



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 23 November 2023

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot) or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

---

**Thursday 23 November 2023**

**CONTENTS**

	<b>Col.</b>
<b>GENERAL QUESTION TIME</b> .....	1
HMP Stirling (Noise Complaints).....	1
Severe Winter Weather (Disruption to Public Services).....	3
“Migration to Scotland after independence” (Staff Resource).....	4
Health Services (Highlands and Islands).....	5
Renfrewshire Council (Meetings).....	6
Vulnerable People (Third Sector Organisations).....	8
<b>FIRST MINISTER’S QUESTION TIME</b> .....	10
Michael Matheson (Expenses).....	10
Honesty and Integrity in Government.....	14
Fossil Fuel Boilers (Replacement).....	16
Energy Costs (Support for Households).....	19
General Practitioner Surgeries (Expanding Role).....	21
United Kingdom Government Autumn Statement.....	22
Israel and Hamas Agreement (Hostages).....	24
National Health Service Dentistry.....	25
University of Aberdeen (Languages).....	25
Grangemouth (Petroineos Announcement).....	26
Scottish Budget (Agriculture and Rural Communities).....	26
Unpaid Carers (Respite).....	27
<b>PROMISE OVERSIGHT BOARD REPORT</b> .....	28
<i>Motion debated—[Martin Whitfield].</i>	
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab).....	29
Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP).....	31
Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	33
Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab).....	35
The Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise (Natalie Don).....	36
<b>SCOTTISH PARLIAMENTARY CORPORATE BODY QUESTION TIME</b> .....	40
Fairtrade Products.....	40
Exhibition Spaces.....	41
Staff Cost Provision Up-rating.....	41
Staff Recruitment.....	42
Crèche (Restriction on Hours).....	43
Michael Matheson (Use of Parliamentary Device Abroad).....	44
Michael Matheson (Office Expenses).....	46
<b>PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME</b> .....	47
<b>TRANSPORT, NET ZERO AND JUST TRANSITION</b> .....	47
Battery Energy Storage Systems (National Strategy).....	47
Road Safety (A77).....	48
British Transport Police.....	49
Air Pollution (Urban Towns).....	50
Circular Economy (Wind Turbine Decommissioning).....	51
Hydrogen Fuelling Infrastructure.....	54
Low-emission Zones (Impact on Disabled People).....	55
<b>URGENT QUESTION</b> .....	58
Petroineos (Closure of Refinery).....	58
<b>DISABLED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD) (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 1</b> .....	65
<i>Motion moved—[Pam Duncan—Glancy].</i>	
Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab).....	65
Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con).....	69
The Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise (Natalie Don).....	72
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con).....	75
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab).....	78
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD).....	80

Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP).....	83
Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	85
Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP) .....	87
Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab).....	89
Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP).....	91
Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab) .....	92
Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con) .....	95
Natalie Don .....	97
Pam Duncan-Glancy .....	100
<b>BUSINESS MOTION</b> .....	105
<i>Motion moved—[George Adam]—and agreed to.</i>	
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	106

---

# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 23 November 2023

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

## General Question Time

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Good morning. The first item of business is general questions. I invite members wishing to ask supplementary questions to press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question, and I make the usual appeal for brevity in both questions and answers.

### HMP Stirling (Noise Complaints)

1. **Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress towards addressing the reported concerns raised by local residents about HMP Stirling. (S6O-02773)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** As the member will understand, that is largely an operational issue for the Scottish Prison Service, but I can assure him that the noise complaints are being taken very seriously by both me and the SPS. Officials from the Scottish Prison Service and Stirling Council attended a public meeting with MSPs and councillors on 13 November to update residents on the actions that they are taking to help alleviate the noise coming from parts of the prison. Those include a range of operational and infrastructure options.

**Keith Brown:** I attended a public meeting last week, where representatives of the SPS were able to hear directly from residents about their concerns. I am pleased that the SPS agreed to provide updates every fortnight to keep people informed of progress towards addressing the issues.

Over the past few days, however, I have received several emails about continued disturbances, and I have real concern over what my constituents feel is a lack of urgency on the various mitigation measures discussed at the public meeting, with most of those measures appearing unlikely to happen until well into the new year. The situation is clearly having a significant impact on the lives of my constituents. For example, one constituent has explained that his eight-year-old daughter sits with headphones on, crying, because she is so upset by the noise that she is hearing. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is not acceptable, and that the SPS

must expedite its plans to address the situation as a matter of urgency?

**Angela Constance:** I agree very much with the member, who has continued to raise these matters with me, that the issues need to be resolved as soon as possible for all concerned. I know that the SPS is rightly very concerned about the impact on neighbours, and that it has been taking action as a priority, as Mr Brown is aware. The SPS remains committed to engagement with local residents. Indeed, Prison Service officials are meeting local councillors today to discuss the operational measures that they are already taking to minimise the noise. I have asked the chief executive to keep me updated on progress.

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Residents are exhausted by the continued disturbances. The new facility continues to fail the inmates and residents, who cannot wait months for mitigation measures to be implemented. They need action, and they need it now. It is quite clear from what was said at the public meeting that residents were not in any way considered through the design and planning processes for the facility. What urgent action can we put in place to resolve the situation for the exhausted residents?

**Angela Constance:** I thank Mr Stewart for his extensive correspondence on this matter, which has included some video footage. I reassure him, all members and the constituents whom they represent that they have my support in working with the Prison Service to get matters resolved as quickly as possible. He will, of course, be aware of all the actions that have taken place both operationally, within the prison, and structurally, outwith the prison. I very much want to see the situation resolved, and I can confirm to Mr Stewart that I have replied to his extensive letter this morning.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** The evidence is clear that the noise disturbances at HMP Stirling have been getting worse, not better, despite the proposed mitigations from the SPS. At the public meeting last week, which was co-ordinated by my colleague Councillor Alasdair Tollemache, the SPS admitted that it had no way of monitoring noise around the site beyond recording the complaints from constituents. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the SPS must urgently find a way to monitor noise disturbances at HMP Stirling systematically and proactively to start to restore trust with residents, as well as monitoring whether or not the mitigations are working?

**Angela Constance:** I can confirm to Mr Ruskell that I have replied to his councillor colleague and assure him that staff on site are actively intervening daily to limit the sound levels that are related to the disturbances experienced on the

prison site and by residents. Alongside that and further other operational measures, the SPS has given a commitment to continue to measure and monitor the noise levels to inform the development of further options to suppress them.

### **Severe Winter Weather (Disruption to Public Services)**

**2. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures it has in place to reduce disruption to public services due to severe winter weather. (S6O-02774)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and its regulations in Scotland, business continuity is a core responsibility of categorised responders. To support that responsibility, the Scottish Government hosts regular winter resilience meetings over the winter months, with a wide range of stakeholders. The next winter resilience meeting is on 24 November. In addition, at a local and regional level, Scottish Government officials engage directly with partners to support preparedness, including through resilience partnership. That is not limited to winter preparedness, but is part of a continual process of monitoring and assessment.

**Christine Grahame:** I have a feeling that the subject of my supplementary question is not within the cabinet secretary's portfolio, but I will ask it anyway.

Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale are mainly rural areas. Keeping the road network clear is crucial to all the services that the cabinet secretary has mentioned. How is road grit allocated to local authorities? If necessary, can a local authority access additional road clearing assistance?

**Angela Constance:** For brevity, the best thing that I can say is that I will, with urgency, ask the Minister for Transport to reply to Ms Grahame.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** There was a lessons-learned exercise after storm Arwen. Issues that have been highlighted include the digital voice programme, turning off the copper wire telephone network and the lack of resilience in the mobile phone network. Last December, Shetland had a severe weather event that caused power cuts for up to six days for some people. What engagement has the Scottish Government had with the communications sector to ensure that people are able to contact public and emergency services during such severe winter weather events?

**Angela Constance:** Beatrice Wishart raises good points about the interaction between severe

weather, communications and power outages. I have answered a number of substantial questions from colleagues on the lessons learned from storm Arwen and will forward my responses to Ms Wishart. I also reassure Ms Wishart that robust debriefing is built into our resilience arrangements because, after each and every incident, there are lessons to be learned. However, I will ensure that the member is replied to in depth.

**John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP):** Although I acknowledge that winter weather can disrupt public services, we are increasingly finding that heavy rainfall can disrupt public services in spring, summer, autumn and winter. There is a risk that heavy rainfall can result in the type of disruption that my constituents have experienced in the past two months, so can the justice secretary reassure Parliament that all responders are preparing for changes in climate in order to protect public services?

**Angela Constance:** Yes, I can. We live in Scotland, where weather disturbance is all year round; resilience, therefore, is an all-year-round activity. As we all know, climate change is with us here and now, and it is one of the biggest challenges that we face here and now.

### **"Migration to Scotland after independence" (Staff Resource)**

**3. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many civil servants worked on the production of the latest "Building a New Scotland" paper on immigration and European Union policy. (S6O-02775)

**The Minister for Independence (Jamie Hepburn):** I apologise to Alexander Stewart and other members that I am not in Parliament in person to answer his question.

As with other publications in the "Building a New Scotland" series, "Migration to Scotland after independence" was co-ordinated by the Scottish Government's constitutional futures division, with officials from other business areas contributing as part of their normal duties supporting the Scottish ministers. There are presently 21 staff in the constitutional futures division.

**Alexander Stewart:** The minister has just related that 21 civil servants may have spent their time working on a policy that will never be implemented. Does he think that civil servants' time is better spent on dealing with national health service backlogs, for example, or on writing this latest piece of literature in the Scottish National Party's taxpayer-funded independence campaign?

**Jamie Hepburn:** When it comes to NHS performance, I remind Alexander Stewart that we have the best-performing accident and emergency

provision of any part of the United Kingdom. I also remind him that this Government won the last Scottish Parliament election, which his party lost. In that election, we said that we would advance the case for independence, so we have not only the right but the responsibility to do that. It was part of our manifesto commitment.

When it comes to the time that is being devoted by Scottish Government civil servants, the cost of the work that is being undertaken in 2022-23 in producing those papers, and of the constitutional futures division overall, represented 0.0035 per cent of the Scottish Government budget. In comparison with the great opportunities that would be brought by independence—which, I assure Mr Stewart, we will win—that cost is well worth paying. *[Applause.]*

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** I thank everybody for the round of applause. *[Laughter.]*

Described as “xenophobic and completely unacceptable” by the African Union, the United Kingdom’s illegal Rwanda deportation policy stands in stark contrast to Scotland’s human approach. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the UK’s plans to force through new legislation, and what steps is it taking to help the Tory Government understand that it is imperative that we create an asylum system that treats people with dignity and respect, as set out in the Scottish Government’s proposals?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Be brief, minister.

**Jamie Hepburn:** We welcome the Supreme Court’s judgment. Not only is the UK Government’s policy immoral, but it has now been deemed illegal. Rather than seeking to circumvent that ruling by removing itself from the European convention on human rights, as has been suggested, the UK Government should accept the ruling and ditch its Rwandan policy. We will push it to do that, and I have pushed it to drop its so-called illegal migration act.

When all is said and done, we need independence in order to create a humane approach to asylum here in Scotland.

### Health Services (Highlands and Islands)

**4. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how many health services across the Highlands and Islands have been downgraded or lost entirely over the last 16 years. (S6O-02776)

**The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson):** It is for territorial national health service boards and their planning partners to organise and provide high-quality services that meet the needs of local

people, in line with national guidelines and frameworks. Clearly, those services are developed over time to account for factors such as changes in clinical best practice and significant technological developments.

When it comes to the Government’s commitment to and investment in local health services, the resource budget of just NHS Highland has increased in real terms by 19.5 per cent between 2010-11 and 2023-24, and in cash terms by 83.1 per cent—£348.6 million—between 2006-07 and 2023-24.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston:** Sixteen years of Scottish National Party mismanagement has seen a running down of our rural health services. Maternity provision has been downgraded in Caithness and Moray, general practitioners are undergoing pressure across the region, and our ambulance crews are increasingly stretched. Many of our more remote and vulnerable communities have lost out.

At a meeting of Sir Lewis Ritchie’s steering group in June this year, NHS Highland committed to providing urgent care and minor injuries cover at Portree hospital, seven days a week, by the end of October. That has still not happened. Will the cabinet secretary tell me and my constituents in north Skye when they will get that vital service back in Portree for seven days a week, as they were promised?

**Michael Matheson:** Jamie Halcro Johnston will be aware that some of the changes that have been made to specific services in the Highlands have come about as a result of safety issues. For example, the issue of the midwife-led service in Caithness was the result of the death of a full-term baby in 2015. The independent review of that made recommendations on why changes had to take place in order to improve safety in the delivery of that service.

When it comes to the provision of services as set out in the Ritchie report, Professor Ritchie is engaging with the health board and local stakeholders to make sure that there is resilience in the provision of urgent care services in Portree for seven days a week. That work is on-going. The board is also working very closely with the Scottish Ambulance Service to ensure that that service is resilient.

Jamie Halcro Johnston will also be aware that we have just invested £27.7 million in the new Broadford hospital to provide additional clinical services in the area.

### Renfrewshire Council (Meetings)

**5. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the education

secretary last met with Renfrewshire Council, and what issues were discussed. (S6O-02777)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth):** I last met Renfrewshire Council on 31 August of this year, when we discussed school provision in the Dargavel and Bishopton areas of Renfrewshire. The member attended that meeting, as did Natalie Don MSP as the constituency MSP, the interim chair of Dargavel primary school parent council and the chair of Bishopton Community Council. My officials remain in close contact with the council and receive regular updates on school provision developments in the area.

**Neil Bibby:** The cabinet secretary will be well aware of Renfrewshire Council's Dargavel debacle, which will cost taxpayers an estimated £160 million. There are now concerns that a similar blunder might even now be taking place at St Andrew's academy in Paisley. Meanwhile, plans for a new Thorn primary school in Johnstone were dealt a blow as the council's funding bid to the Scottish Government failed. Given that, what additional support will the Scottish Government provide to Renfrewshire's children to ensure that no child is left paying the price for Renfrewshire Council's incompetence and financial mismanagement?

**Jenny Gilruth:** I very much recognise the scale of the challenge, and we engaged on that matter on three occasions during the summer recess. I understand that the council is keen to learn lessons from the report that was undertaken on the action, particularly at Dargavel primary school.

On Government funding, it is worth saying that, over the years, Renfrewshire has benefited from Scottish Government funding for the school estate. It was awarded £16 million towards three projects through the schools for the future programme, and Scottish Government funding is also supporting Paisley grammar school through the learning estate investment programme.

Although Scottish Government investment is intended to augment and not replace local authorities' responsibility for the school estate, we will continue to explore with the Scottish Futures Trust how we can improve the school estate.

More broadly, it is worth saying that the Scottish schools estate has improved since 2007, when 61 per cent of our schools were in good or satisfactory condition, to now, when more than 90 per cent of them are in good or satisfactory condition. That is thanks to investment from the Scottish National Party Scottish Government.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 was not lodged.

## Vulnerable People (Third Sector Organisations)

**7. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is working with third sector agencies to improve outcomes for vulnerable people. (S6O-02779)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Every portfolio across the Scottish Government works closely with third sector agencies and organisations, many of which support our work with vulnerable people across Scotland. Scottish Government grant making is allocated across portfolios to various parts of the third sector to make a positive difference in many areas. The Government recognises the vital work that third sector organisations do on a daily basis to help make Scotland a better place for everyone.

**Audrey Nicoll:** Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust recently launched its impact report, which highlighted how the charity used the power of football to support communities across the north-east to close the poverty-related attainment gap, improve physical and mental wellbeing and support our most disadvantaged citizens through the cost of living crisis. Will the cabinet secretary join me in congratulating Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust? Does she agree that, when public finances are so constrained, it is all the more important that local authorities and the Scottish Government continue to support such fantastic organisations?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I very much agree with Audrey Nicoll on that point. The Government recognises the impact that football clubs and their associated trusts and foundations can have on the lives of people and communities across the country, and Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust is a fantastic example of that work in action. I know, for example, about its initiative with its dementia-friendly football memories programme, which is run with Alzheimer Scotland. That is but one example of one club and the tremendous work that it does in its community, and I commend it for that.

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** For more than a decade, the Government has pledged multiyear funding settlements for the third sector and the First Minister repeated that commitment at the most recent Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations gathering. When will the cabinet secretary be able to update Parliament on that and, more important for the third sector, when that will be delivered, or is it just more warm words from the First Minister and his Government?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The First Minister spoke directly to the third sector at that gathering, as Mr O'Kane said, and he committed to looking at



the issue. Clearly, it is a difficult area for the Scottish Government when our budget is not guaranteed. In fact, the damaging policies of yesterday's autumn statement show how difficult it is to ensure that we provide support not just for the third sector but for our public services in general. We are absolutely committed to that through our fairer funding approach, and I look forward to working with the third sector to deliver on that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes general question time.

## First Minister's Question Time

11:59

### Michael Matheson (Expenses)

#### **Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):**

I understand that the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body has announced the launching of an investigation into the health secretary's expense claims. Although that investigation is welcome, the health secretary still has to come to Parliament to give full answers and the First Minister must give us a frank response today.

For a moment, let us set aside the doubts about Michael Matheson's latest story about how he racked up a massive bill on his phone while on holiday. If we believe the unbelievable, suspend our disbelief and assume that that fable is true, just for one minute, that still does not explain why, back in February, Michael Matheson claimed £11,000 of taxpayers' money for a bill that he could not account for. He promised Parliament, and gave written assurances, that the bill was the result of constituency work and only of constituency work. His new version of events proves beyond doubt that that claim was false.

The First Minister said that it was a "legitimate" expense. Does he still believe that?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** Let us remember that, when Michael Matheson discovered what had happened, after speaking again to his family and to his teenage boys about the use of his iPad, and as he laid out in full in a personal statement last week, he took the immediate decision to pay back the full amount.

Michael Matheson has made mistakes in handling the issue. That is something that he has admitted to. In what I thought was a very emotional statement in the chamber, he gave the reasons why that happened. He wanted to protect his teenage boys from the frankly harsh political and public scrutiny that often comes with the roles that we occupy. On discovering from his teenage boys what had happened, he immediately agreed to pay back the full amount.

Let me read a quote from an interview on STV:

"I'm sorry. It was a big mistake. It's something that shouldn't have happened, but I am ultimately the only person responsible for that ... This was a big mistake, by me, for which I'm deeply sorry. I know how badly I performed here and how much I've let people down and for that I'm very sorry."

That was a quote from Douglas Ross, when he failed to declare £28,000 of income.

The point here is that we did not call for Douglas Ross to quit. We accepted the point that he had

made an honest mistake. People will see through the hypocrisy of Douglas Ross saying that it is fine for him to make an honest mistake but that it is not fine for Michael Matheson to make an honest mistake.

We will not get distracted by Douglas Ross's political opportunism. The health secretary is getting on with the job of ensuring that our health service recovers through what will be a difficult winter.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** I ask for briefer questions and responses.

**Douglas Ross:** Let us be very clear: my apology, which was full and frank, was about not declaring something; Michael Matheson tried to dupe the taxpayer out of £11,000. He wanted the taxpayer to pay £11,000.

Is that the reason why the First Minister could not answer my question? Because he did not answer it, I will put it again. The First Minister previously said that that was a "legitimate" expense claim. Does he still believe that?

Michael Matheson claimed that £11,000 from the taxpayer and promised Parliament that it was for constituency work, but his story has changed. We are now supposed to believe that he did not understand why he had been billed so much and that he was clueless. Michael Matheson supposedly did not know anything about it, but he was certain that it was the taxpayers' problem and that the bill was theirs to pay. If he had no idea what the bill was for, why on earth did he claim taxpayers' money to pay it?

**The First Minister:** The motivation for Michael Matheson's actions last week—

**Douglas Ross:** Why?

**John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP):** Listen!

**The First Minister:** —before his personal statement—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** First Minister, I ask you to resume your seat.

Mr Ross and Mr Swinney, I expect better behaviour from both of you. We need to hear the answers from the First Minister and we need to hear the questions as well. First Minister, please resume.

**The First Minister:** They clearly do not want to hear the answers. That is the exact point. *[Interruption.]* You can hear that they really do not want to hear the answers, Presiding Officer.

Michael Matheson, in what I would say was a very emotional personal statement to the

chamber, laid out in full detail the handling of the issue of the expenses in relation to his iPad, and he was clear that he should have handled it better. I agree with that. On discovery of the fact that his iPad had been used by his teenage boys, he agreed immediately to pay back the full amount. As a father of two children, including a teenager, I can understand the motivation to protect one's family, but I agree with others in the chamber that it should not have been handled in this way, and Michael Matheson, of course, admitted to that.

After making that personal statement, Michael Matheson has been getting on with the job of health secretary. That is why, on Monday, he chaired NHS Forth Valley's annual review. That is why, this week, he has announced £42 million for an extra 153 doctor training places—the largest expansion on record. It is why he visited Glasgow Caledonian University's school of health and life sciences. It is why he met the Royal College of Nursing this week. As much as Douglas Ross and the Conservatives want to distract him, what I have is a health secretary who is getting on with the job.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am going to have to require briefer questions and responses.

**Douglas Ross:** We have a health secretary who claimed £11,000 from the taxpayer and a First Minister who will not simply answer whether that was a legitimate claim to make or not. Michael Matheson is taking the public for fools. He supposedly found out on Thursday two weeks ago what really happened. He apparently learned at that stage that there was personal use of the iPad and that other people had incurred the data costs. However, the following Monday, Michael Matheson was asked point blank whether there was any personal use of the iPad. He said no. He was asked directly whether anyone else had used it. He said no. Was the health secretary telling the truth when he gave those answers?

**The First Minister:** I say for the third time that Michael Matheson accepts, admits and admitted to this chamber that he made mistakes in the handling. *[Interruption.]* Douglas Ross shouted at me, "Why?" I say again that Michael Matheson addressed that. He did what he did to protect his teenage boys. Did he make mistakes? Absolutely. Has he admitted that? Absolutely. Has he agreed to pay back the full amount? Absolutely.

Is it not telling that Douglas Ross wants to talk about the health secretary? What he does not want to talk about is the savage cuts that the UK Government has unleashed on the health service through yesterday's autumn statement. If we want to listen to those in the health service, let us hear from the Royal College of Nursing's chief nurse, Professor Nicola Ranger. She said that the autumn statement is

“short-sighted”

and that

“The NHS faces a multi-billion pound deficit”.

The Conservatives do not want to hear from nurses. They want to try to distract, deflect and dodge away from the fact that their autumn statement has led to savage cuts to the health service. We will not let them forget that.

**Douglas Ross:** The only person deflecting here is Humza Yousaf, who cannot give honest answers. If everything to do with Michael Matheson was an honest mistake, why have there been so many dishonest statements about it?

