell in Alaska.

So, when the cabinet secretary reminds us of Scotland's proximity to the Arctic circle, of course, he is right. We are a near-Arctic state. But let me remind the cabinet secretary that it is the duty of this Parliament to press him on whether he means for us, actively or tacitly, to be complicit in this new economic, cultural, ecological, social and military colonialism. Or are we prepared instead to build an alternative relationship and to follow an alternative strategy that is forged on the values of peace, not war; of social advance, not economic exploitation; and of conservation, emission controls and climate change co-operation, in place of mineral extraction, environmental dumping and corporate takeover?

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Will Richard Leonard reflect on the importance of sub-nation states and petrol states coming together and committing to a just transition and to signing up to the Beyond Oil & Gas Alliance?

**Richard Leonard:** Yes, I do support that, because a debate is taking place at the moment in Scotland that is challenging some of the premises that I thought we had accepted. There needs to be an international approach to the issues of just transition. I wholly support that.

Let me finish by saying that we need to build a relationship where we respect cultural diversity and biodiversity, where we support native communities and indigenous wealth building, and where we provide practical solidarity to indigenous trade union organisation, too, because the earth is a common treasury that we must defend—not with gunboats and the bellicose rhetoric of nationalism, but with ethical socialist, ecological and humanitarian action. That is what our vision should be: a people's vision that reaches beyond economics, looks to the bonds of our common humanity and has a shared vision of peace, justice and sustainability.

16:07

**Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** I am waiting for my microphone to go live.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Martin, is your card in? Could we have Ms Martin's microphone on, please? [*Interruption.*]

**Gillian Martin:** Scotland and the Arctic have been intertwined for centuries, due to our close geographical proximity, so it makes sense that our ancient relationships are being reinvigorated, reignited and redesigned to match our modern times. Whether with Norway, Sweden, Canada, Alaska, Iceland or Finland, there is common ground between us across a lot of issues, and we all stand to gain valuable knowledge through our interactions, backed by the new links that have been enabled by the Scottish Government's 2019 Arctic policy framework, which was launched by my friend and colleague Fiona Hyslop.

In parliamentary terms, I gained enormous insight into many of those common issues by attending the Arctic Circle assembly, in 2018 with Finlay Carson and in 2019 with Mark Ruskell, on behalf of the then Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee, having many bilateral meetings with politicians who worked in those portfolios, from Iceland, the Faroes, Canada and the Saami regions of Norway, Sweden and Finland.

At that time, our committee was working on the bill that became the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. Hearing from Inuit, Saami and Greenland communities about the devastating impact that climate change is having on their way of life certainly focused my mind on our responsibility to play our part in reducing our emissions. Everyone to whom I

spoke was blown away by the extent of our ambitions in that area, and I am very appreciative of them.

The Scottish Government is ensuring that the benefits of our transition to a net zero economy are maximised, including by working with our Arctic neighbours, with considerable investment from companies that are based in the Arctic states. Hywind Scotland, which lies 25 miles off the coast of my constituency and is now in its sixth year of operation, is the world's first floating offshore wind farm. It was built by and is operated by Equinor and has off-the-chart performance in energy output. Now, with all the lessons that have been learned from that development, Equinor is developing an even bigger project—Hywind Tampen, which is situated off the coast of Norway. In addition, the construction of NorthConnect, the interconnector cable between Scotland and Norway, will allow us to exchange power and increase the use of renewable energy. It will create new trading opportunities for our renewable energy industries while improving our energy security.

Under the Scottish Government's Arctic policy framework, more partnerships are forming as a result of the Arctic connections fund. The second round of funding, which was for the financial year 2022-23, has funded 10 projects. One that piqued my interest was the project on supporting rural women in Arctic low-carbon transitions, which is led by Scotland's Rural College. The transition to a net-zero economy must be a just transition that ensures that no one is left behind, that job security is protected and that new opportunities, particularly for women, are developed. Therefore, I am excited by the aims of that project to establish a knowledge network that will pull together women researchers, policy makers and community practitioners from across Scotland, Sweden, Norway and Canada to share knowledge about how best to support rural women during the transition to net zero in the Arctic region.

Network members will share and explore existing local and regional interventions in their countries to build evidence-based recommendations for future policy on the issue. That will shine a light on tailored support for rural women, who may find themselves taking up new roles in the rural economy or setting up new businesses. As convener of the cross-party group on women in enterprise, it strikes me that hearing from the team behind that project, once it has reported, would make an excellent future session.

We have natural and cultural links to the Arctic already, but strengthening our economic and academic relationships, growing co-operation between Parliaments and Governments and sharing our expertise will be good not only for

Scotland but for our Arctic neighbours and for all of us who cherish the idea of reducing emissions and affecting climate change.

