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Scottish Parliament

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs and Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. We start with portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is rural affairs and islands. There is a lot of interest in this and the next portfolio, so I make the usual plea for succinct questions and responses, and I advise that where I do not think that the question or the response is succinct, I will be intervening. I invite anyone who wishes to ask a supplementary to press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Second Home Ownership (Rural and Island Communities)

1. Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in relation to its cross-Government co-ordination on islands policies, what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding regulating second home ownership in rural and island communities. (S6O-02100)

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands regularly engages with colleagues on a variety of issues, and I look forward to working with her on the important issue of rural housing.

Second homes bring benefits to those who own them and the businesses that they support, but in some communities they can impact the availability of homes to meet local need and it is important that we take action to pursue a fair balance. That is why we recently published a joint consultation with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, seeking views on giving powers to local authorities to increase the rates of council tax on second and empty homes.

Ash Regan: The consultation on raising council tax on second homes is welcome, but I fail to see how that policy will have any impact on the numbers of second homes, which we know can be an issue.

The Highlands is the area that is most affected by second homes. Ullapool is one of many towns that are affected, and Ullapool Community Trust recently described the lack of housing supply there

as a “real and persistent crisis”. Second homes reduce available stock for local families and can push up prices well beyond the reach of key workers. Then, businesses and the public sector can struggle to attract staff, as there is no housing available for workers.

One solution may be for our councils in hot-spot areas to limit second home numbers. Will the Government commit to looking seriously at that option?

Paul McLennan: The Government is looking at a few things just now. We will publish an action plan for housing in remote, rural and island areas that will include up to £25 million from our affordable homes budget to allow suitable properties, including empty houses, to be purchased for long lease and turned into affordable homes for key workers and others. Ash Regan raised an important issue, and I have been engaging with ministers on that today. We recognise that good-quality affordable housing is essential to help attract people to remote and rural communities and to retain them.

The point that you make is something that I would pick up with you in further discussions, if that is okay. We need to think about how we try to attract first-time buyers into such areas, because there is an issue regarding rural housing and depopulation. That is an important point, which we are looking at. There is support for first-time buyers under land and buildings transaction tax, which increases the upper amount of the nil rate from £145,000 to £175,000 and saves first-time buyers up to £600 in tax.

It is a complex issue and there a number of things that we need to look at. The rural action plan that I talked about will be a major step forward, and there are a few points that she mentioned—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, if you could address your comments through the microphone rather than to the member, I am sure that we will pick them up.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I welcome the COSLA and Scottish Government consultation, which aims to tackle the matter of the disproportionate number of second homes in many parts of Scotland, not least my own constituency. What additional measures will be put in place to introduce a limit on the proportion of second homes in comparison to homes that are lived in year round in specific communities, specifically because of the wider impact that the issue has on house prices in such places, which pushes all but a very small number of people out of the housing market?

Paul McLennan: The member will be aware that there are already additional measures that

can support areas to manage the numbers of second homes and short-term lets, such as the introduction of short-term let control areas and the increase in the LBTT additional dwelling supplement to 6 per cent, which helps first-time buyers compete more fairly with buy-to-let investors or people buying second homes.

I mentioned the consultation and I look forward to seeing the responses about providing councils with powers that they can choose to use to achieve fairer taxation on housing. That will inform our next steps on this important issue.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I will press the minister a bit further. Yesterday, he indicated that he might be prepared to go beyond only the council tax. We have done it for short-term lets in relation to planning and licensing. Would he be prepared to consider using that for second homes as well?

Paul McLennan: Yes. Again, if Mr Rennie wants to forward me proposals, I would be happy to look at them and discuss them. The First Minister mentioned that yesterday. If Mr Rennie has any proposals to forward, I would be more than happy to discuss them at a later stage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Katy Clark.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): A recent Scottish Parliament information centre report revealed that Arran has the highest rate of second home ownership in Scotland, accounting for 25 per cent of all privately owned homes on the island. Only 11 per cent of Arran's housing stock is available for affordable rent, and, of course, rents on the island are more expensive than those on the mainland.

Will the minister advise on when the Scottish Government's remote, rural and island action plan for housing will be published and on what is being considered that will particularly address areas where there is a very high density of second homes?

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

Paul McLennan: As, I think, I mentioned, the action plan will be published relatively soon. I will let Katy Clark know when it is available, at that time. We talked about some of the issues that there are. The buy-to-let control areas, which I think I mentioned before, are one part of that. I plan to visit Argyll and Bute and other rural communities to engage with them and talk about the issues that have been raised. It is more complex than that. I talked about the consultation on the second homes supplement. Again, I would be keen to find out Argyll and Bute's understanding of and position on that.

Highly Protected Marine Areas (Potential Impacts on Coastal and Island Communities)

2. Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assurances it can provide to fishers in Na h-Eileanan an Iar constituency who have reportedly expressed concerns about their livelihoods and the future of their communities in light of the potential economic and cultural impact highly protected marine areas may have on coastal and island communities once designated. (S6O-02101)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): First, I take the opportunity to say that I am aware of the strength of feeling arising from the highly protected marine area consultation. We remain committed to continued meaningful engagement with fishers and coastal and island communities. Our consultation has just closed and we are analysing responses and carefully considering feedback.

I reiterate that no sites have been proposed yet. Site selection will be a participatory process, and the expertise of fishers, among others, will be crucial to ensuring that the proposals provide benefits for the sustainable fishing of our marine ecosystems.

Alasdair Allan: Members will appreciate the need to tackle biodiversity loss, but, in many parts of the Highlands and Islands, human communities are at risk, too. The population of my constituency has nearly halved since the second world war and it is projected to drop by another 16 per cent by 2042. Given fishing's strong economic and cultural ties across the west coast, does the minister understand why HPMA proposals have now inspired a Skipinnish song, and can she say how the proposals can be reconciled with the Scottish Government's commitments around depopulation and other items in the national islands plan?

Lorna Slater: I thank Alasdair Allan for his question and for his concern about the matter. This concerns us all. If we do not take action in the marine space, there is a risk that the marine environment will not remain resilient enough to continue to provide the resources and benefits that we gain from it for the long term.

Protecting our marine environment not only ensures that we protect the natural asset upon which the fishing industry and other industries are built but helps to manage the potentially devastating impacts of climate change on the industry. Communities can absolutely benefit from highly protected marine areas; indeed, the Lamlash Bay no-take zone was a result of campaigning by the local community group. Based on studies co-ordinated by that group, it has been noted that, since protection, commercially

important species have increased in size, age and density.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have requests for a number of supplementaries. They will have to be brief, as will the responses.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): With communities up in arms and Scottish National Party back-bench rebellion looming, the Scottish Government now seems to be desperate to be seen to be listening on these plans. However, it has already caused huge anger among coastal communities. Will the minister now drop the plans, go back to the drawing board and engage fully to find agreement with local communities and stakeholders on a way forward?

Lorna Slater: Again, I absolutely appreciate the strength of feeling here. The consultation on these matters closed only on Monday. We will take the time to consider all the responses. Consultations are a tool that we use to collect views from interested groups. The Scottish Government is aware of the concerns of marine users and industries, including fishers, about the potential impacts that HPMA may have on them. Those impacts may benefit certain fish stocks. HPMA studies show that they increase the stock, which can spill over into adjacent areas. That benefits fishers in the form of extra juvenile and adult animals, which has commercial benefit. Of course, HPMA can also benefit recreational sectors.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Given the strength of feeling around HPMA, will the minister listen to the consultation and withdraw the proposals, or does she see them as a red line in the Bute house agreement?

Lorna Slater: As I said in my previous answer, the consultation has only just closed. It includes a very wide range of views, which we will now consider and assess. Of course, it is important to create the right balance in our marine space. We recognise the importance of continued investment in Scotland's seafood and wider marine sectors, as well as the importance of balancing the needs of ecomarine protection and renewable energy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Beatrice Wishart.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): The minister talks about meaningful engagement and recognises the concerns that are being expressed across island and coastal communities throughout Scotland, but when will she meet the people who are most affected in their communities?

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

Lorna Slater: I reiterate that no sites have been selected for this. We want the site selection process to be participatory at every step of the

way. This is part of a just transition for our marine spaces and our work towards net zero. We absolutely intend to have meaningful community engagement every step of the way.

Conditionality Payments

3. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Before I start my question, I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I have been involved in a farming partnership for more than 40 years.

To ask the Scottish Government whether all farmers will have the ability to apply for, and be granted, all conditionality payments under its new agricultural support scheme. (S6O-02102)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): Our vision for agriculture sets our clear commitment to maintain direct support for our producers. The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands has said plainly in the chamber—and I re-emphasise—that our producers will not face any cliff edge as we transition to the four-tier support framework.

We will deliver with our industry to ensure that future support is most effective and accessible for all types of farmer, crofter and land manager, enabling them to continue to produce high-quality food and deliver on our shared outcomes for biodiversity recovery and climate adaptation and mitigation.

Edward Mountain: Unfortunately, that did not answer the question; let us try one more time. Fifty per cent of the future farm payment will be based on conditionality. Will all farmers across Scotland be able to apply for and be granted those grants, if appropriate—yes or no?

Lorna Slater: I appreciate the member's concern. Our commitment to co-develop and work with those who are directly impacted and will be expected to deliver the outcomes on the ground has been important. That is reflected in our creation of the agriculture reform implementation oversight board—the ARIOB—which is co-chaired by the cabinet secretary and the NFU Scotland president Martin Kennedy. The member can be assured that the interests of all farmers are very well represented in that work.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): What the Tories continually miss is that, in Scotland, we are committed to supporting active farming and food production. However, farming will have to adapt if we are to meet our net zero targets, and, indeed, farmers have the skills to do that. I ask the minister for examples of good practice that would see farmers become eligible under each of the tiers.

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

Lorna Slater: The new support framework that is being co-developed with partners will support farmers to take the opportunities that the transition presents and help to deliver our vision for agriculture. We continue to support and invest in our farmers and crofters and to take action on climate change through a range of initiatives, including Farming for a Better Climate, which is Scotland's farm advisory service, the agricultural transformation fund, the knowledge transfer and innovation fund, the agriculture, biodiversity and climate change network and the integrating trees network. Through those initiatives, we continue to encourage the uptake of low-carbon farming practices by offering financial support and providing practical advice and guidance, supporting knowledge and skills transfer and demonstrating the climate and business benefits of taking action.

Food Insecurity and Food Poverty

4. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with food producers, manufacturers and distributors regarding supply chains and how to tackle food insecurity and food poverty. (S6O-02103)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Scottish Government has regular engagement with food producers, manufacturers and distributors, including via the food sector resilience group and the retail industry leadership group. We also engage directly with third sector food groups such as FareShare that redistribute food for social good.

Although third sector groups are able to provide inclusive community activities, the Scottish Government believes that everyone should have the money that they need to access food with dignity and choice. As promised in our programme for government, we will soon publish our plan, which is grounded in human rights. It sets out the further action that we will take to improve the response to hardship and reduce the need for food banks.

Monica Lennon: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for her response, and I am glad that she mentioned FareShare. We are seeing the highest rate of inflation in food prices for almost 50 years, and FareShare has reiterated the struggles that it is experiencing. As colleagues know, FareShare redistributes surplus food to charities and communities across the country, but it is seeing a reduction in what is available to it because of industry pressures.

Last year, the then Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands convened a summit on the issue. Will there be a follow up to that, and what more can the Government do to support charities such as FareShare?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I join Monica Lennon in commending the work that FareShare does, which, unfortunately, is still widely needed in our communities. She is right to point to the work that the cabinet secretary did in convening the summit. As part of my portfolio, I, too, am very interested in working with FareShare and other parts of the third sector to see what we can do to support it.

The important part—which I mentioned in my original answer—is our plan, which we are due to publish soon, to ensure that we are considering what can be done to support families and end the use of and need for food banks in Scotland. However, until we are at that stage, there is, unfortunately, a role for food banks and the work that FareShare does. I am happy to have further discussions with Monica Lennon about that, should she wish.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Yesterday, Humza Yousaf's flimsy document failed to mention agriculture and farming, and it also failed to look at the significant potential for innovation and technology—such as genetic technology—that will play a vital role in decarbonising the industry, improving yields, improving reliability of crops and improving food security. Will the minister or the cabinet secretary reconsider their intransigent position on gene technology?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Strangely enough, I do not agree with the premise or the context that the member put on the document that was published yesterday or on the work that has been done by the Government on that more widely. I appreciate that there are different views on the issue, but the Government has made its views clear. [*Interruption.*] It is a shame that Rachael Hamilton is not listening to the answer to the question. Perhaps I will leave it there.

Livestock Worrying

5. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the steps that it is taking to tackle livestock worrying. (S6O-02104)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): The Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2021 has been in force for more than a year. It provides Police Scotland and the courts with greater powers to deal with people who allow their dogs to worry, attack or kill livestock in Scotland's countryside. Increasing awareness is a

key factor in the prevention of livestock-worrying incidents and associated unnecessary suffering. The Scottish outdoor access code is clear on the rights and responsibilities of land managers and people exercising access rights, and it is widely publicised.

More generally, in 2021, the Scottish Government delivered an awareness-raising digital campaign in partnership with the Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to promote responsible dog ownership. The campaign has been rerun on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram on a number of occasions. It directs the public to information about the law on controlling dogs on the mygov.scot website. The website makes it clear that dog owners are responsible for the actions of their dog, and it sets out potential penalties for failing to control dogs.

Roz McCall: I am sure that the minister will be aware of the horrific attack on livestock on a farm near Kelty, in Fife, which resulted in the death of 20 lambs and more than £7,000-worth of damage. I note the minister's responses, and I will come back to some of them.

Farmers in my region and across the whole of rural Scotland already have to deal with the stresses of the lambing season, and, although sentencing is a matter for the courts, I note that sentencing guidelines for a maximum fine of £40,000 and 12 months' imprisonment, which were brought in in 2021, do not appear to have had the deterrent effect that they were meant to have. A survey that was conducted by NFU Mutual in February found that 29 per cent of respondents knew about the potential fine and 32 per cent of dog owners understood that they could be imprisoned if their pets went on to attack. What more will the Scottish Government do to prevent the mutilation of defenceless animals and protect farmers' livelihoods?

Lorna Slater: I understand the strength of feeling about this. Any dog attack—even just one—is one too many. The worrying of livestock by dogs is completely unacceptable. As well as causing obvious suffering to the animals concerned, the damage that is inflicted on flocks and herds can have severe financial and psychological consequences for farmers.

Estimates from Police Scotland show that 262 cases were reported in 2022, which was down from 301 in 2021, while NFU Mutual estimated that the cost of dog attacks on Scotland's livestock fell by almost by 31 per cent—almost a third—last year.

I am pleased to say that the situation is improving, and the member is correct in saying that, under the 2021 act, which was introduced by Emma Harper as a member's bill, owners of dogs

that attack or worry livestock can be fined up to £40,000 or face a prison sentence of up to 12 months. Currently, we do not have any data for the implementation of the law, because it is relatively new, but sentencing in any given case is a matter for the independent court within the overall legal framework.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will have to move on to question 6, despite there being interest in supplementaries to this question. The responses will have to be briefer, and so, too, will the questions.

Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

6. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is, regarding agriculture and the food and drink industry in Scotland, to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership. (S6O-02105)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade (Richard Lochhead): We are assessing the deal further and await more detail from the United Kingdom Government, although its own scoping assessments show that any benefits, including tariff reductions, will be limited, with a mere 0.08 per cent increase in UK gross domestic product.

Although there might be some growth opportunities for Scottish food and drink producers, those are very limited and there are significant risks, particularly for our sensitive agricultural products, which are set to be damaged by bilateral deals that the UK Government recently agreed with New Zealand and Australia. The former Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has already criticised them as poor deals for the sector. It also remains unclear how the UK will protect domestic standards against the arbitration process of trading.

Willie Coffey: Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming, has said that the UK has joined a trade bloc in which food, farming and environmental standards are lower than our own. That raises concerns about the impact on consumer health and farm businesses in the UK. NFU Scotland and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals have also cited similar concerns about animal welfare standards. Does the minister share my concern that this deal represents another post-Brexit race to the bottom?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister—as briefly as possible.

Richard Lochhead: I very much share those concerns. Scottish ministers continue to argue for a role in UK trade negotiations so that we can safeguard Scotland's interests and watch out for

such risks, because we believe that the UK is potentially joining a trade bloc in which many food, farming and environmental standards are significantly lower than our own, which is not a good road to go down.

Emissions Reduction Targets (Agriculture)

7. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government how it anticipates its proposed agriculture bill and future payments framework will support progress towards meeting Scotland's emissions reduction targets. (S6O-02106)

The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater): Farmers, crofters and other land managers have a key role to play in meeting our climate targets. The new support framework, which is being co-developed with partners, will support them to take advantage of the opportunities around this transition and help to deliver our vision for agriculture. That vision makes clear our commitment to enable producers of high-quality food to deliver on our shared outcomes for biodiversity recovery and climate adaptation and mitigation. The next climate change plan, the draft of which is due this year, will include policies and proposals to ensure that the agriculture sector continues to play its part in meeting our ambitious net zero national target.

Gillian Mackay: Integrating woodland into farms is a big opportunity for farmers across Scotland and for local environments. Will the minister set out how the new framework and revised forestry grant scheme will improve support to all farmers seeking to establish woodland on their land or on land that they manage?

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

Lorna Slater: We are currently consulting on future grant support for forestry, which includes a specific question on how to better support farmers to establish trees on their farms. We look forward to hearing what stakeholders suggest. We envisage building on the principle of the recently introduced provision to include woodland creation as eligible activity in ecological focus areas.

We are actively promoting the integrating trees network—a farmer-led initiative that aims to encourage more farmers and crofters to plant trees and to raise awareness of the multiple benefits that planting trees can bring to agricultural businesses.

Seasonal Migrant Workers (Food and Drink Industry)

8. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government when it

last engaged with the United Kingdom Government regarding access for Scotland's food and drink industry to seasonal migrant workers. (S6O-02107)

The Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees (Emma Roddick): The Scottish Government is clear that we need a migration policy that is tailored to the needs of Scotland's economy, public services and communities. We need people to contribute at all levels of our economy.

However, the UK Government has repeatedly ignored calls from Scottish ministers for a workable immigration system that is fit for all sectors, including the food and drink industry. That is despite recent recommendations from independent researchers for the UK Government to closely involve Scottish agricultural representatives in shaping future policy and schemes. Clearly, UK Government policies are being implemented without a full understanding of their potentially catastrophic impact on rural and island communities. The UK Government must take a collaborative and evidenced-based approach to immigration policy before irreparable damage is done to our economy.

Marie McNair: Key sectors in the industry are being left unable to access the workforce that they require and people who wish to come to Scotland to make a valued contribution. Brexit, being removed from the European Union and the end of freedom of movement have created barriers and are leaving our world-class food and drink industry hamstrung. Does the minister share my concerns about that? Will she continue to urge the UK Government to give an indication of how it intends to fix the mess that it has made?

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

Emma Roddick: Absolutely. The food and drink sector, like others, faces significant workforce recruitment and retention issues. Many of those issues are not new, but they have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit. Many EU citizens have left the UK, resulting in a loss of skills that cannot be quickly and easily replaced.

On the matter of continuing to press the UK Government, the cabinet secretary has written to the UK Government repeatedly and will continue to do so. I hope that the member will support those calls.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs and the islands.

Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is health and social care. There is a lot of interest, and I make the same plea for brevity in questions and responses. I hope that we will have a slightly more positive response. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, I invite them to press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

NHS Lanarkshire Public Health Annual Report 2021-22

1. **Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the NHS Lanarkshire annual report of the director of public health for 2021-22, which was published this March. (S6O-02108)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I welcome the NHS Lanarkshire public health annual report and the insights that it provides. It is encouraging to see the excellent initiatives that are under way and the renewed focus on health improvement. Persistent health inequalities remain, exacerbated by the cost of living crisis and the Covid pandemic. As the First Minister set out yesterday, the Scottish Government will support people with the greatest need, using every power available to protect the vulnerable. We will develop a sustainable health and social care system that ensures that people get the right care in the right place and at the right time, working with Cabinet colleagues to reduce poverty, prevent ill health and reduce health inequalities.