While Michael Matheson’s story has unravelled, Humza Yousaf has been caught up in it. He was told by Michael Matheson last Tuesday what actually happened with the personal use, but the following day—last Wednesday—Humza Yousaf told the press and the public,

“For me, the matter is now closed.”

He continued that Michael Matheson had taken the decision

“given the honest mistake he has made in relation to the updating of the SIM card”.

He stuck to the same story that he knew was false.

This morning, the Deputy First Minister was further embroiled in the scandal. She was asked whether, on a point of principle, ministers in the Scottish Government always tell the Parliament and the public the truth. She refused to answer that question, so let me ask Humza Yousaf a question. If Government ministers need to be honest, why is Michael Matheson still in a job?

**The First Minister:** I will say, for the fourth time, that Michael Matheson admits to making mistakes in the handling of this issue. It is astonishing that the party of Boris Johnson—a man who Douglas Ross described as “honest”—can lecture anybody about standards in public life.

It is telling that, today, just before First Minister’s question time, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, said:

“In the interest of fairness to all, and to avoid prejudicing its investigation, the SPCB will, as of now, not comment on any matters that could have a bearing on this process or provide a running commentary.”

I think that it is right that we let the SPCB get on with the job that it has got to do, and Michael Matheson will get on with the job of ensuring that he protects the health service through what will be a difficult winter.

## Honesty and Integrity in Government

**2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Honesty and integrity on the part of members of both our Governments are essential for the restoration of faith in public life. This morning, on the BBC, the Deputy First Minister was asked twice whether ministers in the Scottish Government always tell Parliament and the public the truth. The answer should have been an unequivocal and simple yes. However, instead, the Deputy First Minister’s answer was that they only “aim to do so.” People have known for a long time that this Government has a problem with the truth, but is that now the official Government position?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** We should all be telling the truth in our interactions, whatever they are and wherever they occur. I will say, once again, what I said four times to Douglas Ross: Michael Matheson of course admits to mistakes in the handling of this entire episode, but, when he found out on the Thursday night of the week before last that his family had used the iPad, he took the immediate decision the next day to pay back the full amount, and, in a personal statement to the Parliament, he not only admitted the mistakes that he made but set out the reasons for those mistakes.

Michael Matheson has undoubtedly reflected on what has happened and, this week, he has got on with his job as health secretary of ensuring that he supports our national health service through what will be an incredibly difficult winter.

**Anas Sarwar:** I am pleased that the First Minister said that we should always tell the truth, because, in the short time that Humza Yousaf has been First Minister, the *Official Report* of this Parliament has had to be corrected three times because of wrong information that he has told this chamber. Once, the correction concerned the serious issue of the Covid inquiry and deleted WhatsApp messages, and another time it concerned a response to me in this chamber, when he gave an inaccurate answer about Scotland’s renewables. On the latter occasion, instead of immediately correcting the record, the First Minister took up hours of civil service time in order to try to spare his blushes. We know that, because Labour now has the full unredacted emails between the First Minister’s office and officials, which show that, when civil servants pointed out that he was wrong, he rejected their advice and his advisers had civil servants spend a month trying to cover up the mistake with a new line and by manufacturing statistics to fit his answers.

If those are the lengths that the First Minister will go to in order to hide the truth about a simple mistake, should anyone be surprised that he will

not sack Michael Matheson for knowingly misleading the public?

**The First Minister:** There is a reason why the people of Scotland time and again have elected us to be the Government of Scotland, and there is a reason why Anas Sarwar's party and the Conservative Party sit here in Opposition. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is far too much barracking and background noise as the First Minister is responding to the questions. Let us hear the First Minister.

**The First Minister:** Anas Sarwar was shouting that they have not elected me. I remind him that I have won elections to this Parliament and that, in fact, the seat that I represent was held by a Labour MSP until I won it, so I will not take lectures from Anas Sarwar about how to win an election.

Of course, it is incumbent on all of us—Government ministers and back benchers—to correct the record if any inaccurate statement has been made. I take that responsibility very seriously. However, on the issue that Anas Sarwar points to, when it comes to Scotland's energy potential, I will not apologise for the fact that we have an incredible renewables potential in Scotland—a potential that we will invest in and unleash for the workforce. While we will talk up our energy potential, I know that Anas Sarwar is interested only in talking it down.

**Anas Sarwar:** The people of Scotland have had only one opportunity to pass judgment on Humza Yousaf as First Minister, and that was the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, when there was a 20 per cent swing to Labour, and Labour got double the vote that the Scottish National Party got. Come the next general election, I will give the First Minister lessons on how to win an election.

These emails show a gross breach of the relationship between ministers and officials. Such behaviour has become the norm for the First Minister and the Government, but it is also a gross breach between ministers and the public when a minister knowingly misleads them. That is why Scottish Labour has long called for a clean up Holyrood act, to sweep away the culture of secrecy and cover-up that the SNP has allowed to thrive. After the Salmond inquiry, the ferries scandal, the failures of the Queen Elizabeth university hospital in Glasgow and the Royal hospital for children and young people in Edinburgh, and the deleted Covid WhatsApp messages, the Deputy First Minister is now saying that the Government only aims to tell the truth. Under the SNP, trust and faith in Scotland's institutions have been lost.

Is it not the case, as represented by the good people of Rutherglen and Hamilton West, that this Government is running out of road, is desperate to save its ministers' jobs and is willing to say anything in order to cling on to power?

**The First Minister:** That is clearly not the case, because we have been re-elected time and time and time and time again by the people of Scotland to run our public services in Scotland.

With regard to freedom of information, I am more than happy to provide a written response to Anas Sarwar about the improvements that we have made in responding to requests, because we take our obligations very seriously.

Anas Sarwar talks about trust and values. I am sorry, but I do not know what Sir Keir Starmer's values are when it comes to the United Kingdom Labour Party. Actually, I take that back—I do know what the values of Sir Keir Starmer are. The values of Sir Keir Starmer are to make sure that he retains the two-child limit, the bedroom tax and the rape clause—which, of course, Anas Sarwar disagreed with but now suddenly agrees with. We know what our values are, and nobody from London or party headquarters will tell us otherwise.

### Fossil Fuel Boilers (Replacement)

**3. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands (Con):** I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests: I own a house and am a private landlord.

To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government policy to require households to replace their fossil fuel boilers with heat pumps or other green energy systems in off-gas properties from 2025 and in on-gas areas from 2030 is still going ahead. (S6F-02557)

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** Our 2021 "Heat in Buildings Strategy" committed to introducing legislation to phase out

"the need to install new or replacement fossil fuel boilers".

We will consult very shortly on detailed proposals for a heat in buildings bill and we will ask everyone across Scotland to help us design and deliver that in the best way possible. That consultation will provide more detail on when and how the proposed changes will take effect.

Moving to clean heating systems will tackle climate change and reduce the exposure of homes and businesses to volatile fossil fuel prices. However, our 2021 strategy also set out the need for the United Kingdom Government to take urgent action. That includes rebalancing gas and electricity prices and ensuring that energy companies play their part in delivering that vital transition. Let me be clear that we simply cannot

meet our legal targets for tackling climate change if we do not end our use of gas boilers.

**Edward Mountain:** I thank the First Minister for that attempted answer, but I am not sure that I am any clearer about whether those targets will be met—it appears that we will have to wait.

I am sure that the First Minister will agree that it is vital that we reach net zero. In order to do so, we need to take the public with us. Does he therefore acknowledge, as some of his Scottish National Party MSPs do, that the unrealistic and poorly thought-out policies that have been set by his Green Party colleagues in the Government, including the one that I mentioned and the deposit return scheme, are doing more to damage efforts to reach net zero than they are to achieve it?

**The First Minister:** We come to the crux of the Conservatives' issue, which is the problem here. In the face of a climate crisis that, in the summer, engulfed many parts of our planet in flames, and in recent weeks and months has flooded many others at home and abroad, Conservative members tell us that they are not climate sceptics or climate change deniers, yet they oppose every single measure that the Government proposes on tackling climate change. Every time we introduce a sensible proposal that is necessary to meet our targets—and we all voted for those targets—it is the Conservatives who oppose it. They have to decide what side they are on. Are they on the side of trying to protect and save our planet or on the side of climate deniers and climate sceptics? Shamefully, they have chosen to make climate change and culture war election issues. The Tories are not just bad for Scotland or the UK; it seems that they are bad for our planet, too.

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** We all agree that there is an acute housing shortage in this country, yet Homes for Scotland, Cala Homes, Taylor Woodrow and Persimmon—all of which are major house builders—have repeatedly warned that the heat pump targets, especially for new builds, have had the effect of forcing up house-building costs so that fewer homes are being built in Scotland. If the First Minister wants to tackle the housing shortage, will he consign the Scottish Green Party's half-baked, pie-in-the-sky policy to the bin, where it belongs, alongside the deposit return scheme and highly protected marine areas? Will he recycle his Green ministers to the back benches, where they belong, and then meet industry and real experts—actual experts—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call the First Minister.

**Fergus Ewing:** —to work out a plan to solve the problem? *[Applause.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We will have a response from the First Minister.

**The First Minister:** Perhaps the applause coming from the Conservative benches might demonstrate to Fergus Ewing that his proposals are not the most sensible ones for him to suggest that we introduce.

I do not believe that we can simply put our heads in the sand and ignore the scale of the climate crisis that we face. It is true that the house construction sector faces challenges. We need only look at the sky-high, rocketing inflation that has been caused by the Conservative UK Government. Let us tackle that inflation and those high construction costs. Not only have we had targets for house building; we have made significant investment in the sector in the course of this parliamentary session and beyond. When it comes to ensuring that we replace gas boilers, we will not consign that policy to the dustbin of history at all. In fact, history will judge very poorly people who are climate sceptics or climate deniers in the face of the climate crisis that is harming our planet.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** While the UK Government sinks into another culture war, cheered on by climate change deniers and naysayers, here in Scotland we are realising our ambitions on heat transition. From next April, all new buildings will need to meet our new standards for clean heating, and our package of funding support for households is the most generous in the entire UK. Does the First Minister agree that our upcoming budget must drive forward pioneering work on tackling fuel poverty and empower households and businesses to make the move to clean heating?

**The First Minister:** I agree that, in the transition from direct-emissions to zero-emissions heating systems, the Government has a significant role to play through legislation and the budget. However, let us be equally clear that the transition to net zero will require private investment, too. Barely a Government in the world will be able to self-finance such a transition entirely on its own. We have seen the report of the green heat finance task force, and I am looking forward to acting on the good work that it has done.

Mark Ruskell is absolutely right that we must ensure that we take the public with us. That is why we have such generous grants for households available—they are the most generous such funding support in the UK. However, I go back to the point that I have made to everyone who has asked questions on this subject. In the face of the existential threat that is posed by the scale of the climate crisis, none of us can deny that action is needed and that we must accelerate that action as quickly as we can.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** On 14 September, the First Minister told the chamber that the climate change plan would be published before Christmas. Despite the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition's assertion that the delay was down to the UK Government, Chris Stark, the chief executive of the Climate Change Committee, said that there were only minor impacts on the Scottish plan and that there were potentially positive impacts from the UK-wide strategy to accelerate grid infrastructure, but that those were reasons to go faster. When will the climate change plan be published?

**The First Minister:** We will publish the plan—

**Members:** When?

**The First Minister:** —before the statutory target. Of course, we aimed to do it a year before the statutory target for publishing the plan. I say to Finlay Carson that the UK Government's rollback on its climate ambitions, which we have seen in its many U-turns, is not just bad for people who live in the rest of the UK but will clearly have an impact on Scotland. It is right that we look to explore in detail what those impacts are.

Frankly, it is shameful that an issue of existential crisis has been turned into an election issue—a culture war issue—by the Conservatives. Would it not be far better if we had an element of consensus on the fact that all of us have to pick up the pace and urgently accelerate the work of tackling the climate crisis? If we do not, our current generation and future generations simply will not forgive us.

#### **Energy Costs (Support for Households)**

4. **Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what support the Scottish Government is providing to households that are experiencing the pressure of increased energy bills, in light of Citizens Advice Scotland launching its worried this winter awareness campaign. (S6F-02572)

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** Energy bills remain significantly higher than they were two years ago, due to a volatile energy market and the United Kingdom Government's complete and utter failure to act. Campaigns such as Citizens Advice Scotland's worried this winter campaign, together with our current Home Energy Scotland campaign, which will drive vital referrals to HES's warmer homes programme, are extremely important.

I have consistently called on the UK Government to fully utilise the fiscal and policy levers that it has at its disposal to introduce measures such as a social tariff as a means of targeting support at people who need it the most. Unfortunately, it failed to do that in the Chancellor

of the Exchequer's autumn statement, thereby leaving people in businesses and communities who are already facing fuel poverty to suffer even more.

**Alasdair Allan:** The First Minister will be aware that energy costs are a particular worry in our island communities, which experience disproportionately high levels of fuel poverty. In yesterday's autumn statement, the chancellor rejected Scottish National Party calls for a £400 energy rebate. With energy prices set to rise again by 5 per cent, can the First Minister assure my constituents that the Scottish Government will continue to support people who are struggling with their energy bills while the UK Government so evidently ignores them?

**The First Minister:** I can reassure the member's constituents on that point. With energy bills set to rise again in January, it is unacceptable that the UK Government's autumn statement completely failed to deliver support for the people who need it the most. Through the islands cost crisis emergency fund, this Government has provided an additional £1 million this year to support islanders who are facing high fuel, food and energy costs in order to help them to meet the cost of living pressures.

While we continue to help people to make their homes warmer and easier to heat through our heat and energy efficiency support schemes, and to support people in fuel crisis through our fuel insecurity fund, unfortunately, the powers to make a real difference remain with the UK Government. Frankly, it is only when those powers are put in the control of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government through independence that we can unleash the full potential of our energy-rich nation.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Given the impact of fuel poverty on the 38 per cent of households that experience it and the 30 per cent in extreme fuel poverty, what lessons has the First Minister learned from the failure to deliver £133 million of investment to make people's homes energy efficient so that people can afford to heat them? What will happen for next year? How many homes will get that energy retrofitting in place?

**The First Minister:** We have taken action to help with fuel poverty. One of my first acts as First Minister was to ensure that we not just doubled but tripled the fuel insecurity fund. From 2 October, our relaunched warmer homes Scotland scheme has been providing more funding and help for households to receive a climate-friendly heating system. In 2022-23, we delivered measures in almost 5,500 households, which is a record number of installs through the warmer homes Scotland programme. As I said, we have already agreed to triple the fuel insecurity fund,

and we also have the child winter heating payment.

I am more than happy to ensure that the relevant minister or the cabinet secretary writes to Sarah Boyack with full details of how we are supporting those who are facing fuel poverty this winter. Again, instead of having to mitigate the failures of a Westminster Government, how much better would it be if we had the powers in our own hands?

### **General Practitioner Surgeries (Expanding Role)**

**5. Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what work is being done to support the expanding role of the general practitioner surgery. (S6F-02562)

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** Since 2018, we have significantly expanded the range of healthcare professionals supporting GP practices. Across Scotland, there are now more than 4,730 primary care multidisciplinary team members working in areas such as pharmacy, physiotherapy, phlebotomy and other disciplines. That means that the average practice now has access to more than five MDT members of the medical department team, alongside GPs and their practice teams. Through our £190 million primary care improvement fund, we are enabling those vital teams to free up practice time so that GPs can focus on more complex community care and reduce referrals to secondary care. That will ensure that more people get the right care in the right place at the right time.

**Sue Webber:** The expanding role of GP surgeries is critical in helping to prevent acute hospitals and accident and emergency departments from being overwhelmed. However, they cannot recruit and retain the various MDT members that the First Minister has referred to.

Colinton surgery in my region has contacted me to express its concern about the disparity in pay that is developing between GP surgery staff and national health service staff. There is now a two-tier NHS pay scale. Staff at the surgery are frustrated and demoralised. Pay for GP staff was uplifted less than it was for their NHS colleagues under the agenda for change. Will the First Minister find the investment to ensure that an uplift can be agreed to support those expanding GP practices that continue to struggle?

**The First Minister:** It is incredible that we are being asked to provide more funding for fairer pay when next year the United Kingdom Government will give us the paltry amount of just under £11 million in health consequential. That represents 0.06 per cent of our health budget in Scotland. Given the level of health consequentials that the

UK Government is giving us this year, it is remarkable that that is not recurring next year. We will concentrate on making sure that our NHS staff are the best paid anywhere in the UK.

On those who work in GP practices, Sue Webber will be well aware of the independent recommendations of the review body on doctors' and dentists' remuneration. We will continue to work with our GP practices across the country to ensure that we do everything that we can not only to recruit staff, which we have done, but to retain them. However, I say to Sue Webber that this Government has an excellent track record when it comes to fair pay in our NHS, in very stark contrast to the UK Government.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** GPs in Glasgow tell me that they are firefighting but are still being expected to do more with less. The mental health and wellbeing strategy is making more demands on GPs, but there is little detail on additional capacity or resource. Does the First Minister acknowledge the pressure that GP practices are under? Does he agree with those practices that the mental health strategy is simply not deliverable without further support?

**The First Minister:** We seek to support and invest in mental health services, and we have a good track record of doing so over the years. I am more than happy to ensure that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance engages with the Labour Party, and any political party, in relation to what more we can do in the upcoming budget.

Mental health has been and always will be an essential part of general practice, and mental health issues commonly feature in consultations. The mental health and wellbeing strategy, which was referenced by Paul Sweeney, acknowledges the need to increase mental health capacity in general practice.

I say to Paul Sweeney that we have a good track record of investment in the health service. This financial year, we have taken the amount to £19 billion. We are more than willing to work with members from all parties to see what more we can do. However, I say to Paul Sweeney that, in the face of significant financial constraints, those who are suggesting that we spend more money in particular areas will have to say where that money will come from.

### **United Kingdom Government Autumn Statement**

**6. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the autumn statement. (S6F-02554)

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** That is the first time that the autumn statement has been

raised in a question, and I am not surprised that Conservative members did not want to go near it, because they are as embarrassed as they absolutely should be about such a dismal autumn statement. It is deeply disappointing that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has failed to provide in it the funding that devolved Governments need. That makes the challenge of our budget next year even more severe.

Yet again, the Conservatives have completely failed to take action to support struggling households, businesses and public services, and missed the opportunity to invest in the services that people rely on and infrastructure that is vital to our economy. The increase in the minimum wage falls short of taking it to the real living wage and, despite the cut in national insurance, hard-working people are still seeing their living standards fall.

We are once again at the mercy of poor United Kingdom Government decisions that compound the pressure on our public finances and increase the misery that struggling households face. Would it not be far better if we did not have to mitigate and wait for autumn statements from an unelected UK Government, but instead had the powers in our own hands?

**Kenneth Gibson:** The First Minister will be aware that the £25 billion in election bribes that the autumn statement contains is less than half of the £55 billion in tax increases and spending cuts that the Tories imposed after the disastrous Truss mini-budget last year. Does he share my astonishment that, at a time of high inflation, the shockingly low extra £11 million for Scotland's national health service is barely a two thousandth of its annual budget, that capital budgets will be severely cut next year, which will impact on essential infrastructure, and that Scotland's public services will inevitably pay the price of yet another abysmal Tory budget?

**The First Minister:** I absolutely agree with Kenny Gibson. Yesterday's autumn statement provided the very worst-case scenario for Scotland's finances. At a time when we need investment in infrastructure to help to grow the economy and investment in public services that so many people rely on, instead we ended up with a cut in national insurance that will deprive those vital services of the much-needed funds that they require.

As a result of the UK Government's disastrous handling of the economy, projected growth is just 0.7 per cent next year, and inflation is still running at more than twice the Government's target. We needed an autumn statement that would grow the economy, invest in public services and protect the most vulnerable in our society; instead, we had proposed sanctions that will penalise those very people.

As we develop Scotland's budget next month, we will, of course, do so in line with our missions of equality, community and opportunity.

I remind members that, when the UK Government did its disastrous mini-budget, the Conservatives demanded that we copy them and follow suit. Thank goodness we ignored them. No wonder the people of Scotland ignore them.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The autumn statement told small businesses in England and Wales that they will benefit for another year from a 75 per cent discount on business rates. I ask again whether the Scottish Government will ensure that that is also the case for small businesses in Scotland.

**The First Minister:** We have, of course, a very good track record when it comes to supporting our businesses. There is the small business bonus scheme, of course, and we have a very generous business support package.

We will consider the consequentialities that come our way and what more we can do to support businesses, but I say to Liz Smith that the small relief that the UK Government is giving to businesses is miniscule in comparison with the damage that her party has inflicted on business through Brexit. The disaster of Brexit that is being felt by businesses throughout this country will not be undone by the paltry sums given by the chancellor yesterday.

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

#### **Israel and Hamas Agreement (Hostages)**

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** It is welcome that Israel and Hamas have reached an agreement to exchange 50 hostages held in Gaza for a four-day pause in fighting. However, much more work is needed to secure a ceasefire and prevent further loss of innocent lives. What is the Scottish Government's response to that development, given that the Parliament has expressed its view on a ceasefire?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** I commend members across the chamber for a very good debate on a ceasefire. I was pleased that the Parliament backed by a majority the call for a ceasefire.

I know that the four-day pause will be very welcome relief for those in Gaza who have suffered complete and utter devastation over the past six and a half weeks. I thank, in particular, those who have been involved in helping to negotiate the four-day pause—the United States, Egypt and, in particular, Qatar, which has been at the centre of the negotiations.



I think that all of us will welcome the four-day pause; however, we want it to be not a four-day pause but a permanent ceasefire. I urge the UK Government to use whatever influence it has, alongside the international community, to ensure that, after four days, the bombing of innocent men, women and children does not simply resume but we actually have peace. Not only that, but they must all strive towards a long-term peace, which must be predicated on a two-state solution.

### **National Health Service Dentistry**

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** Oldmeldrum dental practice and Laws Dental in Carnoustie have told patients that they have no choice but to ditch NHS treatment because of increasing costs and the recent changes that have been enacted by the Scottish National Party-Green Government. Far from the Government protecting dental treatment for NHS patients, we are seeing an exodus of dentists from the NHS because of the Government's actions. Will the First Minister commit to finding a better working structure for dentistry to ensure its long-term sustainability?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** We have invested in NHS dental services, and just recently we agreed some additional NHS dental reforms. The purpose of those reforms—the exact point—is to incentivise NHS dentistry. That has led to some increased fees for dentists, and I am happy to ensure that the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care writes to Tess White with the full details of that. In addition, it is fair to say that NHS registration is significantly higher in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom, with more than 95 per cent of our population registered with an NHS dentist.

However, that is not to take away from the important points that Tess White raises. We know that, on the back of the pandemic, there have been, and continue to be, challenges for our dental sector across Scotland and the UK, and I will ensure that the health secretary writes in detail to Tess White about what we are doing to support NHS dentistry.