16:12

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the unique position that Scotland has as the world's most northerly non-Arctic country. I have enjoyed the contributions and insights from members so far.

I have attended the Arctic Circle assembly in Reykjavík twice as an MSP and have always left inspired by the opportunities for collaboration and learning between Governments, businesses, academia and the third sector. Attending those events has more often felt like coming home than visiting away, such are the warmth of the gathering and the willingness to share and learn from one another.

The geography, the economic, social and cultural history, and the future of our climate all point to the need for that greater collaboration between the people who inhabit and care for the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions. In Scotland, we are undeniably part of that world. It is striking that, when you tilt the map on the northern latitudes, there is a seamless geography that runs from Greenland through Iceland to the archipelagos of the Faroes, Shetland, Orkney, the Western Isles and the west coast of Norway.

That was not lost on our ancestors who explored, traded in and inhabited that world. Some of that history has already been brought into the chamber by Liam McArthur and Jamie Halcro Johnston. It reminded me that my grandfather was stationed at Scapa during the second world war in his work defending the Atlantic convoys.

I will focus a little bit on Orkney. I have to commend the leadership of Orkney Islands Council, which has prioritised its Arctic and Nordic engagement. It is clear that both Orkney and Shetland have much to gain from and share with their neighbours. I hope that the Scottish Government can see that ambition as a strength for Scotland as a whole and that the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture gives serious attention to proposals to invest further in Orkney's Arctic agenda.

The shared geography of the west Nordic region means shared opportunities and learning. I have been struck, as Fiona Hyslop was, by the Faroese approach to developing fixed links across their islands, their ambition for offshore wind combined with tidal energy and the growing development of a new industry: kelp farming. We have a ban on kelp dredging in Scotland, but there is a golden opportunity to develop a licensing regime that

allows a productive, profitable industry to emerge in Scotland, creating hundreds of jobs while operating within our ecological limits. Of course, in recent years, the Faroese have developed a licensing regime to achieve that objective, and I urge the Scottish Government to learn from and act on it.

**Gillian Martin:** Does Mark Ruskell recall that, at the meeting with the Faroese that he and I attended, they said that they started kelp farming as a carbon sequestration exercise but found that the value of the kelp that they were producing represented a massive economic benefit?

**Mark Ruskell:** Absolutely. When we went back last year, we met the same industry representatives that Gillian Martin and I had met several years before, and it was interesting to see the development of that licensing regime over that time. Again, we had interesting discussions with colleagues from Orkney who are now looking to develop such an industry there.

Learning cuts in lots of directions and, following the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's meeting in Reykjavík with members of the Icelandic Environment and Communications Committee, which Fiona Hyslop has mentioned, the Icelandic committee made a visit to Holyrood in January, and we had a productive discussion about how onshore wind has been developed in Scotland and what Iceland can learn from us in that regard.

As a number of members have said, it is clear that our greatest shared endeavour is to save the Arctic from the ravages of climate change, for the sake of all humanity. Katrín Jakobsdóttir, the Green Prime Minister of Iceland summed up the situation well in her speech to the Arctic Circle assembly last year, when she said:

"The Arctic may become unrecognizable in a few decades if we do not act sufficiently today. Everything is changing ... We see glaciers receding, permafrost is melting, heat records are beaten and forests are burning. And all this is happening much faster in the Arctic—where the ecosystem is sensitive and the resources are great."

Alongside Jacinda Ardern and Nicola Sturgeon globally, Katrín Jakobsdóttir has been instrumental in leading the shift in thinking to deliver a wellbeing economy—an economy whose foundations are ecologically restorative but also socially fair and just. As we move forward to the election of a new First Minister in Scotland, I hope that that wellbeing economy mission remains central to the Government and that we take on the challenges and threats to the Arctic, her nature and her people, together, as one.

16:17

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** I am delighted to speak in the debate today. At last month's business in the Parliament event, I attended a workshop on export opportunities that was hosted by Scottish Chambers of Commerce. Business after business told us of difficulties around trading with countries in the European Union due to Brexit and said that they needed to look at new markets into which they would export. Many were looking at the North American market, but it was quite startling to hear how many were now looking to export to Arctic states. Replacing EU markets raises the importance of looking towards those Arctic states, which will be key to our economic success.

"Arctic Connections: Scotland's Arctic Policy Framework" was published in 2109 and introduced by Fiona Hyslop. Scotland needs to look north. Our northernmost islands are closer to the Arctic circle than they are to London—we have heard Liam McArthur and Jamie Halcro Johnston talk about the links between Arctic states and Orkney. However, connections between Scotland and the Arctic go much further than geographical proximity. Our communities share deep cultural and social links as well as similar challenges and outlooks. The Arctic policy framework consolidates our position as a northern European gateway to the Arctic, establishing Scotland as the international partner of choice in tackling shared challenges.