Stephanie Callaghan: The report highlights the profound and disproportionate impact that Covid-19 has had on residents who are living in the most deprived areas of my constituency. As the minister said, that has been exacerbated by the current Tory cost of living crisis. Although the additional £1 million to directly fund general practice surgeries that are serving the most deprived patients across Greater Glasgow and Clyde is most welcome, will the minister consider extending vital targeted funding beyond the inclusion health action in general practice programme, specifically to Lanarkshire, where the burden of preventable long-term ill health is compounded by our proximity to Glasgow and the well-known Glasgow effect?

Jenni Minto: I thank Stephanie Callaghan for her important and insightful question. The First Minister's vision for Scotland, "Equality, opportunity, community: New leadership - A fresh start", which was published yesterday, reaffirmed the Government's commitment to tackling the causes of health inequalities. Inclusion health

action in general practice is a new programme that needs to be tested and evaluated. We have deliberately targeted 2023-24 funding at practices in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde because there is clear evidence that that is where we have the areas of greatest deprivation. We want to ensure that that new programme is effective and that we learn from its first full year. However, I will ask officials to explore future expansion of the programme to other areas of high deprivation, particularly Lanarkshire.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome Jenny Minto to her new role.

Worryingly, the report also shows that the number of deaths from respiratory disease increased by nearly 8 per cent. Asthma and Lung UK has said that North Lanarkshire is an area in which people are more likely to die of lung disease compared with other parts of Scotland. Will the minister and her team discuss that with NHS Lanarkshire and let us know what action can be taken?

Jenni Minto: I thank Monica Lennon for her question on that important issue. I would like to give careful consideration to my answer. I appreciate that poverty remains a key driver of poor health in some areas. I will speak further with my officials and will respond to the member in writing.

Health and Social Care Budget Reductions (Glasgow)

2. **Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported £21 million of budget reductions for health and social care in Glasgow. (S6O-02109)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): National health service funding is at record high levels, and the draft 2023-24 health budget provides more than £1 billion of support for social care, meaning that social care spending has increased by more than £800 million compared to 2021-22.

From a Scottish Government perspective, that is well ahead of our trajectory to increase spending by 25 per cent—£840 million—over the life of the Parliament, despite inadequate block grant funding from the United Kingdom Government. Our settlements from the UK Government have suffered a decade of austerity, with average real-term cuts of more than 5 per cent, equating to a loss of £18 billion. In the face of the UK Government's cuts to our budget, we have protected councils' budgets, providing more than £13.2 billion in 2023-24, which represents a cash increase of more than £570 million, or 4.5 per cent.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I thank the minister for that answer, but I feel that she cannot possibly be listening to trade unions or service users and constituents in Glasgow, whose quality of life depends on those services. The health and social care partnership is already long past the point of sustainable delivery, and now, according to its budget paper, it is likely to breach its statutory obligations to service users in the city. So, what is the Scottish National Party-Green Scottish Government going to do now to sort out the mess that Humza Yousaf has left behind in health and social care, and to properly fund and deliver the vital public services that the people of Glasgow need and deserve?

Maree Todd: My starting point in all of these issues, which I am sure we would all agree with, is the people using social care services and the workforce delivering that vital care. We absolutely need to ensure that people are cared for in the best environment, which, in many cases, is in their home or within their own community. We are more than happy to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and provider representatives—we do so regularly—to understand the issues that they currently face, and we encourage and welcome open communication. We remain absolutely committed to establishing a national care service—which, I am sure, many in the chamber will agree will absolutely be the answer to the challenges that the member is raising—and we are continuing our work with our co-design process. Our overarching ambition remains to end the postcode lottery in care provision throughout Scotland through a national care service, as was recommended in the independent review of adult social care.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): Lightburn hospital, in my constituency, offers significant additional step-down, step-up capacity, which has been proven to relieve the pressure on bed blocking in acute hospitals, as NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde indicated to me in a letter, and to do so at far lower cost. Will the minister have discussions with the board to understand how best to maximise the use of that asset to clear bed blocking and help with waiting lists in a more cost-effective manner?

Maree Todd: Again, my starting point is that we need to provide care for patients in the community, largely, but in the best place and the right place for them, and at the right time. I am more than happy to hear from the member the specifics of the case that he raises and will begin discussions with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde in order to find solutions to the challenges that it faces.

All over the country, we need to encourage flexibility in how we provide care in order to meet

the needs of patients, who should be at the centre of all the decisions.

University Hospital Ayr

3. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on reported potential reductions to bed numbers and the closure of a ward at University hospital Ayr. (S6O-02110)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): NHS Ayrshire and Arran has been clear that the planned closure of beds relates to additional pandemic capacity across the system and that there are no plans to close core beds at either Ayr or Crosshouse hospital.

Sharon Dowey: Five months ago, I wrote to Humza Yousaf to demand that services at Ayr hospital not be reduced. He replied that there were “absolutely no plans” to close surgical, intensive care unit or accident and emergency services. Now, however, it is reported that ward 10 in Ayr hospital may close, 75 beds could be cut and ICU beds are being moved to Crosshouse hospital. One senior national health service staff member described that move to me as “shocking”. It lets down NHS staff and puts patient safety at risk.

Can the cabinet secretary tell us why the First Minister has broken his promise to the people of Ayrshire?

Michael Matheson: First, we need to be careful not to conflate two different issues. The first issue is the surge capacity that was created during the pandemic. Ward 10 in Ayr hospital, which the member made reference to, was exactly that—surge capacity to deal with challenges during the pandemic. As boards across the country are going through that process, they no longer require that capacity and are, therefore, removing those particular facilities. That is exactly what is happening there. As has also been made very clear by the health board, core capacity remains the same.

The second issue that Sharon Dowey mentioned was in relation to the ICU beds. Members will be aware—as, I am sure, Ms Dowey is—that Ayrshire and Arran health board has put in place an interim arrangement to deal with the specific staffing issue of not being able to recruit a consultant to cover the ICU beds at Ayr hospital. I am sure that Ms Dowey will recognise that it is absolutely critical that beds of that nature have the right skilled medical cover to meet their needs. Those staffing challenges are exactly why the board has put in place that interim arrangement, which allows it to maintain its level of ICU beds across the health board area in a way that delivers the necessary quality of care and patient safety. It

is important to recognise the staffing challenge for that board, which is exactly why it has had to put that interim arrangement in place, in order to facilitate safe patient care.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Jackie Baillie, who joins us online, has a supplementary question.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): As the cabinet secretary has alluded, NHS Ayrshire and Arran announced that intensive care beds at Ayr hospital would transfer to Crosshouse hospital on an interim basis, but I have subsequently been contacted by staff who tell me that the transfer is to be made permanent and that, consequently, vascular and orthopaedic surgery have already moved, with more categories likely to follow. That is a significant service change, so can the cabinet secretary advise whether that is the case and why that has not been subject to public consultation? Can he also advise whether the process for consulting on major service change is being amended? If so, why has that not been made public—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary.

Michael Matheson: The answer to Ms Baillie's latter point is that there has been no change to that particular process. If the board was taking forward permanent changes, it would be required to undertake a full consultation exercise in order to do so. That is why the board has confirmed that the arrangements that it is putting in place are on an interim basis, because of its staffing challenges and desire to make sure that it continues the full complement of ICU beds on a basis of 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, across the board area. For the reasons that I have just mentioned, the board has had to put those interim arrangements in place.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Colin Smyth has a very brief supplementary question.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The A and E target at Ayr hospital has not been met for two years; delayed discharge in South Ayrshire has almost doubled in the past year; and NHS Ayrshire and Arran has reported capacity levels of 100 per cent at Ayr hospital. Will the cabinet secretary accept that those cuts in bed numbers are nothing to do with a lack of demand or need, but are due to a lack of funding? NHS Ayrshire and Arran's deficit is set to double to an eye-watering £56 million this year.

Michael Matheson: As I have already mentioned—and I am sure that Colin Smyth heard me—the core bed capacity in NHS Ayrshire and Arran remains the same. Those surge capacity beds were put in place for the purpose of the pandemic. The health board has also made it very

clear that the closure of those particular beds will be carried out in a safe, sequential manner over a period, as it manages its delayed discharges in order to see their reduction in the acute sector and moves towards more care support in the community. NHS Ayrshire and Arran has given an assurance that it will take that forward in an appropriate way, to make sure that quality of care is maintained going forward.

Health and Social Care Providers (Communication and Collaboration)

4. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what steps are being taken to improve effective communication and collaboration between health and social care providers. (S6O-02111)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): The Scottish Government is actively involved in many programmes of work that are designed to maximise the benefits of health and social care integration through effective communication and collaboration between all partners in the system.

Several proposals, which the ministerial strategic group for health and community care has brought forward, are concerned with collaborative leadership and building relationships. Much work has been done in that area in recent years, including training for integration joint board members, and engaging with stakeholders to support integration, foster collaboration and encourage the sharing of practice across the health and social care sector.

Michelle Thomson: I thank the minister for her response and for outlining those areas.

I have been contacted by a number of constituents who have been discharged without an appropriate care package being in place. I have had cases relating to NHS Forth Valley and heard about experiences in other health boards such as NHS Lothian. Given the adverse impact that such discharges have on service users and their families, and the commitment to quality service integration, some of which she has already outlined, will the minister give more detail about the specific work that is being undertaken to reduce such instances?

Maree Todd: I would be more than happy to look into any specific issues, if the member wishes to pass on the details to me. Although we absolutely recognise the pressures that are facing our health and social care system, individual discharge decisions should be undertaken by the relevant multidisciplinary teams to ensure that the appropriate care package, should it be required, is available, even if that is part of a discharge to assess decision. We are working very closely with

the acute and social care system to ensure that best practice on discharge is embedded and sustained through our hospital occupancy and delayed discharge action plan, which was issued to partners last month.

Inclusion Health Action in General Practice

5. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the inclusion health action in general practice programme within the NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde area. (S6O-02112)

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): In March 2023, as part of our efforts to improve the health outcomes of some of the most disadvantaged patients, we provided new inclusion health action in general practice funding of £300,000 to practices in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde with the highest levels of poverty and disadvantage. On 5 April, the First Minister announced a further £1 million of inclusion health action funding for this financial year. The funding enables practices to take practical action to tackle challenges that they and their patients face in relation to health inequalities.

Bill Kidd: Last month, the Progressive Economy Forum published findings that United Kingdom Government austerity policies have lost £540 billion in public spending since 2010, compounding the situation that was set out in research from the University of Glasgow, which showed that people across the UK are dying younger as a result of austerity, with people in the poorest areas being hardest hit. Over the past 200 years, there has been consistent improvement in mortality rates, up until 2012, when life expectancy reduced specifically for people living in poverty. Does the minister agree that that is completely unacceptable?

Michael Matheson: Many of the health inequalities that people suffer that result in premature death are a result of the social inequality that they experience. That social inequality is largely driven by financial inequality in our society. The research that the member referred to, which was by the University of Glasgow and, I think, the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, clearly highlights the close association between austerity policy and its impact on social inequality and then directly on health inequalities.

There is absolutely no doubt about the evidential link that exists between austerity policies that are being pursued by the UK Government and their direct impact on life expectancy. That is why the measures that we put in place to tackle public health must be closely linked to tackling social inequality, including the

measures that were discussed in yesterday's debate in the chamber and the measures that we can introduce to reduce child poverty, which are systematically undermined by austerity policies that are being pursued by the UK Government, which result in greater social inequality and reduced life expectancy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary—as briefly as possible.

Michael Matheson: As the academics have highlighted, there is a clear link between the austerity policies of the UK Government and their impact on life expectancy in Scotland.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary to his new role.

Data from Public Health Scotland shows that the overall risk of developing cancer is 30 per cent higher in the most deprived areas of Scotland compared with the least deprived. That is just one example of deprived communities paying the harshest price of health inequalities. Data shows that cancer, drug deaths and alcohol-related admissions are all more prevalent in those areas. In his new role, how will the cabinet secretary prioritise prevention to tackle the root causes of the multitude of health inequalities that have occurred under his Government?

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

Michael Matheson: The member raises a really important point, and I go back to the point that I made about social inequality being one of the major drivers of the health inequalities that we experience in our society. Some of the funding that we are providing for inclusion health action is about supporting the GP practices that are working with patients who have the poorest outcomes because of those social inequalities, to give them more time and support to work directly with that patient group. For example, in the deep-end practices, that additional capacity supports them in tackling some of the negative outcomes that patients experience as a result of public health challenges.

All the other public health measures that we are taking alongside that, including reducing smoking by promoting smoking cessation and ensuring that we are reducing the level of alcohol intake, play an important part. However, those measures can take us only so far, unless we tackle the endemic problem of social inequality, the root cause of which is austerity, which has been perpetrated by the Westminster colleagues of those on the Conservative benches.

Social Care (Unfilled Posts)

6. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

To ask the Scottish Government how many social care posts remain unfilled across Scotland. (S6O-02113)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): The Scottish Government does not hold that information. There are more than 1,200 social care providers across Scotland, with local authorities responsible for providing or commissioning services. Local authorities and health and social care partnerships will wish to ensure that, in providing a range of services, their workforce planning arrangements take full account of the need to have safe and sustainable numbers of staff. The Scottish Social Services Council, as the regulator of social care services, publishes an annual report on vacancies in social services, which can be found on its website.

Alex Rowley: The fact is that nobody knows how many vacant posts there are across Scotland. Local authorities—I have made freedom of information requests to most of them—can tell us what vacant posts they have, but they cannot tell us about vacancies in the private sector.

Let us take Fife as an example, where more than 60 per cent of social care is provided by the private sector. Social care companies are struggling to recruit; they cannot recruit. How on earth will we tackle the problems when we do not know exactly what the problems are? Across Scotland, tens of thousands of older people need care packages, but they are unable to access them.

Does the minister agree that we must tackle poor pay? Does he agree that we must tackle the unacceptable terms and conditions of workers in the private sector?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister.

Alex Rowley: That is why we have got the problem.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister.

Maree Todd: I agree with the member that we must tackle both pay and conditions to improve the situation in social care. Yesterday, I had an inspiring visit to a hub in Fife, where incredible work is going on. One of the things that I heard from those working there is the challenge of providing care in wealthy areas, where people who work in social care cannot afford to live. There are different challenges in different parts of the country, and this Government is determined to tackle every one of them.

On pay, we have already provided £100 million of additional funding to uplift pay for workers

providing direct adult social care in commissioned services for this financial year. From April, those workers will see their pay increase to a minimum of £10.90 an hour, in line with the real living wage for the 2023-24 financial year. That represents a 14.7 per cent increase for those workers in the past two years, with pay rising from at least £9.50 an hour in April 2021 to £10.90 an hour in April 2023, and I guarantee that—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. I want to get in a supplementary. I call Christine Grahame, whose question needs to be brief.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): It is brief. What impact has Brexit had on staffing levels in the care sector?

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

Maree Todd: We are deeply concerned about the impact of exit from the European Union on the recruitment to critical front-line social care roles. The Scottish Government has always recognised the crucial importance of non-United Kingdom citizens to Scotland's economy, to our society and to the delivery of our vital health and social care services.

The Scottish Government has provided funding to NHS Education for Scotland to lead the delivery of a programme of work to support social care providers to increase workforce capacity through international recruitment. The aim of the programme is to support social care providers to navigate the UK immigration system more easily and to have support available to alleviate some of that bureaucratic burden on the international recruitment—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. We move to question 7.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Outsourcing)

7. **Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is supporting national health service boards, including NHS Ayrshire and Arran, that have outsourced child and adolescent mental health services in order to reduce waiting times, to bring such services back in house. (S6O-02114)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): The use of the independent sector has been an option open to all health boards to help address short-term capacity issues.

Through Scottish Government investment, we continue to engage and support boards, including

NHS Ayrshire and Arran, to build their workforce and to implement the national CAMHS service specification. In 2021-22, the Scottish Government allocated around £40 million to improve CAMHS and neurodevelopmental services for children and young people, and, in 2022-23, we invested £32 million via the mental health outcomes framework to improve the quality and delivery of mental health and psychological services for all.

Carol Mochan: We are well aware of the pressures that health boards and CAMHS face, but the issues with long waiting lists are long-standing, and that is due to Scottish National Party inaction. Health boards are now having to outsource CAMHS to reduce waiting times. I would have expected the minister to commit Government to returning services in house.

Is the Government committed to supporting health boards to return those services in house? If so, what is the timetable for that?

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

Maree Todd: I can assure the member that we are absolutely committed to improving in-house services. Part of tackling the backlog is the use of private services. We have allocated £32 million to improve the quality and delivery of mental health and psychological services for everyone. The priorities of the funding were to continue to deliver improvement in CAMHS and psychological therapies, eating disorder services and neurodevelopmental services, as well as on-going innovation and service reform.

I hope to be able to return to the chamber sometime soon to report positive progress.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a very brief supplementary from Tess White, who joins us online.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): Does the minister think that the Strang report has been sufficiently implemented? If so, can she explain why waiting times for CAMHS treatment have gone backwards?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please be brief, minister.

Maree Todd: I can assure the member that largely across the country waiting times for CAMHS treatment are going in the right direction. In some places, because of the focus on tackling long waits, the number of people who are waiting beyond 18 weeks has extended, but I expect that to be a temporary challenge as the situation improves. As I have said, I expect to be able to report real progress to the Parliament very soon.

Patient Travel Schemes (Review)

8. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it will review the NHS Scotland patient travel scheme and the Highlands and Islands patient travel scheme. (S6O-02115)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The review is a substantial exercise for the Scottish Government and national health service boards and, regrettably, it remains delayed due to on-going prioritisation of the remobilisation of services. It will be taken forward as soon as possible, taking full account of the matters raised by members, including Ms Grant.

Financial support for travel remains available for patients and authorised escorts, according to eligibility criteria and medical requirements. Boards are expected to support patients to identify and access the support that is available, while taking into account individual circumstances and ensuring that patient care is at the centre of all decisions.

Rhoda Grant: Patients can travel long distances to access healthcare, and it can be really expensive, especially if an overnight stay is necessary. At the moment, they can claim back £50 for an overnight stay, but budget rooms in Inverness can cost in excess of £400 in the summer. That means that constituents are cancelling treatment. They are also not able to take family with them because the criteria are unreasonable.

The situation is now urgent. Will the minister make it a high priority to review this as soon as possible?

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

Jenni Minto: I recognise exactly the issues that Ms Grant has raised, having experienced them myself and having many constituents who have experienced them. The Scottish Government continues to work with boards to limit the need for travel in the first place, where that is possible and clinically appropriate, especially by utilisation of the Near Me service. However, I understand the issues that she has raised, and I am happy to look into them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business, to allow front benches to change.

Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill: Section 35 Order

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by Shirley-Anne Somerville on challenge to the United Kingdom Government's section 35 order on the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:54

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The Parliament has already been informed of the petition that was lodged by Scottish ministers last Thursday for judicial review of the Secretary of State for Scotland's decision to make an order under section 35 of the Scotland Act 1998 preventing the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill from proceeding to royal assent.

I must make it clear that, as always with live legal proceedings, there are strict limits on what I can say, and I must not enter into the substance of our petition or the UK Government's statement of reasons. I am sure that members will understand that restriction. However, I wanted to make this statement to explain the decision as fully as possible to Parliament.

We have not taken this decision lightly—we have considered it carefully, and it was clear to us in our deliberations that allowing the UK Government's veto on the democratic decisions of this Parliament to go unchallenged would undermine our democracy. Equally, the veto was used with no prior discussion or warning, and without ever hearing from the UK Government about what amendments it would have wanted in the bill. That cannot go unchallenged, because of the implications for future legislation and for devolution, particularly as the secretary of state refused our offers to work on potential changes to the bill.

I can confirm that, to this day, the UK Government has not offered up a single area for amendment that would satisfy it in relation to the issue of gender recognition reform. Therefore, if we want to take a stand and protect our democracy and devolution, there is no option but to pursue a legal challenge.