### **University of Aberdeen (Languages)**

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Constituents who work in modern languages at the University of Aberdeen have contacted me about the university management's plans to withdraw honours degrees in languages, cultures and societies. Given the Scottish Government's commitment to improving language learning in schools and the existing shortage of language teachers in the North East Scotland region, does the First Minister agree that Scotland

cannot afford Aberdeen losing those languages degrees?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** I agree with much of what Mercedes Villalba says. Learning an additional language is a great skill for any person to have, and the news that she gives to the Parliament is of concern. It is, of course, ultimately a matter for the university, and it is appropriate that it makes those decisions. I will ensure, however, that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills—or, indeed, the Minister for Further and Higher Education—engages with Mercedes Villalba to see what support we are able to offer.

### **Grangemouth (Petroineos Announcement)**

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** Workers in Grangemouth, in my constituency, are fearful for the future after the announcement by Petroineos this week that it is moving from being a refinery to being an import facility. Although I will ask an urgent question later today, will the First Minister take this chance to confirm that he will do all in his power to protect that vital industrial asset and workers' jobs?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** Yes—I give that absolute confirmation. I thank Michelle Thomson for raising the issue. As she said, there will be an urgent question later this afternoon.

Neil Gray and I both met with Petroineos earlier this morning. Neil Gray then went on to meet with the trade unions as well, and I believe that he has offered a briefing for all MSPs tomorrow. We absolutely will engage with the owners of Grangemouth—who will engage, as we have been doing, with trade unions—and with the UK Government, and we will do everything that we possibly can to secure a sustainable future for Grangemouth refinery.

In my conversations with Petroineos, it was very clear that a whole range of factors have to be addressed. Some of those are domestic, but many of them are undoubtedly global. I give Michelle Thomson an absolute assurance that we will work with everybody to ensure that there is a sustainable future for Grangemouth.

### **Scottish Budget (Agriculture and Rural Communities)**

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** On Tuesday, Shona Robison, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance, failed to guarantee to farmers that £28 million of ring-fenced funding will be returned to the Scottish agricultural budget. Furthermore, £45 million is being cut from the rural budget. Why is the First Minister abandoning rural communities and farmers?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** That is astonishing from the party of Brexit—talking about abandoning our farmers. It is the party that has inflicted the biggest and most dangerous self-harm that our society and economy has ever seen—and for what? I do not think that Rachael Hamilton and the Conservatives have an ounce of credibility when it comes to standing up for our farmers.

We will continue to invest in our agricultural community and in our farmers. We will ensure that they do not have to suffer any more of the pain that has been inflicted on them by the Conservatives' hard Brexit.

### Unpaid Carers (Respite)

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** Today is carers rights day, when we should all express our appreciation for what unpaid carers do. The state of caring report that has been published today makes for harrowing reading. In particular, 51 per cent of carers who are struggling financially have not had a break. Why was the First Minister's carers strategy of last year so thin on respite commitments? Does he agree with calls, including those from Labour members, for at least two weeks of respite to support carers who are in such need?

**The First Minister (Humza Yousaf):** I am more than happy to look into the suggestion that Paul O'Kane makes. I start exactly where he did, by thanking all our carers for the incredible work that they do. Every carer I meet rightly challenges the Government by saying that they do not need just warm words—they need to see action. That is why the Government has acted, and I am more than happy for the cabinet secretary to write to Paul O'Kane, setting out in detail the measures that we have taken and will take to support carers now and into the future. We will consider his suggestion on respite.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes First Minister's question time. There will be a pause to allow members to change seats.

12:46

*Meeting suspended.*

12:47

*On resuming—*

## Promise Oversight Board Report

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-11227, in the name of Martin Whitfield, on keeping the Promise—oversight board report. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that on 16 March 2021 the Scottish Parliament committed to delivering what it considers a "revolution in children's rights", by unanimously passing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill; acknowledges *The Promise Oversight Board Report Two*, which was published in June 2023; notes that the report examines three thematic areas, including education, brothers and sisters and homelessness; further notes the Oversight Board's concern that Keeping the Promise is not being fully considered and implemented across all relevant policy areas; notes the findings of the report, which highlight the challenging financial landscape facing local authorities and the fears that resources focus more on supporting existing services, rather than upscaling to meet the aims of The Promise; further notes the request in the report for greater evidence that funding is not being used to simply mitigate cuts, and for a strategic investment plan to deliver the required change so that at least 5% of all community-based health and social care spend will be on preventative whole-family support measures by 2030; notes the view that all care experienced children and young people must have a range of individual in-school relationships that they can trust and rely on, with school staff being trauma-informed and using nurture practices, and school moves avoided; further notes the view, according to the report, that there must be more data transparency on informal exclusions, as well as on the use of limited timetables and attendance data specifically for care experienced young people, and that reduced timetables must be reviewed regularly and must not become another form of exclusion, with care experienced young people being supported in attending and attaining all subjects, at all levels; notes the belief that, where living with their family is not possible, children must stay with their brothers and sisters, where it is safe to do so, so that they belong to a loving home; understands that care experienced people have more than double the chance of experiencing homelessness, usually before their 30th birthday; notes the view that more must be done so that there are housing pathways for care experienced young people, including restarting the prevention pathway for care leavers; further notes that, according to the report, "care experienced" is not defined in statute and that this is expected to be rectified in the Scottish Government's forthcoming The Promise Bill; notes the view that it is important to recognise all types of care experience and to understand what it means for the individual person and their family so that their experiences are not discounted, and further notes the belief that Keeping the Promise is non-negotiable and that any delay would not keep the promise made to children, families and the care experienced community, including in the South Scotland region.

12:48

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** As always, it is a great pleasure to bring a members' business debate to the chamber. I thank the members from across the Parliament who supported the motion and the members who have found time to speak.

The debate comes at a time when we are considering young people. It was international students day on 17 November, and the Monday just gone was world children's day. Last Friday, Children in Need 2023 took place, which was described as a SPOTacular night. It showed the generosity of people across the United Kingdom in helping children all over the UK to thrive and be the best that they can be. We have also heard that today is carers rights day.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child talks about rights to an education, to play, to food, to health, to housing, to respect for privacy, to freedom from violence and abuse, and to family life. We encompass all that in the promise that was made here in Scotland—Scotland's Promise to care-experienced children and young people that they will grow up loved, safe and respected. In those three simple words, we encompass a convention that is recognised around the world. We recognise the days that celebrate young people, people who support them, their families and their wider communities. Young people have the right to grow up to be loved, safe and respected.

I make no apologies for the many words that went into the motion, which allows the Parliament to consider the work of the Promise oversight board—a board of experts who have just one role: to hold Scotland to account on whether it is doing enough to keep the Promise.

More than three years have passed since the Promise was first made—to keep it by 2030. In order to do that, we had to move Scotland a great distance from the independent care review all the way through to the implementation of the Promise. Today's motion addresses the second report from the oversight board. "The Promise Oversight Board Report Two" rightly points out the huge amount of work that has already been achieved and the massive efforts that have been put in by individuals, organisations, the third sector, charities, local authorities, the education establishment, schools and the Scottish Government.

That comes with a very blunt proviso, however: that we can keep the Promise by 2030, but achieving the original aims in "Plan 21-24" is not realistic by next year. We need to pay great attention to that. We often hear people say that we set high targets and work hard to achieve them,

and that it is sort of all right if we do not make it, because we will get there. We hear people talk about the great steps that have been taken to arrive at something. For people to grow up loved, safe and respected, we need to do more—the "we" is organisations, local authorities, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. Indeed, the Scottish Government probably has the key role in a complex jigsaw. Without the Scottish Government being able to achieve what it needs to do, it will be almost impossible for those who are working so hard, day in, day out, to make the Promise a reality, not just from 2030 but in relation to the experiences that our care-experienced children have, day in, day out.

The report identifies three priority areas: education, brothers and sisters—siblings—and homelessness. The Parliament held a debate yesterday about homelessness. When we talk about care-experienced children, we are talking about a small subset of a greater set, but the concept that they could be rendered homeless is a frightening thought. I go back to the UNCRC and the right to housing.

On the subject of brothers and sisters, it almost seems strange that it took so long to understand the significance of keeping siblings together—the significance for their own development, the significance for their siblings' development and the significance of being together in empowering them to face challenges that they perhaps cannot face otherwise. We promised that it would happen, but we need much faster and stronger joined-up thinking to allow it to happen.

Going into care is a challenging experience at the best of times. It frequently comes after events that, thankfully, most people will never experience, but they will stay with the young people for the rest of their lives. If that experience is to stay with them, it should stay with them in a shape where they have been supported and cared for. That begins with a child being with their brother or sister—perhaps a younger brother or sister you sometimes just want to put your arm around, telling them "It's all right," even if you perhaps do not believe it yourself. It could be a brother or sister to look up to when they are older, and they are there to provide a bit of certainty in life.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** At the Education, Children and Young People Committee meeting yesterday, we heard powerful evidence from Who Cares? Scotland regarding the importance of siblings being kept together, whether in residential care or in foster care. We heard about the conflict relating to the reducing numbers in residential care, which sometimes prevents that. Could the member reflect on that?

**Martin Whitfield:** I am very grateful for that intervention and will reflect on it by saying that we

want our young people to be loved, safe and respected—the three words of the Promise that the Parliament made in this chamber to care-experienced children in Scotland.

The third area that the report draws attention to is education. Education has had enormous challenges as a result of Covid. As an adult with some knowledge and experience of education, I look at education and see a challenging environment. Nevertheless, for many care-experienced children, education can be a place of certainty and safety. They can find an adult there they can talk to, not necessarily about the excitement of history, politics or the spelling test on Friday, but perhaps about how they are feeling. It is a big ask to assure Scotland that the education system that our care-experienced children are in—that all of our young people are in—is fit for purpose to provide that. It is a hard ask, but it is a justifiable ask, because we want our children to grow up loved, safe and respected.

I make no bones about the fact that I am aiming my words at the Scottish Government, because that is one of the purposes of the debate. One of the calls contained in the report is for the Scottish Government to set out a clear set of principles—the outcomes and milestones that will guarantee the Promise. The report calls for a strategic investment plan to deliver the required change, and there is a demand for proper sequencing, strategic planning and resourcing.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill will, I hope, come back to the chamber and find its rightful place on our statute book, but one of the asks from those involved in it, and one of the things that will facilitate its development, speaks to the very heart of the Promise, which is that we, in this Parliament, and the Scottish Government must start legislating in a way that brings human rights and our young people's rights into every area of law, so that, should those rights be needed, they can be enforced. That is the route. If we can achieve for care-experienced children the simple demand to be loved, safe and respected, we can achieve it for all our young people.

12:57

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I thank Martin Whitfield for bringing this important debate to the chamber and for his commitment to improving the lives of young people and children.

About one in every 100 children in Scotland goes into care before their first birthday, and children living in the 10 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland are 20 times more likely to become care experienced than those in the 10 per

cent least deprived areas. I could fill my four-minute slot with a barrage of statistics about outcomes for care-experienced young people—all of them important but, frankly, none of them good. Instead, I will focus on the Scottish Government's commitment to improving the lives of young people through the Promise and on addressing the points in Martin Whitfield's motion.

As Martin Whitfield said, the Promise oversight board's second report highlights a number of areas that are crucial to the wellbeing of care-experienced children, including sibling contact, homelessness and education. There is so much in the report that it is impossible to cover everything in a short speech. On sibling contact, as a member of the Criminal Justice Committee in this session and of the Justice Committee in the previous one, I had an amendment accepted to the Children (Scotland) Bill to ensure that local authorities must take steps to promote direct contact between a looked-after child and their siblings, where appropriate—it is important to say "where appropriate". I have seen how important sibling contact is to the welfare of children through friends of mine who adopted a little boy aged 18 months, and his sister one year later. Those children now have their sibling bond to nurture them as they grow up. I cannot stress how important that attachment, nurture and security is.

Care-experienced adults are twice as likely to have experienced homelessness, usually before their 30th birthday. That is shocking. We must do better and improve the pathways and outcomes for care-experienced people, which is exactly why the Promise was set up.

Education is the building block that is needed for every young person, but particularly for care-experienced young people, who face unique challenges. A central aim of the Promise is that they are supported in attending and attaining all subjects, and are encouraged to enter higher education. Only yesterday, I saw a billboard advertising job vacancies for care-experienced people. That is a huge sign of progress.

According to the report, the term "care experienced" is not defined in statute. I am pleased that that is expected to be rectified in the Scottish Government's forthcoming Promise bill. I am sure that the minister can expand on that. Legislation can be a force for good, as I believe that bill will be.

Last week, in the Parliament, I met an inspiring group of young people—the changemakers, who are supported by Children 1st, which is the driving force behind the bairns' hoose and supports children in Scotland holistically and practically every day. They do an amazing job, and my meeting with them filled me with hope and optimism. I understand that Children 1st is now

working with parents to produce a film to spread the word about its peer research and help professionals to keep the Promise. Sharing and working together is always the best way forward.

As Martin Whitfield's motion says,

"Keeping the Promise is non-negotiable",

and I am sure that the minister will confirm that when summing up. We must build on what we have started, without further delay. I urge everyone to believe that the Scottish Government is committed to getting it right for every child, whatever their background or life experience. We have much to do, and I accept that perhaps the pace could and should be a little faster, but our commitment is strong, and we will fulfil our Promise to Scotland's disadvantaged young people.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Roz McCall joins us remotely.

13:01

**Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank Martin Whitfield for bringing the debate to the chamber.

Given my past contributions, it is no secret that I fully support the aims of the Promise and its goal to support people with care experience in Scottish society. When the Promise was made, the former First Minister described it as one of the most important moments in her time as First Minister, and the Scottish Government said that it was committed to implementing the recommendations within a decade. I applaud that.

However, if, three years on and with several new review papers, we are still saying that someone's support depends on where they live, on whom they ask and on whether they had adequate support or encouragement, we are, unfortunately, not on track to achieve the Promise. Given that many independent organisations, including The Promise Scotland, state that the issues that the independent care review was supposed to address are getting worse, we are not on course to achieve the Promise. Given that the number of foster carers that are provided is decreasing and the number of spaces that are required is increasing, we are not on course to achieve the Promise. Given that the Promise oversight board's report of June 2023 highlights the specific areas of concern that need addressing immediately as education, brothers and sisters and homelessness, and until those fundamental basics to provide care-experienced children with the help they need for a full and positive life are met, we are, unfortunately, not on course to achieve the Promise.

Recognising the cold, hard facts is the only way that we can get the Promise back on track. First, we need a comprehensive definition of "care experienced" that is recognised in statute. The importance of recognising all types of care experience is paramount, and that definition must encompass them all.

This week is adoption week Scotland, the focus of which is to listen to and support all people who have experience of adoption. I want to echo and widen that sentiment in the debate. Experience of care is so much more than being care experienced, and we cannot put the proper support measures in place until we define what we are supporting. I will focus on the three areas of concern that were highlighted by the Promise oversight board.

The first of those is education. Helping teaching staff and support staff to identify trauma-based behaviour as early as possible best serves the needs of our care-experienced children in the classroom, through primary and high school and on to apprenticeships, colleges and universities. Providing support and the relevant coping mechanisms will help care-experienced young people with relationships with their peers, help them study, and give them the best start, support and recognition to thrive in school and a capacity to participate in activities and move on to positive destinations. That must be addressed immediately.

The second point is removal from siblings. Children are being fostered and adopted in separate homes from their siblings, which creates more trauma and reinforces the trauma that is already present. The pain of separation is difficult and complicated for a child to voice.

Last week, I attended an event for the 100th anniversary of Scottish Adoption and Fostering, and I heard from a young lady who had been placed with a loving family but was separated from her biological sister. It was only with the perseverance of her foster parents that they were able to keep up regular contact. Her story is one of thousands, and children in such situations face repeated trauma, so we must address that immediately.

Homelessness in care-experienced adults is on the rise, with evidence showing that care-experienced people have more than double the chance of experiencing homelessness before their 30th birthday than those who are not care experienced do. Difficulties, barriers and poverty when children leave their care environments have a devastating effect, and unfortunately that must also be immediately addressed.

The oversight board's concern is that we may not be on course to achieve the Promise. The

report's request for greater evidence of transparent funding usage is not only reasonable, but essential. It is crucial that resources are strategically invested to meet the aims of the Promise, and it must happen without further delay.

Keeping the Promise is non-negotiable. Any delay will be a betrayal of the commitment that we made to Scotland's children, families and care-experienced community.

13:05

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank my friend Martin Whitfield for the motion and for securing the time in the chamber. As he stated, it is great that in March 2021, there was the passing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill in the Scottish Parliament. That was definitely a significant moment in the Parliament's history, and we need to move on it.

The Promise came from that. It was a much-hailed Government commitment. It was championed by the former First Minister, and has continued commitment from the current First Minister. The Promise commits that by 2030 all of Scotland's children and young people will grow up loved, safe and respected.

It is one of the most important parts of the Scottish Government's commitment to Scotland and its young people. The desire to make it a reality is extremely high across the chamber. It is a noble goal, and one that we must all strive towards.

The reality is, sadly, that the Promise oversight board does not believe that the current pace of change means that the original aims of "Plan 21-24" are realistic by next year—as we have heard.

The Promise oversight board is independent of the Promise. It is made up of care-experienced people, whose job is to scrutinise whether the Promise is being kept. With its second report, which was published in June, it has been brave enough to tell us that the Promise is not being kept. It has told us that "Plan 21-24" will fail, and that the recommendations in the plan will not be met. It feels that Scotland is going to fail those with care experience at the first hurdle of the Promise. That is not good enough, and we must make moves to ensure that it what is in the plan happens.

Scottish Labour wants to commit to supporting the Government to ensure that the Promise is fully implemented in the best and most timely manner possible. The overview board report clearly states that keeping the Promise is not negotiable. It said:

"Scotland cannot afford to wait; our children and young people are relying on us. Over the next year we expect to

see explicit leadership and drive from the Scottish Government."

It is fair to say that there is a lack of leadership and, for the care community in particular, the slow pace of progress causes some hurt and upset.

I was speaking to young people in the care community, and they asked me to ask the minister whether she feels that failure is being rewarded. They also asked me to ask where the accountability is for keeping the Promise. The Government funds The Promise Scotland—a private limited company—with millions of pounds-worth of public money every year. Those young people would also like to know whether the same person who wrote the plan will be responsible for setting the next stage of the plan.

Those young people asked me to ask about that because they have been advised that the way in which the plan will be scrutinised may be changed. There was to be a phased approach to scrutinising the plan, but now there will be a change. The plan was to run from 2024 to 2027 and then from 2027 to 2030, but now there is a suggestion that it will just run for the next six years, so there is a worry about accountability.

I will also mention family support. As Martin Whitfield and others said, the Promise says that Scotland must support families to stay together. There is a concern that there is a variety of approaches across Scotland to delivering the whole family wellbeing fund and that the fund is not bringing about the transformative change that was intended. The reality is that local authorities are being starved of cash by the Government. Is the minister highlighting that? We want to know that the fund is not being used to mitigate problems within local authorities.

We are running out of time, so I will close. I hope that we can debate this subject again during Government time, because a number of points should be discussed.

13:10

**The Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise (Natalie Don):** I thank members for the opportunity to close the debate and thank all members who have made considered contributions.

As has been noted, it is our ambition for all children to grow up loved, safe and respected and to reach their full potential. It is absolutely essential that we turn that ambition into a reality for all care-experienced children and young people across Scotland. It is reassuring to hear members come together in support of the ambition set out by the Promise. Although the Government absolutely must and will lead from the front, we will only achieve success if we work together to

improve our policies, change how we deliver services and recognise, respect and respond to the needs of our care-experienced population. By working together, we can make transformational and sustainable change happen.

Important progress is being made. The First Minister and I met Fiona Duncan on 7 November and were heartened to hear that she believes that Scotland is on track to keep the Promise by 2030. Although that is encouraging, I absolutely understand that the pace must be continued and, in key areas, accelerated if we are to maintain that positive direction of travel.

It is, of course, not for us to judge success. It is imperative that the children, young people and adults who have experience of the care system tell us how it is for them and where we must continue improving, and I will listen to those voices. In that regard, I welcome the continued scrutiny that the Promise oversight board provides, not only of the Scottish Government but of all the organisations that share responsibility. I also welcome the engagement of our representative partners, including Who Cares? Scotland, who regularly help us to listen to the voices that matter.

This week, the First Minister wrote to Fiona Duncan to ask her to provide further detail about the areas in “Plan 21-24” where progress is required and, in so doing, to set out a proposed timeline and her ambitions for the development of “Plan 24-30”, which is something that I know Carol Mochan is very interested in. That information will help us to make connections and drive forward progress. It will help us to focus on what is next, who must deliver and by when, and I encourage all members to get behind that work.

During the eight months in which I have had the honour of holding this position, I have had the pleasure of visiting a range of projects and seeing the truly excellent progress that is underway. The virtual school in North Lanarkshire has seen a dramatic reduction in exclusions. I was truly heartened to see the efforts being made by Siblings Reunited in Fife to unite siblings, an extremely important matter that was raised by Rona Mackay, Martin Whitfield and Roz McCall. I have visited kinship carers in Airdrie and, just yesterday, I visited Aberlour’s perinatal support service in Falkirk. Those are just a few of the visits that I have made.

Members will no doubt know of other work that is under way in their own constituencies. What matters is how we move from having examples of practice to established practice. That point was echoed by those who attended the Education, Children and Young People Committee meeting yesterday. We must work together to share our learning and ensure that what works can be

spread across Scotland, so that the whole care-experienced community will benefit.

I will highlight some key areas of progress. Members will be aware that the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill is currently going through Parliament and is a key vehicle for the legislative change that is necessary for Scotland to keep the Promise. If the bill is passed, it will represent the first step in a process to reform the children’s hearings system that will include consultation on the changes proposed in the recent review by Sheriff David Mackie. As I have said before, the Scottish Government’s response to that report will be published by the end of this calendar year.

I say to members that I could list many examples of work that is under way, including the Scottish recommended allowance for foster and kinship care, which will benefit over 9,000 families, helping them to provide the standard of living and the wellbeing that the children and young people in their care deserve; and the £2,000 care leaver payment to support our young people as they move on from care, which was put to consultation earlier this month. However, I do not raise those points to be combative. I have absolutely no right to do that. Instead, I want them to help to demonstrate the seriousness with which I and this Government take the task that has been set. We absolutely must deliver the change that is required, and we will.

**Martin Whitfield:** It is right that the minister has not raised those points as successes in their own right just to celebrate them, but they are fine examples of how we are moving from where we are now towards keeping the Promise by 2030. We have legislation going through that is clearly too far advanced for it to encompass the request from the third sector that we legislate to encompass the UNCRC, but we have a fine opportunity in the Promise bill that will be coming forward. Can the minister give an assurance that that will be drafted to encompass the UNCRC?