The key things that are mentioned in the framework are climate action and renewable energy solutions; connectivity; science, research and innovation; and a sustainable marine economy. Only a few months ago, along with colleagues from the cross-party group on renewable energy and energy efficiency, including Sarah Boyack, I met parliamentarians from Iceland to discuss aspirations in the area of renewables. As has already been mentioned by Fiona Hyslop, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee held a meeting with them the same day. We discussed solutions in relation to issues that we face in Scotland. In particular, we focused on community engagement, skills development and, of course, supply-side development. Those discussions open up opportunities for our renewables sector and allow the export of our expertise in the market.

The policy framework sets out Scottish expertise and encourages mutual learning between Scotland and our Arctic partners. It sits alongside complementary strategies such as the Nordic-Baltic policy framework, helping to ensure that best practice and innovative ideas, such as the baby box, are shared with like-minded regional neighbours.

The Arctic connections fund is one of the most vitally fruitful projects to arise from that framework. It was launched in March 2022, and Scotland-based organisations are encouraged to apply for a grant of between £1,000 and £10,000 for projects that explore the shared issues between Scotland and the Arctic.

Scotland's links with close neighbours in the European Arctic are invigorating rural economies and protecting our natural resources. We have heard that the northern periphery and Arctic programme secured over €6.8 million for Scottish organisations between 2014 and 2019 alone. Since 2014, Scotland was also granted €12.1 million through the North Sea region programme. Unfortunately, we have lost that funding opportunity.

We have other collaborative projects, such as the memorandum of understanding between Scotland and Denmark to promote co-operation on district heating and energy efficiency. That is incredibly important. Around 15 years ago, when I was a councillor, I visited Denmark to look at its district heating systems. Denmark was ahead of us then, and it is miles ahead of us now. We have to learn from it in that regard.

Of course we need to replace some of the European funding that has fallen away because Scotland has left the EU. That is still an issue. The Scottish Government remains determined to protect Scotland's reputation as an open and outward-looking nation that addresses acute global challenges such as climate change challenges.

**Sarah Boyack:** I listened to Paul McLennan's comment about how far behind Denmark we are now in respect of community heat networks and renewables. Is there something that we need to be doing with political leadership to link up our councils and the Scottish Government to see what is possible? We have some excellent schemes, but they are not everywhere, and we need to move from saying, "It's a good idea," to saying, "We need to do this as standard practice and make it happen."

**Paul McLennan:** I agree with that point. One of the key things that the Existing Homes Alliance Scotland has talked about is tackling our retrofitting challenge on a local authority basis. I am working on that in my own local authority area, and I ask other local authorities to try to work on that, as well.

In conclusion, we share many interests with our Arctic neighbours, but we need to develop closer links. The framework helps us to do that.

16:21

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)**

**(Con):** I am pleased to be taking part in this debate because, as someone who represents Aberdeen, I know that trade links to the Arctic, and to Norway especially, are vital. I have been to and enjoyed visiting Norway many times. It will be at the heart of my contribution.

Aberdeen is twinned with Stavanger. I had the pleasure of being in Stavanger on a number of occasions in my previous role working in the oil and gas industry. Aberdeen and Stavanger is a perfect twinning, with the economies of both areas having relied heavily first on fishing and latterly on oil and gas. That partnership and friendship remains strong. Stavanger even gifts Aberdeen a Christmas tree each year.

I was pleased to read the 2019 Scottish Government document "Arctic Connections", which has already been discussed. It includes a section on oil and gas, which states:

"The industry supports a total of 110,000 jobs in Scotland when including direct, indirect and induced employment."

It goes on to say:

"A strong domestic oil and gas industry can play a positive role in supporting the low carbon transition, in terms of transferable skills and infrastructure."

Things were much better in 2019 before the Greens were in government. The SNP of old seemed to understand how important the oil and gas sector was to our economy and our transition. That now seems to be a distant memory for this anti-growth and anti-business devolved Government.

Another part of the document that caught my eye was on digital connectivity. The document states:

"The challenges of broadband deployment in the Arctic are akin to those encountered by Scottish remote communities. Like Scotland, Arctic states have established broadband speed and coverage goals to increase interconnectivity in sparsely populated areas."

While the Scottish Government has made a complete mess of the reaching 100 per cent—R100—scheme and missed its goals, Norway has some of the best fixed and mobile speeds in the world, as we heard earlier. That shows that that is possible, and that is something that we should strive towards.