The Scotland Act 1998, which established devolution, included section 35, which allows the secretary of state to make an order prohibiting the Presiding Officer from submitting a bill for royal assent, even though that bill is within this Parliament's legislative competence. The intention

behind how the powers should operate was made clear in comments by the UK Government minister Lord Sewel in July 1998, when he said:

"These powers of intervention are of course meant to be long stops ... Their existence should be sufficient to ensure consultation between Whitehall and Edinburgh so that there may be no need for them to be used."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 28 July 1998; Vol 592, c 1392.]

There were concerns at the time that powers under the 1998 act could amount to a veto on devolved legislation. There was discussion of the need for controls on how the powers might be used, and of the fact that they could be used as a political tool. Indeed, the clause was dubbed the "governor general clause" and was described by Conservative MP Michael Ancram as having

"a power to bring the actions of the Scottish Parliament to a halt."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 12 May 1998; Vol 312, c 265.]

The need for some control around the use of Scotland Act 1998 powers is reflected in the memorandum of understanding between the UK Government and devolved Administrations. Updated in 2013, the memorandum clearly states that, although the legislation contains powers for the secretary of state to intervene in devolved matters, these powers should be used

"very much as a ... last resort."

In fact, the UK Government's unprecedented use of section 35 was the very opposite of a last resort.

The memorandum goes on to state:

"The UK Government and the administration concerned will therefore aim to resolve any difficulties through discussion so as to avoid any action or omission by the devolved administration having an adverse impact on non-devolved matters. If formal intervention should become necessary, the UK Government will whenever practicable inform the devolved administration of its intentions in sufficient time to enable that administration to make any representations it wishes, or take any remedial action."

There were no such representations from the UK Government. There were no representations made in the consultations of 2017 and 2019, when, of course, the UK Government planned to make similar reforms. There were no representations throughout the nine-month passage of the bill. The UK Government took no steps to resolve its concerns and did not raise the possibility of a section 35 order with us.

The Scottish Government has been proposing gender recognition reform since 2016, to bring the law into line with international best practice. We held two public consultations, including on a full draft bill and impact assessments. With over 30,000 responses combined, that was some of the widest consultation ever undertaken on Scottish legislation. The UK Government made no response and did not provide a view.

In fact, the UK Government proposed similar reforms and, in its 2018 consultation, explicitly recognised that Scotland could take its own approach, stating:

“Gender recognition is devolved to Scotland. That means Scotland can have its own system for gender recognition if it wants to.”

The UK Government undertook to work closely with the Scottish Government on the implementation of the Scottish proposals,

“especially on the implementation of its proposals where powers are not devolved”,

and on

“mutual recognition of certificates issued in different parts of the UK across the UK.”

Although the UK Government subsequently dropped its proposed reforms, the joint work on implementation went ahead. At official level, there were fortnightly meetings between UK and Scottish officials as the bill progressed through Parliament, including early work on a section 104 order, which is the usual method for resolving impacts between devolved and reserved law.

Far from raising concerns, the UK Government explicitly endorsed Scotland’s ability to take forward reforms and otherwise made no comment. The UK Government gave no response to the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee’s call for evidence, and there was no ministerial contact until the UK Minister for Women and Equalities responded to a letter sent in October by my predecessor as social justice secretary, Shona Robison, which led to a meeting the day before stage 3 of the bill. Cross-border effects were discussed at that meeting, but no changes were requested by the UK Government, and there was no mention of consideration of a section 35 order.

The Secretary of State for Scotland’s first contact on the bill was a letter on the night of 16 January informing us that he would be laying a section 35 order the next day. The UK Government did not allocate debating time for a House of Commons motion seeking to annul the order, so rather than raising concerns or amendments through the normal Government channels and rather than following the memorandum of understanding, the secretary of state used the section 35 power exactly as even Conservative MPs feared would happen at the time of the 1998 act—as an absolute veto to strike down any devolved legislation passed by a majority of this Parliament that he dislikes, without discussion and based on political, not policy, judgment.

Immediately after receiving Mr Jack’s letter in January, Shona Robison offered a meeting with the secretary of state and a potential way forward:

the Scottish Government would work with the UK Government at both ministerial and official levels to explore potential amendments to the bill. The secretary of state absolutely refused that offer, stating that there would be no further meetings between the Governments on the issue. He set out three options for the Scottish Government: we could drop the bill, which was passed by a majority of this Parliament, altogether; we could address his concerns in an amended bill, but he did not say which areas would need to be amended to allow the section 35 order to be dropped; or we could pursue legal action.

The UK Government’s statement of reasons does not provide a basis for amending the bill, and Mr Jack, in direct contradiction to the position in the UK consultation, has stated that any divergence of approach in Scotland would be unacceptable. He has said:

“In short, two different regimes create adverse effects.”—
[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 17 January 2023; Vol 726, c 218.]

It has therefore proved impossible to find a way forward or to consider a form of amended bill that this Parliament would agree to and that would lead the secretary of state to revoke the order.

The Scottish Government remains committed to the bill, as amended and agreed by a majority in this Parliament, which would make it easier for trans people to live their lives and access their existing rights. More than 350 million people around the world already live in countries and regions with the type of system that is proposed in the bill.

Irrespective of people’s views on the bill—I recognise that some remain firmly opposed to it—challenging the UK Government’s use of section 35 is the only option for a Government that wants to uphold and defend the democratic will and devolved powers of this Parliament. To not challenge the order would mean accepting that the secretary of state can ultimately strike down any devolved legislation, even after full and detailed scrutiny by Parliament and after MSPs have amended, debated and voted on a bill. If, after all that, one person can simply decide that a bill should not proceed, without that decision being questioned, it sets a precedent that calls into question devolution itself.

If the UK Government can use that power once without being challenged, how long will it be before it uses it again? As we have seen with the Sewel convention, once a precedent has been set, the UK Government will find it easier to justify using a power again and again, gradually eroding the hard-won devolved powers of Scotland.

I know that, although the bill was passed by an overwhelming majority of members, not all MSPs

and not all of the wider Scottish public agree with the bill's aims, but I hope that we can agree that the unprecedented intervention of the Secretary of State for Scotland to halt a bill on devolved issues that has already been passed by this Parliament must be challenged. That is why the Scottish ministers have lodged the petition for judicial review. We will fight to defend the devolved competence and democratic function of this Parliament, and it is right that we do so.

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

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am an advocate. I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of her statement.

It is, of course, deeply disappointing that the Scottish Government has chosen to challenge the section 35 order in the courts. It is plainly doing so now to divert attention from the serious crisis that is currently engulfing the Scottish National Party.

A lengthy and expensive litigation is the wrong choice for the bill and for all those whom it impacts. It does not benefit the trans community, it does not benefit women, and it does not benefit the Scottish taxpayer.

Lord Hope, who is one of Scotland's most eminent judges and a former deputy president of the UK Supreme Court, has described the prospects of success in the case as "very low" and has implied that it is a waste of public money.

We should remember that the Scottish Government was warned of the impact of the bill on the Equality Act 2010 during the bill's passage, yet it ploughed on regardless. Furthermore, despite the UK Government publishing its very detailed statement of reasons behind its decision to make the order, we are yet to see the details of the Scottish Government's legal position. I am fully aware of the restrictions that apply here, but if it is in the public interest for the Scottish Government to challenge the section 35 order, it logically follows that it is also in the public interest for the Scottish Government to publish its legal advice.

My questions are specific. Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether the Lord Advocate has tendered legal advice on the prospects of success in the judicial review? Will she now publish that advice, and will she advise Parliament on the estimated cost of the litigation if it is appealed all the way to the Supreme Court?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As the member well knows, there is a convention of not publishing

legal advice, and the UK Government will take exactly the same position as it moves forward with the matter. I highly doubt that Donald Cameron will be suggesting that the UK Government publish its legal advice. Let us have a debate about what we can and cannot do on a realistic basis.

We are very keen to be as transparent as possible on the matter, which is exactly why we have asked for the court's agreement to publish the petition. We have recently received an agreement that we can do so, and we hope to publish the petition in due course—tomorrow, I hope, now that that confirmation from the court has been received.

Nevertheless, I again strongly caution against any suggestion that we are doing this out of a desire to take this route as our first course of action. We have no option—as I detailed in my statement, the alternatives that we had were closed down to us not through our decisions, but by the UK Government. Neither I nor the Scottish Government wanted to get into that position, but if the UK Government is going to refuse to have discussions with us, I make no apology for standing up for the rights of the Scottish Parliament and for a bill that the Scottish Parliament has passed.

When it comes to the cost, I appreciate that that is a matter of concern for members and, indeed, for the public. This is not the way that we would have wanted to go about things, and therefore we did not want this cost to be incurred. However, we will, of course, publish the costs for the action once it is completed. It is impossible for us to be able to do so beforehand because we do not know how the matter will proceed in the courts. However, once it has gone through due process, we will, of course, be very transparent and publish the costs regarding this issue.

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement and for outlining to Parliament the decisions that were taken during the recess.

It is critical that we do not lose sight of the purpose of reform, and every day that the bill spends in court is another day in which trans people do not have access to a reformed process.

The UK Government's use of a section 35 order was the wrong approach. As the cabinet secretary said, it is a mechanism to be used as a last resort. The issue is too serious and too important to be reduced simply to a political debate or a constitutional football.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the section 104 meetings between the UK Government and the Scottish Government, which were held in relation to the UK Government's 2018 proposals. In response to the letter that was sent by my

predecessor in the role of Scottish Labour spokesperson, Pam Duncan-Glancy, the former Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government confirmed that the Scottish Government had committed to working with the UK Government under section 104 in relation to the bill. Can the cabinet secretary outline the detail and outcome of those discussions? We asked for that confirmation throughout the bill process, and it was confirmed that that was in hand.

Moreover, given the length of time that the case is likely to take, as has been widely reported, will the cabinet secretary give an outline guide to the Parliament on how she expects the matter to be in the courts, in line with the legal advice that she will have received?

Finally, while reform is locked in legal proceedings, can the cabinet secretary outline what specific actions the Government is taking to support trans people, in particular, to access important services such as healthcare, for which waiting lists remain too long?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: In the same way as many people will be concerned as we progress to legal action, we will be concerned because of the delay to the bill and the impact of that on the trans community. I am deeply sorry that it has come to this and that we are not moving directly towards royal assent.

The section 104 meetings were progressing. Discussion was on-going between officials—that was positive and constructive—and nothing was raised with ministers that flagged that a section 35 order was coming our way or that suggested that we would not move forward with a section 104 order in due course, as we do with many bills in the area.

How long it will take in court is a matter for the court. It will be for the court to decide when the case is heard. Obviously, it is not too late for a change of heart on the part of the UK Government and for it to withdraw the section 35 order and save us all the challenge of a court process and the impact that that will have on the trans community and, indeed, others who are concerned about the bill. It is not a matter for me to lay out a timetable; I am afraid that I am unable to do so.

However, Paul O’Kane has raised an important point about other matters relating to the trans community on which it is important that we step forward, because, although this was an important piece of legislation, it is not the only aspect of my portfolio—or, indeed, of other cabinet secretaries’ portfolios—that can assist. Paul O’Kane has my full assurance that we will continue to move forward on those issues across Government.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Along with members of all parties, the

Scottish Liberal Democrats voted for the provisions of the bill in good faith after repeated assurances from the Scottish Government that it was both legally competent and within the reach of the Scottish Parliament. As such, it would have been surprising had the Government not taken the section 35 order to court.

Alister Jack has signalled several times that he does not believe that that form of gender recognition is appropriate. That should imply that there is a form of gender recognition that is appropriate, in his sight. The Government has signalled that there has not been further contact since the section 35 order. Has there been any signal from officials in his department or other Scotland Office ministers as to what reforms could be made to the bill to make it competent in their eyes?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Alex Cole-Hamilton raises the real crux of the matter, which is that the alternative to court action was possible only if we could work with the UK Government on possible amendments. I have to say that the sum total of those discussions is zero. We have not had any suggestions. I am not saying that we are asking the UK Government to write the amendments—of course we are not; we are not asking it to write the legislation—but the first step in the process would, of course, be getting in the room and having a discussion about where the areas of concern are and working out where the bill could be amended. Of course, we would then have to see whether that would be something that the Scottish Government and, indeed, the Scottish Parliament—because the bill is now the Scottish Parliament’s bill—would be keen to amend, but at least we would have been able to go through that process.

We have been absolutely unable to get even to step 1. That is a deep disappointment to us, and it leaves us no option but to move to court action. However, it is deeply disappointing that the secretary of state did not take up the invitation to go through that process.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Cabinet secretary, post-Brexit, we have seen a dramatic shift to executive power decision making by the UK Government on devolved matters. The Sewel convention underpinning intergovernmental relations has been ignored nine times, and we now have the unprecedented use of a section 35 order in a devolved area of competence on a bill passed overwhelmingly by this chamber.

UK Government ministers have declined invitations to allow committees of this Parliament to scrutinise the use of the order for the first time in 23 years, in terms of both policy and constitutional implications. Cabinet secretary, is it

not imperative that our democratic settlement, which is being eroded at every opportunity, is protected? Is it not the case that not challenging the order as a matter of principle would be to step back and let the Westminster—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary.

Clare Adamson: —executive power grab—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary.

Clare Adamson: —ride roughshod over this Parliament?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Clare Adamson raises a very important point. As a Government, we have an obligation to ensure that we stand up for this Parliament and the decisions of this Parliament. Not to do so would be a dereliction of duty on our part.

The reason why that is particularly important is that—I say this with deep regret—we now have a UK Government that does not pay attention to Sewel motions and rides roughshod over many aspects of what we would normally see as usual due process. Because we are in that state and because this is a series of decisions that the UK Government has taken over a number of issues, which have certainly suggested very strongly a challenge to devolution, we have an obligation to stand up for the rights of this Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Another eight colleagues wish to ask questions and we have just under nine minutes before we move on to the next item of business, so I would appreciate slightly shorter questions and slightly briefer answers.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The SNP dragged the UK Government to court over a referendum; now it is pursuing another unnecessary grievance over gender recognition reform. The new First Minister is desperate to divert from the scandals that are tearing his party apart, rather than focusing on the priorities of the people of Scotland. Humza Yousaf knows that the vast majority of the public oppose this absolutely reckless self-ID bill, but he is picking a fight with the UK Government anyway.

Having failed to answer the question from my colleague Donald Cameron, will the cabinet secretary say how much the SNP's manufactured and divisive court battle will cost the taxpayer?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We know that the easiest way to save the taxpayer money would be for the UK Government to revoke the section 35 order and let us get on with proceeding to royal assent.

The deadline for when our announcement was made was based on when the section 35 order

was laid by the secretary of state. Let us get back to why the announcement of the decision was made last week—again, that was based on the deadline set by the UK Government.

It is a deep disappointment, but perhaps not surprising, that the Scottish Conservatives are once again not standing up for the Scottish Parliament.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary has already touched on, offers to work with the UK Government on potential changes to the bill have been refused by the secretary of state, leaving a legal challenge as the only reasonable means of resolving the situation. Can the cabinet secretary say any more about the justification that the UK Government has provided for the complete lack of engagement?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: One of the many things that are deeply disappointing is the fact that the UK Government has not set out why it is refusing to engage with us. I fully understand that we might have different views on what was in the bill and on whether a section 35 order could be used, but the fact that UK ministers were invited to give evidence to the Westminster Women and Equalities Committee on the section 35 order but refused and that they refused to give evidence to parliamentary committees in the Scottish Parliament is deeply disappointing. The very least that this Parliament deserves is a better explanation from the UK Government of why it has decided to go down this route and has left this Government with no option but to seek legal challenge.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Has the cabinet secretary been advised that there are reasonable prospects of success for the petition? Can she confirm the main legal principle that the Scottish Government will be advancing in court? Is it that the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, if enacted, would not impact on the operation of the Equality Act 2010?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If Katy Clark will forgive me, I will not comment in detail on what she has said. I laid out in my statement that I cannot get into the substance of our petition or the UK Government's statement of reasons, as there are on-going live legal proceedings, but I hope that the fact that we are willing and keen to publish the petition will assist with some of the points that Katy Clark raised.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): It appears that the UK position on gender recognition in Scotland has shifted since 2018, when it was that

“Scotland can have its own system”.

I know that no amendments have been proposed by the UK Government. As a last resort, to truncate litigation, would the Scottish Government be sympathetic to a sist of proceedings, with the agreement of the UK Government and leave of the courts, to see whether the bill could be amended to both parties' satisfaction, while still protecting the Scottish Government's right to proceed if that does not happen?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I cannot comment on how the legal challenge could proceed, as that relates to live legal proceedings. All that I would say to Christine Grahame is that that is not a decision that would be for the Scottish Government; it would also require the UK Government to act in a certain manner.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. I also pay tribute to Shona Robison for her steadfast commitment to the bill and equalities.

The cabinet secretary has made clear that there was no meaningful engagement by UK Government ministers on the GRR bill and no amendments that would satisfy them. Does she agree that that is a very clear indication that the UK Government is acting in bad faith, with no intention of genuine discussion and against the principles of devolution, and that the section 35 order is being used as a weapon in the culture war against trans and wider LGBTQIA+ rights?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is very definitely an example of the UK Government acting in bad faith. Maggie Chapman is right to point out that there has been no intention on its part to have genuine discussion on the issue. Members can draw their own conclusions about why that might be.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary knows, I was opposed to the bill and I remain opposed to the bill. However, it seems that if Westminster is allowed to veto this legislation, it could veto any legislation. Can she confirm that that is the case and that it could stop our budget or absolutely anything else?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I thank John Mason for his question, because he raises a very important point. There are members in here from different parties, including my own, who held a different position on the bill, but the dangerous constitutional precedent that this sets should be a worry to all of us, regardless of our position on the bill. Indeed, that was why Mark Drakeford, the First Minister of Wales, was quick to criticise the order. He said, referring to the then First Minister:

"I think the UK Government's decision to use powers that have never been used in the whole history of devolution is a very dangerous moment, and I agree with the First

Minister of Scotland that this could be a very slippery slope indeed."

He is quite right to point out that there is a principle behind this that all of us should be aware of. All of us should be willing to stand up for this Parliament when the UK Government intervenes.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Humza Yousaf said that a double rapist who was sent to a women's prison was "at it", but if Humza Yousaf gets his way, there will be no way of stopping any predatory man who is at it. Can the cabinet secretary explain how the legal action will resolve this fundamental contradiction?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Of course, not for the first time, Russell Findlay is trying to connect the bill with something that has nothing to do with whether someone has a gender recognition certificate. Again, I fully appreciate and respect that members across the Parliament have different views on the bill. However, in considering why the section 35 order was made by the UK Government, let us ensure that we recognise that we have taken the decision to lodge this petition for judicial review because we cannot have a UK Government that has a veto over a bill that was—yes—hotly contested but was amended and passed by an overwhelming majority in this Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Finally, I call James Dornan, who joins us online.

James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): Can the minister give any further clarity as to why the UK Government used the section 35 order against the clear will and competence of the Scottish Parliament rather than a section 33 reference to the Supreme Court?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The UK Government has not used a reference under section 33 as it is not challenging the legislative competence of the bill. That shows that it accepts that the bill is within the devolved competence of this Parliament. The use of the section 35 order is unprecedented because it vetoes a bill within devolved competence that has already been passed by this Parliament. It is now up to the courts to look at that in detail.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes this item of business. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business to allow members on the front bench to change over.

Scotland's Finances and Wellbeing Economy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-08604, in the name of Neil Gray, on managing Scotland's finances and working with business to drive the wellbeing economy. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:25

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): It is a privilege to open my first debate in my new role as the Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy. Before I start in earnest, I pay tribute to my predecessors who held responsibility for elements of the portfolio that I am now in charge of. John Swinney, Michael Matheson, Ivan McKee and Kate Forbes have contributed and will continue to contribute a huge amount.

It is particularly pleasing to have seen Kate Forbes back in her place this week after her period of maternity leave. I know what a wrench it is to return to work after such periods—in my case, paternity leave on three occasions. I wish Kate and her family, Ali and Naomi, well for adjusting to the new normal that we all have to adjust to after that process.

A growing, thriving economy is about more than just numbers. Economic success means making the most of the incredibly rich resources that Scotland has. It means high living standards, people being able to fulfil and exceed their potential and a dynamic and strengthening business base that, in turn, feeds into strong and sustainable finances that support public services and communities.

I take this opportunity to underline my commitment to working closely with our business community to maximise Scotland's sustainable economic growth potential. Yesterday, the First Minister set out plans to agree a new deal for business and the introduction of a new group co-chaired by me that will explore, among other things, how Government can better support our businesses and communities using the policy levers that it has.

Our message to Scotland's businesses is clear. We hear your concerns about high United Kingdom inflation, supply chain issues, labour shortages and the impact of regulation, and we will continue to work with you to mitigate the potential impact of those issues. In return, we will work in partnership with you to support fair work and

support businesses to develop and internationalise, which will drive prosperity.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Neil Gray: Do I have time to do so, Deputy Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes.

Murdo Fraser: I welcome the cabinet secretary to his new role. I look forward to working with him. The First Minister said in the chamber on 30 March that, throughout the period of office of the former First Minister, Scottish gross domestic product growth had outstripped that of the UK as a whole. That statement is not true—he misled the chamber. Will the cabinet secretary apologise for the First Minister making that false statement?

Neil Gray: The First Minister was referencing the most recent GDP figures, which show that Scotland's GDP growth is outstripping the UK's. It may be sad for the Conservatives to admit that it appears that the Scottish economy is doing well, but we will continue to work well to ensure that our economy continues to thrive. This week, we have incredible labour market statistics that show that unemployment in Scotland is at a record low. Surely that is something that we all welcome and seek to build on in partnership. I look forward to working with Murdo Fraser constructively, as I will with all colleagues across the chamber.

The past few years have seen the cost crisis, the pandemic, the impact of the UK's disastrous Brexit and the fiscal instability brought on by the decisions in the UK Government mini-budget. Those things have brought untold damage to the wellbeing of people and businesses in Scotland and they have laid immense pressures on our precious public services and community and voluntary sectors.

Output in the global economy is forecast to slow in 2023, and Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine continues to present a risk to global trade and activity. However, the International Monetary Fund forecast says that the UK economy has the weakest growth outlook in the G20 for 2023. As a devolved Government, we do not have all the levers that other countries have to bring forward economic interventions to support their economies, businesses and people, or the levers to mitigate UK decision making.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I agree with the cabinet secretary about his assessment of the UK economy, but can he explain why the Scottish economy is going to perform even more poorly than the UK economy? According to the Fraser of Allander Institute, its decline will be greater than the decline of the UK's economy. Can he explain why that is going to happen?

Neil Gray: We obviously want to reverse that. We are putting in place measures through the prospectus that we put forward yesterday, and we are coming forward with a wellbeing economy to ensure that we can take advantage of the massive resource potential that we have in Scotland. Of course, we are constrained in that not all the economic levers that a normal, independent country would have at its disposal to generate economic growth are within our gift and, as Willie Rennie accepted, we are reliant on a failing UK economy and economic approach. He has to recognise that we are doing what we are doing with one arm tied behind our back. It is perhaps time that we had full control of all the fiscal and economic levers, to ensure that we can take advantage of the economic opportunities that we have.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Neil Gray: Do I have time, Deputy Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is a bit of time in hand if you wish to take the intervention.

Neil Gray: I will take a last intervention from Liz Smith.

Liz Smith: I am very grateful. I, too, welcome Neil Gray to his position. As I understand it, some of his colleagues are currently looking at ways to use the powers of this place better. Does he agree with that assessment when it comes to improving the economy, and does he accept that it is well worth looking at that?

Neil Gray: We will always look at ideas that can ensure that we maximise the opportunities that we have. That is not only about policy levers, because we also have to recognise the limited resources that we have in this Parliament. As I said in response to Willie Rennie, we have to recognise that we do what we do to try to generate economic growth with limited powers and resources compared with those that a normal, independent country would have. I am happy to work with Liz Smith if she has ideas on some of the areas that we have within our gift that would allow us to generate further growth, and I look forward to that. I am looking to engage with the Opposition spokespeople in the coming weeks.

The UK Government needs consistently higher levels of public investment. Our foreign direct investment competitors are committing greater budgets to incentivise investment. The UK needs to invest using the levers that it has—which we would like to enjoy—on a scale that matches our ambitions. As was shown in a recent publication by the Resolution Foundation, Britain is a “low investment” state, which has ultimately left us poorer.

In the United States, the Biden Administration is stimulating massive investment in renewables and green technologies through the Inflation Reduction Act, and the European Union is following suit with its new Net Zero Industry Act and its Critical Raw Materials Act. Other Governments are leading the way and bringing markets and investment with them, but the UK is left on the sidelines, with the risk that investment will flow to the EU and the US rather than to Scotland.

The UK’s lack of action means that we are at a competitive disadvantage. There is a narrow window of opportunity to reap the rewards of our renewables revolution, so now is the time for the UK Government to prioritise meeting net zero targets and other vital infrastructure priorities and to invest in the economy rather than squandering Scotland’s energy assets once again.

That is why this debate is so important. In the face of financial and economic pressures, as well as the threats of climate change and child poverty and the need to enhance public services, it is essential that we come together to drive our transition to a wellbeing economy. That was the focus of the discussion that I had with the organisations that represent businesses across Scotland only hours after my appointment.

A wellbeing economy is a strong, growing economy that is environmentally sustainable and resilient and that serves the collective wellbeing of people first and foremost. It empowers communities to take a greater stake in the economy, with more wealth being generated, circulated and retained in local communities. It protects and invests in the natural environment, provides opportunities for everyone to access meaningful and fair work, and values and supports responsible, purposeful businesses to thrive and innovate.

That is why our national strategy for economic transformation emphasises wellbeing, building on and broadening the sustainable inclusive growth approach that was taken previously, and it is why one of the three missions that the First Minister announced yesterday is to increase opportunities in our country with an economy that is “fair, green and growing”.

In order to make the shift towards a wellbeing economy, we need metrics to track its progress, and we developed our wellbeing economy monitor specifically to look beyond just GDP and measure how Scotland’s economy contributes to improving things such as health, equality, fair work and environmental sustainability. In committing to a transition to a wellbeing economy, we can build on our considerable strengths and maximise our potential with the powers that we currently have. With independence, we could do so much more.

Scotland has a rich, diverse economy with many areas of strength, but there are underlying structural issues. We have an ageing population and our working-age population is falling. That is why we have made a commitment to address Scotland's labour market inactivity challenges and remove barriers that keep people from contributing economically.

Investing in skills across people's lifetimes is critical to future productivity and success as the economy and labour markets continue to evolve. Apprenticeships provide people of all ages with great opportunities to upskill and reskill. They help people to progress on their chosen career paths and thereby provide the skills that the economy needs both now and in the future.

Certain industries still face recruitment challenges—I hear about that when I meet employers in my constituency—so we continue to call on UK ministers to establish a joint task force on labour market shortages. An urgent rethink of UK Government immigration policy is also needed in order to increase access to the international labour that our economy needs. To that end, the Scottish Government has developed a rural visa pilot proposal that represents a practical and deliverable migration solution. The Migration Advisory Committee stated in its 2022 annual report that the proposal is “sensible and clear” in both scale and deliverability. We will continue to push the UK Government to engage with us on that.

We need to do all that we can to help people to get into good jobs and stay in them, by providing the right support—such as employability services, health services and childcare—at the right time, especially for those who are furthest from the labour market. The national strategy for economic transformation emphasises the need for high-quality childcare to enable parents and carers to work, increase their working hours or enter training and education.

Our recent early learning and childcare parent survey demonstrated clear positive benefits from the increase in the funded ELC entitlement, with almost three quarters of parents acknowledging that it supported them to work or to look for work. Our ELC provision, which is the most generous in the UK, also helps to tackle inequalities such as the gender pay gap. However, we have ambitious plans to go even further. In the current parliamentary session, we will build a system of school-age childcare and design a new offer for one and two-year-olds, starting with those who stand to benefit the most. Our commitment is set out in the policy prospectus that the First Minister published yesterday. I hope to meet the childcare sector soon—including the private, voluntary and

independent sectors—to understand where we can support its crucial role in childcare delivery.

Our focus on people's wellbeing, which prevents harm, is good for Scotland's economy. In the face of acute labour shortages, it will help many sectors and businesses to access the workers that they need in order to be successful and drive our journey to a stronger, fairer, green economy. That will benefit Scotland's tax base and public finances while also having positive impacts on our children and future generations.

Through our holistic approach to supporting the wellbeing of our children and young people, we can help to improve outcomes in education, employment, health and justice by ensuring that our children and young people are supported, encouraged and empowered to contribute to and benefit from the development of a wider wellbeing economy. By taking a preventative approach now, we can reduce issues in the future—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I have given you some latitude because you took a number of interventions, but I ask you to bring your remarks to a close now.

Neil Gray: Of course, Presiding Officer.

The development of offshore wind can help to achieve a just transition to net zero, decarbonise our energy system and create good-quality jobs. It is also one of the lowest-cost forms of electricity generation at scale. We have huge opportunities in relation to our ScotWind offshore project, looking at hydrogen and the tidal and marine sector—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I really do have to ask you to conclude.

Neil Gray: In conclusion, it is clear that we have the plan, the opportunities and the ambition that are needed to deliver a wellbeing economy. However, to succeed, we need everyone to be round the table. The prize when we succeed will be a prosperous, dynamic, thriving Scottish economy where everyone shares in and benefits from our success. The Government's motion indicates the steps that we need to take to ensure that we get there and reap the opportunities that are there for us all.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the need to create a wellbeing economy that is democratic, works for people and planet, and supports communities to fulfil their potential; believes that such an economy must be equitable, sustainable and dynamic in order to address the climate crises, the current financial and economic challenges, and to deliver a just transition to net zero, reduce child poverty and enhance public services; notes that plans to expand childcare support and implement the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and the Just Transition Plans will deliver new opportunities for

communities, businesses and individuals across Scotland; considers that the development of community wealth building legislation will be a key component of the approach to local and regional economic development and empowerment, will promote and sustain fair work, create and retain more wealth within communities, build Scotland's tax base, strengthen its economic resilience, increase wellbeing for current and future generations and support the delivery of high-quality public services, and recognises that independence would allow Scotland to make greater progress, but, until then, calls for the devolution of additional powers, in relation to energy, the economy and employment law, to the Scottish Parliament to support Scotland's transition to a wellbeing economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. I call Liz Smith to speak to and move amendment S6M-08604.1.

15:38

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): As well as welcoming Neil Gray to his position, I welcome Michael Marra to his. I look forward to working with them both.

The minister was quite right when he said that there are issues with the UK economy, but issues with other European economies have been flagged up by the International Monetary Fund and by various economists.

However, I want to concentrate on the Scottish Fiscal Commission's sustainability programme, which was missing from the First Minister's comments yesterday. I was a bit surprised about that because—Willie Rennie was quite right in what he said—the situation for Scotland when it comes to fiscal issues is considerably worse than the situation for the rest of the UK. That is partly to do with our ageing population demographic, but it is also to do with the fact that the tax base in Scotland is not nearly as broad as it should be. That also has an effect on productivity.

There are some serious concerns about what the Scottish Fiscal Commission has said—no least about the fact that social security spend alone is predicted to increase from £4.2 billion in the past financial year to £7.3 billion in financial year 2027-28.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I will, in a minute.

That is a very substantial increase and it takes into account only one area of considerable spending.

John Mason: Liz Smith concentrates quite a lot on the idea that we do not have enough people to work and that, therefore, more people are not working. Will she accept that a relaxed immigration system of some kind is absolutely necessary?

Liz Smith: I accept that. However, I also think that the issue is not just about immigration; it is about ensuring that coming back into the working population are people who have not, perhaps because of Covid or other challenges, been participating in the workforce.

The issue is also about more than that: it is about the tax take that Scotland desperately needs from people in the working population, in order to ensure that we are addressing the problem. The Scottish Fiscal Commission's most important conclusion is that the current tax and spend model in Scotland simply will not cut it. I think that that is the most serious issue that is confronting the Government. Kate Forbes—I am pleased to see some of her colleagues who have similar ideas on the back benches—quite rightly focused on exactly that issue, and she is right to see that as the main problem that Scotland needs to get over if we are going to succeed.

The Scottish Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee was very clear in paragraph 63 of its recent "Budget Scrutiny 2023-24" report that the efficacy of the tax system in Scotland has to be questioned. It needs a complete overhaul, because many tax elasticities and behavioural changes are simply not being properly accounted for.

However, what are the actual tax rates? There is a debate about the structure of tax as well as one about tax rates. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the First Minister have been telling us that they want a much more progressive tax system. In theory, and in terms of social justice, that is absolutely fine, but in practice it cannot work, because we do not have the wide tax base that we need. Simply hiking up tax rates for middle and higher earners and, as a result, increasing the tax differentials between Scotland and the rest of the UK is a serious issue, and it will not bring in the money that we require in order to ensure that the economy is on the right footing.

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I will, in a minute.

That is the point that Willie Rennie raised in a debate just before the Easter recess. In continuing to increase the tax rate, there comes a point at which that will have diminishing returns.

Ivan McKee: Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I will in a minute, Mr McKee.

Way back in 2016, my colleague Murdo Fraser quite rightly questioned the previous—infamous—cabinet secretary, Derek Mackay, about the Laffer effect. In continuing to squeeze middle and higher earners, there comes a point at which not only

does the amount of revenue reduce but there is a detrimental effect on economic activity.

Ivan McKee: I will not entertain the chamber by going through the differential calculus that lies behind the Laffer curve, but Liz Smith should have a look at it, because it does not say what she says. This is really about understanding exactly where we are on the curve, because that will give a different perspective.

I am trying to understand the point that Liz Smith made about the Scottish Fiscal Commission. She is on the Finance and Public Administration Committee, so she should know that the Scottish Fiscal Commission does a behavioural analysis and factors that in to the tax-take numbers in advance of any tax changes being made. By the time the numbers are presented for the budget discussion in the chamber, the behavioural impact has already been factored in. I do not know about Liz Smith, but I trust the SFC to make sure that it checks its work and that it understands that the behavioural factor ratios are correctly implemented.

Liz Smith: I absolutely trust the Scottish Fiscal Commission, and Ivan McKee is quite right to say that a lot of its analysis is first class. Indeed, the analysis that it has just issued in its “Fiscal Sustainability Report” is groundbreaking and has never been done before. However, the key point is that the overall conclusions of the SFC are damning, because they suggest that there will be a 10 per cent deficit for who knows how long—perhaps 50 years. That is serious.

I will help the SNP out a little bit with regard to what we need to do. We, on the Conservative side of the chamber, are unashamedly the party of economic growth. That means having a competitive tax and investment structure, and putting emphasis on creating a modern infrastructure for housing, transport, net zero and the rural fabric of our nation. We are also unashamedly on the side of business and of breaking down the tax barriers and red tape that stifle enterprise and innovation. That requires that all levels of government—local government, the Scottish Government and the UK Government—work together to support business and our local communities, including through placing emphasis on levelling up.

Neil Gray: Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I am in my last minute.

We are unashamedly on the side of promoting jobs, transferable skills and incentives to keep people in the workforce. There has been lots of chat from the SNP about that, but we need a lot more detail on exactly what policies are to be put in place.

Finally, I ask the minister, please, to ditch the Greens when it comes to this matter, because they do not have the first idea about or understanding of what it means to have economic growth underpinning the new Scottish Government.

I move amendment S6M-08604.1, to leave out from the first “recognises” to end and insert:

“is grateful to the Scottish Fiscal Commission (SFC) for its ground-breaking work contained within the recent *Fiscal Sustainability Report*, which forecasts Scottish economic trends for the next 50 years; notes the concerns cited by the SFC that current tax and spend structures and current models for public services will not deliver the necessary revenue that Scotland requires to address the substantial fiscal deficits, which are forecast to be around 10% each year, and calls on the new Scottish Government to be fully focussed on improving productivity, on widening the tax base and delivering the economic growth that Scotland so desperately needs.”

15:46

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): I welcome Neil Gray to his place and his promotion to cabinet secretary. I know that it has been a bumpy old start for the Administration, but I wish him well.

However, the motion that Parliament is considering today is little more than a collection of platitudes, and is little different to the motion that we debated just a few weeks ago, which was the former Deputy First Minister’s swansong. I am afraid that the tune is none the sweeter for having a new singer, so far.

Neil Gray: Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Marra: No, thank you. No singing, please, Mr Gray.

The SNP is a political movement and a Government that exists to deny difficult numbers, and we have heard a little bit of that already. When the numbers showed that we were falling down international education league tables, this Government withdrew Scotland from those tables. It was a self-serving mistake that amounted to self-harm on this country. Yesterday, finally, after 13 years, that mistake was reversed. I imagine that whatever benefit the First Minister believes will now be accrued has been lost over all those long years without those measures.

Further, when the Government’s official kite-marked figures, which were produced by the Office for National Statistics, showed that we benefit to the tune of an average of £10 billion a year from fiscal transfer within the UK, the SNP decided that those figures had to be trashed. That approach started in the dark corners of the internet with sad little men in their bedrooms, but it has eventually become a rite of passage for SNP

leadership contenders to do exactly that by savaging “Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland” figures in meetings of party members across the country—GERS deniers, each and every one of them.

Now, of course, we have seen the video of the former First Minister—in relation to whom Humza Yousaf is proud to call himself the continuity candidate—saying, when the numbers showed that the SNP was running out of money, “Don’t ask questions. Wheesht for indy.”

As a wise man once said:

“Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?”

That wise man whom I am quoting is, of course, Colin Beattie MSP, who was speaking at the Public Audit Committee in January 2022. For those of us who are less familiar than Mr Beattie is with the works of the Roman poet Juvenal, the translation is “Who watches the watchmen?” Well, Colin Beattie and the SNP know now: it is Police Scotland.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Michael Marra: No, thank you.

It really is astonishing for the SNP to slink out from the blue crime-scene tent to come here today and preach probity in public finance, and it is equally astonishing that, in its forensic search for relaunch policy ideas, the Scottish Government has stumbled on the concept of economic growth. That is an idea that was wilfully expunged from this Government’s policy agenda in its partnership with the Greens. So, I say to the cabinet secretary today that if the Government wishes to trade in economic concepts such as a wellbeing economy, as laid out in the works of Trebeck, Williams, Jackson and Raworth, it must be able to explain where the ecological and social limits of growth are. That is what a wellbeing economy is.

There is, to be frank, no evidence in any of the muddled thinking that has been presented so far today, in the motion, in the cabinet secretary’s speech or in the First Minister’s intervention yesterday, that the Government is engaging in anything more than wilful abuse of that concept as a branding exercise.

Neil Gray: Rather than just serving up soundbites in his speech, I implore Michael Marra to look at the prospectus paper that was published yesterday, to see the outline of the work that the Government is looking to embark on in order not only to achieve the wellbeing economy but to look at the wellbeing economy metric—it is available and publishable and can be seen—that will track the progress that we hope to make in order to ensure that we achieve the wellbeing economy. If he could engage on those facts, which I hope he

does as we engage across the chamber, we will be closer to, rather than further away from, what he has outlined.

Michael Marra: I am certainly happy to engage with the cabinet secretary on any of the metrics in a discussion of what any of it means. As I outlined in my most recent speech in the chamber on the economy, after years of listening to economic policies from this Government that have, frankly, jumped from one idea to the next over 16 years, I struggle to believe that the latest bandwagon that is being jumped on will be any more coherent or delivered than any of this Government’s previous attempts.

We are being invited to celebrate other broad concepts. The high bar of this Government is to not do ridiculous things, to decide not to continue to do ridiculous things or to decide to pause doing ridiculous things for a short while before starting them again. What do the deposit return scheme, the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill and the ban on alcohol advertising all have in common? The answer is the ineptitude of a Government that can turn any crumb of a decent idea into a toxic morass almost as quickly as it tries to blame Westminster. Of the mess that the Government has made of the deposit return scheme, the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland said:

“This is a bitter betrayal of Scotland’s natural environment.”