**Natalie Don:** As Mr Whitfield will be aware, the Promise bill will be introduced by the end of the current parliamentary session, and we will take all considerations on board.

The Promise oversight board recently wrote to the Minister for Housing and the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport in relation to homelessness and suicide prevention. We really appreciate the board’s feedback on those issues and the continued oversight, and I understand that the two ministers are responding respectfully to that.

Before coming to a conclusion, I pick up on the point that Rona Mackay raised about the definition of “care experienced”. We will undertake a

consultation on the definition in spring 2024 to inform the Promise bill, which could be used to legislate to introduce a universal and inclusive definition.

I acknowledge the number of children and young people who are in care in Scotland. It is falling, which is positive news. It is up to all of us to continue our work to ensure that, where it is safe for them to do so, children and young people will stay with their families and that those families can access the support that they need at the right time and in the right way. For our young people who are transitioning out of care, we have a package of support available to help them into adulthood. For our care-experienced adults, we acknowledge across our services that being care experienced is lifelong.

I emphasise again that I will continue to listen to the voices of our care-experienced community in order to continue to progress change and ensure that we are getting it right. I thank Mr Whitfield for bringing this discussion to the chamber. I look forward to the opportunity to continue to work with him and, of course, all members as we continue our journey to deliver the change that is required.

13:18

*Meeting suspended.*

14:15

*On resuming—*

## **Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body question time. I recommend brief questions and responses, wherever possible. Anyone looking to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

### **Fairtrade Products**

1. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body under what circumstances Fairtrade products are used in catering in the Scottish Parliament. (S6O-02785)

**Claire Baker (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body):** It is incumbent on our catering services provider, Sodexo, to source and use Fairtrade products whenever possible as part of the delivery of the catering service in the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament serves a wide range of Fairtrade products, including fresh fruit, coffee, hot chocolate and a range of tea and fruit and herbal teas.

**Colin Smyth:** A member of the cross-party group on fair trade raised with me, in my capacity as convener of the group, that non-Fairtrade coffee was being served at a recent parliamentary reception. I am keen to know on what occasions and why the decision would be taken to serve a non-Fairtrade product when a Fairtrade option was available, which is the norm in the Parliament. Will the SPCB consider publishing the level of Fairtrade spend in the Parliament?

**Claire Baker:** I thank the member for raising that issue. Fairtrade tea, coffee and sugar sachets are served where possible. I know that, recently, due to a supply chain issue, an alternative had to be sourced.

The team will continue to work with the supplier to ensure that the sachet options are Fairtrade, which should be standard. The coffee that is served in flasks is always Fairtrade.

We can look at disaggregating the spend. I think that we spend around £25,000 on Fairtrade products, which is about 5 per cent of our total spend at the moment. I can write to the member with a fuller response.



### Exhibition Spaces

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

To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will consider having a third exhibition area, in light of there being considerable demand for such spaces. (S6O-02784)

**Christine Grahame (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body):** Apart from the two existing spaces, there are currently no other suitable spaces in the busy parliamentary campus or available resources to support an additional member-sponsored exhibition space. However, the SPCB is sympathetic to the issue and we are happy to explore it as part of future work on the use of the building.

Although there is a lot of demand for member-sponsored exhibitions, most can be accommodated within the current arrangements. When that is not possible, parliamentary officials will always seek to offer an alternative date to accommodate the exhibition or, where appropriate, offer organisers a member-sponsored event instead.

**John Mason:** I have to slightly disagree with the member and suggest that there are other places where we could have an exhibition. Near the pass office, there is quite a lot of space in the garden lobby. I would be happy to discuss other options with her because, just the other night, we were at the Scottish Gypsy/Traveller community cross-party group, which has been able to book a space, but not until next October.

**Christine Grahame:** It is not simply a matter of space; it is to do with resources, the equipment that is required, the staffing and so on.

As I said, the SPCB is sympathetic to the issue, and we will see whether another space can be found as we explore future work on the use of the building, especially as the use of the building has changed following the Covid pandemic.

### Staff Cost Provision Uprating

3. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body how the staff cost provision uprating for 2024-25 will be calculated. (S6O-02795)

**Jackson Carlaw (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body):** We know that Christmas is coming, because this question always precedes it. I can say to Jackie Baillie that, as part of the annual budget cycle, the SPCB considers the indexation of all provisions, including staff cost provision. The index to be applied is a matter for SPCB judgment rather than automatic application, and it will, of course, be confirmed when the SPCB submits its budget for consideration to the Finance

and Public Administration Committee in the coming weeks.

**Jackie Baillie:** And here was me thinking that Jackson Carlaw was auditioning to be Santa, but I fear that he might disappoint me. I point out to him that the SPCB has used a figure of 6.7 per cent for average weekly earnings and 6.2 per cent for the annual survey for hours and earnings. However, data published last week shows that the annualised increase in AWE from October to September this year was, in fact, 7.5 per cent. I encourage Jackson Carlaw and the SPCB to use the most recent figure to uprate the staff cost provision to ensure that staff receive the uplift that they deserve, and that he gets the title of the best Santa ever.

**Jackson Carlaw:** Well, if I am Santa, Jackie Baillie can be one of the elves, and I am happy to support her application in that regard.

I take note of what Jackie Baillie says. The corporate body considers the various indices at a point in time. I am not sure that I recognise the figure that she has quoted, but we applied AWE to the staff cost provision last year, and we thought that that was an admirable decision.

### Staff Recruitment

#### 4. **Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):**

To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what difficulties there are, if any, in recruiting staff for jobs in the Scottish Parliament. (S6O-02781)

**Jackson Carlaw (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body):** The corporate body is proud of its ability to attract and retain talented staff from a wide range of backgrounds, despite on-going challenges, with which we are all familiar, in the recruitment market, and with vacancies for some roles outstripping the number of people who are actively looking for work.

The corporate body continues to be successful in attracting people with the right skills and experience for our roles. The SPCB takes a strategic approach to recruitment. We assess the market constantly, including benchmarking salaries, and we engage with candidates at all stages of the recruitment process to learn about how we can improve. Our competitive salaries and benefits, including flexible and hybrid working arrangements, are attractive for jobseekers, which means that we continue to be successful in attracting high-quality candidates for our vacancies.

**Kevin Stewart:** I thank all the hard-working staff who keep the place going and look after us so well.

It seems that, in recent times, there have been a number of vacancies in security and catering in

particular. What is the corporate body doing to ensure that we have good—the best—pay and conditions in place for our staff? Have shift pattern changes had an impact on recruiting and retaining staff?

**Jackson Carlaw:** The corporate body puts fair work at the centre of its approach to employment, and staff survey results show that our staff consistently respond positively regarding the employment package that we offer. We take a number of approaches to ensure that that is the case. Salaries are regularly benchmarked with comparator employers to ensure that they are fair and competitive and attract candidates with the right skills and experience. We also have a no compulsory redundancy guarantee in place until the end of this parliamentary session, which gives staff security and reflects the organisational values of inclusiveness and respect by ensuring that SPCB staff feel safe to be themselves at work.

I am not aware that shift working has created any particular difficulty. The one area in which we have found an exception to our ability to recruit has been in the appointment of senior software developers. However, we have reviewed our recruitment approach for those particular vacancies and are confident that we are well placed to advertise the roles again, with the expectation that we will be successful this time.

#### **Crèche (Restriction on Hours)**

**5. Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will provide an update on its work to ensure that the crèche facility can offer more than four hours per week per child. (S6O-02747)

**Claire Baker (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body):** We are working hard to find a solution. The main reason for the current four hours per week restriction is the lack of access to an adequate outdoor space. The facilities management office met the Care Inspectorate and our crèche provider on Tuesday 7 November to look at options for creating a new outdoor space that would allow the current restrictions to be eased. An initial feasibility report has been drafted by our property services consultant, and outline design work is now under way. Once the design work has been completed, further work will take place in relation to timescales, budget and liaison with the Care Inspectorate.

**Kate Forbes:** Of course, the facility has not changed; only the limits that have been imposed on it have changed.

Last term, at least four MSPs who were also mothers stepped down from Parliament, with some citing the impossibility of balancing childcare

and political office. That figure is guaranteed to increase unless the ridiculous and unnecessary limit of four hours per week per child is resolved. If it is not resolved, that will, ultimately, mean less representation in Parliament of working parents in Scotland. Does the SPCB understand the urgency of the matter and will it work tirelessly to resolve it?

**Claire Baker:** I appreciate how challenging it can be to combine the role of an MSP with caring responsibilities. I was a user of the crèche when I was first elected and my daughter was one year old, so I recognise how important it is for MSPs to get that level of support.

We are working hard to find a solution, in the first instance, to get us back up to the four hours a day provision that we had before, but it is the Care Inspectorate that is putting those restrictions on us.

With regard to our longer-term ambition, we are having discussions with the Scottish Government that might enable us to use its nursery. As I said, we have set out a design consultancy process and we will look at all the options that are available to us.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I support the efforts that Kate Forbes and Meghan Gallacher are making to have the hours of the crèche facility extended. However, I have grave concerns, which I hope that Claire Baker can address, about security in relation to children in this building. I was baffled, and greatly concerned, that a member of the SPCB, Maggie Chapman, encouraged, endorsed and applauded an illegal protest on the roof of this very building. That is totally unsatisfactory from a member of the SPCB. Can she give me assurances in that regard?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I do not think that that is relevant to the original question. We will move on to question 6.

#### **Michael Matheson (Use of Parliamentary Device Abroad)**

**6. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body when SPCB staff were notified by Michael Matheson of his holiday to Morocco and intention to take a parliamentary device abroad. (S6O-02796)

**Claire Baker (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body):** Mr Matheson did not notify the Parliament's information technology team about his intention to take his device abroad. As the member himself has confirmed to the chamber, he contacted the Parliament's IT team on 28 December, from Morocco, seeking assistance with a parliamentary device.

**Edward Mountain:** Obviously, some arrangement has been made to allow Michael Matheson to pay only £3,000 from his office expenses to offset the £11,000 bill. Will the member confirm when Michael Matheson first offered to pay a contribution, who set the amount and on what basis it was set?

**Claire Baker:** As the member will know, the SPCB has today issued a statement that was circulated to all members of the Scottish Parliament. This morning, the corporate body determined that it would undertake an investigation in line with its duties under the MSP code of conduct.

The investigation will consider whether the claims for £11,000 of public money, incurred through data roaming charges, were proper and met the requirements of the scheme and whether resources were used for parliamentary purposes in accordance with all corporate body policies.

We will seek to conclude our investigations promptly, and our findings will be published. Depending on those findings, a number of options might be open to the corporate body, as set out in section 9 of the code of conduct, including referral to the Parliament's Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee.

I am sure that Edward Mountain will appreciate that, in the interests of fairness to all, and to avoid prejudicing our investigation, the corporate body will, as of now, not comment on any matters that could have a bearing on the process. It is important to stress, however, that the corporate body remains wholly committed to openness and transparency and will release all material that it can, when it can, in line with our legal obligations.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I am grateful to the member for the information that has been given, but I would be grateful if the corporate body could give an idea of the timescale for its investigation into Michael Matheson's inappropriate use of expenses. I note that the statement says that it will be done "promptly", but what does that mean?

**Claire Baker:** I am sure that Jackie Baillie will appreciate that the investigation was announced only this morning. However, the corporate body recognises members' interest. We will undertake the work as promptly as we can, and we will respond. I am afraid that, this afternoon, I cannot give a proper timescale for that. We want to make sure that it is a fair and transparent process, and we will undertake the investigation in those terms. I refer the member to my earlier statement.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I believe that, after First Minister's question time this afternoon, in response to the announcement of the investigation, the First Minister's official

spokesperson confirmed that Humza Yousaf will co-operate fully with the corporate body's investigation. Will the member confirm that all interested parties, including the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, will be interviewed as part of the process and that such interviews will feed into the investigation that has now been launched?

**Claire Baker:** As the member would expect, this will be a fair and due process. The member who is involved in the investigation would be able to provide us with further written representation if he wished to do so.

#### **Michael Matheson (Office Expenses)**

**7. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what its position is on whether the £3,000 used from Michael Matheson's office expenses for roaming charges constituted value for money, as required of all expense claims under the reimbursement of members' expenses scheme. (S6O-02788)

**Claire Baker (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body):** As I have said, the investigation that we are undertaking will consider whether the claims for £11,000 of public money, incurred through data roaming charges, were proper and met the requirements of the scheme and whether resources were used for parliamentary purposes in accordance with all SPCB policies.

**Alexander Burnett:** My supplementary question relates to the management of the Parliament's website, not the investigation itself.

Michael Matheson's roaming charges bill, which was partially paid for out of parliamentary expenses, was more than double the value of the rest of the MSP mobile phone bill claims combined. That clearly cannot represent value for money for the taxpayer, and the expenses claim has now been deleted from the Parliament's website. Was the expenses claim removed from the Parliament's website because it blatantly did not comply with the requirement that expenses claims must represent value for money?

**Claire Baker:** As the member will know, Michael Matheson recently paid the £11,000 back to Parliament, and the expenses database has been updated to reflect that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes SPCB question time. Before we move to the next item of business, there will be a brief pause to allow for a change of front-bench members.

## Portfolio Question Time

### Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition

14:31

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is portfolio question time, and the portfolio on this occasion is transport, net zero and just transition. Any member who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Question 1 has been withdrawn.

#### Battery Energy Storage Systems (National Strategy)

**2. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the just transition secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding whether a national strategy for battery energy storage system sites could form part of Scotland's plans for a just transition. (S6O-02766)

**The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead):** We are clear that battery energy storage systems are an essential component of a decarbonised electricity grid. We are currently in the process of updating our energy strategy and just transition plan for publication by next summer, taking into consideration the responses received to the consultation on the draft strategy. The finalised energy strategy and just transition plan will set out in more detail our vision for energy storage.

**Rachael Hamilton:** I thank Richard Lochhead for that answer and for the update on the national strategy.

People in communities across Scotland, including those who live around the Eccles substation in my constituency, have so far been supportive of battery storage applications to play their part in meeting net zero targets, but they are concerned about the cumulative negative impact of multiple applications across prime agricultural land. Can the minister reassure my constituents that, in line with the similar guidance that exists for onshore wind, guidance will urgently be issued for battery storage? Will he take up an offer to meet me to discuss the Government's direction of travel for renewables in the context of the use of prime agricultural land?

**Richard Lochhead:** I thank Rachael Hamilton for raising an issue that is going to grow in prominence across the country as more battery storage facilities are built. As I said, they are an

essential part of Scotland's future energy profile. I know that planning officials recently met Rachael Hamilton and other groups to discuss some of the concerns in her constituency and the local region. At the moment, the planning guidelines allow for energy developments on agricultural land; a number of conditions are attached to that in certain circumstances. I will certainly pass on Rachael Hamilton's request for a direct meeting with ministers to discuss that.

I assure Rachael Hamilton that we are considering such issues carefully as we work up the final energy strategy and just transition plan, and that we will continue to take on board the concerns expressed by her constituents and by other members.

#### Road Safety (A77)

**3. Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to reduce accidents and improve overall safety on the A77. (S6O-02767)

**The Minister for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** We are committed to improving safety across our network. Since 2007, £124 million has been invested in the A77 to ensure its safe and efficient operation. In addition, our annual assessment of trunk road safety performance has identified three investigations on the A77 to be progressed this financial year: on Bellfield to the B7038 overbridge, on Holmston to the East Ayrshire boundary and on powered two-wheeler collisions. We have upgraded and completed new signing and road markings between the Monktonhead and Dutch House roundabouts, while also developing speed management measures for Turnberry, Kirkoswald and Ballantrae.

**Sharon Dowe:** I have been talking about the A77 since my maiden speech. It is the main artery connecting the central belt to Northern Ireland, through the port at Cairnryan, and it takes an average of 69 minutes to travel a 43-mile stretch. The Government's own south-west Scotland transport study identified the A77 as the slowest A road in the country, with an average speed of 37.7mph. It is also leaving the south-west at an economic disadvantage. When will the A77 be fully dualled?

**Fiona Hyslop:** In relation to the improvements, we said in our spring budget revision that there is priority for the A77—that is why the A77 is mentioned in it.

The member's question was about reducing accidents and improving overall safety, rather than increasing speed. I know that addressing some of the speed management and safety issues around Turnberry, Kirkoswald and Ballantrae will affect speed. However, the building of the Maybole

bypass, which was a considerable investment, will have helped to improve driving times.

I am very familiar with the A77, and I am keen that it gets the time and attention that it needs, as well as the funding. That is why I am pleased to report the progress that is taking place this financial year on those key areas.

### **British Transport Police**

**4. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the effectiveness of the British Transport Police on Scotland's railways. (S6O-02768)

**The Minister for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** As the member is aware, the British Transport Police reports to the United Kingdom Department for Transport, but it works in close partnership with ScotRail, Police Scotland and Scottish Government officials. The British Transport Police advises that its operations in partnership with ScotRail have seen a significant reduction in antisocial behaviour on Scotland's rail network. We encourage the British Transport Police to continue to work closely with Police Scotland and the rail industry to ensure that its operations are focused on the needs of rail passengers and staff.

**Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** I was delighted to recently host the first-ever BTP exhibition in Parliament. The minister is correct that the officers do a sterling job of keeping people safe on Scotland's railways.

However, the BTP sometimes faces difficulties when asking the Crown Office for permission to publicly release images of individuals who are suspected of committing a crime. The BTP is sometimes told that corroboration is needed before an image can be released. That requirement can be difficult to fulfil in cases of crimes of a sexual nature, so such images are not released, to the despair of victims and officers. Will the transport minister raise that important issue with the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member raises an important point about how we can have successful prosecutions. He will know that those decisions are matters for the independent Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. However, I think that anything that improves awareness will help to ensure that people know that if they commit a crime, they could well be captured. The issue of what can and should be used in evidence is not a matter for me, but I will bring the point that the member has made to the attention of the justice secretary.

### **Air Pollution (Urban Towns)**

**5. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce air pollution levels in urban towns such as Coatbridge. (S6O-02769)

**The Minister for Energy and the Environment (Gillian Martin):** Scotland enjoys a high level of air quality and, over the past three decades, levels of the main air pollutants have declined significantly. In 2022, for the first time outside of the Covid-19 lockdown periods, all air quality objectives were achieved in the 98 sites in the Scottish monitoring network, including the air quality management area in Coatbridge.

That has been achieved through tighter regulation, improved fuel quality, cleaner vehicles and an increased focus on sustainable transport. Our cleaner air for Scotland 2 strategy builds on those successes by setting out actions for further reduction of air pollution across Scotland.

**Fulton MacGregor:** The minister will be aware, and in fact has made mention, of the areas of Whifflet, Shawhead and Kirkshaws in Coatbridge, which were recently prescribed as air quality management areas, as the air quality in those zones did not fall within the legal limits. That is especially relevant for the area around the Shawhead flyover, which is a busy junction that connects Coatbridge and wider Lanarkshire to the M8 motorway. In fact, in 2019, Shawhead recorded an average of 27.17 micrograms per cubic metre of nitrogen dioxide. That was the 33rd highest level in Scotland, with only roads in our major cities having levels above that.

Given that the air pollution is almost exclusively caused by traffic issues, what can the Scottish Government do to ensure that air quality remains at a safe level, especially in the context of increasing traffic levels in areas such as Shawhead, and given that the council there seems to have approved plans for further industrial development at that junction?

**Gillian Martin:** Our cleaner air for Scotland 2 strategy sets out a series of actions to further reduce emissions from transport sources. In addition, national planning framework 4 sets out our spatial strategy for Scotland's long-term development.

It is clear that development proposals that are likely to have significant adverse effects on air quality will not be supported. Co-benefits for air quality will also be delivered through policies on tackling the climate and nature crisis, sustainable transport and 20-minute neighbourhoods.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The Kingsway in Dundee goes through

several of the most deprived communities in the city, and it is used by thousands of vehicles each day. That exposes residents to high levels of air pollution. Transport Scotland's assessment of a potential bypass suggested that the project would have a positive impact on air quality by taking away 50 per cent of the traffic on the Kingsway. Does the minister recognise the health and environmental benefits that that project could bring to Dundee?

**Gillian Martin:** Yes, I do. I have an example from my own area in Aberdeenshire. One of the most highly polluted streets in Scotland would have been Market Street in Aberdeen. As a result of the Aberdeen western peripheral route, which the Scottish Government delivered on, a significant amount of traffic has been diverted away from the city of Aberdeen.

The cabinet secretary might be interested in pursuing that issue further with Mercedes Villalba, as I do not have the detail of that particular proposal in front of me.

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** People are understandably seeking more affordable alternatives as the cost of winter heating soars. However, Asthma and Lung UK Scotland has highlighted the negative impacts of domestic burning on respiratory conditions and how domestic burning increases levels of dangerous pollutants, including carcinogenic emissions. Can the minister outline what steps the Scottish Government is taking to raise public awareness of the adverse impacts of domestic burning and any measures that are in place to promote healthy, affordable and environmentally friendly heating methods?

**Gillian Martin:** Stephanie Callaghan has outlined why ensuring that our air is as clean as possible is a real health priority. In one of the actions in our cleaner air for Scotland 2 strategy, we are working with stakeholders on the development of an air quality public engagement framework. That will include raising public awareness of the impacts of domestic fuel burning. We intend to publish that framework in 2024.

### **Circular Economy (Wind Turbine Decommissioning)**

6. **Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making towards achieving a circular economy, including through the development of the wind turbine decommissioning sector. (S6O-02770)

**The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead):** Progress is being made in several areas. As well

as the Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill and the forthcoming circular economy and waste route map, we provide support through the recycling improvement fund, funding for the share and repair network and business support through Zero Waste Scotland. The national strategy for economic transformation also identifies the circular economy as a new market opportunity.

Through the recently published onshore wind sector deal, we have agreed to work with the onshore wind sector and the coalition for wind industry circularity to publish a strategy paper by October 2024.

**Meghan Gallacher:** Zero Waste Scotland's document "The future of onshore wind decommissioning in Scotland", which was published in March, shows the recyclable components of a wind turbine. It states that between 4,800 and 5,500 turbines will be decommissioned between 2021 and 2025, and it shows which parts will be broken down and into what materials. However, one essential part is missing: the blades. Can the minister outline how the Government can achieve its net zero targets through a just transition when our renewables are not currently fully recyclable? When will that fundamental problem be rectified so that our renewables are actually renewable?

**Richard Lochhead:** The member raises an important issue, and I think that everyone would agree with the sentiment that she outlines. In the coming years, we have, through the energy transition, to get to a position in which we can recycle as much of our materials as possible. The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill will address some of those issues.