Another similarity between Scotland and Norway is the island communities. It seems that, while Norway is investing in low-carbon vessels, we are investing in Norway's old diesel fleet. We should be looking closely at what Norway is doing and, if we are serious about meeting our climate

change goals, looking to invest in electrifying our harbours is a must.

Fishing is another area in which we have common interests. We should be working closely with our Arctic partners to ensure that we fish in a sustainable way and to learn how to transform our seafood industry through increased automation.

In closing, I agree with the motion that we should be collaborating with our Arctic partners. I also agree that we should learn from them. We should learn from them how to protect our oil and gas industry, as it is a key part of our energy transition. We should learn from them how to run a ferry service that is reliable and greener and which helps to support our island communities. We should learn from them how to grow our fishing industry and invest in automation. We should learn from them how to roll out a decent broadband service. We should learn from them how to roll out world-leading telemedicine, so that our rural communities are not left behind. We should learn from them how to build a decent car-charging infrastructure. In fact, this precarious SNP-Green Government should learn from our Arctic neighbours how to run a country properly.

16:25

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** In recent weeks, a close family member who is on a work placement in Norway has been sending me regular pictures and videos of the northern lights—the spectacular displays of colour in the skies, which graced many of our skies in Scotland earlier this week. However, the Arctic is a lot more than lights in the sky. Indeed, the Scottish-Arctic connections that have been forged through history continue to drive new and creative partnerships, exchanges and co-operation.

Scotland's historical connections with the Arctic are extensive. Aberdeenshire-born polar explorer Thomas Abernethy was awarded five Arctic medals in the 1800s and was one of many Scottish explorers recognised for their pioneering polar research.

Recently, RAF Lossiemouth has been re-established as a key air base in the north of the UK, with a new fleet of maritime patrol aircraft monitoring the north Atlantic and the high north region at a time when tracking emerging military threats has never been so relevant. I note the comments of Sarah Boyack and other members on the issue of global security. I completely agree with them.

Of course, our Arctic connections are embedded in our cultural and social linkages, our shared climate change targets and the interchange of information and expertise, reinforced by shared

policy ideas and initiatives. I commend the Arctic policy framework that was developed by my colleague Fiona Hyslop, which sets out the priorities around developing our Arctic connections in a modern Scotland.

An excellent example is the Scandinavian barnahus or bairns' hoose approach, which ensures that children who are victims of violence or abuse have all their needs met in an integrated way, in one place, under one roof. I am delighted that the Scottish Government has committed to implementing that internationally renowned approach in the programme for government, and I was pleased to receive confirmation that the 2023-24 justice budget includes £2.5 million of additional funding for victims and witnesses, including support for the justice aspects of the next phase of the Scottish bairns' hoose model.

On research and innovation, the Scottish Arctic connections fund continues to support academic collaborations with our Arctic partners, and it is testament to the strong linkages between the north-east and our Arctic friends that the University of Aberdeen and Robert Gordon University have successfully received funding to support a number of projects, including a just transition project that will identify the challenges and opportunities in optimising regulation to achieve a just transition; a project to explore ways in which Arctic region countries address the challenges of the out-migration of young people, which will inform interventions and good practice in Scotland; and a project exploring the sustainability of an Inuit community in the Canadian Arctic.

I must also mention the strong energy collaborations between Scotland and the Arctic. For decades, Scotland has been home to many people who have settled in the north-east from Arctic countries. They have brought their skills and knowledge into our oil and gas sector—and, now, into our developing renewables sector. I was dismayed by the political nuances and tone of Douglas Lumsden's speech. Equinor's development of the Kincardine project—the world's largest floating wind farm, just off the Aberdeenshire coast—is but one of many examples of our solid energy relationship.

Scotland is rightly positioning itself as a key Arctic partner by embracing new friends, growing powerful links and strengthening our internationalist reputation. We have much to be proud of, but there is still much to do. As a constituency MSP for Aberdeen South and North Kincardine, I look forward to receiving my invitation to the forthcoming international Arctic exchange conference.

16:30

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I apologise to members for missing part of the cabinet secretary's opening speech.

Just two days before the Arctic Circle Japan forum meets in Tokyo, I am pleased that we are taking the opportunity to discuss Scotland's existing links with our Arctic partners and the ever-increasing number of opportunities to collaborate with Arctic states, nations, regions and communities.

Perhaps it is human nature to conjure up a mental map when we talk about our economic and cultural links with the world. On a daily basis, we speak about our relationship with other devolved nations on these islands and with London. In recent years, Brexit and our place in Europe has increasingly dominated our thinking. In global terms, we think about the power balance between east and west, and our place being lodged somewhere between the USA and China. On the mental map, that consideration takes us south, east and west, but rarely north—certainly, not as much as it should—despite our strong links that date back to the millennia before the Viking era.