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): While Michael Marra talks about the “morass” of the economy, could he confirm that the last words of the most recent Labour UK Government were that there was “no money” left?

Michael Marra: If Mr Brown wants to invest himself in the idea that the most recent Labour UK Government was responsible for the global financial crisis that resulted in the banks crashing, he might recall that the First Minister under whom he served, Alex Salmond—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could we have less sedentary chitchat, please?

Michael Marra: Alex Salmond called the regulation of the banks in this country “gold-plated”. We know that we have a very difficult economic situation in this country as a result of the Tory Government and Liz Truss’s ineptitude, but this Government has to rise to making sure that there is economic growth in this part of the country.

The manner in which the deposit return scheme was devised would have been ruinous for businesses, and Scottish firms deciding to sell only outwith Scotland is a perverse situation. It is

right that the scheme is put back on the blocks for the moment, which is entirely due to the Government's incompetence. Yesterday, Ross Greer said that it is a Westminster delay. I assure him that the businesses that I speak to are not asking for a derogation from the single market regulations: that is not their reason for feeling that the scheme has been a complete disaster. They want a scheme that is appropriate for consumers and businesses and can increase recycling without costing jobs. The first thing that they want is a scheme that is led by a Government minister who can answer the most basic of questions about it.

The test of economic competence for this Government will be whether it can reverse the situation that Universities Scotland described last week as the "managed decline" of its sector. That situation is entirely unacceptable, and it is crucial that it be reversed if we are to ensure that our economy can thrive again. The questions will be whether we can meet the skills demands to make a jobs-first transition and whether the Government has a real plan to deliver growth. Our financial prosperity counts on those questions being addressed.

On the question of financial probity, I am afraid that the Government has already failed.

I move amendment S6M-08604.2, to leave out from "notes" to end and insert:

"recognises the tremendous potential that Scotland has to be a world leader in developing an economy that works for everyone; believes that the Scottish Government should be doing more by using the extensive powers available in Scotland to create jobs, deliver environmental sustainability, tackle the cost of living, upskill workers, grow Scottish businesses and channel more investment into high-growth, innovative firms of the future, so that everyone benefits from Scotland's prosperity; understands that sustainable economic growth will be required to successfully deliver a jobs-first transition to net zero and an economy that works for all; believes that it is vitally important that the Scottish Government enables businesses and households to have confidence in Scotland's economic prospects, and calls on the Scottish Government to prioritise openness, transparency and competence in the management of Scotland's finances."

15:54

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I welcome the cabinet secretary to his post. I think that the first step that he took—to indicate that we are going to reset the relationship with business—was a wise step. There is little doubt that that relationship had really been tested, certainly over recent years and certainly with the arrival of Nicola Sturgeon as First Minister. That relationship was much more strained, so he made the right decision to reset it. However, the real test will be delivery on the key economic indicators over time.

I embrace the wellbeing economy approach. It is fundamental that we have good public services and a good local environment for people to enjoy, in which they can work and live good and healthy lives. The difficulty sometimes with this Government—there was an indication of this in the minister's speech—is a tendency to focus more on the wellbeing aspects than on the economic aspects. That tends to be the attraction on such occasions, so I hope that there is a different approach—a more balanced approach—as we go forward. We need a strong economic approach, as well as good public services and a good environment, and we need them to work in tandem to boost the economic prospects of the country.

I like the wellbeing economy monitor; however, I have to say that it is rather subjective. Quite a lot of the indicators are of the view that the Government is making progress. For instance, the poverty-related attainment gap is down as making progress, but if I look at secondary 3, the gap is as wide as it has ever been and there is no indication that it is narrowing. Therefore, I think that it is subjective.

Certainly, we are not making progress on GDP either, because it has fallen since 2017. We need an independent assessment of the monitor to make sure that it has as much validity as the GDP and productivity figures that we rely on. The Carnegie Trust has done some really good work on that, and I hope that we will see a reform of the monitor to reflect the more accurate indicators on wellbeing.

The fundamentals on the economy are not good. Liz Smith rightly pointed out the Scottish Fiscal Commission's work and the report for the longer term. The productivity index provided by the Confederation of British Industry, which shows Scotland lagging behind the rest of the UK on 11 out of the 13 indicators, is not good either. There is some short-term improvement, but the longer-term outlook is very weak. If we look at labour productivity, in 2020-21 it went up by 1.2 per cent for the UK; however, in Scotland it flatlined. We are going to have to see significant progress on productivity if we are to get some improvement.

Likewise on GDP—the UK economy is a basket case as a result of Liz Truss's budget decisions, but Scotland is lagging even further behind. We should be better than the UK performance.

I want to see improvements on this—

Neil Gray: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: I am really limited on time today, I am afraid.

I want to see a real focus on universities and the potential that they provide. Scottish research

performance has slipped in the recent Research Excellence Framework, going from 15 per cent of UK research council funding to 12.5 per cent. That is a major generator for economic potential, but we are slipping further behind.

On the skills agenda, we still do not have alignment and colleges still do not have certainty about the future. We also need to have a better relationship with the UK Government, rather than having constant friction.

As Liz Smith highlighted, we need to have a more balanced approach to income tax. I am in favour of progressive taxation—I argued for an increase of a penny—but we cannot keep on arguing. We need greater progress and we need progressive taxation, because there is a tipping point. We need to base it on evidence—I want to see the Government looking at evidence rather than living by a slogan and the rhetoric. We need to have an appropriate approach to that.

This debate is far too short, I am afraid. We need to have a much longer debate on the economy, because there is so much more to cover.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Rennie. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to please press their request-to-speak buttons. I know that some members have not yet done so.

We now move to the open debate—*[Interruption.]* Excuse me, I ask members on the front bench not to talk when I am speaking. Thank you very much indeed. I call Christine Grahame.

15:59

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Wellbeing starts—

I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer—I seem to have done something funny to my screen. Sorry about this, but can someone remove something from my screen, please? *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Can someone assist, Ms Grahame? Thank you.

Christine Grahame: I have got a lot of funny stuff down the side of the screen.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Are we all good to go, now, Ms Grahame?

Christine Grahame: I am technologically intact.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excellent—please continue.

Christine Grahame: We know that wealth protects and that poverty brings with it physical and mental ill health, which blights the prospects

of some children even before birth, because the damage of poverty and inequality begins in the womb. It can also corral whole communities, as a postcode can determine people's prospects in health, wealth and happiness.

Sustainable economic growth focusing on indigenous businesses, fair taxation and fair pay, together with a just benefits system, provides a foundation. However, it is simply that: a foundation. Therefore, it is what we build on that foundation that matters. Of course, we do not have power over the macroeconomy, over most areas of taxation or over some substantial benefits. Devolution dilutes not only radical progress in redistribution but the growth of a nation's wealth.

Despite that, housing, education and health care are just some examples of where Scottish Government policies have and will improve the quality of life of those who currently cannot see the way forward for themselves and their children.

We need to accelerate the building of public sector homes. Currently, many of my constituency emails deal with housing issues: overcrowding; damp; people languishing on council lists for years; and people paying high rents in the private sector or stretching their income to breaking point with a mortgage. Yes, there is a place for home ownership, but that should be a choice, not driven by necessity.

That said, wellbeing starts with a decent roof over everyone's head. In my book, if we want to increase the happiness, health and ambition of people, we should start with social housing. I welcome the measures that have been announced to bring empty homes back into use.

Then there is education, which is the key to having the opportunity to realise our potential. That happened for me. I was brought up in a council house, educated in state schools and had my university fees paid twice, through two degrees. Indeed, at one point, because of the family income, I had a full grant for living costs. I say to the Opposition that Brexit has impacted our university research and development.

I welcome the support for families. The uptake of the baby box is well over 90 per cent, and we have 1,140 hours of free nursery care for three and four-year-olds, with the prospect of that being extended to one and two-year-olds. In addition, there are no tuition fees. We also have free school meals for primary 1 to 5, which will be extended to P6 and P7 for those in receipt of the Scottish child payment.

I turn to health and social care. We do not pay for prescriptions. In England, the cost is well over £9 an item. Here, no one is worrying over the cost, or rationing which medication they can afford, if they can afford any.

For context—we must put some blame at the foot of the UK economy—the UK economy is at the bottom of the G7 countries in its recovery from Covid. It is doing even worse than Russia, which is waging an immoral and costly war. General inflation is above 10 per cent, and food inflation is about 18 per cent. This Parliament can do nothing about that.

It is a bit hypocritical for any Conservatives to argue that poverty in Scotland has nothing to do with Tory policies that we did not vote for. Part of the issue is being dragged out of Europe. No matter what spin Jeremy Hunt puts on it, the UK economy is, at best, stagnant, and teetering on the edge of recession.

Undertaking a house-building programme for social rented housing, as we did many decades ago, would benefit the economy, from the planners, architects, trades and suppliers to the shops that sell the takeaway bacon rolls. If I was to rank the three areas of housing, education and health, I would start with decent housing for anyone in Scotland who needs it.

16:03

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I will be focusing on a number of issues today, which I will do through the use of old-fashioned technology, such as paper, rather than mucking around with new stuff like Christine Grahame and other young bucks do.

I, too, welcome the cabinet secretary to his new role. As an Orcadian like me, he comes from an island that is rich in entrepreneurial skills, drive and determination. I hope that he can bring that to his new position, because that has been sadly lacking over the past few years.

This is an important debate, and more so given the Scottish Fiscal Commission's clear warning, which Liz Smith mentioned, about the significant challenges that the Scottish Government will face in providing devolved public services in Scotland.

As Liz Smith highlighted, the report shows that Scotland's fiscal gap will be around 10 per cent per year and, in only four years' time, spending on welfare will be £1.4 billion higher than the Scottish Government receives from the UK Government. In the longer term, over the next 50 years, health spending will increase so that it consumes half of devolved spending. Further pressure will be added to that by a drop in the population of Scotland over the next 50 years, in contrast to the UK as a whole. Scotland's financial trajectory is unsustainable.

These are not challenges that just Scotland, or the United Kingdom, faces. Countries across the world are grappling with them. As in those

countries, in Scotland the financial and economic model will need to change. It is worrying that, instead of recognising that, the new First Minister seems determined to push on with the failed fiscal policies of the past. Indeed, he seems determined to accelerate a high-tax, high-spend culture that Scotland simply cannot afford, and to make no effort to grow the pie instead of taking larger slices of it from a dwindling number of people.

The Government will do that while claiming, like rabid Corbynistas, to be taxing the rich. However, the rich that they talk about are teachers, doctors and other ordinary people doing vital jobs in Scotland, who no one in their right mind would claim to be rich. They will have more money taken out of their pockets by the SNP-Green Government.

That approach has taken root in the SNP in the past few years, but it has been accelerated by the malign influence of the anti-business and anti-growth Scottish Greens. That party has signally failed to understand that, to spread wealth, you have to create it in the first place. It is a party whose leader Lorna Slater once said that economic growth is bad because it leads to people buying

“crap you don't need to impress people you don't like”.

There will be no fear of that in Scotland if it has to suffer more years of the Scottish Greens in Government, as those people who have not already been driven out of Scotland by high taxes will not have any money left in their pockets, anyway. It is no wonder that there is, at long last, a growing backlash from at least some on the SNP back benches who do not want to see Scotland held to ransom by six anti-growth Green zealots.

It was welcome to see some recognition of that yesterday from Humza Yousaf, who conducted so many U-turns in his statement that I doubt even he knows which way he is facing. His approach resembled that of a man who is left endlessly driving around a roundabout until he works out which exit he wants to take.

I support the need for good jobs and believe that employment should be secure and rewarding. However, those things require strong businesses operating in a strong economic environment. The SNP-Green approach of the past few years—of more tax, more regulation and more uncertainty—is not the way to achieve that.

In January, the Fraser of Allander Institute reported that business confidence was low in Scotland, with only 5 per cent of Scottish firms feeling more confident about the outlook for their businesses after the Scottish Government's budget. It found that business activity had significantly declined, with the value of new activity

down by nearly 5 per cent and new capital investment down by nearly 15 per cent.

Businesses need to have confidence that the Government is there to support them and will give them the tools to do the job. That means delivering the infrastructure that businesses need, for fast broadband and reliable and fast road, rail and—dare I say it—ferry links. That needs Government support, through enterprise agencies, Business Gateway and other bodies such as the Scottish National Investment Bank, to be focused on and ready to meet the needs of businesses in the way that businesses want those needs to be met. It needs Scotland's governments—UK, Scottish and local—to work together, as they did with the city and regional deals on the green freeports.

Talk of a wellbeing economy is all very well, but business needs less rhetoric from Government and fewer regulations. I had hoped that a new First Minister would herald a new approach. Unfortunately, the evidence so far suggests that Scotland is in for more of the same from this Government—a continuity First Minister whose Government will continue to make many of the same economic and fiscal mistakes of the past.

16:08

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I start by welcoming the cabinet secretary to his new role. I wish him all the best and thank him for his comments in opening the debate this afternoon. I hope that he takes my contribution in the constructive manner in which it is intended.

I welcome the widespread recognition by the Government and others of the strong links between a wealthy economy and a fairer and greener economy, which are clearly articulated in the paper that we published with Common Weal yesterday. International evidence shows that the fairest countries, including our Scandinavian neighbours, are also the wealthiest and most productive. However, building that economy requires hard work from Government and others, and it is a path littered with potential wrong turns.

Liz Smith: Will the member give way?

Ivan McKee: I do not have time—sorry. I have four and a half minutes, or whatever it is.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: It is four.

Ivan McKee: There are clear messages that Government needs to internalise and deliver on. First, I will give the good news. The Scottish economy benefits from lower unemployment, lower labour market inactivity and higher average wages than the rest of the UK, and the percentage of workers earning less than the real living wage, which is a key lever in tackling poverty, has fallen by half over the past few years.

Scotland's goods exports, excluding oil and gas, are growing at twice the rate of those from the rest of the UK, despite Brexit. Inward investment performance continues to outstrip that of the rest of the UK outside London and is well positioned for future successes, with some tasty opportunities coming down the track. Scotland's world-leading position on renewable energy, life science, fintech, digital, premium food and drink and, of course, the space sector is well recognised, not just at home but globally, which is important. I look forward to minister Richard Lochhead's space debate next week.

Of course, none of that takes away from the fact that much more needs to be done. The considerable day-to-day challenges that businesses face on labour and skill shortages, energy and input cost inflation and access to markets need to be addressed in the immediate term. However, sometimes, the best thing that Government can do is just not make things worse, and it was welcome to see some recognition of that in the First Minister's statement yesterday, but there remains uncertainty around the direction of travel on key policies.

Although Government may find comfort and space to manoeuvre, that is not the case for business. Therefore, lesson 1 for the Government is: be clear and consistent, and resist the temptation to chop and change to grab soundbites. Business does not appreciate politics as show business.

The second advantage that the Government has is that it is in the fortunate position of knowing what it needs to do. The blueprints for success are in place. It was great to hear the cabinet secretary reference the national strategy for economic transformation, which lays out the actions that are required to deliver a strong wellbeing economy that is fairer, greener and wealthier. The supporting action plans on exports, inward investment, innovation and skills, regional development and other issues are robust, but Government has to focus on delivery. Do not be diverted into more discussions and reviews, just because it is easy for officials. Relentless and tireless focus on doing the right things, day in, day out, is what gets results. Spin over substance does not cut it.

To make this happen, Government needs to work with partners, not just through superficial engagement but through deep strategic partnerships. The mechanisms to deliver that are in place. Industry leadership groups, with their capacity to mobilise sectors to deliver agreed strategies, are key. Government needs to avoid convincing itself that it knows best. As I learned, ministers are far from the most important people in the room when dealing with business.

Partnerships go much wider than just business. The role of trade unions is critical to delivering on this agenda, and they need to be at the centre of ILGs and other partnerships. The same goes for the mechanisms that are now in place through regional economic partnerships to align and mobilise efforts right across the country.

Support for business is complicated and cluttered, with 130 different funds at the last count. That is expensive to administer and difficult to understand and has limited impact. Therefore, the next lesson is: do less, but do it better. More random unco-ordinated and non-strategic initiatives thrown out in an attempt to grab headlines are the last thing that the economy needs. Stay focused on where a real impact can be made. For example, the industry group on rest of UK talent attraction has the potential to add up to £1 billion to tax revenues over the next five years if its actions, which have been agreed with industry, are followed through. The ILG chairs group is a powerful forum for cross-sectoral co-operation and innovation and has a deep reach across Scotland's diverse economy.

In conclusion—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): You do need to conclude, Mr McKee.

Ivan McKee: —the other good news is that the Government will have help. The cabinet secretary and the First Minister have welcomed constructive input to taking forward this agenda, and my colleagues and I are only too happy to take up that offer.

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

Ivan McKee: The cabinet secretary will be delighted to hear that we will continue to engage extensively across the economy and with partners, polishing our thoughts on what needs to be done to deliver the strong wellbeing and net zero economy—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McKee.

Ivan McKee: —that is definitely within Scotland's reach.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise, but we have no time in hand and therefore members will need to stick to their speaking time allocation.

16:14

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): It is hardly three weeks since I spoke in a debate in the chamber on the wellbeing economy. That was often more a valedictory debate for John Swinney, as he stepped down from his role. Although I do not grudge him the tributes that were paid that

afternoon, I raised a number of matters of substance, to which I intend to return this afternoon.

It is just over a year since the Scottish Government produced Scotland's national strategy for economic transformation. At the time, some disappointment was expressed over the lack of a gendered understanding of the economy and the lack of an acknowledgement of the extent and nature of economic inequality.

Although the commitment to develop a wellbeing economy monitor was welcomed, if the Government is serious about the matter, it needs to demonstrate that economic policy is shifting from one that is driven solely by GDP growth to one that takes a transformative approach to address poverty and inequality.

The wellbeing economy monitor update in December 2022 showed that wealth inequality is worsening. In March, the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, set out why growth is not the "magic wand" to address poverty. Wealth and income inequalities largely cancel out any of the positive impacts on wellbeing that are expected to come from increased GDP.

During the pandemic, aspirations were expressed about building back better, doing business differently, investing in our communities and valuing workers, particularly those who were shown to be undervalued but vital to the operation of society. As we face a cost of living crisis, those ambitions appear to have been lost, but surely recognising models that put people first is more relevant than ever and offers solutions to some of the challenges that we face. We can create a more resilient and robust economy that is better placed to withstand external pressures and unpredicted events.

There are calls for the national performance framework to be transformed into a wellbeing framework, for a review of the national outcomes to ensure that wellbeing goals are a key part of policy and spending decisions, and for a discussion to be opened up on taxation and how we redistribute wealth fairly. The forthcoming wellbeing and sustainable development bill, which is overdue, provides another opportunity to be bold and to take decisions to accelerate the transition.

Although we can talk of Scotland's membership of the wellbeing economy Governments partnership, it is clear that current actions are not sufficient to achieve the substantial redesign that our economy needs to achieve that vision. We need bolder action, and we can learn from partners. As I highlighted last month, New Zealand has started to build its budget around wellbeing

priorities and, since 2019, has been consistent in those goals. The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales provides additional scrutiny of the wellbeing economy agenda. Here in Scotland, we could learn from local initiatives, including innovative community wealth building approaches in North Ayrshire and community ownership and engagement models in Dumfries, which are empowering communities.

Tied to the economic model that is based solely on GDP is the idea that business success can be demonstrated only by growth, but we know that many businesses do not fit that model. Businesses in the creative economy, for example, do not fit that measure of success and are therefore not valued and supported by Government agencies. The report from the business purpose commission for Scotland showed that almost half of people think that the role of businesses in society is to maximise returns. However, when the Fraser of Allander Institute asked what role businesses should have, almost two thirds of people thought that they should have a role in finding profitable solutions to the problems of people and the planet.

We need to do more to promote and grow social enterprises and co-operatives. They are often more resilient than other businesses, which is an important consideration as we recover from the pandemic. There is a real opportunity to grow the number of social enterprises and co-operative businesses in Scotland. The amount of money that supports the co-operative and social enterprise fund is small, and it is disappointing that such models continue to have a very low profile in the Scottish Government's economic strategy. We need a greater focus on co-operative models if the target of having 500 employee-owned businesses by 2030 is to be achieved.

16:18

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): The motion asks us not just to examine budget spreadsheets and haggle over spending but to think about service delivery in the long term and reconsider how we measure economic progress and face up to challenges, including the need to eradicate child poverty and minimise climate change.

The notion of a wellbeing economy is becoming increasingly well understood. For too long, countries have focused primarily on growth, often with low productivity, wage stagnation and environmental degradation. China's economy appears—at least on paper—to be a model of success, with booming exports, high investment and rapid growth. Nevertheless, few of us would want to live in that economy. China's growth exceeds the pace of institutional development, and there is an unstable business environment in

which the rule of law is often an afterthought, working conditions are often poor and unsafe, regulation is weak and little consideration is given to the planet. China's example might be extreme, but it illustrates a point: growth tells only part of the story and neglects the quality of life, the distribution and allocation of wealth, the calibre of jobs created and the fairness of conditions.

In 1968, US senator Bobby Kennedy said that GDP

“measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion ... it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

Although the relative simplicity of gross domestic product means that it remains an indicator, measuring wellbeing is increasingly important, and Scotland is at the forefront on that. As a founding member of the wellbeing economy Governments group, in which member countries work together to develop priorities for a wellbeing economy, Scotland's contribution to mainstreaming the concept is highly valued, and our national performance framework has wellbeing as a core part of the Scottish Government's purpose.

I am grateful to the Carnegie UK Trust for sharing its work in this area, in particular its paper on “Gross Domestic Wellbeing”. That is mapped against GDP, focusing on 10 domains, and it is linked to Office for National Statistics data. It helps to enliven the concept and offers thematic reviews of 800 recommendations from nearly 50 commissions and inquiries since 2010. The thoughtful paper that my colleagues Kate Forbes, Ivan McKee and Michelle Thomson have produced is also a useful addition to the debate.

Although I am supportive of such efforts and am keen to see wellbeing progressed, it is clear that development, fairness, equity and the alleviation of poverty will not be achieved without economic growth. While some economists would happily ignore wellbeing, others would abandon growth and its measurement altogether.

We are also focusing today on the management of Scotland's finances, and it would be irresponsible of us to ignore the worrying analysis of Scottish Government budgets in the recent fiscal sustainability report from the Scottish Fiscal Commission, which projects spending and funding over the next 50 years. Between 2027 and 2073, on current demographic trends, health spending will grow from £19 billion in today's prices to £60 billion—a 218 per cent increase that is associated with new treatments and the greater prevalence of chronic health conditions. Total spending will rise by 123 per cent to £120 billion, while Scotland's economy will grow by only 72 per cent.

Simultaneously, Scotland's population will fall by 400,000, with those aged 65 and over increasing from 22 per cent to almost a third of the population. Driven by historically low birth rates, that demographic shift and fall in the number of economically active citizens creates a huge challenge for our public finances and for the re-imagining and delivery of services.

Chamber time must be set aside to enable us to debate the commission's report fully and hear from all parties about their proposals for addressing challenges such as taxation, immigration, the retirement age and access to benefits and services. We cannot bury our heads in the sand and shirk our responsibilities.

Daniel Johnson: *rose*—

Kenneth Gibson: Many countries seek to raise low birth rates. We can do so by delivering more high-quality, affordable childcare; having more flexible, paid parental leave; pursuing policies that support both partners' involvement in child rearing; improving work flexibility and job protection; and ensuring that the disposable income of middle earners is not impacted by crippling tax burdens. Fundamentally, we need to address the high cost of housing, with supply being the key issue.

Through developing a wellbeing economy that marries productivity and growth to environmental sustainability, we can improve our work-life balance, increase the quality of employment and make an overall commitment to a better, fairer society, and we can address long-term challenges that GDP growth alone cannot solve.

I apologise for not taking interventions—time was against me.

16:22

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I welcome Neil Gray to his new role.

The motion before us describes a wellbeing economy that recognises our dependence on the natural environment in order to thrive. Such an economy is purposeful; it relies on and enhances democracy to enable communities to fulfil their potential. To address the climate and nature crises and the cost crisis; to deliver a just transition to net zero; and to reduce child poverty and enhance public services, radical change is needed. Those interrelated challenges and crises are not freak accidents resulting from bad luck in a game of chance; they are systemic outcomes of the limitless growth model that has been adopted to date by London's Tory Government.

We welcome the renewed focus that the new First Minister has brought to the chamber. The focus on tackling child poverty is essential—the wellbeing of our youngest generations is

imperative for the future prosperity of Scotland, yet that investment is not normally accounted for when we ask ourselves how well we are doing. Embracing the wellbeing economy will increase, rather than decrease, the opportunities that are available to individuals, communities and businesses.

Our economic strategy must go hand in hand with the just transition plan. The on-going cost crisis highlights the blatant injustice of people worrying about how to afford to pay their next energy bill while oil and gas companies laugh all the way to the bank. In addition, those whose livelihoods have depended on the fossil fuel industry's success in Scotland are increasingly concerned about their job security.

New legislation on the horizon could genuinely transform the way in which wealth is created, retained and distributed for the benefit of Scottish communities. We must take advantage of community wealth building to ensure that the influx of public and private investment in the renewable energy sector flows into, and stays in, our towns and cities.

It is worth remembering that, just a few months ago, more than 100 charities, academics and others—from the Scottish Trades Union Congress to the Scottish Men's Sheds Association and Scottish Women's Aid—wrote to the former First Minister calling for an urgent transition to a wellbeing economy that

"delivers good lives for all people and protects the health of our planet".

That is what we need to do, and as fast as possible. The public is telling us that we are not yet moving in the right direction quickly enough to achieve the outcomes that the people of Scotland deserve.

Of course, changing course is no easy task when, in large part, the ship is being steered by a Tory Government with virtually no understanding of the systemic shortcomings that we are facing. However, it is in our power to do more and, in particular, to stop doing things that take us backwards.

Communities and the third sector are key to helping us to identify the things that we need to stop doing and the things that we need to do more of or do better. Local and regional economic empowerment and development doubles the need for a new deal for local government. We have the crucial role of standardising the key ingredients of a wellbeing economy: fair work; public procurement that takes the impact of public spending into account; support for community buyouts; workers having the right to buy their businesses; democratic reform that puts citizens at the heart of the decisions that affect them;

participatory budgeting; and an end to the hegemony of advice from the big consulting firms and vested interests. Let us stop relying on the people who are most responsible for getting us into this mess.

Although much valuable work is being done by the Scottish Government, the third sector and local government, more is clearly necessary, especially because of the headwinds that we face with a Tory-led UK Government that fails to grasp the nettle. Business as usual—a fixation on GDP and economic growth—has got us into the climate crisis, the nature emergency, increasing inequalities, soaring inflation, obscene profits for energy companies while people freeze and so many other injustices that should shame us all.

The economy must work for the wellbeing of everyone and our life support systems—not just for the billionaires.

16:26

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I welcome Neil Gray to his new role. It was a pleasure to hear from my colleague Ivan McKee, who delivered thought leadership at the rate of a Gatling gun. His presence here is the back benches' gain.

In our document written for Common Weal, we comment on the complexity of a wellbeing economic system and how multiple areas interrelate, not just in policy but through multiple lenses.

We know that Scotland is a member of the wellbeing economy Governments group. The group states that a wellbeing economic system should have a fundamentally gendered lens from the outset rather than treating intersectionality as an add-on.

Although I accept that the Scottish Government's NSET contains a commitment to develop a wellbeing economy monitor, which in its latest iteration includes measures on the gender pay gap, that does not yet begin to meet the test of a fundamentally gendered lens. At the moment, we can have only a piecemeal sense of that. Our reporting does not routinely disaggregate by sex, or indeed a variety of other diversity measures. On multiple occasions, I have asked ministers to what extent and how the Government—and all public sector agencies to which it provides funding—ensures that disaggregated data is gathered. Too often, it is a well-meaning rather than a wellbeing approach that is taken.

In our report, we credit Highlands and Islands Enterprise for applying conditionality to its business grant support in terms of the real living wage and our fair work agenda. However, the

Government conditionality does not go far enough in and of itself.

On a gendered lens, I would look for gender equitability in all public sector funding—in business start-up grants, procurement and so on. I would also look for early confirmation of the delivery of recommendations from the Ana Stewart review of female entrepreneurship.

We cannot and must not underestimate the loss of women's contribution. New analysis by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies and the Women's Budget Group found that the barriers to paid work encountered by women mean that £88.7 billion of gross value added is lost to the economy in England, Scotland and Wales annually. That is equivalent to the contribution of the entire financial services sector in the UK.

Sara Reis, acting director of the Women's Budget Group, said:

"These findings further underline the hugely significant economic cost of systemic barriers to paid work for women—including caring responsibilities, the cost of childcare and wages undermined by the gender pay gap. What's more, they don't capture the social cost—the loss of connection, sense of accomplishment and mental challenge for women excluded from paid work is immensely damaging for both their individual health and the wellbeing of our communities."

It is therefore not only in barriers to employment and the continuing injustice of the gender pay gap, but in the very approach to the design of public services, town planning, transport, access to education, women's healthcare and so on that this becomes important. Even in access to our political institutions, we see that the prevailing attitudes still keep women from achieving true equality, which in turn causes further harm.

I close with a question to the cabinet secretary: do you agree with the challenge set down by WEGo and will you set out some of your thinking on it in your response?

16:30

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): The dog may have a new head, but it is the same tail wagging it. Economic growth in Scotland is hindered by this coalition of chaos, with many of those on the front bench who had business experience having been sacked and the Greens continuing to hold sway over policy and pull the strings.

What is most concerning is that it is Scottish business and the Scottish public who will suffer the most. Our economy is lagging significantly behind the UK economy. Despite the nonsense that the First Minister said last week, Scotland's GDP grew at a lower rate than that of the rest of the UK during Nicola Sturgeon's reign. That is an

absolute disgrace and highlights the severe mismanagement of the Scottish economy by this devolved Government.

According to the Scottish Fiscal Commission, Scotland's finances are unsustainable. It stated:

"the Scottish Government will face significant challenges in funding the future provision of devolved public services in Scotland."

The Scottish Fiscal Commission continued its gloomy outlook by stating that

"our economic projections show Scottish GDP growing by an average of 1.2% each year for the next 50 years,"

which is lower than similar projections for the UK.

Social security spend is increasing massively. Health spending is going from 35 per cent of devolved spending to 50 per cent. Policies such as universal basic income are simply fiscally unsustainable, and the Fraser of Allander Institute found that business confidence in Scotland was low.

All of those points demonstrate the SNP's profound financial mismanagement of Scotland's finances and economic growth. That is hardly surprising when we consider that the SNP cannot even manage its own party finances.

Taxing the middle-income earners of this country—our teachers, nurses and public sector workers—will not have the effect that the Government believes that it will have. It will drive middle income earners away from Scotland. The Scottish Fiscal Commission expects the Scottish population to fall by 8 per cent, while the UK population will increase by 5 per cent.

The SNP needs to work out why that is. Is it because it has cultured a deeply divided country, or is it because Scotland pays more tax than the rest of the UK? This devolved Government is driving earners away, and that needs to be reversed.

The Scottish Conservatives absolutely support the drive towards a wellbeing economy, but that starts by building up business, increasing wages and reducing household costs. The SNP Government has lost the confidence of businesses, is taking more from people's pay packets, and seems hellbent on shutting off our energy supplies in the North Sea.

We want to see this devolved Government work with the UK Government to establish projects that will grow our economy for the benefit of us all, whether that is investment into freeports, levelling up or investment zones. We want to see this devolved Government take responsibility for the years of failure and work towards a Scotland that works for everyone instead of conjuring up

grievance and blaming Westminster at every opportunity.

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade (Richard Lochhead): Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Douglas Lumsden: I have no time. Sorry.

Scotland deserves a Government that is able to deliver economic growth, financial stability and hope for the future. Instead, we have a Green-SNP coalition that stifles growth and has lost the confidence of business and the population of Scotland. Its record on economic management of this country is woeful, and it is time for it to listen to the business community, the middle-income taxpayers, the experts in this area and even Kenny Gibson, who are asking it to stop increasing taxes, widen the tax base and truly create a wellbeing economy for everyone.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call John Mason, who will be the final speaker in the open debate, after which we will move to closing speeches. Everybody who has participated in the debate will need to be here for the closing speeches.

16:35

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): We previously had a debate on the wellbeing economy on 22 March, so there has been a fair bit of duplication today. I may well make some of the same points.

Key issues for me continue to be that we need to have measures such as gross domestic product, gross national income and similar. However, as has been said, GDP is a poor metric of human wellbeing. Scotland's national performance framework has a big part to play in that space, along with the new wellbeing economy monitor. We owe John Swinney a debt for driving forward the NPF. I continue to think that we, as a Parliament—including, I accept, myself—have not used the NPF as much as we could or should have. My feeling is that, when we consider the wellbeing economy, we can build on what the NPF is already doing, embedding it more and making it more effective.

There is currently a review of the national outcomes until June. We could add care as an outcome. I personally am open to that. However, we do not want to lose focus by having too many outcomes all at the one time. The Finance and Public Administration Committee published its report on the national performance framework last October, and we discussed the Government's response at yesterday's meeting. I think that both the committee and the Government agree that a number of areas need to be considered further,

including integrating the NPF more into the systems and processes of Government. For example, one recommendation was that all levels of Government should more explicitly set out how their actions will deliver on specific NPF outcomes. That may well be implicit at the moment, but the committee would be keen to see that being more clearly spelled out.

When I spoke in the debate last month, I focused on two of the national outcomes: the economy and poverty. I continue to believe that those two are hugely important. There is too much divergence in income and wealth in Scotland, and we need to distribute both better among our population. Today, I will mention another national outcome: health.

That is not least because the briefing for today's debate from the Non-Communicable Disease Alliance makes some important points and is very helpful. In particular, it emphasises the clear link between health-harming products and the negative impact on people's health and also on our economy. It reckons that the impact of alcohol, tobacco, overweight and obesity costs our economy between £8.1 billion and £12.4 billion each year. It refers to National Records of Scotland figures for 2021 and to more than 12,000 deaths being considered preventable. Of those, more than 7,000 were deaths from non-communicable diseases such as cancer, heart disease, stroke and lung disease. The briefing says:

"We must prioritise supporting the people of Scotland to live long, healthy lives that also allow them to contribute to the economy."

That combines wellbeing and the economy.

Finally, I will make a few comments on the amendments. It is very difficult to see what Labour is actually saying or asking for in its amendment. I love the phrase

"The Scottish Government should be doing more".

What does that mean? Not very much. The amendment also says that we should

"tackle the cost of living"

but gives no suggestions as to how, or how that should be paid for. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Mason. Could the front benches, who will have the opportunity to close very shortly, please do Mr Mason the courtesy of listening to what he is saying?

John Mason: I am glad that I have woken them up with that little phrase. Now I will go for the Conservatives. In their amendment, they refer to the Scottish Fiscal Commission's recent "Fiscal Sustainability Report" but miss out one of the key

themes, which is Scotland's ageing and reducing population, although I accept that Liz Smith took that point on board. They could have called for a more relaxed immigration system for Scotland so that we could get more people of working age here, but they did not. Even without independence, the UK could be issuing visas allowing, and requiring, new arrivals to work in Scotland.

All in all, I welcome this further debate on the wellbeing economy and urge members to support the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I note that a number of members who participated in the debate are not in the chamber for closing speeches. I will expect an explanation and/or an apology.

16:39

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): They do not know what they are about to miss out on.

I, too, welcome Neil Gray to his position.

"It's the economy, stupid." That is not an insult but a statement of the criticality of the economy brief to all the work that we do in the Parliament. Quite simply, without a thriving economy, nothing else is possible. However, I note that the debate has some similarities with the debate that we had before the recess. I know that we are sometimes asked by the official report to give our notes in advance, but I was tempted to provide them with a hyperlink to the *Official Report* of 22 March.

There are some differences in today's Government motion, though. It talks about sound financial management—not that the Government spoke much about that in the debate. I guess that it thinks that questions about sound financial management are best put by the police rather than by Parliament.

I will start with what Liz Smith and Kenny Gibson highlighted, because the fundamental baseline for this conversation ought to be the Scottish Fiscal Commission's report. As much as we may support or disagree with the policies that the Scottish Government is pursuing today, we all need to address ourselves to the long-term outlook in relation to the fiscal gap of the £1.5 billion of commitments over and above projected revenues. Underlying points such as the increase in health expenditure and slower productivity growth at a UK level should be addressed, but the fact that Scottish productivity growth is even lower than that also needs to be addressed. Fundamentally, that is all driven by demographics, as Kenny Gibson highlighted.

One point of warning that I make to all members is that, although migration is undermined by Brexit, ultimately, in the longer term, the world's population will start to decline by the 2080s. In the short and medium terms, we need to consider solutions that look at migration, but, in the longer term, every country in the world will have to deal with a shrinking population. That is the seriousness of intent that we need: we must treat demographics as seriously as we treat net zero. Frankly, I do not think that the debate has the status that it needs or requires right now.

One other key difference between today's debate and the debate on 22 March is that we have seen a return of the acceptability of the word "growth" from the Government. In those narrow terms, I would accept it. However, much as Michael Marra pointed out in his contribution, what was wrong with it in the first place? I agree that, ultimately, we cannot have simply a crude measure of GDP growth—that is too narrow and crude, and it measures the wrong things. If we are serious about tackling poverty, delivering net zero and tackling those demographic changes, we need growth, because tackling those things in a stagnant or declining economy is 10 times harder. We need a dynamic economy if we are going to tackle the structural barriers that impact on those things. We need a dynamic economy in order to deal with those challenges. That is precisely what people such as Torsten Bell and the Resolution Foundation say.

That is why growth is so important, and it is why it was so unfortunate that we ended up with a delay to the national strategy for economic transformation—by as much as six months, if rumours are to be believed—because there was so much negotiation between partners and the Government. Maybe we will get some clarity.

Neil Gray appealed to us all to follow his plan, which was published yesterday.

Richard Lochhead: If the member is emphasising demographics as being one of the most important challenges that Scotland faces, is that not a case for the Labour Party changing its position on Brexit?

Daniel Johnson: We absolutely need a more holistic and realistic view on migration, which is exactly what people would get from a Labour Government.

I come back to the Scottish Government's so-called plan, which Neil Gray appealed to us to follow. There are 11 bullet points in there, including such things as increasing the number of businesses, increasing wages and increasing the amount of investment. There is nothing wrong with those things, but they are, at best, broad outcomes. They are not even detailed or precise in

their focus, and there is certainly nothing in the plan about what specific measures he intends to follow them.

Neil Gray: We put forward in the motion specific measures that the Labour amendment seeks to take out—expanding childcare, implementing the national strategy for economic transformation and the just transition plan, community wealth building, promoting fair work and delivering high-quality public services. Those things would all be removed by the Labour amendment—why is that?

Daniel Johnson: In the words of Ivan McKee, we need specific and clear targets. Those are just words from Mr Gray. They are broad headings. If the Government is to be serious about any one of those things, it needs to produce clear action points that will deliver those things, not just name check them. Frankly, that is all that that intervention amounted to.

Ivan McKee: Will the member give way?

Daniel Johnson: Very briefly.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ivan McKee, briefly.

Ivan McKee: If Daniel Johnson wants to see the specifics on that, he should go to the NSET report, because it is all laid out there, over 100 pages.

Daniel Johnson: We are being asked to believe that this is fresh thinking and new leadership, but it is either fresh leadership or it is continuity. Maybe Mr McKee is correct, but the Government cannot ask us to believe that this is fresh thinking and then say that all of the fresh thinking was the stuff that the previous Government did—it just does not wash.

If we are going to have a genuine reset, we need a genuine focus on the structural problems that the Scottish economy has. For far too many people, there are major structural barriers to their seizing opportunity. We have the absolute absurdity of the tightest labour market since records began while people are stuck on low wages. We need to identify the barriers that prevent people from taking up work. Some of those are simple things such as a lack of public transport or of useful childcare. However, all that we have from the Government is the promise to come up with a plan on childcare for one and two-year-olds. We do not even have a date for when that plan will be implemented.

If we are serious about this, we need to embrace the concept of wage maximisation that people such as those in the Wise Group want. We need plans that actually support people into training, and not plans that only ask them why they are not doing it. We need to deal with the structural issues. Only in that way will we deliver a well-rounded wellbeing economy. The

Government uses those words, but it does not have any numbers or targets for the delivery of the plans. Frankly, those were absent from the Government's speeches and motion today and from the plan that it published yesterday.

16:46

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Earlier, I welcomed Neil Gray to his role on the front bench. I also welcome Shona Robison, who we might hear from shortly, to her role as Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance. I look forward to working with both of them.

Today's debate has been helpful, but we have only skimmed the surface of a vital subject. It is a pity that the debate was truncated. We lost 30 minutes, which meant that speeches from those on the back benches were cut to four minutes. Like Willie Rennie—who I am pleased to see is now back in his seat in the chamber, albeit rather late—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fraser, for the avoidance of doubt, Mr Rennie was in the chamber; he just was not in the seat that he is in now.

Murdo Fraser: Ah, well, I apologise to Mr Rennie; I did not realise that he had joined us on the Conservative benches. I agree with him that this is a vital subject. I hope that we will return at the earliest opportunity for a debate on the economy, because I genuinely think that some of the ideas that were put forward by Mr Gray are of interest and that they deserve greater scrutiny and discussion.

During the Easter recess I spent some time in the north-west Highlands; coincidentally, I was in the constituency of Kate Forbes. The weather was glorious—which explains the unseasonal tan—and the signs of spring were all around: there were trees and bushes bursting into bud, young lambs in the fields and queues of campervans on single-track roads—well, with one notable exception.

However, despite the great weather and the warm welcome, all is not well in the rural economy. Those I spoke to in the hospitality sector were not optimistic. They face a range of serious challenges. They know that businesses south of the border have been given a 75 per cent rates reduction for the current year to assist with post-Covid recovery. Despite having the Barnett consequential to do the same in Scotland, that has not been passed on by the SNP Government. There are real concerns about the proposed restrictions on alcohol promotions and very serious concerns about the proposed deposit return scheme which, despite being a good idea in principle, has been implemented in a most calamitous fashion.

On top of that, those in the Highlands and Islands are suffering from the on-going delay to deliver the promise to upgrade the A9 to a dual carriageway and the on-going debacle with the ferries hitting island communities, and now they face the threat of highly protected marine areas devastating the fishing sector.

Every one of those issues comes under the control of the devolved Administration, and it could choose to put every one right. I therefore welcome the U-turns that were announced by the First Minister yesterday on the alcohol promotion ban and on delaying the deposit return scheme. It seems that the continuity candidate in the recent leadership contest is already ditching the legacy of his predecessor as fast as he can; he is in full retreat.

Those U-turns are welcome, but much more needs to be done to address the issues in the Scottish economy. Despite what we have heard from members on the SNP benches this afternoon, the UK economy is doing better than many predicted. We recorded the fastest growth in the G7 in 2022, at 4 per cent, and despite what we hear about IMF predictions, I gently remind members that the IMF's track record in predicting UK economic growth is not a good one. I think that members will remember Christine Lagarde apologising to George Osborne for getting it all wrong a number of years ago.

At the same time—this is the crucial point—Scotland's GDP has grown at only around half the rate of the UK average in the period since 2014. Despite the First Minister claiming the contrary, Scotland's GDP grew between 2014 and 2021 by 12.72 per cent and, over the same period, the UK's GDP grew by 21.87 per cent.

Neil Gray: We went over this earlier, when Murdo Fraser made an intervention during my speech. Does he accept that the trend in the most recent figures shows that Scotland's GDP growth outperforms that of the UK's GDP growth?

Murdo Fraser: I have just demonstrated that the trend since 2014, over a seven-year period, is that we are growing at half the rate of the UK average. If the new cabinet secretary is going to tell me that the trend will miraculously turn around under his tenure, we look forward to seeing that; the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

Neil Gray: Of course, the member also has to accept that, if we had the full economic levers that would allow us to continue to generate the economic growth that other, independent nations enjoy, we would be able to do just that.

Murdo Fraser: Mr Gray might want to listen to some of his colleagues on the SNP back benches, who now seem to have found some interesting new solutions as to how he might use the powers

that he currently has to help grow the economy. Maybe he should start listening to them.

All those figures matter, because a growing economy delivers not just more and better-paid jobs but more tax revenues to spend on the public services that we all want to see. It is no wonder, as Liz Smith and other colleagues referred to earlier, that the Scottish Fiscal Commission warns in its fiscal sustainability report that, down the road, the Scottish Government faces significant challenges. I agree with Kenneth Gibson, who said that this is such a serious issue, it deserves a full debate by itself.

The response from the new First Minister seems to be that we should be increasing taxes still further. That shows that he has learned nothing from the experience of the SNP Government in widening the tax differential between Scotland and the rest of the UK. Again according to the Scottish Fiscal Commission, Scottish taxpayers are paying around £1 billion more per year, but this is translating to a net increase in tax revenues of only £325 million—barely a third—because we have slower earnings and employment growth in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK. As Jamie Halcro Johnston reminded us, under the SNP, we are all paying more in tax but we are seeing very little benefit for it.

Rather than learn the lesson from that, the new First Minister wants to go further and increase taxes even more. All that that will do is lower the tax take, shrink the economy and starve public services of even more resources. I hear from the new First Minister that he is considering a wealth tax. Ivan McKee referenced Scandinavia earlier. Look at Norway, where a wealth tax has been introduced—it has been increased in the past year. What has that done? It has fuelled capital flight. In the past year alone, 30 billionaires relocated from Norway to Switzerland, with a massive loss in tax revenues to Norway. I am not sure that there are people on the SNP front benches who understand that; I hope that there are. However, I am sure that there are some in the Forbes faction on the back benches—or perhaps we should call it the Government in exile on the back benches—who understand that and I hope that those on the front benches might start listening to them.

We need to see the Government taking a different approach. In the recent SNP leadership contest, we saw Kate Forbes at least talking about growing the economy and creating wealth. We know that the Greens are instinctively hostile to that; we know that they do not believe in growth, as Douglas Lumsden reminded us. However, I hope that there might be some in this new ministerial team who understand the basic point that, without a growing economy, we cannot afford

a health service, an education system or the transport network that we desperately need.

I was pleased to hear yesterday from the First Minister that he intends to reset the relationship between the Government and business. That message was repeated by Mr Gray today. That would be a welcome move and a contrast to what we have seen in recent years. It really is time that the Government started listening to the voices of business. The sector's asks are simple and modest: competitive taxation, quality infrastructure, no additional bureaucracy or regulatory burdens and a Government that gets out of the way, rather than trying to hold it back at every turn. If that is what the new team is prepared to deliver, we will be pleased to support it.

16:55

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): First, I thank everyone for their—in the main—constructive contributions to the debate. Many have been helpful and informative. I will make an offer: let us create the space for further discussion about the range of matters that have been raised in the debate, whether that is through working on a cross-party basis where we agree, or, where appropriate, through bringing matters back to the chamber. We will not agree on everything, but there are areas on which we can make progress. In working with Neil Gray, we are certainly keen to do that where we can.

I will pick up on a couple of the issues that Liz Smith and others raised about the SFC's report. We recognise the need for sustainable public finances—everyone in the chamber has to recognise that.

Issues including demographics have been touched on. Kenny Gibson made a fair point: we have within our control some powers with which we can make progress, whether they relate to childcare, parental employability or getting people who have been economically inactive back into the workplace through the work of the child poverty delivery plan.

All of that is good, and we need to do it. However, we also need to recognise—and honest recognition from members in other parts of the chamber is needed—that we are hampered by our lack of control over immigration policy. The rural visa pilot programme that has been proposed is a constructive and pragmatic suggestion. We need such levers.

Liz Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Shona Robison: I will let Liz Smith know in a second.

We also need an urgent review of the fiscal framework, because the current one does not work for Scotland's public finances on a number of levels. We have agreements about that review, and we need to take it forward so that we can fully benefit from growing and broadening the tax base.

Liz Smith: I thank the cabinet secretary for allowing me to contribute again.

First, on the fiscal framework, that work is already under way. Secondly, if we look at the most recent research on immigration we see that net immigration is improving. In Scotland, we have to ask why we are not benefiting more from that in comparison with what is happening in the rest of the UK.

Shona Robison: We need to make sure that we support communities that require labour and people to move into them in order that we address their needs and fill the skills gaps in industries in their areas. We need people to come here, and we have a role to play with policies such as the key worker housing initiative that was announced yesterday. We will work with rural communities and businesses to support them to deliver key worker housing for people who want to move there. More generally on rural Scotland, in my area of responsibility as Deputy First Minister there is a commitment across Government to pull together a rural delivery plan in order to address some of the issues, whether they relate to the rural economy or key worker housing. We recognise that some communities struggle to sustain businesses and the local economies of their areas. If we can agree on some things, we want to make progress on them.

We also need to talk up Scotland. I will highlight three areas where broadening the tax base and growing the economy are under way and initiatives are doing well. In debates such as this, there can be a tendency to talk Scotland down, which we cannot have. I do not think that that is in anyone or any party's interests.

First, let us take photonics. The Scottish sector is a £1.2 billion industry that supports 6,500 highly skilled jobs and has added value per employee that is three times the national average.

Secondly, the initial awards in the offshore leasing round for ScotWind have delivered more than £750 million in revenues for the public purse, which will bring billions of pounds of investment into the Scottish supply chain. Thirdly, the hydrogen action plan will make Scotland a competitive producer in low-cost renewable hydrogen.

There are many areas in which we can broaden the tax base and grow the economy. Those are but three examples of where that is already

happening. We should get behind those industries and sectors to make that happen.

On taxation, I absolutely accept that there needs to be balance. We need to get that right, of course. However, the Scottish Fiscal Commission, which has been well quoted throughout the debate, has estimated that the decisions that we have made in Scotland since income tax powers were devolved might raise up to £1 billion more in this financial year than would have been raised if we had followed the UK Government's tax policy. Some members across the chamber might think that that is the wrong decision, but lower taxes mean lower spending, and members who ask for lower taxes cannot then come to the chamber to ask for higher spending. That is not economically literate, so they must therefore set out where the spending reductions would take place. However, of course I accept the need to broaden the tax base and grow the economy.

Murdo Fraser: The cabinet secretary was in Parliament when Alex Salmond was First Minister, so she probably remembers, as I do, Alex Salmond arguing for a 3 per cent cut in corporation tax in Scotland, based on the view that that would increase tax revenues because it would grow the economy. Does she now disagree with that analysis?

Shona Robison: I have never agreed with the concept of trickle-down economics. To be honest, I note that we need a balance between taxation and business regulation. Murdo Fraser seems to be indicating that he does not want business regulation, but the business community, in a meeting with Neil Gray and I, expressed support for appropriate business regulation. Businesses absolutely acknowledge the importance of regulation, where it is important to have it. Of course, if we did not have any regulation, we would not have health and safety at work or all the other improvements that have been made. Regulation is important.

I also want to touch on a couple of areas that have been raised by members. Willie Rennie talked about his keenness for an independent assessment on the wellbeing economy metric and about the work of the Carnegie Trust. We should look at that, so I am happy to take forward work on how we can make that happen.

Michelle Thomson mentioned the importance of a gendered analysis and Claire Baker referred to it, too. Of course, the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls and the work that is being taken forward by the women's budget group is important in this domain, but I am happy to have further discussions on the issue. Just yesterday, I met the NACWG and invited it to engage with us on the budget process earlier, and it is happy and keen to do that.

I have tried to respond to as many points as I can, and I apologise for missing any. I want to end where I began, with an offer. I think that, on many issues, all of us in the chamber can try to make more progress in respect of what we agree on. That will not be easy, but we have an opportunity to do so. I am keen to look at public sector reform and at the public sector landscape to ensure that every pound of public money that is invested goes on the most efficient and best outcomes for the people of Scotland.

I hope that that is an area on which we can have agreement, so I am really keen to look at ways of trying to build consensus, whether that is through regular meetings across the parties on areas on which we agree, or through bringing ideas to this chamber for debate. Members have my assurance that that is how I intend to do business on behalf of the Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on managing Scotland's finances and working with business to drive the wellbeing economy.

Business Motions

17:05

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-08621, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 25 April 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Illegal Migration Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 26 April 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Constitution, External Affairs and
Culture;
Justice and Veterans

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 27 April 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
Opportunities for the Space Sector in
Scotland

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time
 Tuesday 2 May 2023
 2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Wednesday 3 May 2023
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and
 Energy;
 Finance and Parliamentary Business
followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist
 Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.10 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business
 Thursday 4 May 2023
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Net Zero and Just Transition
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Moveable
 Transactions (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.30 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 24 April 2023, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*George Adam*]

17:05

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives object to the debate that is scheduled for next Tuesday on the United Kingdom Government's Illegal Migration Bill and, for that reason, we will oppose the business motion tonight. We are deeply concerned, although not surprised, by the Scottish

Government's intention to use parliamentary time to debate an issue that is entirely reserved to the UK Parliament. Plainly, there are very differing views across this chamber on the issues of migration, but we have no idea of the Scottish Government's views on the bill, because no legislative consent memorandum has been published or made available to the public. The Government has failed to publish any formal documentation regarding the competence of the bill in advance of the business motion that has been presented to Parliament today. We do not know whether the Scottish Government thinks that devolved competence is engaged or whether it believes that legislative consent is necessary. If it does believe that consent is necessary, we do not know why or in what way. We do not know what areas of devolved competence the Scottish Government argues are affected. No committee of this Parliament has taken evidence or considered the bill in any form. That situation makes a mockery of this Parliament and its processes.

More broadly, it is telling that, in the early weeks of the fledgling new Government, one of the first issues that the Scottish Government wants to debate is a UK bill on a matter that is specifically reserved, as a matter of law, to the UK Parliament. In short, no credible rationale has been given as to why a debate on the bill is either justified or necessary. For those reasons, we will vote against the business motion tonight.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the minister to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau.

17:07

The Minister for Cabinet and Parliamentary Business (George Adam): I normally have a lot of time and respect for some of the things that Donald Cameron says but, after two weeks of people having a bit of a break, we are once again having the business questioned. My title says that I am a member of the Scottish Parliament. This is a Parliament, which has the opportunity to discuss anything that the people of Scotland want to discuss. The Illegal Migration Bill, in particular, vexes many of the members in this chamber and, across the parties, people have opinions on it. The bill has gone through the House of Commons at an accelerated pace; it is anticipated that it will complete its passage next week and move to the House of Lords. Given the subject matter, it is important that the Scottish Parliament has an opportunity to debate the bill before that process is complete.

The UK Government's view is that the bill is on a reserved matter, but the Scottish Government's view is that the bill amends the powers and duties of Scottish ministers to provide support and

assistance to victims of human trafficking under the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015. Of course, Scotland's Parliament should be able to discuss any attacks on devolution. The Scottish Government is committed to lodging a legislative consent motion as soon as possible and will schedule a debate when the subject committee has considered and reported, as is routine.

The Conservatives were never fans of devolution, but the rest of us in this chamber believe in this Parliament and we will discuss what this Parliament and the people of Scotland want to discuss.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S6M-08621, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:09

Meeting suspended.

17:12

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the vote. The question is, that motion S6M-08621, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Members should cast their vote now.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am having other technical problems this afternoon—now it is the mobile phone. I would have voted yes.

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

Before I take any further points of order, we are just checking a technical issue. I will report back shortly.

I resume the points of order. I think that Clare Adamson was first. Would you like to make your point of order?

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Initially, my app was showing that I had not voted, but it has now recorded that vote. I confirm that I voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Yes, your vote has been recorded, Ms Adamson.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My issue is the same as Ms Adamson's. There is confusion about whether my vote has been registered. I voted yes. Can I check that that has been recorded?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded, Mr Doris.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I have connection problems with my app. I voted yes. Can I check that that has been recorded?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Mochan. Your vote has been recorded.

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I think that I voted yes twice. Can I check that that was recorded?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your vote—singular—was recorded, Mr McLennan.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can I check that my vote was cast?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Your vote has been recorded, Ms Mackay.

I confirm to those members online who have raised queries as to whether their votes have been recorded that they have been recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)

Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 87, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 25 April 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Illegal Migration Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 26 April 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Constitution, External Affairs and Culture;
 Justice and Veterans

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 27 April 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:

Education and Skills
followed by Scottish Government Debate:
 Opportunities for the Space Sector in
 Scotland

followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 2 May 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 3 May 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and
 Energy;
 Finance and Parliamentary Business
followed by Scottish Conservative and Unionist
 Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)
 5.10 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 4 May 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 11.40 am General Questions
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Net Zero and Just Transition
followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Moveable
 Transactions (Scotland) Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.30 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 24 April 2023, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion

S6M-08622, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the timetabling of a bill at stage 1.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 6 October 2023.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:17

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-08623, on the approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and S6M-08624, on committee meeting times.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Legal Aid and Advice and Assistance (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 2.00pm and 3.30pm on 27 April 2023.—[*George Adam*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question on those motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:17

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Liz Smith is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Michael Marra will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-08604.1, in the name of Liz Smith, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08604, in the name of Neil Gray, on managing Scotland's finances and working with business to drive the wellbeing economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)

Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08604.1, in the name of Liz Smith, is: For 28, Against 87, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-08604.2, in the name of Michael Marra, which seeks to amend motion S6M-08604, in the name of Neil Gray, on managing Scotland's finances and working with business to drive the wellbeing economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)

Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)

Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-08604.2, in the name of Michael Marra, is: For 23, Against 92, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-08604, in the name of Neil Gray, on managing Scotland's finances and working with business to drive the wellbeing economy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

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

McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

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

White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-08604, in the name of Neil Gray, on managing Scotland's finances and working with business to drive the wellbeing economy, is: For 64, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the need to create a wellbeing economy that is democratic, works for people and planet, and supports communities to fulfil their potential; believes that such an economy must be equitable, sustainable and dynamic in order to address the climate crises, the current financial and economic challenges, and to deliver a just transition to net zero, reduce child poverty and enhance public services; notes that plans to expand childcare support and implement the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and the Just Transition Plans will deliver new opportunities for communities, businesses and individuals across Scotland; considers that the development of community wealth building legislation will be a key component of the approach to local and regional economic development and empowerment, will promote and sustain fair work, create and retain more wealth within communities, build Scotland's tax base, strengthen its economic resilience, increase wellbeing for current and future generations and support the delivery of high-quality public services, and recognises that independence would allow Scotland to make greater progress, but, until then, calls for the devolution of additional powers, in relation to energy, the economy and employment law, to the Scottish Parliament to support Scotland's transition to a wellbeing economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Next, I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions, if no member objects.

The question is, that motion S6M-08623, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S6M-08624, on committee meeting times, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Legal Aid and Advice and Assistance (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 2.00pm and 3.30pm on 27 April 2023.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will move to the next item of business after a short pause. Members who are leaving the chamber should do so quickly and quietly.

Healthy Ageing in Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-07967, in the name of Alexander Stewart, on healthy ageing in Scotland. 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 acknowledges that the University of Stirling-led Healthy AGEing In Scotland (HAGIS) study is the first of its kind to follow individuals and households across Scotland, including in the Mid Scotland and Fife region, through the passage of time; understands that the study, which was launched on 24 July 2015, is an ongoing, major Scotland-wide study of the health, economic and social circumstances of people over 50, which will enable future improvements to be made to the health and wellbeing of this age group; believes that there are currently two million people over 50 in Scotland, comprising 38% of the population; understands that the HAGIS study will capture a snapshot of the current circumstances of 1,000 people over 50; further understands that, following its findings in Autumn 2016, the aim was to expand the study to 8,000 people in 2018, charting changes in their health and social circumstances over the decades and reporting every two years; notes that the multi-partner HAGIS project team includes the Universities of Strathclyde and Edinburgh; believes that, while people in Scotland are now living longer and the size of the older population is increasing, the country historically possesses a relatively poor health record and significant levels of income inequality; considers that, as a result of its extensive research since inception, the HAGIS study is proving to be what it sees as an extremely valuable and important new member of the growing worldwide network of longitudinal ageing studies, uncovering the unique health and social circumstances currently experienced by Scotland's ageing population; acknowledges the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), which is a global collaboration, aligned with the last ten years of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live; understands that the three domains of healthy ageing are physical ageing, mental/cognitive ageing and social wellbeing ageing; considers that harmonised data from HAGIS will permit quantitative comparisons of the ageing processes in Scotland with findings from the other members of the Health and Retirement Study family, which now covers more than 50% of the world's over-50 population, and commends the University of Stirling and its multi-partner university project team for embarking on what it considers as a significant and invaluable study into the improvement of health and wellbeing in the lives of Scotland's growing ageing population.

17:25

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this debate to the chamber this evening. I also thank members who supported today's motion, which highlights the Healthy Ageing in Scotland study. It was led by the University of Stirling and

focuses on the real-life day-to-day experiences of older people in Scotland.

Healthy ageing is an important issue for many people across the chamber, and I have no doubt that we will hear some thoughtful contributions. It is clear that the issue will become only more important to Scotland in the years to come. As we know, there are already more than 2 million people aged over 50 in Scotland, which equates to around 38 per cent of the population. We also know that Scotland's population has been steadily ageing for the past 40 years—a trend that will continue. Indeed, the study highlights that there will be an 85 per cent increase in people aged over 75 by 2039, which is a higher increase than is expected in any other part of the United Kingdom.

The study provides first-hand details and insight into the lives of over-50s in Scotland, and aims to look at older people's health, their economic circumstances and their social wellbeing. It is also Scotland's entry into the Gateway to Global Aging Data platform, which provides data on over two thirds of the world's over-50s population. A number of helpful reports have already come out of the study, including one that had a specific focus on how the pandemic affected the wellbeing of older people. That study highlighted the fact that the pandemic affected older people's wellbeing at the time, and we know that older people depend on services that are recovering even today.

The truth is that the wellbeing of older people in Scotland was a problem well before the pandemic arrived. Data from National Records of Scotland show that Scotland still has a lower life expectancy when compared not just with the rest of the UK but with countries across western Europe. That is quite damning, so I look forward to hearing what the minister says on that in her summing-up speech.

Although overall life expectancy remains low, there is also a huge gap in life expectancy between the most deprived and the least deprived areas of the country. For men, that gap is about 13 years, and for women it is 10 and a half years. Those are worrying trends, and the gaps continues to widen.

There are also public health issues in relation to smoking, alcohol and cancer rates. Those all play a part in the situation. Mental health and loneliness are also significant problems in Scotland, with more than half of older people saying that they sometimes feel lonely. It is also estimated that there is at least one chronically lonely person on every street in Scotland. That represents a crisis.

Given that more than 50,000 Scottish pensioners live in relative poverty, it is important that the Scottish Government considers what older

people are dealing with when it comes to expansion of its social security programme. Older people are more likely to have higher levels of disability, but a significant percentage are not claiming the disability benefits that they might be entitled to. We cannot allow older people to be left behind because they are not receiving the support, including financial support, that they require.

The Scottish Government needs to do more to address the matter. The Scottish Government must also engage with older people and stakeholders, including Age Scotland, as it develops its benefits take-up strategy.

The waiting lists that older people now face in the national health service are at tipping point, and the situation is spiralling out of control across many health board areas. The new health secretary should scrap his predecessor's failed recovery plan and bring in measures to get waiting times back on track. That is vitally important.

Given all the problems that we have, the Scottish Government must send a clear message that it needs older people, and they should be seen as a key priority, going forward. The First Minister set out many priorities yesterday, but he did not specifically mention anything about our ageing population and older people. We used to have a dedicated minister for older people. That role has been incorporated into other remits, which is something that I feel should not have happened and is a fault and flaw within the new Government set-up.

That is not to mention the fact that comments have previously been made by a member of the Government suggesting that the number of older people who have passed away since 2014 would lead to a "gain" for independence. That is an astonishing comment for anyone to make about older individuals in our community. After such comments, it is perhaps not surprising that research by Age Scotland has found that only 21 per cent of over-50s in Scotland feel valued by society.

Although the study is a work in progress, it is already clear that its findings will be increasingly important in the years to come. The University of Stirling and its partners, including the universities of Edinburgh and Strathclyde, should be commended for the work that they have done so far. Scotland could truly be a great country in which to grow old and the findings of the study could be key to making that vision a reality, but there must be support and understanding from the Government. It is clear that further action from the Scottish Government is needed in this area and I hope that members from across the chamber will join me in pushing for that.

Older people are important and valued, and the Scottish Government must support older people and treat them with the respect that they deserve. They are an asset to our communities and constituencies, not a liability to Scotland and its future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members who intend to speak in the debate to ensure that they have pressed their request-to-speak buttons.

17:32

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate Alexander Stewart on securing the debate and congratulate the University of Stirling, which has a proven track record in respect of issues regarding the elderly.

I declare an interest, having entered Parliament in 1999, when I was already—according to the definition of ageing—elderly, although I was only 55. I am now on track to be 79—

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): No!

Christine Grahame: —too soon for my liking. Where did all those decades go? Thank you, Mr Whittle. The first comment that I will make is that not only are we—the "aged"—all individuals, but we represent a substantial age range, spanning five decades, so one cannot generalise.

I know that the challenges of ageing are not only physical but are, as the motion states, cognitive and social. I would expand that list to include the isolation and loneliness that were referred to by Alexander Stewart, who is very young. We have the research, but what can we, as politicians and individuals, do?

Older people are generally—I do mean generally—reasonably well catered for in respect of healthcare, for example with regular vaccinations, but it is when we are unable to care for ourselves that we are vulnerable, especially if we do not have savings or a decent pension.

That is why reform of the care sector and support for its workforce must be priorities. Too many people languish in hospital when aids and adaptations to their homes, care support at home, or access to a care home would not only free up hospital beds and the staff who service them, but keep people hale and hearty. Mental and physical wellbeing can soon disintegrate when a person is stuck in a bed far from the home where they should be. The creation of integration joint boards was a first step, but we need cohesion between the national health service and the care sector.

There is also the plague of isolation and loneliness. There are folk whose trip to the local

shop or supermarket is the only social interaction that they have. Travelling on the bus with their pass is a bonus; it might be their only social life. The phone might be silent unless there is a cold call, and the front door remains locked, even in daytime, because there is no one coming to visit. Many people will not admit that they are lonely or that they have only the television or radio for companionship.

Retirement need not be absolute. For some people, continuing to work either whole time or part time, if that is compatible with the demands of the job, is a choice. I note that, with the diminishing workforce, many elderly people are returning to work, but doing so should be their choice and should not be done to prop up a poor state pension, for instance. Some 40 per cent of people who are entitled to pension credit, which is a UK benefit, do not claim it, and that percentage has remained unchanged during my entire time in Parliament.

For many people, especially very elderly people, there is a sense of being invisible and of melting into the background. Confidence erodes, as does the person's sense of self-worth and their value. It need not be like that, however. In society, older people are too often regarded as a burden; they are patronised and they are not given the respect that age has earned them. I can report that age discrimination is alive and well, even in this building. It should be remembered that we were young once, too. We recognise the path that the young are treading, because we trod it before them. Perhaps only with age, however, do we appreciate time, because it is not on our side.

Other cultures value their elders, and we should do more of that in Scotland. I assure members that I will ensure that the Scottish Government does not ignore us.

17:36

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I am grateful to my colleague Alexander Stewart for bringing this important matter to the chamber for debate. He has worked incredibly hard to provide a voice for older people in the Scottish Parliament—although his youthful complexion makes it hard for some of us to believe. The same goes for my constituency neighbour, Christine Grahame.

Disappointingly, I struggle to recall the last time we were able to debate matters relating to older people in the chamber. There is no question but that the issue of healthy ageing is a key challenge facing us in Scotland today, yet, short of our holding a debate on the matter, the First Minister failed to mention our ageing population in his statement on Scotland's priorities yesterday. Older

people will be frustrated by that and by the fact that the Scottish Government has dropped the ministerial portfolio for older people. The Scottish National Party might have dropped that portfolio, but the shadow ministerial team and Alexander Stewart have no such plans to drop this important subject.

This valued group of people have been subject to a catalogue of let-downs—which Alexander Stewart has already alluded to—especially lower life expectancy in deprived areas. We can and must do better. In this context, doing better means examining the evidence that is available to us in order to drive change. I reference the University of Stirling's Healthy Ageing in Scotland study, which will provide us with the opportunity to do that—to use the evidence to good effect. That is by no means the only source of evidence that we can use to drive change for Scotland's ageing population. We cannot hope to cope with the demands of an ageing population without utilising the findings of that study and the work done by other nations to develop best practice.

One example of where that is being done very well is in my constituency in the Scottish Borders. Earlier this year, Scottish Borders Council endorsed plans to build a Dutch-style care village. That scheme is very much part of a shake-up of care provision in the region, and it is a good demonstration of proactive work by the local authority to consider evidence-based practices that can make a real difference for older people by encouraging healthy ageing and combating social isolation.

As Christine Grahame has quite rightly pointed out, social isolation is one of the main issues relating to poor health outcomes. I completely agree that we should be combating that, particularly through initiatives such as the Dutch-style retirement village. We want to move away from institutionalised care and place residents in neighbourhoods, which are closer to broader society. Similar schemes in the Netherlands have found that that helps to tackle loneliness and improves outdoor access, which are key factors in healthy ageing.

I am delighted that our Conservative-run administration in the Borders is leading the way in finding an innovative solution to cope with the challenges of an ageing population and social isolation. I encourage the Scottish Government to take note of that and to join the Borders Conservatives in thinking outside of the box when it comes to dealing with such challenges.

Having this discussion in Parliament is important. In dispensing with the ministerial portfolio for older people, the Scottish Government has sent a deeply concerning message. However, as long as we have the opportunity to speak up for

older people and we continue to do that, we can be their voice in this Parliament.

17:41

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I, too, thank Alexander Stewart for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I also thank all the members who have spoken in it for highlighting how important it is that we have debates to address issues relating to the older population.

On behalf of Scottish Labour, I welcome the Healthy Ageing in Scotland study, led by the University of Stirling, and I put on the record my thanks to the team who will start this extremely important work. The study is the first of its kind and, although it will look at many different factors, including health, social and economic circumstances, the main aim of the team of researchers is a simple but critical one: to improve the health and wellbeing of Scotland's older people by fully understanding their lives.

The health of our population must be the priority for any Parliament and any Government. After the past few years, that is clearer than ever before. However, as other members have stated, being healthy does not just mean being physically healthy; it means being mentally, socially and economically healthy, too. Each of those crucial aspects of life plays a role in determining the health and outcomes of an individual, a family or a population.

The motion correctly notes that our older population is growing and that people are living longer, but it is also right to state that significant and divisive income inequality exists in our society today. I absolutely agree with much of the content of Alexander Stewart's motion and speech. I know that he has been a champion of older people. However, I have to say—because it is important—that his party's policies are responsible for much of that division. We need a whole change in approach with regard to improving pay, closing pay gaps and supporting the lowest paid in order to improve health and wellbeing outcomes later in life. It starts early in life and it continues; people start an unhealthy life and then live an unhealthy life. A lot of that is linked to the austerity that we see in this country.

It is important that we touch on health inequalities right now. Health inequalities are one of the greatest strains in our society—members will not be surprised to hear me say that, as I say it often. We need far greater action than we have had. The First Minister was right to focus on tackling poverty yesterday. However, people from deprived areas in our country are less likely to attend screening appointments. That remains a stark gap and an avoidable one. It is not always

about income; it is about how we ensure that those people can attend vital screening appointments.

We know that health inequality exists from birth, but we also know that it continues to negatively impact people throughout their lives and can determine outcomes in later life. As the project embarks on the study, it will be interesting to see whether we, as parliamentarians, can act more decisively and effectively to address the issues that have led to the study being undertaken.

A staple of any healthy, progressive, modern nation should be the ability of its citizens to age healthily and to grow old with dignity. I hope that the study will allow improvements to be made that will positively impact the health and wellbeing of the older population.

Many of the challenges that are faced by our older people in Scotland today have been exacerbated by poor Government decisions. In some cases, there has been Government inaction. We know that we need to improve the health and wellbeing of our elderly population—we need to do so urgently and to be quite radical about it.

Healthy ageing should be a priority. Once again, I thank Alexander Stewart for lodging the motion, and I thank all members who have contributed to the debate.

17:45

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): It had been my intention to come along today and just listen to what was said, given my advancing years according to what "old" means. However, I happened to take part today in a webinar on a university report on the life expectancy of elite sportspeople. It turned into more of a discussion around early years and attitude, and members will be pleased to hear that I can expect to live an extra five years according to that report.

More important than that, the sportsmen and women who were on that call discussed the reason that we would live longer, which is not necessarily the excessive physical activity that we did in our younger years but the attitude that is ingrained into a sportsperson's mind. We know that being physically active has a positive influence on our life expectancy, so it is not a big leap to think that those of us who did that to excess will benefit from it. During the discussion, we talked about how being active early in life has a positive effect on life expectancy and living well in our later years.

To follow on from the previous discussion, we have health inequality in our society that is yet to be tackled, in my view. In the seven years that I have been in Parliament, I have talked about the

obesity crisis, smoking and alcohol, our mental health crisis, musculoskeletal conditions, type 2 diabetes and preventable conditions such as 40 per cent of all cancers. A lot of those issues are being discussed today. We tackle them in one of two ways: either we decide that we are going to shovel more and more of our resources into treatment of those conditions or we bite the bullet and take a long-term look at how we prevent those conditions in the first place and have fewer people seeking medical treatment.

I am highlighting the need to make our youngsters active so that, in 70 years' time, they will be living a long and active life. Parliamentarians struggle to look further than five years ahead, and I am talking about looking six or seven decades ahead and laying the groundwork for that. If we do that now, it will take four or five years to see any benefit from the policy, and it will take decades for it to bear the full fruit, with an elderly population living long, active and healthy lives.

As Carol Mochan said, there is inequality of opportunity. In order to encourage our pre-schoolers to be physically active, we must give them that opportunity. If we tackle inequality of opportunity, the outcomes in later life will be much better than they currently are. It should be noted—I think that it was said earlier—that, in some areas of Scotland, a person is near the end of their life expectancy if they are 50. That is an utter disgrace in a country such as ours.

As I said, it was not my intention to speak, but I wanted to say that, in order for people to live well in later life, we must encourage our youngsters to live well.

17:50

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I thank Alexander Stewart for lodging the motion for the debate. Like most of my colleagues who have participated in the debate, I am included in the age range for the study. Like Brian Whittle, I was slightly taken aback that it related to people in their 50s. I recognise Christine Grahame's comments about joining the Parliament in her 50s. I have listened to the contributions carefully and I thank everyone for engaging in this important debate.

I welcome the data that the University of Stirling-led Healthy Ageing In Scotland—HAGIS—study provides on Scotland's 50-plus population. As Alexander Stewart mentioned, the Scottish population is ageing. In 2020, an estimated 1 million Scotland residents were aged 65 or older. By 2040, that figure will rise to an estimated 1.4 million residents. It is clear that Scotland must adapt to our increasingly older population and

ensure that all older people are afforded the opportunity to age well and be resilient. I confirm that my colleague Emma Roddick has clear responsibility for diversity, inclusion and equalities, including older people.

The Scottish Government wants to make sure that all our policies on ageing are informed by evidence, and we regularly review the evidence that is available. For example, the Scottish Government is currently co-designing GIRFE—getting it right for everyone—which will form the future practice model of all health and social care professionals and will shape the future design and delivery of services, including those for older people and frailty.

The Scottish Government consulted on a health and social care strategy for older people in 2022. The Government recognises that older people are significantly more likely than any other age group to be living with dementia or to be unpaid carers for someone who is living with dementia.

In March, I was pleased to attend a meeting centre's introduction to dementia event, where I learned about the work that it is doing to support and give confidence to people with dementia and their families. I made the mistake of using the term "dementia sufferers"—we need to change our outlook on dementia and the words that we use about people who are living with it.

In my previous life—this touches on Rachael Hamilton's point about what we can learn from different communities—I managed the Museum of Islay Life, in my constituency. One of my strongest memories is of the additional stories and information about exhibits and photographs from the older members of the island's community, some of whom had dementia. I could see the positive impact on them of contributing to the recording of Islay's history.

Both of my grans lived with dementia, so I am very pleased that the Scottish Government is currently developing a new dementia strategy for Scotland, which will reflect on the challenges that those communities face and build on the supports that matter to them. The Parliament welcomed efforts to develop the strategy and the core participation of people who have lived experience in its development during last month's parliamentary debate on the topic. I look forward to the Scottish Government publishing the strategy at the end of May.

Through our new palliative and end-of-life care strategy, we are prioritising work on anticipatory care plans and looking at what can be done to promote their use. Those plans will enable people to have conversations with health and care professionals about what matters to them and to record and share those conversations as a plan,

so that the care and support that they subsequently receive, if and when their health changes or deteriorates, honours that plan.

Care homes are where people live—Christine Grahame talked about the importance of recognising that. People call those places home, so they should expect the same level of involvement, choice and support for their health and wellbeing as they would if they were living elsewhere in the community. However, we also need to recognise that, with the demographics of people living in care homes having changed over the past 10 to 15 years, the needs of those who reside in them are evolving, too. Many people are living with increasingly complex health and care needs.

“My Health - My Care - My Home” is a blueprint for improvement in care homes and makes a series of recommendations to reduce the inequalities around access to wraparound care. It provides direction and a vision to provide high-quality, personalised care that is proactive, consistent, safe and meaningful. Unfortunately, we have seen social isolation and loneliness being made worse by the cost of living crisis. As part of our emergency response to the cost crisis, earlier this year, the Scottish Government invested £971,000 into providing support to community organisations working to tackle social isolation and loneliness. The £3.8 million social isolation and loneliness fund was launched on 8 March 2023, and it will run to July 2026. That new Scottish Government funding will provide significant longer-term support for organisations and projects working on the ground to tackle social isolation and loneliness in our communities across Scotland, which Carol Mochan highlighted as well.

Over the two years since 2021, we have provided £36 million to the communities, mental health and wellbeing fund to support the mental health and wellbeing of individuals, particularly those who are at most risk, including older people, funding projects such as the concrete garden project in Possilpark, which provides a space where people can meet, eat, learn new skills and garden. Local projects such as that, which are focused on local solutions and supporting local communities, are key to helping people's wellbeing and reducing social isolation.

However, it remains a sad reality that health, quality of life and even life expectancy, which Alexander Stewart mentioned, can vary significantly across our communities. Those inequalities are driven by differences in income, wealth and power. By addressing them, we can make Scotland a healthier and fairer place to live. That is why our public health initiatives are complemented by wide-ranging action to reduce poverty and mitigate the impact of the rise in the

cost of living. In a country as energy rich as Scotland, we should not have people living in fuel poverty.

However, with the UK Government rolling back its already inadequate response to the energy cost crisis, we know that many people will be struggling to keep their homes warm. Despite key policy levers such as the regulation of energy markets remaining under the UK Government's control, we are doing everything in our power to help those who are worst affected. Most recently, the First Minister announced increased support for households with energy costs, with up to £30 million available through the fuel insecurity fund—a tripling of the fund from this time last year. With that additional funding, we will be able to help thousands more people to stay warm in their homes. We want to ensure that all our policies on ageing are informed by evidence, and, as I said before, we regularly review that evidence.

I hope that I have set out clearly the Scottish Government's commitment to older people and to healthy and dignified ageing and that I have shown that the Scottish Government believes that older people are a valued and respected part of our community.

Meeting closed at 17:57.

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