I should say that we have an onshore wind sector deal commitment whereby, supported by Government, all the relevant agencies in the onshore wind industry have agreed to deliver at least one specialist blade treatment facility in Scotland by 2030. A lot of thought has been given to the objectives that the member wants to achieve, and there are measures in place that it is hoped will deliver that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There are a number of supplementaries. I will try to get them all in.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Can the minister give an update on how the Scottish Government is supporting the enhancement skills and training provision to help to deliver on the needs of the wind industry and achieve a circular economy?

**Richard Lochhead:** The education and skills system is already adapting to the transition to net zero, and institutions such as our colleges and universities are key anchors for that transition. For

example, the Energy Skills Partnership co-ordinates the wind training network, which allows colleges to better collaborate with industry on the skills that are needed for both onshore and offshore wind.

In addition, Zero Waste Scotland has developed a range of courses to develop circular economy skills, and it is working to embed those circular economy principles across all our sectors.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** The Circular Economy (Scotland) Bill is currently being considered by the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. Although it is largely a recycling bill that focuses predominantly on household waste, has the minister considered how it could be improved in order to ensure that a circular economy is achieved across our industrial sectors such as renewables, where we will see huge investment? Will he support amendments at stages 2 and 3 that cover those sectors to deliver the huge, joined-up opportunities and action on green jobs that we need?

**Richard Lochhead:** Those are important issues that Parliament should consider. I am not the minister responsible for the bill, but the Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity will be appearing before the relevant committee in a matter of days, and the committee members will, I am sure, take the opportunity to raise those issues.

I will ensure that the minister will be aware of Sarah Boyack's questions prior to that appearance. The purpose of the committee system is to improve the bill and make sure that we capture all those opportunities for the Scottish economy and to address our carbon footprint.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** Given the changes in energy production and delivery, and the challenges in encouraging young people into science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects, what can the Scottish Government do to ensure that training and careers are supported to develop a circular economy, including in wind turbine decommissioning? I note the minister's response to Jackie Dunbar's question.

**Richard Lochhead:** Again, that is an important issue, and I tried to address some of the points in response to Jackie Dunbar's question. The universities and colleges are now beginning to address that issue, and it is important that they do so with some urgency.

The Scottish Government is funding a number of projects to ensure that there are transferable skills between, for instance, oil and gas and renewables. The member is quite right that we need to use decommissioning as a massive economic opportunity for Scotland, in relation to

both onshore wind turbine equipment and offshore oil and gas installations.

I have visited one yard in Scotland where there are a number of jobs—I think that it was in Shetland, but I would have to verify that. The yard is decommissioning an offshore platform, and there are 20 or 30 jobs involved in doing that. That platform was built in a yard in Scotland in the first place, so that is a good example of the circular economy and the economic opportunities.

### Hydrogen Fuelling Infrastructure

**7. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the development of hydrogen fuelling infrastructure for use by heavy goods vehicles and other road-going heavy machinery. (S6O-02771)

**The Minister for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** We support the roll-out of infrastructure that is needed for hydrogen vehicles to operate in Scotland. Aberdeen city has two hydrogen refuelling stations. Transport Scotland has contracted Heriot-Watt University to work with road haulage fleets and stakeholders to assess where initial en-route charging and refuelling infrastructure for zero-emission HGVs will be needed.

The zero emission truck task force convened by Transport Scotland includes a working group that is focused on hydrogen refuelling infrastructure. The task force is developing strategic actions to unlock a successful transition to zero-emission HGVs, and it expects to publish the HGV decarbonisation pathway early next year.

**Brian Whittle:** My colleague Sharon Dowe has already highlighted the issue of the A77. Hydrogen is increasingly seen as a major player in the drive towards net zero. In order to take advantage of the huge potential that Scotland could and should have in the green hydrogen economy, it is important that demand is created and that the appropriate infrastructure is in place.

People with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and other breathing issues clearly had a major problem with the air quality, as was, in Glasgow. Disabled people and carers will absolutely benefit from clearer air.

There are currently few options for hydrogen refuelling. Does the minister agree that, without the infrastructure, businesses will be reticent to make the change? We need roads such as the A77 and the A75 to give us a hydrogen superhighway that will turbo boost that element of our decarbonisation.

**Fiona Hyslop:** I hope that Brian Whittle will appreciate from my initial answer that we take the

issue seriously. That is why we are working with the industry to identify where hydrogen refuelling infrastructure can be best placed. I am conscious of Scotland's freight opportunities. To maximise impact, I am working with my Welsh counterpart in relation to our United Kingdom-wide interministerial meetings—the next one will focus on freight. There is rail freight and road freight, but urgency is required to anticipate the opportunities that hydrogen brings for heavy vehicles in particular.

I hope that Brian Whittle is reassured by my initial answer that we are looking at that and working at pace to deliver exactly what he asks for. We should listen to what the industry, as opposed to anyone else, says about the location for facilities. For freight that travels to Northern Ireland, it would make sense for the A77 and the A75 to feature. Let us see what the industry task force comes up with.

**Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP):** When I was at the PNDC conference in Glasgow yesterday, I saw great examples of Scottish businesses working to develop hydrogen, including Hydrogen Vehicle Systems from Glasgow, which is at an advanced stage of developing hydrogen vehicles and is working with partners to put in place the refuelling infrastructure as a consequence. I commend that work to the minister.

Will the minister give an update on Scotland's hydrogen train project, which is another stellar example of Scottish universities' innovative work? How is that initiative supporting the decarbonisation of our public transport sector?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Our hydrogen action plan sets out our ambition to be a leading hydrogen nation. In a collaboration with the University of St Andrews and Scottish Enterprise, £3.5 million of Scottish Government funding was provided to convert a class 314 train into a hydrogen fuel cell train. Many of us saw that when it was displayed at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—and it had trials on the track in 2022. That developed local supply chain knowledge to support the introduction of a zero-emission fleet over the longer term, and lessons learned are being considered as part of planning for future rail fleet options.

#### **Low-emission Zones (Impact on Disabled People)**

**8. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that low-emission zones do not have any negative impact on disabled people and carers. (S6O-02772)

**The Minister for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** We are all aware of the harm that excessively polluting vehicles cause, particularly to the young, the elderly and those with pre-existing health conditions. For disabled people who cannot switch to a cleaner alternative or who get a lift from someone who has a non-compliant vehicle, we have developed the low-emission zone blue badge exemption system so that registered vehicles will not incur an LEZ penalty charge notice. The Government continues to provide support and funding for low-income families and microbusinesses that need support to prepare for LEZs.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Paid and unpaid carers are worried about the potential impact that the low-emission zone could have on their ability to enter and travel through the city centre to provide vital care. As it stands, they can access an exemption only if the person they support asks for that one day at a time. I have discussed that with Glasgow City Council, which is prepared to consider ways to streamline the process so that a more permanent exemption could be provided to carers, but Transport Scotland manages that system. Is the minister willing to work with Transport Scotland to allow exemptions for carers on a longer-term basis?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Under the system that is in place, blue badge holders who require LEZ exemptions can register their details on the official website, and more than 11,000 blue badges have been registered so far, but the member is talking about carers or those who assist others. I will certainly bring her comments to Transport Scotland's attention, but it is clear that Glasgow City Council is in the lead.

Another aspect is supporting low-income families to access funding to make changes. There is a two-track system of helping people to move to lower-emission vehicles and identifying whether a need exists for a short-term exemption rather than a temporary one. I cannot give a commitment to that today—I do not think that the member would expect me to—but she has had the opportunity to raise the issue.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** I welcome the minister's responses. Does she agree that, fundamentally, the LEZ is a good thing that helps absolutely everyone? The evidence from London was that particulate matter reduced by 13 per cent in five years.

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member is correct that air pollution affects everybody's health. That is why the Scottish Government and the city authorities in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow are delivering air-quality improvements through low-emission zones, with a number of them about to be rolled out next year.



I draw members' attention to the evidence sessions that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee held when I was deputy convener. We examined the issue under the committee's wider scrutiny role, and one of the significant pieces of evidence was on the impact of particulates on health. That was a very good short, sharp inquiry through which the Parliament drew attention to the matter, and I refer members to the evidence that was taken by the committee.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio question time.

## Urgent Question

14:56

### Petroineos (Closure of Refinery)

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to support those affected by the decision of Petroineos to close its refinery.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray):** I thank Michelle Thomson for giving me this opportunity to update Parliament.

First, I recognise that this is a very worrying time for the workers at Grangemouth, and I assure them of my personal commitment and the Government's commitment to work to ensure that they receive the appropriate support. Having spoken to refinery senior managers along with the First Minister this morning, it is my understanding that this is not a decision, at this point, to close the refinery but a decision to start the necessary preparations to have the potential to transition Grangemouth to an import terminal.

We will continue to engage proactively with all stakeholders as the situation develops. The management was clear that the decision is a commercial one, taken due to global factors, not a decision that has been taken because of anything that the Scottish Government or the United Kingdom Government has done. Indeed, the management is supportive of our 2045 targets. I also met representatives of Unite the union and the Scottish Trades Union Congress this morning to express our full support for staff at Grangemouth and to ensure that we are doing all that we can to secure a sustainable future for the refinery.

We have a shared commitment to insisting that a just transition for workers is at the heart of any future decision. I will continue to engage with the unions, and I restate that my door is always open for constructive dialogue to support the future of workers and the site more generally.

Finally, I have written to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero today to outline my concerns regarding the announcement, and I have asked for an urgent meeting to discuss how we can work together to support those affected by the decision. We will be seeking assurances around fuel security.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** I will allow a wee bit of extra time for this question, but a number of members are seeking to ask supplementaries, and I therefore ask for the questions and answers to be brief if possible.

**Michelle Thomson:** I quite agree with the cabinet secretary that our immediate thoughts must go to those affected by the decision, regardless of the outcome, who are now fearful for their jobs with the move from a refinery facility to—potentially—an import facility. The impact will, indeed, be felt by those directly working in the refinery, but also potentially by small businesses and those working in the wider supply chain around Grangemouth.

Grangemouth already struggles with high levels of social deprivation, and the ultimate closure, potentially, will be felt acutely in the town. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the wider impact of the change on the small and medium-sized enterprise sector, supply chains and Scottish gross domestic product? What discussions has the cabinet secretary had with trade unions and the management of the refinery on which he can give additional information? Finally, will the Scottish Government work with me, as the constituency MSP, to set up a task force to support those who could be affected?

**Neil Gray:** We absolutely recognise the uncertainty, anxiety and feeling of despair that the announcement will place on a range of people and workers associated with Grangemouth. I give my assurance that I will work collaboratively with all partners to ensure that any impacts of this and subsequent decisions are mitigated as far as possible.

It is important to note that Grangemouth remains an important asset in Scotland's energy future. We have therefore committed to publishing a just transition plan for Grangemouth in the spring, and work on that is well under way. We have engaged with business, the local community and wider stakeholders, and we will continue to do so over the coming weeks and months.

As I have set out, I met this morning with the trade unions and assured them of my support and that this Government is committed to securing jobs at the Grangemouth site. I agree with the unions that we must succeed in securing a just transition for workers. We will work with the unions, MSP colleagues, workers and wider stakeholders to ensure a sustainable future for the refinery and support those who may be affected by what happens at the site.

**Michelle Thomson:** In its discussions thus far with the UK Government, which has reserved responsibility for fuel security, and Petroineos, what assurances has the Scottish Government been given regarding the matter? Has it asked the UK Government to conduct a risk assessment to test any assurances?

Furthermore, it is only at a very early stage that there is potential for a sustainable future for the

site beyond just the importing of fuel. What further steps does the Scottish Government anticipate taking to move the site from the potential for a just transition to an actual just transition, be it in sustainable aviation fuel or hydrogen? Will the cabinet secretary commit to keeping members updated on any progress?

**Neil Gray:** Through the refinery's maintenance periods, Grangemouth imports fuel from other markets; therefore, the site already has the ability to operate as an import terminal. My understanding is that this announcement is the preparatory work to enable that to happen at a greater scale. Following our meeting with Petroineos this morning, I wrote to the Petroineos trading chief executive to seek assurances from him, along with other asks, that the business will ensure that Grangemouth's role as a source of domestic road and air fuels will continue for years to come.

My officials remain in regular dialogue with the UK Government. Given the reserved responsibilities of the UK Government, I have written today to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero to ask for an urgent meeting. I have been clear in the letter that it remains my firm preference that the refinery should continue operating for as long as possible. We will continue to engage proactively with Petroineos as we develop our just transition plan for Grangemouth, and I give a commitment to keep all members updated on that as it progresses.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is a considerable degree of interest in putting a question to the cabinet secretary. I will seek to take questions from as many members as possible, but I will need members' co-operation and succinct questions and answers.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I believe that the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero has spoken by phone with the chief executive of Petroineos, and I note that the cabinet secretary has written to the chief executive. Will the cabinet secretary undertake to meet the chief executive, and will he also undertake to press for a meeting with the secretary of state? As we learned from experience in 2016, it is very important that both of Scotland's Governments work closely together on the matter. That is what the people of Grangemouth would expect, at the very least. Will the cabinet secretary give assurances that he will have those meetings and that everything will be done co-operatively, in order to do what is right for the people of Grangemouth?

**Neil Gray:** Yes. In my initial answers to Michelle Thomson, I have given confirmation on both of those matters. Just to provide absolute clarity,

however, the offer of a meeting came from Petroineos in its initial correspondence to me. I have since responded, saying that I absolutely would like that meeting to take place in very short order. I also wrote to the secretary of state today, asking for a meeting in a collaborative space, to look at what we can do together and to consider all potential options to extend the potential life of the refinery. We understand the challenges in achieving that. A very challenging situation has been outlined, but we will endeavour, working with Petroineos, the UK Government, trade unions and other partners, to do everything possible to ensure that there is a longer period for the refinery and a more sustainable future for the wider Grangemouth site.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** Hundreds of families across central Scotland will be anxious today after the announcement of the proposed closure of the refinery. For years, Grangemouth has been synonymous with Scottish industry. It is strategically important for Scotland and, indeed, the whole of the UK, and it plays an important role in providing fuel security.

When was the cabinet secretary first told this devastating news? Can he detail the Scottish Government's prior work with Petroineos on net zero transition and when it started? What plans are in place to secure jobs and the future of Grangemouth?

**Neil Gray:** As Jackie Baillie would expect, we have been aware for some time that the business has been considering its future transition options, and we have been working with it as part of that. Like all refineries across the UK and across Europe, Grangemouth will have been considering a range of commercial factors as part of that, given the wider geopolitical and economic situations around the world.

We were notified by the business on the morning of Tuesday 21 November, at the same time as the workforce, of Petroineos's specific plans—as announced in the media yesterday—to commence preparatory work for the construction of the import terminal at Grangemouth and Finnart. Given that the refinery is more than 100 years old, that potential has been on the horizon for some time, which is why work on a biofuel refinery, the opportunity for the wider site to be part of the carbon capture cluster and the opportunity for the development and usage of hydrogen has been part of what we have been doing.

I hope to give colleagues from all parties an opportunity tomorrow afternoon to discuss some of that in greater detail, and I will be happy to share details with colleagues who request them in writing.

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I have met unions and have spoken to residents. Rightly, they are concerned about what yesterday's sudden announcement means for Grangemouth. My thoughts—like those of many MSPs, I am sure—will be with those who are affected. The lack of information is causing concern among the community, and I believe that an urgent summit is required to provide certainty about what comes next. Will the cabinet secretary consider convening that summit, and will he meet workers with me at the site?

**Neil Gray:** As I set out in my initial response to Michelle Thomson, I met Unite the union and the STUC and have given a commitment to continuing engagement with the trade union representatives, not least to discuss options and ideas that they may have for the wider Grangemouth site and for the refinery. There will be an opportunity tomorrow afternoon for Gillian Mackay to discuss some of those ideas with me. I am more than open to considering the opportunities that may arise from such a summit and whether meeting workers directly at the site with her might help to assuage some concerns and answer questions that they may have.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** If I heard the minister correctly, he said that 2025 might not be the end for the refinery—that its life could be extended. What factors might be considered in extending that life, and what support is offered by the Government to make that happen?

**Neil Gray:** It is not a hard-and-fast decision. A final decision has still to be taken. I do not want to set unrealistic expectations that the situation is not incredibly challenging, given the age of the refinery, its relative efficiency and the global factors at play in the energy costs that it faces and the costs of the fuel that it puts out. The margins are becoming incredibly challenging. I am looking at everything that I can do within the resources that we have, and I am looking to work with UK colleagues on the ideas that I set out in response to Jackie Baillie's question, such as carbon capture, hydrogen and a biofuel refinery, to make sure that the wider Grangemouth site continues to be a heart of industrial activity. We will continue to look at those areas and will provide as much support as we can.

**Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba):** Last year, Scotland's North Sea sent more than £9 billion of revenue to the UK Treasury, yet it looks as though we are heading towards "Grangemouth no more". The refinery is of strategic national importance, and the Scottish Government has intervened decisively twice before to help to save the plant—in 2008 and 2013. What are the prospects for its doing so again?

**Neil Gray:** We are looking at everything that we can do to ensure continued industrial activity at the Grangemouth site. It is important not to be too alarmist in the narrative that we put forward. This is about the refinery, not the wider Grangemouth site and the wider businesses and operations that are based there.

Obviously, the Grangemouth refinery is incredibly important, strategically and as an economic asset. We will continue to look at all that we can do—given the answers that I have already given—alongside colleagues in the trade union movement, Petroineos and the UK Government, on anything to extend the life of the refinery. However, I cannot underline enough the challenges that are currently faced.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** The news from Grangemouth is a hammer blow to the industry and the local economy. The devolved Government has set out to demonize the oil and gas industry at every opportunity. Along with Labour, it is against new production in the North Sea and would prefer that we rely on imports.

The SNP has accepted the Greens into Government. The Greens want to shut down the oil and gas industry, and the First Minister said two months ago that he wanted to end Scotland's role as the oil and gas capital of Europe. Does the cabinet secretary now accept that the message that the Government is sending out is putting thousands of jobs at risk—including those at Grangemouth?

**Neil Gray:** I am very sorry that Douglas Lumsden has chosen to take that tone; it is not the tone that others have taken. In fact, Petroineos said that its decision had nothing to do with decisions that have been taken by either the Scottish Government or the UK Government; its decision was taken because of global factors, and it is a situation that refineries not only in the UK but around Europe face.

Unfortunately, the narrative that Douglas Lumsden has attempted to set out is entirely unhelpful and does nothing to help the workers that are affected.

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I remind members of my voluntary entry in the register of members' interests. Does the cabinet secretary stand by his statement that the closure of the Petroineos oil refinery at Grangemouth is a commercial decision that will future proof the site, or does he agree with me that it is a strategic national asset, that the jobs are strategic national manufacturing jobs and that this is about a strategic national energy supply, the future of which should not be determined by billionaire absentee owners?

**Neil Gray:** I have engaged constructively with the trade union that is directly involved at the site—Unite—and the STUC, and there is a shared understanding of the need to ensure that a just transition happens not only at the refinery but also at the wider Grangemouth site.

I hope that Richard Leonard is able to attend the discussion that we will have tomorrow to set out in more detail some of the work. I agree with him that Grangemouth—not just the refinery, but the wider site—is of strategic importance. However, it is privately owned by the joint venture of Ineos and PetroChina, and they have commercial decisions to make. We are looking to do what we can to support those decisions going forward, but the resources that we have—and that the UK Government has—need to be considered.

We will work with the trade union movement, the joint venture partners and the UK Government to consider all that we can do to extend the life of the refinery.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the urgent question. I thank members for their co-operation, which meant that I was able to take a supplementary question from every member who sought to ask one.

## Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-11381, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. I invite members who wish to speak to press their request-to-speak button. I call Pam Duncan-Glancy to speak to and move the motion.

15:14

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer.

“Thank God for that; now I can be your mum again.”

Those were my mum’s words when we heard that my transition to adulthood had—at last—been agreed. After a lifetime of fighting, wading through swathes of policy and papers that would put a library to shame, being up at the school more often than I was and watching me defer entry to university for two years because of the lack of a transitions plan, my mum could finally retire as the project manager that she had been forced to be. We were exhausted by the time, energy, brain and body power needed simply to give me a fighting chance of fulfilling my dreams.

That was 23 years ago, but there are still hundreds of thousands of families like mine, voiceless and struggling to get the fighting chance that they deserve. It is for them that I have introduced the bill and it is incumbent on all of us to be their voice today and every day and to make laws that improve their lives. They do not need warm words or good will—they need laws to clearly set out that they have rights.

Johann Lamont MSP knew that in session 5 of this Parliament when she first introduced the bill, and I put my thanks to her on the record today.

I also thank Inclusion Scotland and Camphill Scotland for their support. They can see that the current system is failing, and it takes only a quick glance at the evidence to see just how badly. When Jamie Hepburn MSP asked a parliamentary question on the subject in 2008, disabled people were three times more likely than others not to be in education, employment or training; 15 years later, there is little evidence that that has changed. Disabled people are still considerably more likely than their non-disabled peers to have no qualifications, the disability employment gap for young disabled people is 31 per cent, and only 7 per cent of learning-disabled people are in work.

Those are damning indictments of a systemic failure that is locking disabled people out of opportunity and holding our country back. The fact that I find the hardest to hear is that young disabled people have the same aspirations as their peers at age 16, but, by 26, believe that nothing that they can do will change their lives. At a time when they should be excited about their future, we are stripping them of hope.

Two decades ago, my mum described that as falling off a cliff. Just two months ago, a disabled young person described it to me in similar terms. She said:

“It’s like being thrown in the deep end and expected to know how to swim.”

So little has changed.

We all agree that inaction is not an option, and my inbox is full of the reasons why. It is full of messages from young disabled people who are preparing to leave school with no plans and no options. I particularly thank the mums and dads, disabled people, Differabled Scotland, Glasgow Disability Alliance, Children’s Hospices Across Scotland, Enable Scotland, Diabetes Scotland, Inclusion Scotland, Spina Bifida Scotland and many more organisations, many of which are represented in the gallery here today, for highlighting the lived experience of disabled people in Scotland. Their experience tells us what the Education, Children and Young People Committee’s report concluded, which is that existing approaches are complex, cluttered and difficult to navigate, disconnected, stressful and ultimately not delivering a Scotland where disabled people can flourish.

The bill before us is an opportunity to fix that, which is why I am deeply disappointed that the Government said on Tuesday that it does not intend to support it today. I hope to use the remaining time that I have in the debate to convince all members to listen to disabled people and their families and to do what they are asking, which is to change the law. It is not too late to do the right thing.