The vast tract of our planet that is covered by Iceland, Greenland and the sweeping north Atlantic corridor—which links those nations with Norway, Sweden and Finland in the east and the USA and Canada in the west—along with Scotland's place on its periphery, merits far more of our attention. Although Scotland is not an Arctic nation, we are one of the planet's most northerly non-Arctic nations. As a good global citizen, we have a strong interest in fostering greater mutual learning between Scotland and the Arctic and in playing our part in fighting the very real climate and nature loss that the Arctic faces, which colleagues have, rightly, focused on in great detail this afternoon.

Scotland has much to learn from our Arctic neighbours. We also have much to offer. I was pleased to hear the cabinet secretary relay the feedback that he received that Scotland is increasingly viewed as a place that is home to innovation, research, learning, technology and the development of solutions that can benefit the whole Arctic region. That is something that we can, and should, all be proud of. The contribution that Scotland can make is not limited to one particular area of expertise; it is across a range of sectors and industries. We have already heard about a few such areas, and I look forward to hearing more examples in the winding-up speeches.

Only a few months ago, my colleague Audrey Nicoll, who has just spoken, hosted a team from Robert Gordon University in the Parliament. At

that event, it was outlined that Scotland should be setting a high ambition to become a global energy hub. We should build on our existing energy expertise in order to become a centre where new energies such as hydrogen are developed, produced and transported directly between Scotland and our Arctic neighbours. Scotland's energy industry is world leading. However, our expertise lies not only in the technical development of renewable energies, but in pioneering marine special planning to maximise the potential of such projects in an environmentally and economically sustainable way, in partnership with communities and industries. The opportunity for knowledge transfer between Scotland and the Arctic in that area is huge, and that is to say nothing of the positive impact that the development of those new energies will have in preserving our threatened Arctic environment.

Blessed with natural scenic beauty, Scotland and the Arctic have much in common. However, with natural scenic beauty comes the challenge of managing the growing number of people who want to come and see it for themselves and exploit the resources, which Richard Leonard mentioned. That is especially relevant when we consider how environmentally fragile some of our most picturesque landscapes are. Scotland's practical experience of balancing our desires to grow tourism, protect our natural environment and generate sustainable economic growth is, therefore, of value to our Arctic neighbours, particularly in areas where tourist numbers are currently low but growing exponentially. Nations around the Arctic are hungry for its resources, and we must resist some of those urges.

Scotland's islands passport initiative encourages tourists to visit more of Scotland's 96 inhabited islands and helps to alleviate tourism pressure points by spreading tourism to our wider regions. That initiative and our experiences in establishing it are of real value to our friends in the Arctic. I am sure that Scottish civil servants—joined, of course, by parliamentary colleagues—will be in high demand at Arctic Circle events, where they can share learning and field questions on the initiative's operation.

Scotland prides itself on being a country that is home to big ideas that make a mark on the world. More than that, we want to share our ideas and take our place in global networks and partnerships that allow that to happen. Through closer collaboration with the Arctic, Scotland can create new opportunities to share and learn. I support the Scottish Government as it takes forward efforts to solidify the valuable partnerships with our friends in the Arctic.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to winding-up speeches. I should say that we have a little time in

hand, so I can be generous to those who are closing.

16:34

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary, Angus Robertson, for bringing these important issues to the chamber. I echo his words on the importance of continuing our educational support in relation to the Arctic region, including the preservation of indigenous languages.

Scotland has a responsibility to co-operate and work with our northern neighbours. Particularly now, strategic co-operation with our European Arctic neighbours must continue in order to ensure a safe, peaceful and prosperous Arctic. There is much that Scotland and the UK as a whole can be doing to help and support the Arctic region and its nations. The Arctic now exists as a complex environment, with more state and non-state actors involved than ever before. As my colleague Sarah Boyack said, we must preserve the Arctic as an area of peace and co-operation.

We very much welcome the Scottish Government's support for our Scottish Labour amendment. Russia shares 53 per cent of its border with the Arctic Ocean, and more than two and a half million of Russia's inhabitants live in Arctic territory, which is about half the population of the Arctic. The Russian Federation is geographically and politically tied to the Arctic, and its presence in the region must not be overlooked.

Under Putin's leadership, the Russian Federation has recently changed its state Arctic policy. It references no plans for continued co-operation with the Arctic Council; instead, it references the pursuit of Russian national interest. Full strategic co-operation and engagement with all Arctic states will simply not be possible while Putin's illegal war in Ukraine continues. Any framework that sets out to improve Arctic co-operation must not infringe on the diplomatic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation by the United Kingdom and its allies regarding the illegal invasion of a sovereign nation. The Scottish Government needs to recognise the new reality and shape co-operation based on the high-security situation.

As my colleague Richard Leonard commented, multilateral engagement must be at the centre of future co-operation efforts in the Arctic region. My colleagues have already mentioned the melting glaciers in the Arctic, which represent the devastating effect that global warming is having on our planet. Climate change and global warming have securitised the Arctic as a region. Changes in the Arctic environment are greater than they are everywhere else, and temperatures in the Arctic

rise three times faster than the global average, with impacts across the globe.

The Arctic should be at the heart of our sustainability goals. The current climate crisis poses a significant threat to the Arctic region and to its almost four million inhabitants. That is something that we can strive to co-operate on. Scotland and the Arctic region should share the same climate action ambitions, now and in the future.

16:39

**Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con):** I am pleased to bring this debate to a close on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

We have heard a lot today about Scotland's growing ties with the Arctic and although I recognise the importance of strengthening our relationship with Arctic countries, we must remember that we are debating a reserved matter.

As we have heard in the contributions today, there are areas where we can strengthen our links with the Arctic. It is encouraging that Arctic Frontiers will hold a one-day conference in Aberdeen on 17 March. That will be a great opportunity to bring together speakers from the worlds of policy, science and business, so that they can share their expertise and identify new opportunities for Scottish and UK-Arctic collaboration.

The just energy transition is one of the areas where we should seek to strengthen our ties and share scientific knowledge and expertise on marine pollution and biodiversity monitoring, through organisations such as Marine Scotland science and the Arctic connections fund.

The UK Government already does a lot of work to support our connections with the Arctic. It recently published its Arctic policy framework, which outlines the UK's commitment to the Arctic Council as a state observer and to protecting the Arctic's climate, people and environment; increasing engagement on issues that affect indigenous communities; promoting and protecting biodiversity in the Arctic; and addressing environmental threats in the region. The framework also emphasises the Arctic region's importance for our security.

Being part of the UK allows us to use our defence resources to protect our interests in the high north. We are all aware that the region is strategically important, not only to the United Kingdom and its allies but to aggressive countries such as Russia.

I believe that the Scottish Government should focus on the issues that matter the most to the people of Scotland. We must prioritise our

economy, infrastructure and public services, and collaboration with our Arctic neighbours, to help us achieve that, is welcome.

I will highlight some of the points that have been raised today across the chamber. Donald Cameron spoke about his belief that it is important to engage with Arctic nations, continue to enhance our relationship with them and share best practice in tackling the climate change crisis, which was also mentioned by quite a few other members. Jamie Halcro Johnston spoke of Orkney's Norse heritage, the long-standing ties between Orkney and its Arctic partners, as well as others around the world, and depopulation.

Angus Robertson told us about the pool of expertise that we have in Scotland, what we can do for the Arctic and how our help is warmly received. Sarah Boyack spoke about the importance of focusing on the climate change crisis, working with our Arctic neighbours, and the impact of the invasion of Ukraine.

Liam McArthur gave us a history lesson on Orkney and spoke about its ties with the Arctic. Richard Leonard spoke of his concern about military activity, as well as threats from Russia, which has said that the Arctic is Russian. He also spoke about the threats to the indigenous population and the need for climate change co-operation. Gillian Martin talked about ancient relations being reinvigorated and the need to help rural women on the way to net zero.

Audrey Nicoll told us about the pictures that she had received of the northern lights, which I think that we have all seen this week, whether on Facebook or other social media. The northern lights are one of the benefits of being up in the Arctic, but she emphasised that the Arctic is much more than that. Douglas Lumsden spoke of his association with Norway and how we can learn from Arctic states in areas such as broadband, ferry fleets and fishing.

There were also contributions from Paul McLennan, Mark Ruskell, Fiona Hyslop, Kenny Gibson and Foysoy Choudhury.

However, people are waiting too long for treatment at Crosshouse hospital, accident and emergency at Ayr is threatened with reduced services, the high streets in Ayr, Girvan and Cumnock need more support, and drivers need improvements to the A77. I would much rather that we gave more debating time to matters that affect people in Scotland today and issues that are devolved to this Parliament.

We need to work with our fellow UK nations, as well as our Arctic neighbours, to create a brighter future for all Scots.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Angus Robertson to wind up the debate.

16:44

**Angus Robertson:** In my opening remarks, I set out some of the initiatives that the Scottish Government has promoted in recent years to deepen collaboration with the Arctic region. In closing, I will reflect further on the strategic objectives of that work and the approach that the Scottish Government is taking to pursue them.

However, first, I will respond to points that were made by speakers from all parties during the debate. With some very minor exceptions, there has been a hugely constructive tone from all parties in the debate, which is warmly welcome.

Donald Cameron began by saying that Scotland has an important role to play—which is a bit of a contrast to the summing-up speech from his party. He said that it is important to engage with our Arctic and northern neighbours both economically and culturally. I agree with him.

Donald Cameron said that it was right to highlight the difficulties that are posed by Russian aggression in Ukraine. He pointed out that the risks to stability and security in our northern region as a result are an absolute given. He also pointed out, given the nature of the climate crisis, how important it is for us to be working with our Arctic and northern neighbours.

He was—and I am pleased that it is on the record—very gracious and explicit in the Conservative Party's praise for GlobalScot and the Scottish international trade network, and I look forward to hearing more about that from other colleagues on his party's benches in future debates.

Sarah Boyack of the Scottish Labour Party talked about the twin challenges of climate security and global security. She made the point, quite rightly, that the aggression of Russia has meant that there is a diversion of collective focus away from the climate crisis but that we must not lose sight of the scale of the climate emergency. She also put on record her party's growing interest in the likes of Scotland being able to sign international agreements. I look forward to her party further developing its recognition of why being a normal international nation as a sovereign state is a good thing.

Liam McArthur rightly drew attention to the historical connections between Orkney and Arctic neighbours. He had a long list of areas of co-operation, both actual ones and ones that can still reach full fruition. I totally agree with those.

I pay tribute to Fiona Hyslop, my predecessor in this office, for all that she did and continues to do

to promote links between Scotland and the Arctic and the high north. In particular, she pointed out the opportunities that we have with our northern neighbours in the field of renewables, particularly hydrogen, and I can attest to that through the conversations that I have had with decision makers in our neighbouring countries, which have a huge interest in the potential for co-operation with Scotland. That is something—

**Liam McArthur:** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Angus Robertson:** I will, of course.

**Liam McArthur:** I am very grateful to the cabinet secretary for his generous remarks. However, I could not help but notice that he ducked the question of the determination of Orkney Islands Council and other partners to see ORIC in Stromness become a centre of excellence for research on the Arctic and Nordics. Would the Scottish Government lend its support to that, as well as to the idea of a reprise of the 2019 conference in Stromness?

**Angus Robertson:** Forgive me; I did overlook that and I should not have. I have a long list of points that colleagues made. I am sorry—I did not mean to skip over that.

I would like to look very closely at the proposals that are being made. It would be a hugely positive development to have a centre of excellence and a reprise of the event that took place in Stromness. He is right to highlight the role that Orkney Islands Council has. I regularly meet the convener of the council when attending events in our northern region. I have strongly encouraged him and other colleagues to look at the likes of the mayors network in Arctic Frontiers as a way of local authorities being able to take a direct role in relationships with other parts of the northern neighbours. Those are the beginnings of a conversation with Liam McArthur, and I look forward to being as helpful and supportive as I can be.

Jamie Halcro Johnston is a man from the northern isles, so he knows exactly how important our historical and current links are. He talked about issues of depopulation, rurality and connectivity, and he was absolutely right to do so.

Richard Leonard talked about geostrategic instability, which he has good reason to highlight, as well as the importance of the rights of indigenous people—people whose communities might be in jeopardy and under threat. He posed the question of which priorities are being pursued and asked whether they are extractive or relate to militarisation. I will say that the Scottish Government is committed in particular to co-operation on renewables but also to stability.

We cannot avoid the fact that we are seeing challenges that we need to think about in new ways. It was not long ago that there was sabotage to the subsea infrastructure of the Nord Stream pipeline. All of our nations for which energy is an important focus need to have the tools at our disposal to ensure that we are not subject to that kind of malign influence.

Gillian Martin talked about the importance of emissions reduction through co-operation, and there is so much that we can do in that as groundbreaking nations in northern Europe and the Arctic.

Mark Ruskell highlighted his attendance at an Arctic co-operation event. He, Gillian Martin and, I believe, Douglas Lumsden have been at such events. That is hugely worth while. I hope that other colleagues who have taken part in or listened to this debate will think about attending an Arctic event, and I hope that members who have done so will forgive me for not mentioning them. I strongly encourage it. The conference that is being held in Aberdeen on 17 March is a good starter for those who have not been at one yet. I very much look forward to seeing colleagues from all parties at future Arctic and northern events.

Mark Ruskell talked about wishing to build on the ambitions of Orkney and Shetland for the rest of Scotland, and I think that that is absolutely right. He highlighted the role of Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir of Iceland, who deserves particular praise. He also highlighted the parallel approaches of the Icelandic and Scottish Governments to the wellbeing economy. I note for the record her warm words of praise for our outgoing First Minister, and indeed the warm words from former Icelandic President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, which have been well heard and received in Scotland.

Paul McLennan talked about the potential for local authority connections. He is absolutely right to do so. We need as many parts of Scotland to realise the huge untapped potential that we have for enhanced relations with our Arctic and northern neighbours.

Douglas Lumsden spoke very persuasively about the importance of the links between Aberdeen and Stavanger. He underlined the importance of the energy sector and the transition that both Norway and Scotland are facing. Indeed, that was the subject of my discussions with the Norwegian state secretary for energy, Andreas Bjelland Eriksen, only a few weeks ago. Douglas Lumsden said that we should learn from our Norwegian neighbours. Hooray! I totally agree. I listened closely to his speech, and I think that he missed out the last page about the success of Norway after it became independent in 1905. Once one of the poorest countries in Europe, it now celebrates its success as one of Europe's

richest. Of course, Norway set up an oil fund, which will be able to fund its public services in perpetuity—something that the United Kingdom Government has not done for us. [*Interruption.*]

With the permission of colleagues, I just want to conclude by referring to the final speeches.

Audrey Nicoll talked about our geostrategic importance, which she is absolutely right about, and highlighted Lossiemouth. I should say that we have been trying to be consensual on most of these issues, but there is more that we can do in terms of our geostrategic co-operation. Northern air policing, which is organised through NATO, has had nearly 50 deployments, but the United Kingdom has only ever been able to provide one. I think that all of us would welcome a much more full-blooded level of commitment towards that.

Audrey Nicoll also talked about the advantages of social policy co-operation, including such ideas such as the barnahus or bairns' hoose approach and the baby box. There is more that we can do there.

Kenneth Gibson talked about technology and innovation.

Foysol Choudhury talked about a cross-party approach to this issue, and he is absolutely right that there is much more that we can do together. He also reminded us of the accelerated speed of global warming in the Arctic and high north, which should spur us on to act more in concert with others.

As a minor correction to Sharon Dowey's words on behalf of the Conservative Party, I say that we have this afternoon been debating external affairs, which is a reserved responsibility. She mentioned the importance of the economy and infrastructure as devolved areas of co-operation. If she has not already read it—indeed, if any colleagues have not yet read it—I would draw their attention to the Scottish Government's excellent Arctic policy framework, which outlines all the devolved areas in which Scotland is co-operating with our northern neighbours.

The Scottish Government will continue to engage with and mobilise expertise across Scotland to promote our offer among Arctic audiences, encourage knowledge exchange and support sustainable economic development. A team Scotland approach is required if we are to fully seize the strategic opportunities that are offered by Scotland's role as Europe's gateway to the Arctic region. I therefore welcome the cross-party investment in international platforms such as the Arctic Circle assembly. I know that Liam McArthur and members of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee were there last year.

Many of the matters that this Parliament is responsible for have direct relevance to Scottish Arctic collaboration. I therefore invite members to work with the Scottish Government to continue to promote Scotland as an expert and committed contributor to Arctic co-operation. The tone of this afternoon's debate and the cross-party approach should give us all confidence that that is, indeed, the case.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** That concludes the debate on Arctic connections—Scotland's growing links with the Arctic.

## Motion without Notice

16:56

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** 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. I invite the Minister for Parliamentary Business to move such a motion.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time be brought forward to 4.56 pm.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

16:56

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-08073.1, in the name of Donald Cameron, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08073, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Arctic connections—Scotland's growing links with the Arctic, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-08073.2, in the name of Sarah Boyack, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08073, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Arctic connections—Scotland's growing links with the Arctic, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-08073, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Arctic connections—Scotland's growing links with the Arctic, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament acknowledges the value of Scotland's involvement in multilateral relations with Arctic nations; agrees on the value of increasing collaboration and building stronger relationships between Scotland and Arctic nations; recognises the importance of participation in educational programmes and sharing knowledge to promote sustainable development in the region and learn from best practice developed there; notes with concern Russia's recent changes to its Arctic Policy, which remove reference to cooperation with the Arctic Council and instead prioritise 'the national interests of the Russian Federation'; believes that any framework for Arctic cooperation must respect sovereignty and the rule of law, and that this is incompatible with the invasion and annexation of the sovereign territory of neighbouring states; calls for the Arctic to remain safe, stable and peaceful; acknowledges the particular threat posed to the Arctic by the climate crisis, and the need for climate action to be at the heart of Arctic cooperation; supports the continued engagement with Arctic states, nations and regions to pursue sustainable trade opportunities, develop joint solutions that strengthen community resilience and mark longstanding cultural ties, and acknowledges the UK Government's updated Arctic Policy Framework, which commits to cooperating with Arctic countries where necessary, as well as protecting their environment and the UK's security.

*Meeting closed at 16:57.*



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