I put on record my thanks to the committee for its work on the bill, and to the countless disabled people and their families who responded to the inquiry, told their stories and shared their worst fears. If nothing else convinces colleagues that we should act, their tenacity in fighting for change should. I hugely welcome the light that has been shone on the issue and the work that the committee did, and I welcome many of the committee’s conclusions about the need for change. Indeed, such is the case for change that the committee report could be described as a dossier of the failures in the current system.

There are many ways to change that and I welcome the minister's offer to work together to identify collective solutions. However, I remain firmly of the opinion that, although the proposed changes in practice and policy are sorely needed, we will not change disabled people's lives unless we change the law.

I say to the minister that I am disappointed by her letter to the committee. It seems that the offer to work together will rely on me being content to ask families to wait and see whether existing non-legislative routes will work, although it is clear that they do not. That has been clear for years, and I am not content to ask people to wait any longer. Disabled people cannot keep waiting and seeing whether the next strategy will work or whether good practice will magically spread. Angela Morgan's review of additional support for learning concluded that the system is overly dependent on committed individuals, that it is fragmented and inconsistent and, crucially, that ASL is treated as being someone else's problem. That someone else is usually a parent, a carer or an overworked member of staff.

The bill that is before us today seeks to change that. It gives a minister responsibility for transitions; it puts a strategy to sort this out in law; it gives young disabled people a right to a plan for their transition from school; and it empowers organisations to work together to lighten the load of overburdened families.

The rights and opportunities of young people should not be left to chance or rest on their luck in finding a sympathetic ear or having a carer or parent who has the resources, energy and time to keep fighting. It should also not rest on manifesto commitments and ministers acting in good faith. The SNP manifesto in 2016 committed to a national transitions strategy. Young disabled people who went to school then have now left with no strategy, almost all of them with no plan and with their future in tatters.

It is fair to say that the legislative landscape is cluttered and complex. I ask the Government, "Why not take the opportunity of this bill to clarify it?" However, as well as being complex, I agree with Angela Morgan that it is full of loopholes, which is why we need new law. One such loophole concerns the right to a plan. The committee's report and the Government rely on provisions in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004. The provision in the 2014 act that is referred to is about children's plans. The relevant section of that act was never brought into force and the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill, if passed, will repeal it. There is therefore no statutory basis for such plans.

The provision in the ASL act that is cited is about co-ordinated support plans. Only 0.2% of eligible children access such a plan, and their provision is limited by whether a local authority sees fit to exchange information with the agency about an individual child. There is no absolute right to a transition plan or a requirement to start them early, and the plans are not focused on transitions or disabled people. Nothing in existing law does what I propose in the bill.

Nothing of substance has changed since the Government proposed its strategy seven years ago. The system is still broken. The committee described many of those failures as an "implementation gap". The Government's response says that it will spread good practice to address that, but what its response does not say is that the evaluation of the principles into practice approach found that, when resources were tight, pressure on staff and services meant that they had to prioritise other work above the principles into practice work. Without a statutory framework for a strategy, how will transitions be protected in tough times?

I say that not to underplay the importance of that work, but to highlight that a non-statutory approach piloted in 10 authorities—which has shown that, when resources are tight, its work is sidelined—is not enough. This is not an argument against legislation, but one that shows what good work could be done if it was underpinned by legislation.

Disabled people are sick and tired of their rights hinging on good will. Today, on international carers day, we could transform not just the lives of young disabled people, but the lives of carers, too, because we know that incredible stress is put on family and parents. When I was elected, I promised to put the ladder or the ramp out for other disabled people to follow. That starts by making sure that they have a clear right to a future in law, with mechanisms to hold people to account and make sure that disabled people have a fighting chance.

We have an opportunity today to do that—to get ahead of the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and move from reliance on some good people to some good law. Today, we can put principles not just into practice, but into legislation, too. Today, we have an opportunity to vote to change the lives of every young disabled person in the country. We should take it, and I sincerely hope that we will.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Sue Webber to speak on behalf of the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

15:23

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** I am pleased to be speaking on behalf of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. First, I thank the member in charge for introducing the bill, which has given us the opportunity to discuss both at committee and, importantly, here in the chamber today the important issue of how to improve the opportunities for disabled children and young people as they grow up.

I thank colleagues for their detailed consideration of the bill and all the people and organisations who provided evidence, either in person or by responding to our call for views. ARC Scotland helped us to organise informative, informal sessions involving young disabled people called divergent influencers, a group of parents and carers of disabled and young people and a group of practitioners who are involved in improving the experiences of young people as they make the vital transition to young adult life.

I also thank the pupils at Buchanan high school, which is an additional support needs secondary school in Coatbridge, who hosted an extremely informative visit and told us about their preparations for leaving the school that year. Speaking to all those pupils was invaluable and it gave us a great insight into the issues that children and young people are facing.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I was one of the members who had the privilege of being on that visit. Does Sue Webber agree that what was outstanding from that visit was the quality of the leadership that was being shown in that school, in terms of their attitude towards their accountability to those young people?

**Sue Webber:** I agree. We have found many times that the people who are having an impact and making positive changes to disabled people as they transition into adulthood are the individuals who take leadership roles in their communities.

I thank the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee—I bet that it does not get many thanks—and the Finance and Public Administration Committee for their work in scrutinising the bill and for sharing their conclusions and recommendations.

Given the complexities involved in the bill, we took the unusual step of writing to both the Government and the member in charge with our findings, seeking a response before finalising our report. I thank the Government and Pam Duncan-Glancy for their helpful and extensive responses.

I would like to say at the outset that the members of the committee were not convinced that the general principles of the bill should be agreed to, with the exception of Martin Whitfield, who attended as committee substitute for the member in charge. Today, I intend to set out briefly some of the reasons why the committee came to that conclusion. I want to be clear, though—and I cannot reinforce this position enough—that we argued that doing nothing in relation to improving outcomes for disabled children and young people in their transition to adulthood was not an option. We were extremely concerned when we heard evidence of the poor experiences of transitions for many disabled young people. We agreed that things must change, and they must change quickly.

The bill requires the Scottish Government to introduce and implement a national transitions strategy for improving transitions to adulthood for disabled children and young people. It also says that there should be a transitions plan for every disabled child or young person. Going from what we heard, the committee agreed that a national transitions strategy was needed. Importantly, we were aware that the Government was already working on it, so we pressed the Government for a committed timeline and further information on its development.

We were deeply concerned to hear that young people and their families were not always being listened to by professionals. Some young people told us that their transition was often built around what people thought was right for them, rather than what they wanted to do. That is not acceptable.

The committee recommended that the experiences of those who have been through transitions should be at the heart of the design of any national strategy. That should help to ensure that negative outcomes are avoided and that a person-centred approach is built on.

The Government has now published its statement of intent, which summarises its research and engagement on the strategy and sets out what the Scottish Government should focus on now.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Can the member set out whether the committee has had confirmation of when the strategy will be published?

**Sue Webber:** I have not yet had that detail. Perhaps the Government can make that clear in its contributions during the debate.

Make no mistake, we intend to return to the issue of the transitions strategy, and we will be pressing the Government to move more quickly on introducing and implementing an appropriate and

robust national strategy. It will not be an option for the strategy to lie on a shelf, gathering dust.

The committee heard concerns about the legislative competence of the bill's provisions on the assigning of a minister with special responsibility, and about the accuracy of the costs associated with the bill. The member in charge responded to those points.

A major concern for us was how the bill, if it became an act, would interact with the laws that are already in place in this area. For example, the existing legislative framework refers to additional support needs rather than disability, and we felt that it was unclear whom exactly would be covered by the bill.

The committee was also concerned about the need for a diagnosis in order for young people to access support as set out in the bill, even though the definition of disability in the Equality Act 2010, which is used in the bill, does not require a diagnosis to be made.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Ms Webber will remember that, in recognition of that fact, I said in the committee that I could amend the bill at stage 2 to take the part about diagnosis out. The member will also recognise that, for the bill, we chose the definition of disabled people that is used in the Equality Act 2010, because the bill is about that specific group of people.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give Ms Webber a wee bit of time back.

**Sue Webber:** The inability to define that formed part of the crux of the challenges that we faced regarding the accuracy of the financial memorandum. We know now—and we already knew—about the challenges faced by young people with additional support needs who are desperate for a diagnosis and about the waits that are required.

We felt that the bill would introduce conflict into an already cluttered legislative landscape. The committee heard that many children and young people, as I have just said, face long waiting times for diagnoses, and that some young people do not wish to pursue a diagnosis or view themselves as disabled or as having a disability.

For those reasons, the committee is concerned that the bill would place a statutory duty on local authorities to provide transition plans to disabled people and young people, but with a lack of clarity on how they would identify the eligible children in the area.

Worryingly, we heard that the current legislation has not had the positive impact that was envisaged. Many witnesses described it as complex, cluttered and difficult to navigate for young people and their families.

Several stakeholders highlighted local authorities' poor deployment of co-ordinated support plans, despite their statutory nature. Many stakeholders spoke about the considerable difficulties that are faced by those who work to support young people in their transition to adulthood, with extreme pressures on resources in local authorities and health and social care systems, and the precarious nature of funding in the third sector.

We heard about issues around organisational cultures, particularly regarding the differences between children's and adult services and the difficulties with information sharing. We do not believe that the bill would resolve those issues with resourcing or the interactions between children's and adult services. However, we agreed that urgent action must be taken to address those issues, and the Government must ensure that that happens.

I have not had time to cover all the issues that were raised during our scrutiny of the bill, but I look forward to hearing from other members of the committee during the debate.

The Education, Children and Young People Committee supports the aims behind the bill and commends Pam Duncan-Glancy for bringing the bill before us. However, for the reasons that were set out in our report and in my comments, we were not convinced that it should progress beyond stage 1.

15:32

**The Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise (Natalie Don):** I thank Pam Duncan-Glancy for the spotlight that her bill has shone on transitions to adulthood for disabled people and for setting out her personal experience in her contribution today. I also pay tribute to those who have worked with her on developing the bill.

I express my appreciation to the convener, Sue Webber, and all the members of the Education, Children and Young People Committee for their thorough consideration of the bill and for their comprehensive report.

Like everyone here, I whole-heartedly share Pam Duncan-Glancy's ambitions to improve the experiences of and outcomes for disabled young people as they make the transition to young adult life. Becoming an adult is an extremely important time in any young person's life. It can be exciting, but it can also be daunting. It can be a time of hope, but it can also be a time of uncertainty.

There are already examples of good practice across Scotland. For example, the committee heard about the benefits of transitions co-ordinators, the experiences that young people are



having at Buchanan high school, which the committee visited, and the work of the Association for Real Change Scottish Transitions Forum and the Enable Works stepping up programme, which are both funded by the Scottish Government.

However, we absolutely recognise that, at the moment, too many disabled young people are not getting the support that they need. I have followed closely the stage 1 evidence on the bill and have heard young people, their families and practitioners share experiences that fall well short of what they need and have the right to expect.

The Scottish Government is deeply committed to improving transitions for disabled young people, so that they can all have a positive and supported experience. We recognise the challenges that were raised in the committee's evidence in relation to disabled young people's experiences of their transition to adulthood, and we are resolutely determined to do more.

We have already given non-statutory effect to two of the bill's main provisions. That has been done through the joint ministerial leadership for transitions by me and the Minister for Equalities, Migration and Refugees, and through the commitment to introduce Scotland's first national transitions to adulthood strategy.

In response to Pam Duncan-Glancy's question, I am pleased to confirm that we will aim to publish the strategy by the end of next year. That is an integral part of our work to improve transitions for disabled young people. On 28 September 2023, we published our statement of intent on the strategy. That sets out the proposed scope of, and vision and priorities for, the strategy, which are based on what we have heard through research and stakeholder engagement to date. Accompanying the published statement of intent is an online survey that will be open until the end of November 2023. The survey provides a vital opportunity for us to hear directly from more people with lived experience, and we are keen to capture the widest possible feedback.

**Stephen Kerr:** If the strategy is to be published by the end of next year, when, in the minister's estimation, will there be a change in young people's life experience as they make that transition? When will something arrive that will make a material difference to their experience?

**Natalie Don:** We are already taking action now, through the statement of intent. We are listening to feedback and encouraging further action. As I said, the strategy, which will be published by the end of next year, will involve direct input from the statement of intent.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** I thank the minister for clarifying the publication date for the strategy. However, I still think that it is too late, and I echo

the concerns of my colleague Stephen Kerr about how soon change will happen. As my bill sets out the structure for change, how will the strategy be monitored, how will it be scrutinised by the Parliament and how will we know whether it is working?

**Natalie Don:** I will come on to much of that later in my speech. If Pam Duncan-Glancy is happy for me to do so, I will set that out as I go along. I absolutely want things to happen faster, and where I can push for further change, I absolutely will.

I will now turn to the bill and say why, despite my gratitude to Pam Duncan-Glancy and those who have supported her in her work, I agree with the committee's conclusion that the bill is unlikely to be the most effective way to make the required improvements. In its stage 1 report, the Education, Children and Young People Committee raised a number of important questions about the bill, including, in particular, how it would work in practice and whether it would deliver on its intended goals. Sue Webber has just highlighted some of those concerns, and the Government shares many of them. In particular, the bill would require local authorities to develop an individual transition plan for each disabled young person in a local authority area, but it remains unclear exactly who would be covered by the bill and how they would be identified.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** The definition of who will be covered by the bill is the same as that proposed by the Government in its strategy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give the minister a bit of time back for interventions.

**Natalie Don:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

With apologies to Pam Duncan-Glancy, as I said earlier, I will come on to those points. For now, I am just laying out my concerns, which were reiterated by the committee's convener.

It is also unclear who would be responsible for managing and implementing individual transition plans, particularly when a young person has left school. The bill mandates a plan for each young person, even if a young person does not want one. I believe that planning should be person led and that it should adapt flexibly to what the young person finds most helpful.

The committee has also recognised concerns, which the Government highlighted in its evidence at stage 1, about

"duplication and overlap of key aspects of existing legislation".

The committee's report concludes that the bill risks creating

"additional complexity and confusion"

for

“disabled young people and their families, as well as for professionals trying to navigate this landscape”.

That has been mirrored in feedback from stakeholders; many stakeholders who responded to the committee’s call for views or provided evidence raised similar concerns. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities said that it

“does not support the call for a new Bill as there is significant Legislation already in place.”

The Association of Directors of Education in Scotland suggested that

“there is reasonable and appropriate legislation already in place”.

The Association for Real Change Scotland said that it continues

“to have multiple concerns about whether the Bill in its present form will meet its intended aims.”

We agree with the findings of the committee, and many of those who provided views to it, including COSLA and a number of local authorities and integration joint boards, on the uncertainty of the bill’s cost implications and the likely underestimation in the financial memorandum.

It is clear that, should the bill progress to stage 2, it would require substantial amendment to address the legal and practical issues that have been raised.

I reiterate my thanks to Pam Duncan-Glancy for her tireless work on this important matter. I will continue to work with her on our shared ambition of improving transitions for disabled young people, regardless of the outcome of today’s debate. However, for the reasons that I have set out, the Scottish Government agrees with the committee’s conclusions and with the view—which has been expressed by COSLA, organisations such as the Association for Real Change Scotland and others—that the bill will not necessarily deliver on its laudable aim of resolving the issues that are experienced by disabled young people. I am sure that the focus and the priority that we are taking forward will do that.

15:40

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I have come late to the bill, consideration of which was well in train by the time I joined the Education, Children and Young People Committee right before the summer recess. My initial thoughts were very positive. Improving outcomes for disabled children and young people in the transition to adulthood is absolutely the right thing to do, particularly given the poor experiences of transitions that many disabled young people have, which I heard about through the committee.

Statistics from Inclusion Scotland showed that, one year after leaving school, young people with impairment-related additional support needs are more than twice as likely to be unemployed and that—Pam Duncan-Glancy brought this up earlier—by the age of 19, young people with impairments are three times as likely to be not in employment, education or training. In addition, the committee’s conclusion that there is currently no systematic data on children and young people’s experiences of transitions to adulthood is deeply troubling.

I commend Pam Duncan-Glancy for introducing her bill and for fighting to give people a voice. She has highlighted the fact that, yet again, it has been left to the Opposition to proactively seek solutions to the challenges that the people of Scotland face and to force action from the Scottish Government.

However, we must get this right. We owe it to the people who gave evidence, to those who have lived experience of what is not going right and to those who, one day, will need to make such transitions. My coming late to the bill allowed me to ask myself several questions. The first question that I asked myself was whether legislation per se is the best way to improve transitions for disabled children and young people. The evidence that was provided to the committee’s inquiry seems to suggest that it might not be.

At yesterday’s meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, members heard from people impacted by the failure to make more progress on the Promise, as well as the agencies that have been charged with delivering it. They told us that the addition to an already cluttered landscape, where financial clarity and resources are lacking, of ever more legislation that has challenges in how it interrelates with pre-existing legislative frameworks has led to the current difficulties with the Scottish Government’s achievement of what are laudable aims.

That was exactly what the National Deaf Children’s Society seemed to be saying when it told the committee that there might be duplication between the outcomes of the bill, the co-ordinated support plans, the individualised educational programmes and the child’s plan under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. It also flagged up its concerns about duplication between the national transitions strategy and part 3 of the 2014 act. That is in a context in which, as the committee heard, the current complex, cluttered landscape is already difficult to navigate for young people and their families. Indeed, the Scottish Transitions Forum told the committee that

“the Scottish Government’s resources would be better deployed in clarifying, simplifying and supporting the full implementation of its existing policy framework”.

I then asked myself whether, if I was wrong and more legislation is needed to improve outcomes for disabled children and young people in making transitions, the bill before us is that legislation. Will the bill achieve the changes that Pam Duncan-Glancy highlights are needed and that she rightly demands?

Although I have come to the bill later than colleagues, I come to it as a solicitor who has spent the best part of 20 years interpreting legislation—in particular, aspects of the Equality Act 2010—as well as drafting complex legal documents.

From the report, the evidence, the Law Society of Scotland's submission and my own analysis, among that of others, it is clear that, alongside the concerns raised by the likes of COSLA on the financial memorandum and those raised by the NASUWT on the workload and burden on teachers, there are significant concerns around definitions and drafting. For example, as we have heard, the need for a diagnosis of disability for young people to access support feels retrograde to me, as well as potentially difficult to achieve in the current situation in Scotland, given the interplay with section 6 of the Equality Act 2010.

I come back to some of the organisations that, like me, unequivocally support the intention of the bill but have concerns about implementation. The Royal College of Occupational Therapists raised concerns that poor information technology systems will have a negative impact on transition planning, and, under this Government, those IT systems will not change any time soon. Enable Scotland flagged a risk that the bill might lead to the

“imposition of a ‘one size fits all’ approach”.

Scottish Autism felt that the bill risked diverting attention and resources from a broader whole-life approach. Crucially, the National Deaf Children's Society raised concerns that the bill might have a “detrimental” impact on transition support in early years.

If that is right—or, more accurately, if the witnesses and the committee's conclusions, following extensive examination, on what the bill proposes are right—I cannot help but conclude that, even if we accept that legislating is the proper way forward to achieve what we all hope to achieve, the bill might not get it right for the people who need our support.

That brings me back to the Scottish Government. As I said, I admire Pam Duncan-Glancy for introducing the bill, for giving people a voice and for forcing the Government's hand. Earlier this week, we received a detailed letter purporting that the changes needed and the committee's recommendations will be

implemented. Although, like Pam Duncan-Glancy, I remain deeply wary of anything that the Government says it will commit to, it strikes me that the best way to achieve the important, worthy principles and intentions that she rightly demands is not through the bill but by continuing her proactive and positive engagement with the committee and the Government and by holding it to account to deliver the much-needed reforms that it has promised and have been legislated for but which have failed to be delivered. That will achieve all that we all want to see.

15:47

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** It is a great pleasure to open the debate on the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill on behalf of Scottish Labour. That is particularly so because I have on me the acute and wise eyes of my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy, who is sat to my right.

However, I speak now because this is a stage 1 debate on the general principles of a bill. The next stage for the bill in Parliament would be for it to go to stage 2 for investigation and the addition and subtraction of sections and amendments. During that stage, I think that we would see some of the answers to the previous speakers' questions. In particular, a number of speakers have raised questions about costs and about the financial memorandum that attaches to the bill. It would, of course, be at stage 2 that an updated memorandum would be issued, so that there would be an understanding of the financial implications.

Here we are, in the throes of talking about the minutiae of a bill's financial implications and the process of its progress through the Scottish Parliament, when what we are actually talking about is people. We are talking about disabled children and young people.

As my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy stated, this matter goes back to the previous session. Indeed, it goes back long before that, to when our colleague Johann Lamont introduced a bill that fell because it ran out of time. It is fascinating that, in the outreach for evidence that she undertook, part of the response from the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland was:

“Young people often report experiencing abrupt loss of support at the point they leave school or formal education, a concern which has been raised with our office by young people and their parents”.

The fragmentation of current planning processes negatively impacts disabled children's rights. This bill would require the Scottish Government to have a strategy explaining how it will improve the opportunities of disabled children

and young people and to put a Scottish Government minister in charge of improving opportunities for disabled children and young people moving into adulthood. It would require local authorities to have plans for each disabled child and young person as they move into adulthood. Why? Because transitions are challenging at the best of times. Everyone goes through different transitions in their lives, but we are asking a group of young people who have a disability to do that in a landscape that is truly and utterly chaotic.

Many organisations, representatives, parents and disabled children are watching today. It is important that we recognise the audience that is watching this, including the audience from overseas, which looks to the bill as a signpost to how to do things better.

**Stephen Kerr:** I agree with everyone who has spoken about the bill's laudable aims, but the question is how it will actually change the experience of the young people who are at the centre of our concerns. How do we stop this becoming a tick-box exercise? What will we do about the culture that undermines such initiatives and many other laudable initiatives?

**Martin Whitfield:** The Scottish Government would be required to have a strategy to explain. It would have to appoint a minister to take responsibility, and local authorities would need to have plans in place for each disabled child and young person as they moved into adulthood. That is where the responsibility would lie, and that is where a young person, their family, their friends and their communities could turn to and say, "How are you doing it?"

Earlier today, we talked about the Promise. We still reiterate the agreement on the importance of completing the Promise. There is an appalling phrase, but I will use it. We have a subset of the human race who we are treating poorly. Every speaker so far has talked about the chaos that is the current landscape. We have seen good practice, but for every element of good practice, there is bad practice.

A parent said that starting the transitions process

"has been the most stressful year of my life. To put that into context my daughter went through brain surgery at 8 years old, but this was more stressful."

We have been told:

"We are given the excuse our young people are too complex, previously they wouldn't have lived into adulthood and that's their excuse for the awful care offered."

I want a contribution about a 23-year-old man to be taken account of—I am conscious of the time,

Deputy Presiding Officer. That man is now a University of Glasgow graduate. His parent said:

"I ... had to approach the university admissions department myself to ask about adjustments to entry qualifications and information about the ASN supports he would need and receive. The careers service actually advised him 'not to waste a line on his application applying to University of Glasgow'"—

**Liam Kerr:** Will the member give way?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can allow time for the intervention, if the member wishes to take it.

**Martin Whitfield:** Let me finish this. My apologies.

The parent said:

"strangely enough, this was where he successfully graduated with a 2:1".

If we fail our disabled young people and fail to give them an environment in which they are supported to achieve what they can quite easily achieve with the proper support, we not only do a disservice to that individual; we do a disservice to Scotland and the future that we need.

I hope that, in summing up, the minister is able to articulate the steps going forward with the strategy, because we need to remember that the fact that it is being published towards the end of next year means that the first children it could possibly apply to are currently in secondary 2. A lot of children will transition before that date without support in many areas of Scotland.

I am grateful for your indulgence, Deputy Presiding Officer. I can confirm that Scottish Labour will support the bill at stage 1.

15:54

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** When I first became a member of Parliament for Dunfermline, I met the parents involved in something called the Diamond Association. They were the most ferocious group of parents I have ever met, and they had to be. They had to be ferocious because they had to fight every single day to get those who are now disabled adults—the parents were increasingly elderly—the rights that they deserved. That has stuck with me for ever, because they should not have had to fight so hard to get what they were entitled to.

However, the Scottish Liberal Democrats are not going to support the bill, because the evidence that the committee heard was overwhelming.

Members may ask: who would not want to support a bill that would improve the life chances of the people at the Diamond Association in Dunfermline, who I have just been talking about? That is why the committee went out of its way—

probably quite unusually—to spend a lot of time trying to get the member and the Government to reach some kind of compromise on a way ahead.

Who would not want to support such a bill? It does not look good that we are rejecting, on the basis that I have outlined, a bill that is trying to improve the rights of disabled people through transition. Nevertheless, it is an embarrassment that it has taken so long for the Government to understand that the current system is not adequate. I know that the minister is new to her post, so the legacy is not really her responsibility, but this situation has been going on for years. It should not have taken Pam Duncan-Glancy introducing a bill to Parliament to get the Government to start producing a strategy, which might not come until the end of next year. That is a long time, and it should have been done before now.

It is shameful that we are in this position. To be honest, I am also embarrassed that the Parliament has not, until now, stepped up and done more.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Does the member agree that it is a shame that the first commitment that we had from the Government on the issue was in 2016, and we are still waiting?

**Willie Rennie:** That is one of the reasons why I am conflicted about the bill. I understand: legislation is permanent—it is there on the statute book and it creates a compulsion for Government to act, whereas strategies, motions and debates are fleeting, and although an issue might be at the top of the agenda today, tomorrow it might be forgotten.

I worry that by not agreeing to the bill, we might just be giving the Government a pass to move on. I know that the Government has a lot of other competing issues to deal with, and it does not dispense its responsibility lightly, so I worry about that.

Fundamentally, however, the bill is flawed. We understand that the landscape is conflicted and confusing, and that there is a lot of overlapping legislation. However, the evidence that the committee heard, as Liam Kerr set out, was pretty clear: witnesses thought that the bill would make the situation worse. There is no point in pussyfooting around that—it would make things worse. The last thing that we need is to make the situation worse, and set people and organisations back on the plans that they already have in place.

Pam Duncan-Glancy and Martin Whitfield are right that the issues of diagnosis, scope and costings can probably all be sorted out. However, the fundamental problem is that all the legislation is already in conflict, and the bill would make it worse. That is why I cannot, in all honesty, support the bill, but I suppose that it is a warning from the

Parliament to the Government that, if we are back here again in five years' time, we will be pushing for legislation.

The minister referred quite clearly, in her letter to the committee, to

“duplication and overlap of key aspects of existing legislation”.

Why is the Government not sorting that? It should have put forward its own bill to sort out the overlap and the duplication, if it is already worried about that. I know that addressing that would be complex, because it would involve looking at all the other pieces of legislation. Nonetheless, the Government should be looking into the existing landscape to try to bring some clarity to that, so that we can move forward with a bit more purpose.

We should return to the matter if the Government does not produce the strategy or if it is not effective, or if I visit the Diamond Association again and find that the parents there are just as ferocious as they were back in 2006.

I will give one final example. I visited the Usual Place in Dumfries, which many members will have heard of. It does fantastic work in training people with disabilities and getting them on the employment ladder, and passing them on to other employers who can see the fantastic individuals who have been moulded by that organisation. It is a great cafe and visitor centre—it is a tremendous place. However, it almost closed this year. We should not be facing a circumstance in which organisations such as the Usual Place, which are getting it right, are closing due to a lack of funding.

Why do we not have a funding stream—almost like that for the apprenticeships scheme—that guarantees funding for organisations that do such work? They have to beg and borrow; they have to go from one block grant to another; and they have to go from one charity to another to get the funding to keep going. The Usual Place should be guaranteed a future with guaranteed funding, so that it can guarantee young people a decent transition. That is what this is all about—it is about priorities for people.

We should be giving greater priority to a group of people who—to be blunt—have been let down. We can look at the figures. Enable provided the figure that, of 175,000 people with a learning disability in Scotland, only 7 per cent have paid employment. That is a shameful position for Scotland to be in.

I will not support the bill, but let us resolve to come back and hold the Government's feet to the fire so that we are not back here in five years' time contemplating whether we should have such a bill.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. I remind members that speeches are to be of up to six minutes, please.

16:00

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** I am grateful to Pam Duncan-Glancy for bringing the bill to our Parliament and keeping us focused on the important issue of the poor experience of transitions for many disabled young people. I make it clear to colleagues and the Government that there is a need to act promptly on the issues and to improve the experiences of transitions that disabled children and young people have. Pam Duncan-Glancy is absolutely right that inaction is not an option. If we do not get this right, we are not only impeding individuals; the country is also losing out on a host of talent.

Witnesses told the Education, Children and Young People Committee that professionals do not always listen to young people and their families, that there is a disconnect between children's services and adult services, that there is poor communication across agencies and with young people and their families, and that there is often no clear person to take the lead on transitions, which leads to parents and young people having to advocate for themselves. We also heard of pockets of good practice. I acknowledge and thank the swathes of committed individuals who are maintaining kind, thoughtful and effective practice in a system that is under huge strain.

Despite those pockets of good practice, the current situation is affecting far too many children and young people and their families. That is not good enough. On Monday, I was at an event on tackling poverty and inequality in the early years, where someone used an interesting phrase. They said that, if the only tool that someone has is a hammer, they can end up thinking that everything is a nail.

Many witnesses described the current legislative landscape as complex, cluttered and difficult to navigate for young people and their families and, in some instances, for the professionals who work to support them. In Scotland, we have some world-leading legislation and gold-standard policy—we really do. We have consensus that a human rights-based approach should be taken to policy making, but that is meaningful only when it makes a material difference to the lives of the citizens we represent and when they can not only access their rights but seek redress when public bodies are not delivering on their duty.

The committee heard that there was an implementation gap for existing laws and policy. There are issues relating to resources,

inconsistent practice, access to services across Scotland and organisational cultures—particularly the differences between children's services and adult services—and there is difficulty with information sharing. The answer to that implementation gap is not more legislation.

That general principle aside, there are a number of reasons why the committee could not support the bill. The bill differs from the existing legislative framework, which refers to additional support needs rather than disability. It was unclear exactly who the bill would cover and how they would be identified. Using the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability would be likely to entitle a larger cohort of young people to a transitions plan than the number who social services currently support.

The committee heard that many disabled children and young people and their families cannot receive much-needed support from social services because of pressures on resources and staffing. That has implications for how the bill could work in practice, as it states that transitions plans should be managed by an officer of the local authority.

As colleagues have mentioned, the Education, Children and Young People Committee was concerned about the need for a diagnosis in order for young people to access support. We know from evidence that many young people and children face a long waiting time for diagnosis, and some young people do not wish to pursue a diagnosis or to view themselves as disabled or having a disability. Requiring a diagnosis to access the provisions of the bill would present an additional barrier to receiving support for a number of young people at a crucial stage of their lives.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** I know how passionately the member—and other members—believe in the issue. The member knows, however, that I gave evidence to the committee saying that I would amend the bill with regard to diagnosis.

**Ruth Maguire:** I acknowledge that amendments could be made at stage 2. In general terms, however, the bill is just not fit yet, and the amount of amendment that would be needed is just not practical. There are also issues with the financial memorandum, as we have heard. Without clarity on who exactly would be entitled to a transitions plan under the bill, it is impossible to get accurate estimates of cost and resource implications, and that poses problems for implementation.

Concerns were also expressed about the capacity of teachers to manage much of the initial planning process as part of their existing responsibilities, as envisaged in the bill. For young people with more complex needs and transitions spanning health, social care, education, housing, the third sector and a number of different

agencies, there is a question of how appropriate it would be for a teacher to take on such a role.

I see that I am running out of time, but there is a lot to discuss on the bill. I will set out what I wish to ask of the Government and of the minister in closing the debate. It is a bit dismaying that the strategy will be implemented only by the end of next year. I wonder whether there are things that the minister could do to press for change as we are going along towards the launch of that strategy. It does not feel right to wait that long. Children and young people having their rights not realised is not acceptable—it is an injustice to the individuals concerned and our country is missing out on all that talent.

16:07

**Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. Again, I make no apologies—and I do this every time—for using my short time in Parliament to consistently stand up for the rights of all children, whether they are care experienced, struggling with their mental health or transitioning into adulthood. The aims of the bill relating to disabled children and young people are undoubtedly admirable, and I applaud Pam Duncan-Glancy for driving it forward.

I note Scottish Autism's support for the principle of the bill in its submission to the Education, Children and Young People Committee. As it said,

"The aims of the Bill are laudable, and we welcome any moves to smooth transitions for disabled children and young people into adulthood, thus removing the 'cliff edge' which exists for too many as they leave full-time education."

I agree. That cliff edge is indeed felt by many. We know that care-experienced children, when they transition out of their care support network into a non-structured one, are in the same situation when it comes to accessing on-going support, which has a negative impact on their lives. We recognise that, and we have the Promise as a road map for young people to actively achieve their prospects, but where is the road map for children with disabilities?

When it comes to the impact of a disability on the life chances of a child or young person, the facts are clear and well understood. We know that young people with a declared disability are less likely than those without disability to enter work after leaving school and twice as likely to be unemployed after leaving school, and that the acceptance rate into university for Scottish students with a declared disability is lower than that for students with a declared disability in the rest of the United Kingdom.

I agree with the committee's stage 1 report, which concludes that more work must be done to support those transitioning into adulthood. The report says:

"those with responsibility for transitions must do more to ensure that there is a focus and urgency around improving the experiences of disabled children and young people transitioning into adulthood. This includes, but is not limited to, the Scottish Government, Local Authorities, education, health and social care services, and the NHS."

We know what the problems are, but is the bill the right vehicle to deliver meaningful change for children and young people with a disability? Would the stated intention of the bill, which is

"to introduce, and to implement, a ... National Transitions Strategy to improve outcomes for disabled children and young people in the transition to adulthood",

actually deliver clarity to agencies that would be tasked with delivering those plans? Again, I highlight the submission from Scottish Autism, which states:

"Whether the Bill can meet these aims, however, will depend upon how legislation is implemented once enacted, and how the agencies responsible for delivering the legislation are held to account for those responsibilities."

I would like to be in a position to support the bill today but, unfortunately, in its current form, it lacks detail on costings and raises many issues regarding who is responsible for the transition plans, the additional strain on local authority resources and how the intentions could be implemented in practice.

I have deep concerns about the financial memorandum associated with the bill, which has been mentioned. Those concerns were raised in the Education, Children and Young People Committee's stage 1 report. I want to pull out one part of that. Without clarity on exactly who would be entitled to a transition plan under the bill, it is not possible to estimate accurately the cost and resource implications associated with implementing the bill.

Those concerns about costings matter, especially on delivery. If the bill is not properly costed, we cannot deliver for disabled children and young people and improve their life chances by providing a smoother transition into adulthood. In fact, we would be doing the opposite—we would be failing them. Processes would ultimately be put under immense strain, and the laudable goal of the bill to actively change the lives of many disabled young children and young people would simply not be achieved.

I so wanted to support the principles of the bill. I certainly agree with the concept of supporting disabled children through difficult and challenging times in their lives, and I would challenge anyone to disagree with it. Why, then, has Pam Duncan-

Glancy, as a disabled member of Scottish society, had to introduce a member's bill in order to highlight the transition from childhood to adulthood? We know that members' bills do not have the full force of the structures that are behind other bills. Civil service support and financial will are in the Scottish Government's hands, and it is shameful that the Government has been in power for 16 years and yet disabled children are not further up the priority list for this SNP-Green Administration.

Although the bill's concept is commendable and its aims admirable, in its current form, it has too many flaws to make it workable. I dearly wanted to support it in principle at stage 1 and lodge amendments at stages 2 and 3 but, sadly, that is not possible.

16:12

**Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** I, too, am pleased to speak in the debate as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. As others have done, I thank all the people who generously gave evidence to the committee, and I thank my colleagues and the committee clerks for all their hard work. In particular, I thank Pam Duncan-Glancy for her tireless campaigning, which truly champions the rights of disabled people. That campaigning goes beyond the bill.

From the outset, I have been supportive of the need to address the huge challenges around transition. Although I am not convinced that the general principles of the bill are the right approach, I whole-heartedly agree that the Scottish Government must, as a matter of urgency, address the real and serious challenges.

In evidence sessions, our committee learned that transition planning for disabled people is often an afterthought, with overlooked or rushed transition plans resulting in many young individuals being directed down paths that do not really align with their personal aspirations. In truth, it is difficult to see those as positive destinations. Transitions can happen organically, with time incorporated to explore more meaningful avenues that pave the way for achieving individual goals and aspirations.

During our committee visit to Buchanan high school in North Lanarkshire, which has been mentioned a couple of times in the debate, we saw that working at ground level. I vividly remember that inspiring example of multi-agency teams working together to guide pupils through sustainable and positive destinations that went beyond school. One example was an autistic pupil with dreams of becoming an airline pilot. The school arranged a visit to the airport. As well as

being fascinated by the planes, that young man was intrigued by the baggage system, and is now happily working as a baggage handler. I am sure that we would all agree that that is an excellent outcome.

Although I acknowledge that the bill underscores the importance of taking a person-centred approach to transition planning, I believe that legislative measures alone cannot capture the essence of such examples of kindness and relationships that truly make a difference in a young person's life. Throughout our evidence sessions, we heard again and again that families had good experiences when individuals stepped up to support them—individuals who listened and focused on their views and their wishes. Embedding strategies with a holistic focus on advocacy and supportive relationships will be key in moving forward. The successful principles into practice trials emphasise that need for young people to develop stable relationships, and the learning from those pilots needs to be fed into the Scottish Government's national transitions to adulthood strategy. An important aspect that we must also address is accountability, so I am keen to hear more from the minister on that.

Other members have commented on legislation. Lead Scotland told the committee:

"Despite the existing legislation and expectations on professionals, poor transition experiences are still regularly reported ... we do not believe introducing a new law can be a silver bullet to overcome the layers of complexity transitions presents."

The truth is that the additional legislation that is outlined in the bill will not bring about the changes that I feel that Pam Duncan-Glancy desires.

We have heard today that, with the best will in the world, a transition plan is only as meaningful as the resources that are allocated to back up its delivery. That was also highlighted in evidence. To quote the National Autistic Society, the success of any strategy depends on

"the quality of services and support"—

and education and training options—

"currently available in a local authority area."

We need to be clear that the Scottish Government's transitions strategy must robustly address resourcing.

The reality is that we need not a new law but a fresh approach that develops a supportive culture and ethos combined with the resources that are needed to plan, co-ordinate and deliver services. To close the gaps that disabled people face, the Scottish Government must listen carefully, take disabled young people's views seriously and embed a strategy that works for and with them. It



also needs to be flexible. That is real empowerment.

Although I am not convinced that the bill in its current form will meaningfully address that gap, it is fantastic to see cross-party support for the intentions behind the bill. I am grateful to Pam Duncan-Glancy for all her work. The bill, and the evidence that has been gathered, have provided the momentum for changes that must be at the core of the Scottish Government's work in the area. As others have asked, I ask what can be done now as we wait for the full strategy next year.

16:17

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I commend my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy on her efforts to bring her bill to such an important stage. As my other colleagues did, I encourage the Government to seriously reconsider its position. The debate is about support for the general principles of the bill, and across the chamber, we can see agreement on those principles. Pam Duncan-Glancy has made every effort, and will continue to make every effort, to amend and adapt the bill as we go through other stages. I therefore start from the point of view of being glad to hear support in this area, but I am disappointed that it appears that we cannot get the bill through at stage 1.

I know how important the bill is to Pam Duncan-Glancy. She has been a strong campaigner on these issues for many years, working with many groups of disabled children and young people, and their families, to give them a fighting chance. I was struck by some of the case studies. Martin Whitfield used the example of a family that said that starting the transition process was the most stressful thing that had ever happened to them—their child had had brain surgery at eight years old, but it was more stressful than that. It is clear to me that parents and young people back the bill at this stage, albeit that we might have to make some amendments.

I believe that the bill provides an opportunity to move things forward. That is absolutely what we hear. Things have not moved forward for so many years.

**Liam Kerr:** The member is unquestionably right about that, but the issue is that the evidence that the committee heard is that there would be a severe difficulty with the practical implementation of the legislation. Does the member agree that we have to get change rather than just putting in place more law that, ultimately, does not deliver what she is absolutely right about, which is that we have to move things forward?

**Carol Mochan:** Like other members, I was not on the committee, but I have researched the bill,

and I have been in the Parliament for two years now, and I do not think that any legislation would be easily implemented.

The bill could place duties in legislation to support and enhance the transitions of children and young people, and, given the willingness of Pam Duncan-Glancy to work with people at stage 1, it is disappointing that we cannot get to a point where the bill could proceed through Parliament, so that we could try to pull what people describe as “cluttered” legislation together to get it to a point where we could deliver for people. We are here because we are not delivering for people.

Parents, children and young people have been working with Pam Duncan-Glancy on the bill, and they have found that the current system of support to help develop a transition plan is unclear and that support for parents is lacking.

I worked in the area that the bill covers more than 16 years ago. I remember the situation for parents and families, and that situation has not changed at all in the 16 years since I did my research. Strategies are not working, and committees talking to one another is not working, but the bill provides us with an opportunity.

**Martin Whitfield:** The committee agreed that the draft law had already made a difference by highlighting people's experiences, and it acknowledged that the current arrangements for disabled young people planning their transition to adulthood cannot be allowed to continue. The bill is a legislative vehicle that we could use to make that change.

**Carol Mochan:** The member's intervention leads me to my next point, which is why—when an ideal opportunity, which would give people a bit of clarity that they desperately seek on legislative changes, has been put on the table—is the Government so reluctant to at least move to stage 2?

If I am honest, that is a recurring theme in the Parliament. I have said before that the Government is no stranger to a strategy, but it is very poor at delivering them. That is the truth of the Parliament. This is an opportunity to change that.

**Natalie Don:** The member said that the Government does not want to take the bill to stage 2, but clearly she is hearing concerns, not only from the committee but from across the chamber, about how the legislation is not necessarily the right way to achieve the aims.

**Carol Mochan:** I have said that stage 1 provides us with an opportunity, and Pam Duncan-Glancy has said that there would be ways in which we could get the legislation to work. Deep down, young people, parents and families have asked us

to stop delaying, and we need to try and move things on for people.

I wanted to make so many points, but the main one is that young disabled people do not have the right to a transition plan early enough. There is little that focuses specifically on them, and there is no statutory duty on the Government to develop a strategy for their future. Families are saying that the system is not working for them. We are saying that that has been going on for years and years, and this is a missed opportunity to move on to stage 2.

16:24

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** I am very grateful to have the opportunity to speak in today's debate on my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy's Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill. I begin by paying tribute to Ms Duncan-Glancy for her hard work, dedication and undoubted heartfelt interest in the issue.

Lodging a member's bill is no easy task—as the member will no doubt attest to. However, in many cases, it is the cornerstone of the work that MSPs can do in the Parliament. I was reminded of that only yesterday when I met primary 7 pupils from Jordanhill school in my constituency, whose probing questions could have taught us all a thing or two. One that particularly stuck in my mind was when they asked what had got us into politics. Sandesh Gulhane summed that up nicely by saying that he wanted to effect change on a national level and to have the opportunity to change the lives of many through our work. My reply, and that of Patrick Harvie, echoed those sentiments.

Although we may often debate without agreement here in this chamber, I hope that we can all agree that introducing legislation that can effect real change is one of the most rewarding, and perhaps demanding, aspects of our position. It might not always go as smoothly as we would hope, but, if we can be part of the process of change, we should be proud to do that.

I remember my colleague Joe FitzPatrick's proposal to introduce the responsible parking (Scotland) bill in 2012. The bill sought to ensure that people in wheelchairs, parents with pushchairs, older adults and those with sight loss and other conditions would be able to navigate their way safely around the streets without fear of being forced into oncoming traffic by vehicles blocking their path. The proposed bill was seen as being outside the competence of this Parliament. It was subsequently taken up by my former colleague Sandra White. In 2015, the then Presiding Officer confirmed our Parliament's lack

of powers to pass such a bill and the Government sought to amend the Scotland Act 1998, with the support of the then Scotland minister Lord Dunlop. In 2016, a workable bill was reintroduced, only to fall at the end of that session of Parliament, which is similar to what happened to Johann Lamont's version of the bill. Work to introduce the legislation continued in the fifth session of Parliament and, in 2018, the Government took it over as part of its overall Transport (Scotland) Bill, when those initial proposals were finally realised. The legislation came into effect just this autumn, so the whole process took more than a decade.

I say that to highlight not the seemingly glacial pace of new legislation but its complexity. Even if we are met with roadblocks at first—if members will pardon the pun—by never giving up and by working together, we can ensure that a member's initial aims can bear fruit. I hope that, whatever happens here, that will give confidence to our colleague, who I am sure will continue fighting the multitude of challenges that disabled children and young people in Scotland face, particularly in relation to their transition to adulthood. I am confident that she will continue expertly advocating for change and I am sure that she can, and will, be successful. As we have heard today, we all share the member's ambition to improve the experiences and outcomes for disabled young people as they make the transition to young adult life.

However, as we have also heard, there are still a number of issues with the proposals. Those have been highlighted by the committee and by the Government in its response. They mean that, in its present form, the bill will not have sufficient support at this stage of scrutiny. I say to the member that she should not be too disheartened but should see that in context as part of the process of new legislation—a process that she has initiated and should be congratulated on.

I am also heartened that the Government has agreed to take on the member's work and has recognised the need for change, stating:

"The Scottish Government agrees that the current situation in respect of disabled young people's experiences of their transitions to adult life needs to improve, and that doing nothing is not an option."

As a committee member, and as someone who has great respect for my colleague, I assure her that I too will press for her hard work to lead to positive change.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** We move to the closing speeches.

16:28

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** I am pleased to close this very important debate on

behalf of Scottish Labour. I begin by reminding members of my entry in the register of members' interests, which says that I am a member and former employee of Enable Scotland.

I pay warm tribute to my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy for her work on the bill, which is a sentiment that we have heard in speeches from all parties. Bringing a member's bill can be challenging. I have seen at close quarters her Herculean effort over two and a half years. As we heard in her opening speech, her work is based not only on her personal experience but on her fierce advocacy for other disabled young people and their families.

Pam Duncan-Glancy speaks with authenticity on these issues, and today she has taken another step in using her hammer to break the glass ceilings and glass staircases that she said she would break when she came into this place. We all owe her a debt of gratitude for her work on the bill.

It is clear from the debate that there is frustration about how we can move the agenda forward, find a way to ensure that transitions for disabled children and young people become far more comprehensive and easier to manage, and ensure that they are able to get the life chances that we would want for everyone across Scotland. We heard from several colleagues—Carol Mochan outlined this clearly—that there is frustration that non-legislative interventions have not worked and are not working, and there is a sense that there has been resistance to change over a long period.

I will speak about my experience. I had the good fortune to work in the learning disability sector, for Enable Scotland, for more than seven years. For much of that time, I worked on issues such as the one that we are discussing, and particularly in relation to Johann Lamont's bill in the previous session of Parliament. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to her for her efforts in that regard. Labour is particularly proud of the efforts of our members to advance these issues and to drive them forward.

When working at Enable Scotland, I heard conversations time and time again—members across the chamber have also recounted this today, in different ways—about the fact that families felt that it was an absolute battle just to get the right support services when their young people were moving into adult life. I met countless families who were on the brink and found it really difficult that they had to be a manager of all the issues in someone's life. Pam Duncan-Glancy spoke about that in her speech.

Liam Kerr picked up on a number of issues and highlighted some really stark statistics, which Willie Rennie also referred to. It is worth reflecting on the fact that, according to Enable Scotland, 9

per cent of school leavers who have a learning disability progress to university, compared with 45 per cent of all school leavers. Only 50 per cent of disabled people are in employment, compared with 82 per cent of the overall population, and, for every £1 that a non-disabled person makes, a disabled person earns just 83p. We can see some of the really stark barriers and challenges that exist for young people who have a disability and are entering their adult lives. That is why these issues are so important and it is why everyone is united in wanting change.

It has become apparent—this is no secret—that the bill does not enjoy majority support in Parliament and it will not pass stage 1. That is disappointing. I recognise the issues that members have raised. The convener of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, Sue Webber, and other members of the committee have outlined their concerns. They wanted more detail on the financial memorandum, on what the bill sought to do and on the definition of disabled people, as Ruth Maguire, Stephanie Callaghan and others outlined.

It is crucial that we respect the fact that the member in charge of the bill has been willing at every stage to engage on those issues in a very serious way. She has offered to amend the bill and find the space to improve the definitions and to make them clearer and, indeed, to investigate and look again at the financial memorandum. I return to a point that Carol Mochan made: it is important to respect the fact that, at stage 1, we are asked to agree to the general principles of a bill, and we can develop it at stages 2 and 3.

**Liam Kerr:** I am reluctant to intervene because I am enjoying the member's speech very much. However, a lot of what the committee heard was not just about amending the bill. Stakeholders said that practical implementation on the ground would be very difficult, if not impossible. That was one of the things that concerned many members greatly.

**Paul O'Kane:** I thank Liam Kerr for his intervention and for his kind words about my speech. I hear what he says. However, I have heard that throughout my professional life, and I think that it comes back to the challenge of the cluttered landscape. Regardless of whether the bill progresses—as I said, it is clear that it will not—we will have to deal with that cluttered landscape. There have been opportunities to begin to deal with it, and the Government has to reflect clearly on its role in that regard.

I am conscious of time, so I will go back to where I started. Many people are frustrated because they feel that we should legislate because it would hold people's feet to the proverbial fire, force the issue and make it clear that we must have statutory requirements on

people to deal with some of the barriers that I described in the really stark terms and statistics that I read out.

There is much more that I could say, but time is against me. Labour will support the bill this evening. Once again, we pay tribute to Pam Duncan-Glancy. Whatever happens from here on, we as a Parliament must be serious about getting these issues right, because many young people depend on that.

16:35

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** I, too, pay tribute to Pam Duncan-Glancy, who—typically—made a quality contribution to the debate in her opening speech. The truth is that, in our consciences, none of us in the chamber can disagree with the substance of what she said. We are living in a situation in which people in our country are being robbed of hope. That really is an untenable situation. The committee's report, which we have been referring to throughout the debate, can be quite accurately described as a dossier of failure—that sums up the situation rather well.

Frankly, I struggle with the idea of yet another strategy. A couple of weeks ago, there was a piece in *The Sunday Times* that said that research that had been done into the number of strategies and consultations that the SNP Government has engaged in over the past 10 years had found that the figure averaged something like more than one a week. The bulk of those strategies lie gathering dust on a shelf and have not meant that lives have been improved.

I was impressed with what Bill Kidd said, because it caused me to think, why are we here at all if it is not to improve the lives and life chances of our fellow Scots? That has got to be why we are here. That is why Willie Rennie was right when he said that our position on the bill is not a good look, because it looks as though we are saying something that, really, we are not saying at all. What we are saying is that we want real, substantive change. We want an end to the idea that we are robbing Scotland's disabled young people of their hope, which, as I said earlier, is exactly what we have been doing.

**Martin Whitfield:** Does Mr Kerr have confidence that the vehicle exists in this Parliament to reach where he wants to go without legislation?

**Stephen Kerr:** Legislation is not always the answer. I would say to Martin Whitfield that it is tempting to fall into that class of politician who says that something must be done, and the something that must be done is that we have another bill or another law. We already have a cluttered landscape—that is the phrase that

everyone has been reaching for this afternoon—of legislation as things stand. What we need is a change of culture and approach.

Earlier, in relation to the visit that we made to Coatbridge, we heard that agencies, different levels of government, different functions of government, the third sector and businesses are all working together to put the needs of a disabled young person at the centre of their concern and activity and to give them opportunities. Ruth Maguire strikingly concluded her remarks by talking about what Scotland is losing—what we are all losing—because of our inability to create equality of opportunity for young people who are disabled. Robbing us of that talent is not just a social loss or a personal loss for the individual concerned; it is also an economic loss, and we cannot ignore that situation.

When I hear the minister say that it will be the end of next year before the Government can publish a strategy, I am alarmed at that. I think that it was Ruth Maguire, again, who said that we cannot wait for another year before we see that sort of strategy and hear of the action and outcomes that the strategy is intended to deliver.

Going back to the article in *The Sunday Times*, I am afraid that that strategy will be kicked down the road and that it will be another one of the 500 or 600 strategies that the Government has produced in the past 10 years that do nothing for anyone and do not improve anyone's life experience.

After listening to the evidence that was presented to the committee when I had the privilege of serving on it, I can say that it is heart-rending. We all have constituents who have had that experience. It is draining for the parents, who have nowhere to go—they do not have a single point of help or someone to look to, so they are often left with the almost full-time task of looking out for their son or daughter. They would do so anyway, but it is a struggle. Our responsibility as parliamentarians is to find a way to lessen the struggle, ease the way and maximise the equality of opportunity that should exist.

Deputy Presiding Officer, I recognise that I am almost out of time and I have not even referred to my prepared remarks.

Liam Kerr gave a first-class speech this afternoon. With his forensic skills, my colleague was able to define exactly why we will not be able to support the bill at stage 1, despite the fact that its intentions and desired outcomes are all honourable. I cannot speak highly enough of Pam Duncan-Glancy, whose impact on the Parliament has been quite remarkable in the two and a half years that we have all been here. I congratulate her on that and on being able to dislodge the Government and get it to move in the right

direction. Something has been started by Pam Duncan-Glancy, and those of us who are in the chamber at the moment—especially those of us who have spoken in this debate—have a responsibility to see that something happens. The essence of Liam Kerr’s speech was that something has to change, and another strategy or tick-box exercise is not going to cut it.

16:42

**Natalie Don:** I thank all the members who have contributed to the debate. It is clear that there is cross-party consensus that we should do everything that we can to improve the experience of transitions to adulthood for disabled young people.

With transitions to adulthood sometimes being described—as they have been in the chamber today—as a cliff edge, it is clear that the current situation in respect of disabled young people’s experiences of their transitions needs to improve. As I stated earlier, I am grateful for the evidence that was provided to the committee as it brought together its stage 1 report. I assure members that we are absolutely alive to some of the concerns that have been raised in that report, as well as the concerns that have been raised in the chamber today.

I have already stated that we are committed to improving the transitions experiences of disabled young people. Although I have clearly heard that the whole chamber agrees with the aims of the bill, I agree with the committee and the many stakeholder groups that the bill is not the best way to deliver those aims.

I will respond to some of the comments that have been made during today’s debate. Willie Rennie and other members asked whether we are doing anything to clear the landscape. The answer is yes. We have stated very clearly in the statement of intent that we want a strategy that can complement and help bring a more co-ordinated and joined-up approach to the broad landscape, so that young people, their families and practitioners who support them are better able to navigate it. One way of doing that is through our cross-policy working group to ensure that our policies are better joined up. We have also provided funding to ARC to develop Compass, to help young families and practitioners navigate those transitions more smoothly. Going forward, transitions planning and support should be person centred, responding flexibly to the unique needs and aspirations of each young person.

Pam Duncan-Glancy asked about similarities between who the bill would cover and who the strategy will cover. Although the statement of intent proposes the Equality Act 2010 definition of

disability, it does not require a diagnosis, but the bill, as drafted, does. We have heard the concerns that have been raised around that today. The non-statutory nature of the strategy means that it does not impose transitions plans on young people who do not need or want them, nor does it explain how local authorities would identify disabled young people in order to fulfil its duties.

Possibly every member who has contributed to the debate has, rightly, raised concerns about what we are doing now. They have asked how young disabled people will benefit prior to the publication of the strategy.

The Government is working to improve transitions, because we have heard, loudly and clearly, the voices of those who have told us that more needs to be done. We have supported the Association for Real Change Scotland’s principles into practice programme. The purpose of that is to improve the lived experiences of young people who need additional support to make the transition to young adult life, and to ensure that young people are at the centre of planning for their future.

We have committed a further two years of funding to the Association for Real Change Scotland, through the children, young people, families and adult learning third sector fund, to continue that work, alongside supporting other projects. We also continue to support Independent Living Fund Scotland’s transition fund to assist young disabled people in making a smoother transition from childhood to adulthood by promoting independence, community participation, social inclusion and confidence. Since 2017, more than £10 million has been awarded to more than 5,000 young people.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Thank you for taking my intervention—I realise that time is short. All those initiatives, including the independent living funding, are welcome. The bill does not undo any of that; it just provides a statutory underpinning to keep all of it going so that another minister cannot come along and undo it.

**Natalie Don:** That is not what I am arguing here. During the debate, we have heard clearly the concerns that have been raised about the bill. I am just answering members’ comments about what we are doing now, ahead of the publication of the strategy next year.

In October 2023, we published our “Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC): child’s plan” practice statement. It includes new guidance for transitions, which outlines that particular consideration should be given to disabled children and young people. The GIRFEC child’s plan could be used—

**Stephen Kerr:** All the words that the minister has used are commendable—they are lovely words—but there is a question about resources. What is being described is a function that will often have to be carried out by local authorities. Along with the strategy, and all the intentions that the minister has described, will there be funding?

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

**Natalie Don:** That is something that will be worked out, so I cannot confirm it today. I am sure that the member will appreciate that. How much funding will be available for that will be worked out as co-ordination of the strategy is developed.

Building on GIRFEC best practice, the Scottish Government is co-designing getting it right for everyone—GIRFE—with place-based pathfinder teams across Scotland for people at all stages from young adulthood to end-of-life care. Through GIRFEC and GIRFE, we are absolutely committed to improving transitions between children's and adult services for disabled children and young people.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

**Natalie Don:** Am I able to get the time back, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you a bit of that time back as well, minister.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Can the minister explain why the groups of disabled people's organisations walked away from the GIRFEC strategy group that they were on, because they did not believe that it was delivering for them?

**Natalie Don:** I am sorry to hear that that is the case. As I have said, I am setting out the range of actions that we are taking, but we appreciate that we absolutely need to go further. As I have said, that will be a result of the proposed strategy.

We have continued to provide funding to enable the stepping up transitions programme, which connects disabled young people with fair work, education and productive activities that are designed to support a successful transition into adult life and work. We are committed, by 2026, to helping all school leavers to access the transition support that they need to achieve their potential, and to ensuring that young people can further their education or secure a job or training place. We have implemented the introduction of developing the young workforce school co-ordinators across all 32 local authorities, and we will have more.

We are supporting improved implementation of existing statutory duties for planning under the legislation on additional support for learning. We are also working with local government partners to

deliver the additional support for learning action plan by the end of this parliamentary term.

Further actions include updating the transition planning advice in our statutory guidance and improving the information that is provided to young people and their parents on accessing their rights. The feedback that we have heard through that process will directly inform the delivery of the work and will help to ensure that transitions planning happens more consistently and at an early enough stage.

Of course, we are also bringing forward Scotland's first national transitions to adulthood strategy, which we aim to publish by the end of 2024. I understand the concerns of Pam Duncan-Glancy and many others about how we know that that strategy will make the change that we all want to see, when actions of the past have not necessarily got us to where we want to be. The strategy will be subject to robust and regular monitoring and review to ensure that it delivers on its intended aims and remains in focus.

Today, I commit to making the strategy available to Parliament so that it can benefit from the scrutiny of members across the chamber and the input of their collective expertise. To that end, I again recognise the work that Pam Duncan-Glancy has done on the bill and reiterate my commitment to working closely with her as we develop the strategy.

Each of us in the chamber shares the same goal of improving the lives of disabled children and young people in Scotland. The debate has highlighted where progress needs to be made. This Government is resolutely committed to delivering that progress, and we will work collaboratively with people inside and outside the Parliament in doing so. By working together, we can ensure that all disabled young people making the transition to adulthood in Scotland are empowered to achieve their full potential.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Pam Duncan-Glancy to wind up the debate. I would be grateful if you could take us up to just before 5 o'clock, please.

16:51

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** I thank members from across the chamber for their contributions to the debate and for their kind words, especially my Labour colleagues Paul O'Kane, Carol Mochan and Martin Whitfield. Crucially, I thank everyone in the public gallery and all the organisations that have reached out to me in support and to contribute to the bill and the campaign for it to succeed. I know that you have waited a lifetime for change in this area, and it was my honour to take your fight to this Parliament.

This afternoon, I and Labour colleagues, and others across the chamber, have highlighted the human impact that inaction—the inaction that my colleague Ruth Maguire and others have pointed out—is having on the lives of disabled people right across the country. The reality is that disabled people are being failed on almost every front, and they have been for years.

Willie Rennie said that we had better not be back here on this issue in five years' time. I sincerely hope that we are not, because I have been here before, but I suspect that we might be. I gave evidence to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee on the issue in 2005. We were here then, and we are here now.

There is no denying that what is in place right now is not working. The lived experience and the stats make that clear. From what I have heard today, I am confident that most colleagues agree with the general principles of what I am proposing, despite any disagreement on the finer detail. Indeed, some people looking on might find it difficult to reconcile the final vote with what they have heard members say. I would hazard a guess that some members may face a similar difficulty. I remind colleagues that, in this stage 1 debate, it is the general principles of the legislation that we are discussing, and it is not too late to support them.

Let me now address some of the issues that colleagues have raised. First, I again thank members for their kind words about the bill, especially Stephen Kerr, who really moved me in his contribution. However, this is not about me; it is actually too late for me. This is about all the other disabled people who came after me and who will come after me. It can be lonely fighting for disabled people's rights in this Parliament.

I welcome Sue Webber's speech on behalf of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, especially the bit about ensuring that the strategy does not sit on the shelf. I gently remind members that, as we sit here, no strategy has been developed, so it has not yet reached the printer, let alone the shelf.

Stephanie Callaghan and Roz McCall both spoke of social justice, and I know how much passion those members have for the issue. I welcome Liam Kerr's recognition of the issues with data. We need to monitor the situation and shine a light in the dark corners, and I hope that we can do that together.

Among the welcome recognition of the issues, there are some conclusions that will disappoint disabled people and their families who are watching. There is a colloquialism in Glasgow that we often use when people have been tiresomely repeating themselves, and it is this: "Heard it."

Sadly, I think that that is how many disabled people and their families will feel today.

On the definition that is used in the bill—oh, how we have heard this before—defining a disability has long since been a bugbear of the disability movement and of policy makers. As disabled people, we almost have to have a crisis of identity. We are expected to convince employers that we are fine while convincing benefit assessors that we are not.

I have always said that this was about disabled people. I was unapologetic about that, which is why I used the definition in the Equality Act 2010, as the Government does. I have said on the record—I will say it again, for what it is worth—that I would amend the bill and take out the bit about diagnosis.

On what has been said about the financial memorandum, we have heard that, too—we are always too expensive. That is why I worked hard to get the costings right. I took the committee's advice to look again at the figures. I and a small team of four people in my office—who I thank for everything that they have done—worked tirelessly with trade unions, COSLA and ADES to update the figures. I wrote to the committee with those updates. I could not present a financial memorandum to it, because I cannot do that until stage 2.

In this area, I have to say that it looks a bit like the Government is holding me to a higher standard than the one to which it holds itself. I have asked in parliamentary questions how much the Government spends on transitions and been told that the Government cannot extrapolate that. Conversely, I worked tirelessly to cost the bill as best I could, because I did not want to short-change services or local government. I presented figures and re-presented updated ones, but the Government cannot tell us what its approach will cost.

What we face is not, or certainly should not be, a decision about being cost neutral or even paying for failure by the Government, compared to a costly approach under my bill. The reality is that supporting disabled people to enjoy their human rights costs money. However, I remind members that the National Audit Office has said that good support can save £1 million per person. We are talking about an investment that would save money in the longer term, and I will always fight for that.

On the question from Liam Kerr, Stephen Kerr and others on how the bill could be implemented, Carol Mochan was absolutely right that it would be hard—it always is—but that has never stopped Carol Mochan or me or my party or disabled people or their families. My gran once told me that

hard work is not easy, and easy work is hard to find. I seem to find it pretty easy to find hard work. I really appreciate members' support for the work that I have put into the bill, and that families and organisations have put in, too. I particularly appreciate Bill Kidd's contribution today—thank you.

My colleague Stephen Kerr asked how the bill would change lives. The minister and others have said that the bill overlaps and confuses. I attempted to address that in my opening speech. It should suffice for me to say again that the child's plan is not in statute and will not be. There are no legal rights in this space, and it is not just me who says that—the Law Society said that

“significant improvement is unlikely ... without legislative measures”.

Colleges Scotland said that what is “unique” is that the bill would be actual legislation,

“so there is a right to what it provides, but there is also a framework for parents and young people to work within”.—*[Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee, 8 February 2023; c 11.]*

The children's commissioner said that they welcomed

“the potential introduction of legal duties”.

The rights and opportunities of young people should not be left to chance or rest on their luck in having a carer or parent who has the resources, tenacity, energy and time to keep going and fighting. The reality is that that is what is happening just now, and it is not working. I ask the Government and other members: if not this bill, then what? Disabled people are sick and tired of their rights hinging on a wing and a prayer.

It is for them that I am here today, so I will use my closing moments to say this. I introduced the bill because young disabled people have been let down for far too long. As my colleague Paul O'Kane said, families have been on the brink, left stranded without the support that they need, denied their dreams and aspirations, and set up to fail. Without the significant change that I am proposing, I fear that thousands will be failed in generations to come.

I came to the debate today under no illusions of the scale of the challenge. Change for disabled people is possible, but history—especially recent history—tells us that it is also glacial. I have known for some time that the Government was unlikely to fix the law in this area. Nonetheless, I remained hopeful and, because I am an optimist, I still am.

To my MSP colleagues, I say this. You have a responsibility to stand up for people who are underrepresented and who need you the most. Please use that responsibility well. The world is

watching. Do the right thing. History will remember.

To the minister, I say: how will you be accountable, how will the Government measure success, and how will the Government change things? Those are the measures to which we and disabled people will hold you.

To everyone in the public gallery, to all the organisations that have reached out to me in support and to contribute to the bill, and to disabled people and their families watching us today, I say this. I know that you have waited for a change in this area for a lifetime. I know that some of what you will have heard today will be disappointing. For as long as I have the privilege to sit in this place, your fight will be my fight. I will not rest until your children and your children's children have the opportunity to flourish in the land of opportunity that we know Scotland can be. That is because I made a promise that, when I got elected, I would put the ladder, or the ramp, out for other disabled people to follow and make sure that they have a fighting chance at a future. I will do that.

My party and I will again vote for change today. I am sad that others might not. However, colleagues should rest assured that, tomorrow, the fight for a fighting chance will go on. We will hold the Government to account for the change that it promises every day, and I will do that every day that I am here, because everyone needs that, and it is our job to give them it.



## Business Motion

17:00

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-11416, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 2 extension.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be extended to 9 February 2024.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:00

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S6M-11381, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:01

*Meeting suspended.*

17:03

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the vote on motion S6M-11381, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. Members should cast their vote now.

The vote is closed.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Sorry—I was unable to connect. I would have voted no—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Cole-Hamilton. I will ensure that that is recorded—[*Interruption.*] I think that we have lost him.

Can we have Alex Cole-Hamilton for a point of order, please?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Can you hear me now, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can we have your point of order again, Mr Cole-Hamilton?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Okay—sorry about that. I could not connect, and I would have voted no.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You would have voted—

**Members:** No!

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Can we have your point of order again, Mr Cole-Hamilton?

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am

sure that Alex Cole-Hamilton does not need my assistance, but I clearly heard him say, “No”, and I think that the chamber did, too. I hope that that assists you, Presiding Officer. If not, I will sit down.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Mountain. I am sure that that was in the spirit of being helpful. It was not audible to me. The vote is now concluded, but thank you very much for your point of order.

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)

Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 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)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (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)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-11381, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on the Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, is: For 19, Against 90, Abstentions 0.

*Motion disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

*Meeting closed at 17:08.*

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

---

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

---

All documents are available on  
the Scottish Parliament website at:

[www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers  
is available here:

[www.parliament.scot/documents](http://www.parliament.scot/documents)

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact  
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: [sp.info@parliament.scot](mailto:sp.info@parliament.scot)

---



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba