



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 16 April 2024

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Tuesday 16 April 2024

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 16 April 2024

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Fr Roger Dawson, who is Superior of the Jesuits in Scotland.

Fr Roger Dawson SJ (Superior of the Jesuits in Scotland): Thank you for inviting me to address the Scottish Parliament.

In this year's Oxford and Cambridge boat race, the Cambridge women's crew had a surprise win. More surprising, though, was the way that the coach had created a culture of high performance in the crew.

Most of us think that high-performance environments are ones in which there is challenge, where life is difficult and demanding and which are, therefore, usually miserable as well. However, their coach created a caring culture, in which care and respect were the guiding principles, trust and relationships were built and nurtured, and the crew were expected to look after one another, despite competition for a place in the boat.

They were to "press forward together", rather than compete, and to ask what they could give, not what they could get. Respect included respect for their opponents. Getting things perfect was not the goal: learning was. In order that they could grow, they were encouraged to make mistakes, as long as they learned from them. The purpose was to unlock their potential and possibility, so that they could give their best performance—not for themselves but for others, and not for themselves as individuals, but for the team.

Key to all that was a sense of "psychological safety". Right at the centre of the brain is the amygdala. That peanut-sized bunch of neurons is one of the earliest-evolved parts of the brain and is concerned with safety and defending. Its main emotions are fear and anger, and once it is fired up it is very hard to calm it down. Fear and anger leave us both on the defensive and on the attack—a state that is known as amygdala hijack. We do not make good decisions under the effects of amygdala hijack.

The Cambridge crew were kept safe, and they kept each other safe. It was not a macho environment that was about who was the biggest or the toughest. The culture of care did not

produce a crew that was soft or weak under pressure, but one that was resilient, in which performance was enhanced. It was a winning boat. That built not just confidence, but courage. The crew were eager to learn from one another and they were modest, respectful and committed to supporting each other.

Is that culture of care" just for sport? Is it just for women, or rowing? I do not think so. I think that it is human, and I also think that it is Christian. It is for all of us, as we press forward together. After all, we are all in the same boat.

Business Motion

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-12864, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to the business programme. Any member who wishes to speak against the motion should press their request-to-speak button now. I call George Adam to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 16 April 2024—

after

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Implementation of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time

(b) Thursday 18 April 2024—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice

and insert

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice

followed by Ministerial Statement: Climate Change Committee Scotland Report: Next Steps—[George Adam]

The Presiding Officer: I call Meghan Gallacher to speak to and move amendment S6M-12864.1.

14:04

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):

The Cass review, which was published last week, raises serious concerns about gender-affirming care for children in Scotland.

Not only does the report conclude that there is a lack of evidence to support the use of puberty-suppressing hormones, but it details how children and young people might not be being offered the right psychological support and assessment when they experience gender distress. That should

worry us all. It certainly worries me, as a parent who would never wish any harm to come to any child, especially to children who need support when they are going through difficult times.

The truth is that we do not know what harms are caused by gender care, because we need more research, here in Scotland. I have repeatedly warned the Government about the Sandyford clinic. I have asked for a review, similar to the Cass review, of gender-related services for children and young people, and I have warned about the lack of evidence regarding puberty blockers. Those calls have been ignored time and again. I do not raise these issues to cause problems; I do so because I want to ensure that children receive the right safeguards when they embark on a course of medication that could have life-altering consequences.

We now have a report that suggests that we should approach gender care with caution, but the Scottish Government is burying its head in the sand and refusing to give any indication of whether it will accept any of the report's 32 recommendations or will, at the very least, pause the use of puberty blockers until we have more evidence that they are safe. The Scottish Government must implement those 32 recommendations now—or explain why it will not do so, if that is the case.

It is not as if this Government or Parliament has been starved of opportunities for scrutiny. I have requested ministerial statements, written to the First Minister, submitted a question for First Minister's question time, submitted a topical question and have submitted today an urgent question—all about the Cass review. All were either not taken, refused or ignored by this Government. What more must an elected member do to try to get answers?

Our Parliament's principles are openness, accountability, the sharing of power and equality of opportunity, yet we have a Government that is in hiding and is unwilling to address a serious issue in the chamber.

I stand here today for countless parents, carers and young people and for those who have been failed by gender-affirming care in Scotland who want, and deserve, answers. That is all that they want. They want confirmation of what this Government will do, now that the Cass report has been published in full. The Scottish National Party Government has had two years since publication of the interim report to think about that, but I believe that it has done nothing, in hope that the issue will go away and that no one will dare to challenge it.

Scottish Conservatives seek to amend today's business motion. If the SNP Government stands

for the principles of this Parliament, it should allow a ministerial statement on the Cass review. Otherwise, it will confirm my suspicion that it is trying to dodge any scrutiny and is therefore letting down vulnerable children and young people right across Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-12864.1, to insert after “followed by Ministerial Statement: Climate Change Committee Scotland Report: Next Steps”:

“followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Government Response to the Cass Review

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time”.

14:08

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): I begin with an important part of what Dr Hilary Cass said. Dr Cass highlighted the “increasingly toxic, ideological and polarised public debate”

that does nothing to serve young people who are accessing care, their families or the national health service staff who work to care for them. We should be aware of that when we have such discussions.

The Cass review is undoubtedly important and the Scottish Government has consistently been clear that the review’s final report and findings will be considered closely by the Government, health boards and wider partners, in the context of how healthcare can best be delivered in Scotland. That will take some time, because Dr Cass’s considered 400-page report was published only last Wednesday. We are also clear that much of the report deals with clinical decisions, which are—rightly—made by clinicians, not politicians.

However, the main point that members are aware of is that the Cass review deals with services in NHS England, not in NHS Scotland. It is therefore clearly not the responsibility of the Scottish Government to respond: it is for the UK Government to respond with ideas for its NHS.

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-12864.1, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12864, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to the business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

14:10

Meeting suspended.

14:17

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-12864.1. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Rowley. We will make sure that that is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)

Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr 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)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12864.1, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on changes to the business programme, is: For 53, Against 61, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-12864, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to the business programme, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for—

(a) Tuesday 16 April 2024—

after

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Implementation of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time

(b) Thursday 18 April 2024—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
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and insert

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2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Social Justice

followed by Ministerial Statement: Climate Change Committee Scotland Report: Next Steps

Topical Question Time

14:19

New-build Heat Standard

1. Rachael Hamilton (Etrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it will next review the new-build heat standard. (S6T-01924)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): The new-build heat standard was approved unanimously by parliamentary committee last year, following two consultations. Local authorities are responsible for implementing it. We have engaged with them, and will continue to do so, to ensure that the regulations are implemented in the right way. That is part of the regular implementation process for new legislation, and we will continue to address any need to clarify the guidance.

Rachael Hamilton: The minister might not know that rural communities across Scotland rely on wood-burning stoves to heat their homes—they did so during storm Arwen in particular. The poorly thought-out ban has been criticised by Western Isles Council, a Scottish National Party MSP and even a former Scottish Green MSP. With rural areas already suffering from population decline, why is the minister hellbent on making it even more difficult to heat new homes?

Patrick Harvie: Naturally, I reject the characterisation in the member's question. In fact, we extensively consulted rural stakeholders—including rural local authorities—in developing the regulations, over a number of years and in two formal consultation processes. I am a little surprised that the member put her question in the way that she did given that, in committee, her party colleague agreed with the unanimous support for the new-build heat standard—a measure that has been praised by the United Kingdom Climate Change Committee, which urged the UK Government to accelerate its action in that area to match our timetable.

Rachael Hamilton: Although a provision that refers to emergency heating was secured, which permits alternative heat sources as a back-up in off-grid situations, it does not extend to stoves. The answer that the minister gave shows the ignorance of the SNP and Greens about the situation and about the needs of Scots who live outside the central belt.

The minister might not be banning stoves in existing homes, but the Government is consulting on doing just that. As well as reversing the ban for new builds, the minister must rule out subjecting

rural communities to even harsher winters by ruling out the outright ban on wood-burning stoves. Will he commit to that?

Patrick Harvie: As well as being at a slight loss as to why the member appears unwilling to engage with the fact that her party colleague supported the instrument in committee, I am disappointed that she chooses to misrepresent the Government's position on the entirely separate consultation on the heat in buildings bill, which does not propose an outright ban on existing biomass heating systems or their installation in existing homes—in fact, it asks questions about the additional flexibility that might be required in those circumstances, specifically to deal with the experiences of rural communities that the member mentioned.

It is clear that the new-build heat standard, alongside high energy efficiency standards for new builds, is necessary to drive down carbon emissions. We are convinced that we can do that in a way that tackles fuel poverty for all of Scotland's communities and stimulates the development of a clean heat supply chain in Scotland.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Given the small but often essential and traditional role that peat plays in heating some of Scotland's most fuel-poor communities—such as those in my constituency—will the minister say what criteria will be set for an emergency heat system and its fuel sources in relation to the new-build heat standard? I declare an interest of a sort, as I cut peat for my own use.

Patrick Harvie: The technical handbooks highlight that fixed emergency heating might be appropriate when portable solutions are not viable because of the size, complexity or heat demands of a particular building. However, the new-build heat standard is technology neutral; not only does it make a distinction between direct and zero-direct emissions heating, but it does not distinguish by fuel source.

As for situations in which peat is used for cooking, I clarify that cooking is outside the scope of the new-build heat standard, which means that fuel-burning appliances can be installed if their only purpose is cooking.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The guidance in the Government's "Domestic Technical Handbook" says:

"emergency heating will normally be connected to the same means of heat distribution used by the normal heating system. A back-up source of electrical power would be needed to enable operation of related auxiliary systems."

What analysis has the Scottish Government undertaken of the cost of installing all that? Given that cost and the technical issues, is there not in practice a ban? Will the minister confirm whether the back-up source of electrical power that is now required could include a diesel generator?

Patrick Harvie: As I said in my reply to Rachael Hamilton, the Government has consulted extensively and has heard from organisations, individuals and communities that have experience of the kind that Jamie Halcro Johnston refers to. We have taken account of all their responses and conducted a range of impact assessments on the measure, and we are convinced that it will achieve the objectives that I set out.

I ask Mr Halcro Johnston to recognise that, as with other aspects of our building standards system, when there is a need for discretion and the inability to apply any particular aspect of building standards, that flexibility is always there and will continue to be so.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The recent Climate Change Committee report praised the proposed heat in buildings bill as

“a template for the rest of the UK”

for decarbonising our housing stock, but it acknowledged that we will still need to ramp up the decarbonisation of our homes by a factor of 10 in the coming years if we are to have any hope of meeting our climate targets. Will the minister confirm how the new-build heat standard will contribute to reducing our emissions from such buildings? What is the estimated emissions reduction compared with that from continuing to build new homes with direct-emissions heating?

Patrick Harvie: The policy’s objective is to prevent the greenhouse gas emissions that are associated with delivering space heating, hot water and cooling in new buildings, and so to help to achieve net zero by 2045.

On the climate change plan accounting basis for emissions, over the long term, the new-build heat standard is expected to deliver cumulative savings of about 5.2 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent between 2024 and 2083, under central assumptions. That can be broken down as 2.3 million tonnes equivalent saving in the residential sector and 3 million tonnes equivalent in the services sector.

The member mentioned that the UK Climate Change Committee has praised our work on that. I, too, am convinced that that work will stimulate the development of the supply chain for clean heat in Scotland.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): There is no

escaping the fact that people in rural homes face a particular challenge in remaining warm or decarbonising their heat systems in an affordable way, and that the exceptions in legislation are necessary. Will the minister reassure my constituents in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale that, through the new-build heat standard, consideration is being given to the unique needs of rural and remote homes, and that rural home owners can access additional support, including grant funding, to meet their clean heating needs?

Patrick Harvie: Absolutely. We have taken seriously the concerns of rural communities and have included provision for the use of fixed emergency heating. That reflects the reality that such flexibility might be needed in some circumstances for new homes to provide emergency heat, which could include the use of wood-burning stoves.

I mentioned the extensive consultation that has taken place. North Ayrshire Council, Shetland Islands Council, Orkney Islands Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Aspire Orkney and other organisations and companies working across the country, including in rural communities, took part in that, as well as in a number of separate workshops.

On grant funding, we already provide additional support to households for installing clean heating and energy efficiency measures in existing homes. For example, our home energy Scotland grants and loans have a rural uplift, which means that people in applicable areas can obtain grants of up to £9,000.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister clarify how I am to tell my constituents who are building new houses—for example, in the area of Rothes, which is in the shadow of a plant that burns woodchips to generate electricity, for which a grant is given—why they cannot burn wood in their wood-burning stoves?

Patrick Harvie: People who currently have wood-burning stoves should be reassured that those who claim that there is an outright ban are misleading them. People who already rely on such systems can continue to do so.

In relation to new build, the UK Climate Change Committee has been clear that there are circumstances in which biomass can give us a useful contribution to reducing our carbon emissions, but that will not be the case in all circumstances. We will continue to explore the situations where that is justified, while ensuring that the homes that we build for the future are fit for the 21st century in terms of addressing climate change and particulate pollution.

Free Bikes for School-age Children

2. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its pledge to provide a free bike to every school-age child who cannot afford one. (S6T-01914)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): The free bikes pilot programme concluded in August 2022, and the independent evaluation by Research Scotland was published in January 2023. Based on the evaluation's findings, we concluded that a third sector partnership approach would best meet local needs, rather than a national model for delivery. That informed the development of the free bikes partnership, which was established in April 2023. The Scottish Government has invested £900,000 in the free bikes partnership, which is run on our behalf by Cycling Scotland. To date, a total of 6,814 new, refurbished and specially adapted bikes have been provided to children by delivery partners under the scheme.

Martin Whitfield: Will the Government keep its pledge to provide free bikes to children living in poverty by 2026?

Patrick Harvie: I have already indicated the action that we are taking, and I would hope that those members who have made a rather simplistic calculation about the price per bike for the purposes of press releases will recognise that they are misleading people. The money that is being invested in the programme is not only for the provision of bikes; it is also for adapted bikes, to ensure that the scheme is inclusive, and it includes cycle training, accessories and other costs. I hope that members will recognise the strong value to Scotland in achieving a shift towards active travel, in maintaining the health of our young people and in ensuring that active travel is as inclusive as it needs to be.

Martin Whitfield: I am grateful to the minister for that response, but I did not make mention of any costs or of any quotes. I asked whether or not the pledge was going to be kept in 2026. Can the minister confirm, then, that, by 2026, all children living in poverty will have access to a free bike?

Patrick Harvie: I have set out the approach that we are taking with the free bikes partnership, and the—

Members: Ah!

Patrick Harvie: I am sorry that members do not wish to hear the answer. I have set out the approach that we are taking in relation to the free bikes partnership, which—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Let us hear the minister.

Patrick Harvie: The free bikes partnership is based on the evaluation of the pilots that we undertook. It was absolutely necessary to undertake those pilots to understand the different challenges and the different delivery models. We concluded—in my view, quite rightly—that, on the basis of the evidence, a single national delivery model would not be the best way to meet the needs or intentions of the policy. That is why we are taking forward the third sector partnership programme.

The Presiding Officer: I am keen to allow other members to put supplementary questions, so let us keep them, and responses, concise.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I welcome the fact that nearly 7,000 children have benefited so far, and I want that number to be built on. However, access to bikes must go hand in hand with the required infrastructure. Will the minister outline the progress that has been made in investing in active travel infrastructure, including in extending on-street bicycle storage facilities to support my constituents who live in flatted or tenemental properties?

Patrick Harvie: Funding for active travel is now at a record level of £220 million for the financial year 2024-25. That supports our vision for active travel, where walking, wheeling and cycling will be the natural and easy choices for shorter, everyday journeys. We will continue to build on our record investment in active travel, including in infrastructure. Indeed, I visited some of the storage infrastructure that we have supported in Bob Doris's constituency—and there will be many other examples around the country. I encourage all members to work with their local authorities and regional transport partnerships on the new roles that we have supported them to fulfil in delivering that active travel vision for Scotland.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Government also pledged to provide a free laptop to every child in Scotland. Three years in, the data seems to suggest that fewer than 10 per cent have received them. When in the next two years will that pledge be delivered?

The Presiding Officer: I cannot allow that question, as supplementary questions have to be relevant to the substantive question in the *Business Bulletin*. *[Interruption.]* I have to respectfully disagree with you on this occasion, Mr Kerr.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The minister just waffled in response to Martin Whitfield. There was a clear election pledge that every child in poverty would have access to a free bike. Can the minister avoid the waffle—do not tell

me about the process—and tell me whether all those young people will get those bikes?

Patrick Harvie: I do not imagine that Willie Rennie thinks that I am responsible for any other political party's manifesto. I am responsible for this Government's programme of work. It is the most ambitious and well-funded approach to active travel of any part of the United Kingdom by a very long margin. It is investing in access to bikes, infrastructure and culture change on our roads. That is the way that we intend to achieve the objectives that I hope to achieve, and which I would like to think that everyone hopes all political parties share.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical question time.

Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 (Implementation)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Angela Constance on implementation of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:36

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home

Affairs (Angela Constance): I would like to provide Parliament with an update on the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021. After the commentary that we have seen since the act's commencement on 1 April—much of it misleading at best—I will take this opportunity to remind members of the act's purpose.

Let me begin by emphasising that we in Scotland should be rightly proud of our history as a welcoming nation that celebrates and values diversity in our communities. However, we must be vigilant in protecting those values, challenge those who deny them and recognise that there are people who experience hatred and prejudice every day. We cannot and must not be complacent. We should remember that when we talk about hate crime, we are describing behaviour that is criminal and is rooted in prejudice, where the offender's actions have been driven by hatred towards a particular group—hatred for people just on the basis of who they are.

Police Scotland describes hate crimes as offences that include, but are not limited to, assault, verbal abuse, damage to property, threatening behaviour, robbery and harassment, and they can take place anywhere, including online.

The hate crime act maintains and consolidates existing legislative protections against offences that are aggravated by prejudice against the following five characteristics: disability, race, religion, sexual orientation and transgender identity. Those are the same characteristics that are protected under hate crime legislation in England and Wales.

The act includes age as a new statutory aggravation, for the first time. Last week, I visited Age Scotland and met members of the Scottish ethnic minority older people forum, who were generous in sharing their experiences and why the act is important to them. Katherine Crawford, Age Scotland's chief executive officer, stated:

“It is really important to see age included for the first time as we will get a much better picture of how this features in criminal acts, and how it cuts across other protected characteristics. We hope that the new laws will empower older people to report hate crimes.”

The act introduces new offences for threatening and/or abusive behaviour and the communication of threatening or abusive material that is intended to stir up hatred against a group of people who possess or appear to possess the particular characteristics that I have outlined. That could take many forms, including pictures, videos or information posted on websites.

Lord Bracadale, who led the independent review of hate crime legislation that led to the act, was clear on the need for the legislation to include offences relating to stirring up hatred. He noted:

“Stirring up of hatred might lead to violence or public disorder.”

Why would anyone in the chamber not take a stand against that behaviour in our communities?

Those offences are similar to those that are covered by the legislation in England and Wales, which has criminalised stirring up hatred on the ground of religion since 2007 and on the ground of sexual orientation since 2010. In some ways, we are a decade behind.

It is also important to note that the new offences have a higher threshold for a crime to be committed than the long-standing offence of stirring up racial hatred, which has been in place for the best part of 40 years without controversy.

People can still be offensive, critical and insulting under the act—and we have seen people be exactly that. The act includes rigorous safeguards on freedom of speech, and behaviour or material is not to be taken to be threatening or abusive just because it involves discussion or criticism of matters that relate to one of the characteristics included in legislation. The act is compatible with the European convention on human rights, and it specifically provides that the court should have regard to the general principle that article 10 rights apply to the expression of information or ideas that offend, shock or disturb.

Those of us with a platform as a politician or a public figure have a responsibility to have debate that is rooted in reality, respect and facts. Over the past month, there has, unfortunately, been deliberate misinformation and misrepresentation of the act, losing sight of, and empathy towards, the people in our communities whom it seeks to protect. Debate around the act has provided little light and too much heat.

There is nothing in the hate crime act that is divisive. It should not be anyone’s intention to make it so, and we all know better than to believe everything that we read on social media. Although

we do not claim that legislation in and of itself can eradicate hatred or prejudice, critics should not trivialise or exaggerate its impact with false fears.

The act is an essential element of our wider approach, as set out in “Hate Crime Strategy for Scotland”, which was published last year, to build a Scotland in which everyone can feel safe. We are not there yet. The reality is that there are people who are frightened to leave their home, who avoid public places, and who significantly alter their lives in order to avoid certain interactions. We must listen to those whose voices we have not heard in the past few weeks, who are the everyday victims of hate crime.

If we truly believe in taking a zero tolerance approach to hatred, the law must adequately protect people from those who stir up hatred. As Professor James Chalmers wrote recently,

“Anyone stirring up hatred against such a group is almost certainly already committing a crime, such as threatening or abusive behaviour or breach of the peace. The effect of the Act here is not to make criminal what is currently lawful, but to ensure that the law properly recognises and describes the crime.”

Legislation to protect people from hatred and prejudice is not new, and nor is it unique to Scotland. Offering wilful misinformation, causing confusion and ignoring the fact that similar laws have been in place across the United Kingdom without problem for decades are deeply irresponsible and risk emboldening the small minority who genuinely pose a threat of abuse and violence. We should instead look to those who explain the law as it is and not as they perceive it to be.

In March, Adam Tomkins, who is a former Conservative MSP and a professor of public law, stated:

“Offensive speech is not criminalised by this legislation: the only speech relating to sexual orientation, transgender identity, age or disability outlawed here is speech which ... a reasonable person ... would consider to be threatening or abusive and which ... was intended to stir up hatred and ... was not reasonable in the circumstances.”

Since 2014-15, the number of hate crimes recorded annually has been between 6,300 and 7,000. In 2021-22, the police recorded 6,927 hate crimes, and 62 per cent of those included a race aggravator. In 2020-21, almost a quarter of all victims were police officers.

I am grateful to Police Scotland for its outstanding dedication and professionalism as the law came into force and for all that it does to keep our communities safe. In the first week of implementation, Police Scotland received more than 7,000 reports of hate crime, the vast majority of which were not considered to be criminal. Of the 445 hate crimes recorded over the period 1 April

to 14 April, only seven of those were stirring-up offences.

In the past week, there has been a 74.4 per cent decrease in online reports, to 1,832. Sadly, the number of recorded hate crimes did not decrease so significantly, which again reinforces the importance of the legislation. While volumes of recorded hate crime are up on average, that is to be expected, given the high-profile nature of the act's implementation, and hate crime continues to be underreported. Police Scotland has been clear that demand continues to be managed within its contact centres and that the impact on front-line policing has been minimal.

I accept that the Scottish Government could have done more to inform people about the act and our wider approach to tackling hate crime and prejudice. We have, therefore, today, published a fact sheet to go with the general information note on the act that has already been published. However, let us be clear: even if the Government had produced more information, bad-faith actors who are intent on spreading disinformation would have done so regardless.

I am clear that the purpose and intent of the hate crime act, which was passed by 82 members of this democratically elected Parliament, is to protect those in our country who are at risk of hatred and prejudice. Tackling hate crime is not the responsibility of those who are targeted—it is our, and everyone's, responsibility. We are absolutely committed to the ambitious programme of work in our hate crime strategy, with a range of actions under way to 2026 to support victims, improve data and evidence and develop preventative approaches to hate crime.

People and communities who are at the sharp end of hatred in their daily lives simply for being who they are should rightly look to the Parliament to stand with them, and the Scottish Government will continue to do so.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues that have been raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. I would be grateful if members who wish to put a question were to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement.

Police Scotland has been bombarded with almost 9,000 reports because of Humza Yousaf's hate crime law—a law that threatens free speech, and which is critically different from competent legislation elsewhere in the UK, despite the Scottish National Party spin that we have just heard. The vast majority of those 9,000 reports are

not of crimes; despite the SNP's best efforts, Scotland is not suffering from a hate epidemic—it is suffering from bad SNP legislation.

The cabinet secretary talks about "misinformation"—what an absolute brass neck. The misinformation has come from her Government, including from Humza Yousaf and the Minister for Victims and Community Safety. They misquote their own legislation, confusing the public and fuelling even more complaints to the police. Police officers are paying the price for this absolute shambles, as a new HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland report confirms. They already feel "unsafe" and unable to do their jobs, yet the SNP is now ordering those exhausted police officers to police our speech.

The Government was repeatedly warned that its law was unworkable and would be weaponised. It did not listen to us, or to anyone else, and neither did Labour or the Lib Dems. Will it now listen, admit that it got it wrong and back our demand to scrap Humza Yousaf's hate crime law?

Angela Constance: Bearing in mind that we want a debate that is rooted in facts and respect, I respectfully remind Mr Findlay that it is this Parliament's hate crime legislation. Eighty-two members of this Parliament voted to modernise and update our laws to protect those who are, day in, day out, at the sharp end of hate crime in this country. I, for one, will not turn a blind eye to hate crime or to the victims who suffer at the hands of those who perpetrate hate.

I am clear about my own responsibilities, and I wonder whether all members are reflecting strongly on their responsibilities, because in this Parliament we should be united on two things, irrespective of our views on any piece of legislation. First, we should be united on the evils of hate crime and on the corrosive effect that it has on individuals, families and communities the length and breadth of Scotland. Secondly, I say to Mr Findlay that we should be united, and on the same script in strongly calling for people not to waste police time and discouraging them from doing so.

It is not acceptable for members of the Conservative Party to be democracy deniers. The legislation was subject to very careful scrutiny and excellent cross-party working, some of which Mr Findlay's own party's members contributed to, to make an act that is strong, defensible and compliant with the European convention on human rights and, most of all, that protects victims of hate crimes while also protecting the rights of freedom of expression.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary accept that the first few days of the implementation of the act have been a

shambles, that poor communication has led to confusion over what is a hate crime and that there has been a loss of public confidence?

The police have been overwhelmed and the Scottish Police Federation has said that the training has not been good enough. Many women are still concerned about sex not being included as one of the characteristics in the legislation. Will the cabinet secretary commit to adding sex as a characteristic and to undertaking an urgent review of the operation of the act?

Angela Constance: Let me reiterate what I said in my statement. I consider that the Scottish Government could have done more to communicate what the act is about and—crucially—what it is not about. I also have to accept that, even with better communication, there would still have been bad-faith actors. We should be united on calling that out. The legislation is there to protect vulnerable communities; it is not there to be weaponised by people, irrespective of what side of the so-called culture wars they are on.

I have been very clear that I will introduce legislation to tackle misogyny. The matter has been debated previously in Parliament. It was due to the representation of many women's groups, which did not want sex to be captured, that sex was not included as a characteristic in the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021. There are many reasons for that. For example, women are not a minority; we make up 51 per cent of the population.

Helena Kennedy led excellent work in this area. The Government has consulted on her recommendations, on which we will introduce a bill this year. She said that the prevalence of misogyny in our country and in our society is shocking and shameful. There is no doubt that every woman the length and breadth of Scotland will have experienced misogyny in some shape or form. Therefore, we need to have stand-alone legislation that attempts to encapsulate the full range of offences that are motivated by misogyny.

I very much look forward to working with Ms Clark and other members on the bill.

The Presiding Officer: I am keen to get in as many members as possible and to protect time for the next item of business. I call Audrey Nicoll, to be followed by Sharon Dowe. I ask for concise questions and responses.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The Conservatives want to repeal the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021. Does the cabinet secretary believe that Douglas Ross, as an MP, should also seek to repeal similar acts in relation to religion and sexual orientation in England and Wales?

Angela Constance rose—

The Presiding Officer: I ask the cabinet secretary to take her seat. It is quite clear that the questions should be on issues that have been raised in the statement, so I will move on to Sharon Dowe's question.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): Although the Scottish Government has spent £400,000 on advertising its new hate crime legislation, the public and the police still lack clarity on the definition of a hate crime. That is why a 74-year-old woman in Troon was arrested recently for an incident with a hate crime element but then released without charge. Does the Scottish Government believe that a two-hour training module, which some officers are still to complete, is enough to enable officers to enforce the legislation without arresting innocent people?

Angela Constance: I really wish that the Conservatives would make up their minds on what they want. On the one hand, they want more information and communication but, on the other, they have—to use Mr Findlay's words—the "brass neck" to trip up here and complain about £400,000 being spent on a public information campaign.

For the record, although I am not in charge of the training of police officers, for reasons that I am sure members will understand, I would have hoped that members would have been reassured by the fact that, according to the deputy chief constable, more than 80 per cent of police officers have been trained. That is in recognition of the fact that not all police officers are in front-line roles or operate in the C3—contact, command and control—centres. It is also recognised that the training has taken many forms, with some of it having been face to face.

I also put on record the fact that about £300,000 of additional resource was allocated to Police Scotland for implementation of the 2021 act.

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): Given that thresholds relating to the stirring up of racial hatred have been in place in legislation for more than 40 years in Scotland, what approach is enshrined in the 2021 act in relation to the other characteristics that are now in scope with regard to the thresholds for whether an offence has been committed? Does the 2021 act take the same approach as was taken in relation to racial hatred, or does it take a tougher approach? What does it say about members of Parliament if they are not prepared to stand full square behind legislation that is designed to outlaw discrimination against people on the grounds of disability?

Angela Constance: The hate crime legislation that has been passed by this Parliament takes a tougher approach. A racial hatred offence has been in place across the UK since 1986. The

Public Order Act 1986 criminalises behaviour that is

“threatening, abusive or insulting”

when the perpetrator either

“intends ... to stir up racial hatred”

or is

“likely”

to stir up racial hatred. That is a lower threshold for criminality than is in place for the new stirring-up offences under the 2021 act.

The 2021 act does not change the UK-wide offence in relation to racial hatred. The UK-wide offence is wider than the offences under the 2021 act, as there is no requirement for intent to stir up hatred, and it covers behaviour or communication that is insulting as well as that which is threatening or abusive. Under the 2021 act, the behaviour has to be threatening and/or abusive and intended to stir up hatred, which is a high threshold for criminality.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

As a member of the Justice Committee in the previous parliamentary session, I had a detailed discussion with Lord Bracadale following the publication of his report. There was a clear need to consolidate hate crime legislation and, moreover, to provide consistency and clarity on the subject. The cabinet secretary seems to have conceded that clarity has not been successfully achieved following the implementation of the 2021 act. Will the Government reflect on and review how public information is provided, particularly in relation to the balance between Government responsibility and police responsibility for explaining new legislation, especially in such a sensitive area?

Angela Constance: I recall that Daniel Johnson was very active in shaping the 2021 act and was one of the members who, on a cross-party basis, lodged a high number of amendments to the bill, which is now the law of the land. He reflects well the motivation of Lord Bracadale in his review; its core purpose was to achieve consistency, better understanding and consolidation.

If I can be a grown-up about this, I think that there is always scope to reflect on and review how matters are communicated, but I hope that I will not be the only person in the chamber who will take the time to reflect and review.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): During the past few weeks, the people whose voices have been drowned out by Tory misinformation regarding the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021 are those who will benefit from the legislation.

Can the cabinet secretary detail how the 2021 act will help to provide greater protection for victims and communities?

Angela Constance: The 2021 act provides greater protections because it extends the stirring up of hatred offence to all characteristics that are protected, as outlined in the act, including the new characteristic of age, which is therefore now in line with the existing offence of stirring up racial hatred that has been part of criminal law across the UK for decades.

It is well worth our while to note that approximately a third of hate crimes in Scotland involve a victim who has experienced an incident at their place of work or as part of their occupation. Most of those victims were working in retail and other service industries, and a quarter of recorded hate crimes had a police officer victim. Everyone in the chamber should want to protect people and society from such crimes.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of her statement and I welcome the acknowledgement that preparation for implementation of the law has fallen short of what was needed, which has, to some extent, contributed to the confusion about what the act does and—importantly—what it does not do.

Of course, one gap in the protections is the lack of a stand-alone misogyny offence, which the Scottish Government promised on the back of Baroness Kennedy’s report two years ago. Given the importance of filling that gap, will the cabinet secretary commit to publishing, ahead of the summer recess, the proposed legislation that she referred to?

Angela Constance: I reassure Mr McArthur and other members that I am absolutely committed to introducing a misogyny bill as soon as possible. That is a very important commitment in our programme for government, with which, I am sure, members are well acquainted. I am extremely committed to working on a cross-party basis on the substantial legislation that will come, in the hope that we can all at least attempt to move forward with some degree of unanimity— notwithstanding the fact that we will, of course, want to vigorously debate and scrutinise the proposed legislation to ensure that we have, at the end of the day, the best possible legislation to give further protection to women in this country.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): For the most part, the 2021 act consolidates hate crime legislation in one place. Is the effect of the act to properly recognise that crimes against public order, such as being threatening or abusive, which have long been in place, along with stirring up hatred against the

community, are exactly that—hate crimes—and should be recognised as such?

Angela Constance: That is absolutely the case. The 2021 act outlines that the offences that are covered in the legislation are hate crimes and are not acceptable.

Understandably, there has been a lot of media coverage of the number of reports that Police Scotland has received. The very fact that we saw 213 police-recorded hate crimes last week and 232 the week before that reinforces the importance of the 2021 act. The act is an essential element of our wider approach to tackling hate crime, as well as to recognising the harm that hate crime causes. The legislation sends an important message to victims, offenders and wider society that such crime should not and will not be tolerated.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): In the first week since the 2021 act's implementation, Police Scotland indicated that only 3.8 per cent of the allegations that were received were authentic—240 were logged as hate crimes and 30 as non-hate crimes. Does the cabinet secretary believe that those numbers were due to the widespread misinformation that was spread about the act, including from members of the Scottish Parliament? Does she agree that that misinformation serves to damage the victims and survivors that Parliament should be supporting?

Angela Constance: I strongly believe that the information that Police Scotland has published—with respect to the calls that it received in the first few weeks of implementation of the act—is significantly important. There is no doubt that Police Scotland received a high volume of online hate crime reports, but we should all be encouraged by having seen a nearly 75 per cent decrease in the past week, with the number of calls falling from in excess of 7,000 to in excess of 1,800.

I believe that we are moving in the right direction: the police are receiving fewer calls. Maggie Chapman's point is that, despite there having been a high volume of anonymous online reports, the number of recorded crimes has, at the end of the day, been comparatively small. The fact that there have been 445 recorded crimes in the past fortnight demonstrates the need for the act and should increase confidence in this country that the police are acting proportionately and according to the manner that the law intends.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Can the cabinet secretary provide any clarity as to where Police Scotland's policy now sits in relation to recording of non-crime hate incidents? I have been trying for weeks to get answers out of the police as to why a different approach was taken to

the numerous complaints that were made against the First Minister from the approach to the single complaint that was made against me. However, all that I get in response is confusion, evasion and obfuscation. Can the cabinet secretary tell me where the policy now stands? If she cannot, can she tell me how I can get some straight answers from the police?

Angela Constance: Mr Fraser's having published the letter that he wrote to the chair of the Scottish Police Authority and, helpfully, the reply that he received from the chair, gives clarity on non-crime hate incidents.

Murdo Fraser: No, it does not.

Angela Constance: When we are trying to generate less heat and more light in the debate, all that happens is that Tory members decide to barrack from the back row—[*Interruption.*]

And there we are.

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary.

Angela Constance: I understand and support the need for citizens to have clarity about what information may or may not be held about them and how information may or may not be used, but it is my view that Mr Fraser got a very clear answer from the Scottish Police Authority. I am not going to step in on operational matters.

I remind Parliament that the policy around non-crime hate incidents came from the Stephen Lawrence inquiry report in 1999 and has been in operation since 2004. Of course, a similar procedure for recording non-crime incidents exists for domestic abuse, which dates back to 1999. Mr Fraser will, no doubt, continue to engage with me and the Scottish Police Authority.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary confirm that, apart from age, the characteristics that are used in the hate crime legislation are the same as those that are used in the rest of the United Kingdom? What protection does she believe our older people will be given, with the inclusion of age?

Angela Constance: Yes—the 2021 act covers the long-standing characteristics of disability, race, religion, sexual orientation and transgender identity, just as the legislation in England and Wales does. Of course, we have added age.

Many crimes against the elderly might be driven by a desire to exploit perceived vulnerability. During its consultation, the Scottish Government heard that some offences might be motivated by prejudice that is based on the perceived age of the victim. The inclusion of age sends a clear message to society that such offences will not be tolerated. Although the 2021 act covers persons of

any age, in practice it might be more likely that offences under the act—in particular, offences in which the aggravation applies—are committed against elderly persons.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members that my wife is a serving officer in Police Scotland.

In the cabinet secretary's statement, she said that

"critics should not trivialise or exaggerate"

the impact of the hate crime act with false facts.

Does the justice secretary include in those comments Lord Hope, the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents and the Scottish Police Federation, who have all raised concerns about this bad SNP law?

Angela Constance: No, I do not.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement on implementation of the Hate Crime and Public Order (Scotland) Act 2021.

Scotland's International Culture Strategy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-12845, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's international culture strategy. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

15:10

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Today is the first opportunity that we have had since the Easter break to note some significant developments in relation to culture. I begin by taking the opportunity to thank everybody who did so much to promote Scottish culture in the run-up to and on tartan day, which was marked on 6 April in the United States of America and Canada, including the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society and the Lyceum, among many others. I also put on the record my sincere condolences following the recent untimely death of Scott Williamson, the New Zealand honorary consul to Scotland.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to open the debate on the Scottish Government's international culture strategy, which was published on 28 March this year. I know that all members of the Parliament will recognise the importance of our culture and creative sector to our communities, society and economy, and that they will also recognise the importance of international activity to those vital sectors.

The ability to collaborate across borders is key to developing opportunities for our creative professionals to make our culture and creative sector more diverse and vibrant and to reach new audiences and markets. Although that makes the sector stronger internationally, it also supports the vibrancy and diversity of Scotland's domestic cultural scene and helps us to contribute to global dialogue on some of the key challenges of our time.

For the first time, our strategy will set out a strategic approach to those issues. Although we have supported the sector's international work, the strategy will seek to maximise its potential and take a coherent approach.

We are starting from a strong position, notwithstanding on-going challenges. Scotland's deep and rich culture and creativity are recognised across the world, and the culture and creative sector is respected internationally for its creative

output and for the approaches, business models and ideas that are inherent in the sector.

In recent years, the sector has faced a range of challenges that have had a particular impact on its ability to carry out many international activities. The restrictions that resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic meant that creative professionals were, for the most part, unable to tour and exhibit as they had done previously. Those restrictions have been compounded by the increase in costs that we have seen in recent years. The Government continues to work to support the sector to recover from those impacts, including making a commitment to invest at least £100 million more annually in culture for the financial year 2028-29.

However, those efforts have been further hampered by the on-going impact of the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union. The UK Government's decision to leave the EU has put in place a range of barriers to international activity in one of our most important international markets. Creative professionals now often require costly visas or work permits to carry out activities such as touring in the EU, and they face extensive customs requirements for moving equipment and merchandise. In addition, the loss of access to key EU programmes such as the creative Europe programme has not only impacted funding in the sector but removed an important means of facilitating cross-border partnerships and collaborations. Although we have taken action to mitigate those impacts, including through the funding of the Arts Infopoint UK mobility support service, the failure of the UK Government to negotiate favourable agreements for creative professionals with the EU means that extensive barriers to international activity remain.

Our approach aims to ensure that international engagement is a key element of sectoral recovery from recent challenges and to support its long-term development and resilience. It is in that context that the Government is committed to developing our international culture strategy to maximise the sector's international potential in a coherent manner.

The overarching vision of the strategy is for Scotland's culture and creative sector to be globally connected and to have the means and the opportunities to achieve its international potential. It also envisages that the sector will further contribute to Scotland's cultural, social, economic and environmental wellbeing through its international activity.

To achieve that, the strategy sets out three strategic outcomes: first, to support an innovative, more sustainable and economically stronger culture and creative sector; secondly, to develop an internationally connected and diverse culture and creative sector that contributes positively to

people and communities; and, thirdly, to enhance Scotland's international reputation for culture and creativity, including our response to global challenges.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):

On the point about enhancing culture in Scotland, is the cabinet secretary concerned about the comments that were made recently about the Edinburgh fringe, and does he agree that urgent action is needed to ensure that we do not lose one of the biggest events that people come to Scotland to see?

Angus Robertson: I speak as both the cabinet secretary for culture and the MSP for Edinburgh Central, so I am sure that Meghan Gallacher appreciates that that matter is close to my heart. I strongly support all efforts to build the resilience of the Edinburgh festival fringe. It is important that one does not play up existential concerns but, at the same time, it is important that, wherever intervention is necessary, the Government is committed to that. The conversations that we have with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society and others—because, as we know, there has been distress across the culture sector—are on-going and will continue. I hope that I will have the support of other political parties in the chamber in securing the funding that we all know is necessary to ensure the resilience of the sector in the years ahead.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I share the concern that Meghan Gallacher has raised about the need to support the Edinburgh festival fringe, and I know what the cabinet secretary has said. The cabinet secretary said that there is a fear of playing up existential crisis. Who is playing up existential crisis?

Angus Robertson: I just heard from a member on the Conservative front bench the concern that the Edinburgh festival fringe might not be able to continue. It is that kind of playing up of concerns that I do not think is helpful for the Edinburgh festival fringe—or any other festival, for that matter. There is no matter of dispute that the culture sector here—and indeed, in many other countries—has been going through a period of extraordinary distress over recent years.

I know that we are all committed to seeing resilience and recovery in the sector. To that end, wherever colleagues from different political perspectives have particular views on where extra funding might be sought or where other interventions might be secured, Mr Bibby knows that my door is open to them. I look forward to suggestions from members on both front benches in the course of today's statement. I would be interested to hear what specific commitments and suggestions in general they have.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Angus Robertson: Forgive me, but I have already given way twice. I want to make a bit more progress until it is clear how much of my time remains, but I will happily give way to Mr Stewart if my time allows.

I turn to the issue of international mobility. Mobility underpins activities across the culture and creative sector. It allows creative professionals in Scotland to take their work to other countries and their counterparts from around the world to come to Scotland. A key area of action for the strategy will be efforts to mitigate the barriers to international mobility that have been put in place by Brexit, including working to push the UK Government and the EU to support visa-free arrangements for touring artists and working with the sector to explore new ways to support international mobility.

Mobility is, of course, a key element of cultural export and exchange activity in the sector, but cultural export activity goes far beyond that. In 2021, exports from the sector stood at £3.8 billion, driven by an extensive and diverse range of activities that were supported by both commercial and public organisations. It will be necessary to build on that success by developing connections, providing platforms and supporting organisations, all of which will develop the skills and capacity to work internationally. We will therefore undertake a feasibility study into the development of a support service for cultural export and exchange. It would be good to hear from other parties whether that is an initiative that they would support.

Our screen sector is one of our most valuable assets in cultural exports, so we also work with Screen Scotland and our enterprise agencies to seek new opportunities abroad to support and grow the screen sector.

On cultural reputation, as I have already said, the strategy also considers culture's role in how we as a nation respond to global challenges. Culture Counts, in its response to the public consultation on the strategy, said:

"The strength of Scotland's cultural reputation brings us a voice in international dialogue far beyond our size."

That demonstrates the international impact and success that our cultural and creative sector already has, while showing the value that it can bring and why we must build on that.

There is no escaping the fact that international cultural engagement, and the travel associated with that, has implications for our work towards Scotland being a net zero contributor to greenhouse gas emissions by 2045. However, culture can also help to bring new perspectives

and ideas to discussions about how to tackle climate change. Scotland's culture and creative sectors are already showing leadership in schemes supporting environmental sustainability, including as part of the green arts initiative, which supports Scottish arts and cultural organisations to reduce their impact on the climate and environment. Historic Environment Scotland's work to protect heritage from climate impacts is also world leading and can influence others in their approach. The Scottish Government will engage with work that seeks to develop environmentally sustainable models for international cultural engagement and will consider what steps can be taken to support organisations to assess and balance their environmental impact.

The strategy also recognises that culture has a unique and important role to play in addressing historic injustices. In 2024, Scotland has a strong international image and the desire to be a good global citizen, but we must recognise that our country has not always played a positive role. Cultural connections can seek to address, understand and recognise our role in historic injustices, including slavery and empire. For example, some objects were acquired unethically by Scottish collections in the past and some institutions have recently sought to address that through restitution of those objects. The empire, slavery and Scotland's museums project, which is co-ordinated by Museums Galleries Scotland and sponsored by the Scottish Government, has published recommendations for the Scottish Government about addressing the legacy of historic injustice. As part of that strategy, we will support the implementation of those recommendations, including championing the development of bespoke national guidance for repatriating objects that were acquired unethically.

At this stage, and given that I have a little time, I look to Mr Stewart, offering him the opportunity to remember the question that he wanted to ask earlier.

Alexander Stewart: I thank the cabinet secretary for giving me that time.

We talked about the relief of funding issues in the sector and he was keen on that. What are the cabinet secretary's views on the UK Government's higher rate of tax relief for theatres, museums and galleries and on how that support has affected the sector?

Angus Robertson: I was in conversation with the Treasury to ask for that to happen and am delighted that it has. It is important not only to have what would have been a temporary relief but to have a longer horizon on that. I am delighted to be able to put on record my appreciation that that will continue and my praise for all the cultural organisations that, together with the Scottish

Government, pushed so strongly and convincingly for that to happen. I hope that Mr Stewart will continue working with us in pressing the Treasury to retain that level of financial commitment in the future, because it matters to organisations and venues.

Today, I have set out just some of the actions that our strategy will take forward. I believe it to be ambitious and comprehensive, building on much of the work that has already been taken forward by this Government and our agencies. At its heart, the strategy will prioritise working alongside our culture and creative sector, collaborating with, and drawing on, the knowledge and expertise of those who know that sector best.

I hope that the strategy will also play a positive role in initiating discussion and debate about how we can support international activity in the sector, about how culture can help to address global issues and about how the sector in Scotland can realise its full potential internationally. I therefore look forward to our dialogue here today and with organisations and individuals working in the sector and across society.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication on 28 March 2024 of Inspiring Connections: Scotland's International Culture Strategy; recognises the central importance of international engagement, collaboration and exchange to Scotland's culture and creative sector, cultural innovation and financial health; further recognises that the impacts of Brexit and inflation pressures driven by UK Government decisions have had a detrimental impact on the sector's international activity; acknowledges that COVID-19 has also exacerbated these impacts; notes the strong starting position for this strategy, with Scotland's culture and creative sector's global reputation and existing connections; further notes that this strategy recognises the challenges posed by the importance of international cultural activity and the need to achieve net zero by 2045; recognises the role that the culture and creative sector can play in addressing Scotland's role in colonialism and slavery, and agrees that this strategic approach to supporting international connections can play an important role in the sector's long-term development.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind those members who hope to participate in the debate but have not already pressed their request-to-speak buttons to do so. I also remind those making interventions that it would be very helpful, particularly for those joining us online, to press the intervention button as well as asking for the intervention.

15:24

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I apologise for being guilty of not doing that.

I associate myself with the remarks that the cabinet secretary made about Scott Williamson, the New Zealand honorary consul to Scotland.

There are many areas in which Angus Robertson and I will disagree when it comes to the constitution and how best to expand Scotland's international culture. However, I begin with a point of consensus that is often overlooked when we partake in debates in the chamber, which is that we are all passionate about Scotland. Being elected to the Scottish Parliament comes with a responsibility to do everything that we can to make Scotland the best possible place to live, work and invest in, and to visit. We have some of the most breathtakingly beautiful landscapes in the world, and we have a deep-rooted history that makes us who we are today as Scots. We want Scotland to be the best that it can be, and we want to make sure that our heritage and our culture are protected. That is who we are as a nation. We are fiercely proud.

Scotland's culture is among the most vibrant in the world and it should, of course, be promoted internationally. However, to grow our culture sector internationally, we must first ensure that it is thriving here in Scotland. To do that, the Scottish Government must focus on the domestic challenges that our culture sector is facing. We must harness the power of our culture sector before it is too late.

Our culture sector has been through the mill in recent times—of that there can be no doubt. A successful business model needs strong foundations in order to grow. If the domestic flagship model is not working, it is impossible to expand our global reach. Covid-19 certainly had an impact on the sector, but we are now two years on and we still need a long-term plan—not just an international plan—to restore and grow our culture sector. Many local tourism and culture services have not reopened their doors, and, too frequently, we see reports that many are being forced to close their doors for good. Recently, we heard that VisitScotland is closing its centres. They are the most recent casualties in a long line of tourism businesses that have suffered from savage Scottish Government cuts.

The Scottish Government needs to address those domestic challenges. Otherwise, we will not have the heritage, historical and cultural landmarks to promote internationally. Our creative industries are very important to us. They contribute more than £5 billion to our economy each year and they provide some 90,000 jobs. When Scotland's artists fear for the future of Scottish culture, we should stop and listen. That is not just my opinion; it is shared by writers and film makers after the closure of a film project, a book festival and an art magazine in Glasgow. That is

the aftermath of the Government's decision to cut 10 per cent of Creative Scotland's funding, especially when Scotland's average culture spend is one of the lowest in Europe.

Creative Scotland's chief executive, Iain Munro, has warned the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee that parts of the creative sector will collapse if funding is not increased. I agreed with Clare Adamson when she said in November last year that the Scottish Government needs

"to restore the confidence of Scotland's culture sector",

but I am afraid that the strategy does not do that. It appears to be no more than a rehash of the independence white paper on culture that was published in February. The similarities are quite something. As with any white paper that is published by the Government, it glosses over any responsibility that is held by the Scottish National Party and deflects directly on to others. The Scottish Government needs to be honest with itself. Has it assessed the economic damage that would be done to our culture sector should Scotland ever leave the United Kingdom?

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): On the subject of being honest with ourselves, does the member agree that cheering to the echo the cuts to the Scottish Government's budget from Westminster and then demanding more money for every area of spending would be the very definition of rank hypocrisy?

Meghan Gallacher: Keith Brown really needs to look at his own Government's spending and the amount of money that has been squandered over the years by this SNP Government. That money could easily have been diverted into areas and sectors that need it most—including, by the way, our culture sector, which we are debating this afternoon.

If the Government is being completely transparent with the public, work should have been done on that. However, I have yet to see anything that shows the reality of what the SNP's overall aim is.

That brings me to the case study that has been used, which is Quebec. Using another pro-separation movement as a benchmark for the paper is, in my view, not the right thing to do. It is not credible, and it certainly does not give the full picture of what the overall policy aims are. That was highlighted by National Galleries Scotland during the consultation stage for the strategy, when it said:

"We believe that a light-touch approach to furthering cultural relations that builds on the existing strengths of Scotland's cultural sector will likely bring more benefits than a heavy-handed 'top-down' approach from Government

that links culture too closely with explicit foreign policy aims."

The Government motion is typical of the SNP. It does not address the priorities of the sector here but is in favour of promoting the SNP and its priorities elsewhere. In my view, that is definitely and absolutely the wrong way round. It will not help anyone in the sector in the long term.

In launching the document, Angus Robertson said:

"Our festivals, vibrant music scene and rich cultural heritage bring people from across the world to Scotland."

That is true, of course, but, as I raised in my exchange with the cabinet secretary, there are concerns about the future of the Edinburgh fringe. Not only I but others say that, and it has been reported in the press. Gail Porter is an example of a big name who is being priced out of attending the festival in her home city due to overpriced accommodation.

That raises another problem for Scotland's culture sector. Laws and policies that have been brought in by the Government, such as those on short-term lets, are having a detrimental impact on our culture sector. When it comes to suggestions and being helpful, I hope that the cabinet secretary understands the concerns that are being raised. If the fringe is reduced from its current capacity, a huge part of our culture will go with it, including platforms for new talent and the huge local economic advantages that it brings. It would be a travesty if anything should happen to the fringe, and the Scottish Government would have something to do with that, through bringing in incompatible legislation.

I do not have too much time left, but I will quickly summarise the points that I have made. The culture sector needs a Government that is focused on fixing the issues that have been created domestically by the SNP-Green coalition. It needs a Government that is working on an international strategy, not rehashing independence documents and pretending that it has all the priorities right. It also needs a light-touch approach from the Government, not a heavy-handed policy vehicle that links culture too closely with its own foreign policy aims.

I move amendment S6M-12845.2, to leave out from "welcomes" to end and insert:

"believes that Scotland's culture is among the most vibrant in the world and should be promoted internationally; recognises that some of the points in the International Culture Strategy can help to promote Scotland's culture overseas, but that the document provides another forum for the Scottish Government to promote independence and grievance-mongering; further recognises that local tourism and cultural services have not reopened or are being forced to close, and compels the Scottish Government to dedicate more time to restoring Scotland's cultural sector."

15:32

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I join others in paying my condolences to the loved ones of Scott Williamson.

We can rightly be proud of our culture in Scotland. From the songs of Robert Burns to the poems of Dame Carol Ann Duffy, this nation has produced some of the greatest cultural works, which have made an invaluable contribution to not only our nation but the whole world. That legacy lives on; however, we must also recognise the huge contribution that today's cutting-edge creators make at home and abroad.

Our screen sector brings millions of pounds to the Scottish economy, as do our video games makers. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland has just been ranked, yet again, in the top 10 performing arts schools in the world. I therefore fully agree with the cabinet secretary that we can be proud of our international cultural reputation. However, I hope that the cabinet secretary will agree that the only way that Scotland's culture sector can continue to have a strong international offering is by having a strong domestic cultural ecosystem to support it.

Scottish Labour notes the publication of the Scottish Government's international culture strategy. We largely agree with its sentiments, and it has many welcome aspirations. However, as the Campaign for the Arts has said, the "Inspiring Connections" strategy

"suggests a dispiriting disconnection from the reality in Scotland right now: access to the arts is gravely at risk due to years of underinvestment in Scottish cultural organisations."

Its analysis shows that,

"Despite the Scottish Government's pledge last year to 'more than double' investment in culture ... this year's culture budget is actually 6% smaller in real terms than it was in 2022/23."

Rightly, the Campaign for the Arts has said:

"Organisations can't run on warm words – they need cold cash, or they will cease to exist."

On that, the strategy lacks substantial costed proposals—perhaps because it was informed by a consultation and round tables that were held last summer, before the First Minister's announcement in the autumn.

The strategy also fails to include the words "soft power" anywhere in the text. The culture sector is unrivalled in its soft-power capabilities for brand Scotland. Clear recognition is needed of that.

That brings me to the issue of festivals, which is one of Labour's areas of focus for the debate. The Scottish Government rightly states in its strategy that festivals are "a key cultural asset" for Scotland. That is absolutely true. Our festivals

bring in hundreds of thousands of visitors every year and give creators the chance to make connections with producers from across the globe.

However, right now, many of our festivals are in crisis, despite the Government promising to double arts and culture funding. In the past few weeks alone, Glasgow's Aye Write literature festival has, regrettably, called off its plans this year because it could not secure funding from Creative Scotland. As Darren McGarvey said, Aye Write is a

"big date in the literary calendar in Scotland"

that makes literature "accessible" and "affordable" in Scotland's largest city. That should be a major wake-up call for all of us, and it should be a major wake-up call for the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government should be doing everything that it can to get Aye Write back up and running.

The Edinburgh Deaf Festival—the only festival of its kind in Scotland—has also announced that it is in jeopardy for the same reason. What sort of message does it send out to the world if we are closing the book on book festivals and festivals for disabled people are under threat?

The effects of the crisis in funding are affecting festivals of all shapes and sizes all over Scotland, as we have already heard. I mentioned the Edinburgh International Festival earlier. Fran Hegyi, its executive director, told the Parliament:

"It is extraordinarily difficult for any organisation to manage 16 years of flat funding, irrespective of how well it is run or of other sources of income that it might have. I have worked in the industry for coming up to 30 years and I have never known it to be as difficult".—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 11 January 2024; c 18.]

If that was not enough, as we have heard, this weekend, Shona McCarthy, the chief executive of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, announced that the fringe is becoming almost "impossible to deliver" because of a lack of funding.

To be fair to Meghan Gallacher, those quotes are not playing up fears; they reflect the reality of the situation that our festivals face right now. The Scottish Government is happy to use countless pictures of the fringe festival for its glossy brochures, but it has still not provided core funding to support it, despite the UK Government providing support.

Keith Brown: Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Bibby: Yes, I will.

Keith Brown: The member will be aware of the likely closure of Wales's national museum, which has been attributed to cuts in funding for the Welsh Government. Does he accept that UK Government cuts play any part in the issues that

he has raised? He mentioned some words that are not mentioned. Does he intend to use the word “Brexit” or to address the consequences of it in his speech?

Neil Bibby: The member made a number of points. First, we are in the Scottish Parliament, not in Wales. I am not aware of the situation in Wales, but there have been significant cuts to the culture sector in Scotland, which we are debating today, and cuts from the Scottish Government are being passed on to our culture sector. I intend to come to Brexit shortly.

I understand that Creative Scotland’s budget is tight. There has rightly been criticism of the £85,000 that was awarded to project Rein, and many people have said that they could have used that money. However, that money can be spent only once, and demand is significantly exceeding the supply of resources. There is a clear and urgent need to explore options to protect and save our festivals. The Scottish Government cannot sit idly by while our festivals collapse around us.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society has called on the Scottish Government to hold a crisis summit, and Scottish Labour agrees with that. The cabinet secretary was looking for suggestions, and that is a suggestion—hold an urgent summit. It is a very important and reasonable request. In our amendment, we call for an emergency summit on festivals, and I hope that all parties will support that.

I also agree with the strategy’s emphasis on the importance of international mobility. If we want to export our culture, we need to make it easier for our creators and performers—especially our musicians—to tour. That is also in our amendment.

Angus Robertson: Forgive me, Presiding Officer, because I did not press my request-to-speak button.

It would be helpful if Mr Bibby could clarify whether it is the Labour Party’s position that an incoming UK Labour Government will seek to rejoin the creative Europe programme?

Neil Bibby: I will come on to Labour’s plans shortly.

We recognise that touring is vital in enabling many performers to make income and reach new audiences, but that has been made much more difficult because of Brexit. Today, events on that issue are being held by the face the music campaign. The Musicians Union has said that national performing companies have already been cutting back on touring in Scotland. That is not surprising, considering that they have been dealt a 20 per cent real-terms cut to funding over the past 10 years. Given that the opportunities for domestic

touring are already limited, it is crucial that there is a clear plan to make international touring easier.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Neil Bibby: I am sorry; I have already taken two.

That is why Labour would push for a visa waiver for touring artists and would negotiate an EU-wide cultural touring agreement, including allowances for cabotage, carnets and customs rules.

Scotland’s culture sector is clearly valuable, and it is good that we are discussing the international culture strategy today. However, our international culture offering will be strong in the future only if we protect our cultural scene in Scotland today.

I move amendment S6M-12845.1, to insert at end:

“; recognises the urgent need for a touring agreement with the EU to ease the regulatory burden on internationally touring artists and musicians; notes the significant concerns of the culture sector at the closure of and threats to a variety of festivals across Scotland due to a lack of funding; believes that Scotland’s festivals are an integral part of both domestic and international culture strategy, and calls on the Scottish Government to convene an urgent summit with the culture sector to discuss how to protect and support Scotland’s festivals with sustainable and predictable funding as part of its commitment to more than double culture funding over the next five years.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: On a personal level, I echo the comments of all three front-bench members who have mentioned the sad and sudden passing of Scott Williamson.

15:40

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): On behalf of Scottish Liberal Democrats, I echo the comments that have been made on the loss of Scott Williamson.

I am grateful to Angus Robertson for making Government time available to debate culture and the Government’s culture strategy. Culture does not get enough parliamentary time, particularly in Government time. I welcome Mr Robertson’s motion, and in particular its remarks on Brexit. I recognise the impact of Brexit on the culture sector and the importance of the face the music campaign that we have just heard about. Brexit has made the lot of travelling artists who leave Scotland to go to the continent, and vice versa, almost intolerable. That is yet another hallmark of the hideous calamity of that enterprise.

Angus Robertson: I think that Alex Cole-Hamilton and I agree on the possibility of the United Kingdom’s rejoining programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe. Does he agree that Creative Europe would be a tremendous organisation for the UK to rejoin? Is his party

committed to doing so? We did not get any clarification from the Labour Party on that simple and straightforward question.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am happy to say that we are. Liberal Democrats are fundamentally committed to rebuilding our fractured relationship with Europe, whether it be through Erasmus+ or otherwise. It was a Welsh Liberal Democrat who was instrumental in bringing about Wales's unique scheme, and I hope that Scotland will follow suit in that respect. We are committed to rejoining Creative Europe.

Although we will support the Government's motion today, it belies the steady erosion of culture on its watch. There is nothing to disagree with in the motion, but it misses vital facts about what has happened to culture under Angus Robertson. Culture matters, as do the arts. In the words of George Bernard Shaw:

"Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable."

It is all too easy to lay the arts and culture sector to one side. I can understand why that happens, for good reason. Every day, we see our public services crumbling. They, rightly, command the parliamentary time that is available to debate matters, but it is important that we do not lose sight of the sector. We disregard culture and the arts at our peril. In an increasingly divided world, they are among the few things that have the power to bring us together, at least from time to time. In an increasingly frightening and uncertain time, art comforts, enlightens and engages us. We can lessen our anxiety and support our mental health through its prosecution.

Culture is also the very backbone of civilisation, which is one reason why, in 1930s Germany, the Nazis despised it and sought to bend it to suit their own twisted ideology. Indeed, our culture sector can help us to examine the shadows of our own past—for example, as the motion states, by

"addressing Scotland's role in colonialism and slavery".

Therefore, I repeat that we dismiss its importance at our peril.

Let us also remember the creative industry, of which we have heard something already. It is estimated to be worth £4.5 billion to the Scottish economy. It keeps 80,000 people—our fellow Scots and our constituents—in jobs, and it attracts tourism. It is no wonder that the beauty of Scotland is advertised in the many films and television dramas that are shot here. We have a growing film and TV industry that punches well above its weight. It is baffling, then, that the SNP-Green Government has treated the sector with such disregard in the past. At the SNP conference last October, Humza Yousaf pledged £100 million of additional funding to the sector, but that came

after the Government had cut £6.6 million from Creative Scotland's budget in the previous December, before reinstating that budget in February 2023 and cutting it again last September.

The Government is spinning on the spot. Its approach might seem like no more than a joyless round of hokey cokey, but it has had profound consequences for Creative Scotland, which has been forced to use up its cash reserves to cover that shortfall. At the time, the chief executive of Creative Scotland, Iain Munro, described the situation as

"like trying to change the engines on an aeroplane while you are flying it."—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 28 September 2023; c 8.]

The offhand way in which the Scottish Government is treating the arts is reminiscent of the way in which it has disregarded the business community's need for certainty and clarity in order to thrive, flourish and safeguard jobs.

On the Scottish Government's watch, our cultural sector has been threatened like never before. The Edinburgh international film festival has been pared back almost to nothing. Edinburgh's historic Filmhouse cinema is forced to rely on donations, and it has still not reopened its doors. Screen Machine has been saved from the brink, but there is still uncertainty about its future. The Loch Lomond Highland games have been cancelled after the council was forced to withdraw funding. As we have heard several times, Glasgow's Aye Write festival has been cancelled due to lack of funding, and there have been dire warnings about the Edinburgh festival fringe—that jewel in the crown of our nation's cultural economy. Last week, Edinburgh's iconic Jazz Bar announced that, because of financial pressures, it was closing its doors for good. That was a shock, but it was not unexpected, and it speaks to the symptomatic erosion of our hospitality sector, which has suffered since the pandemic. It has faced a perfect storm of increasing fuel costs, wage bills and rent—yet the Scottish Government has still not stepped in to help.

By slashing the culture budget, cutting money from local government and failing to support businesses with the cost of living, SNP and Green ministers are unleashing a rising tide of pressure on our culture and hospitality sectors. Creative Scotland is under such financial strain that it says that it can support only around 30 per cent of applications to its fund. The Government is guilty of cultural vandalism.

I want the Scottish Government to invest in the future to preserve Scotland's proud music, artistic and literary history, working with the UK Government to ease the strains on businesses that are struggling to stay afloat. Members may

rest assured that, should the Government fail to hit the right note, Liberal Democrats are waiting to save the day. We want to have a thriving, world-leading creative sector, supported by a properly funded Creative Scotland. We want local authority budgets to be protected and enhanced to ensure that the benefits of the arts and culture are available to everyone and to every generation that comes after us. The Government has a role to play in nourishing those roots, and it is time that it played it better.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate.

15:46

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Last week, I had the pleasure of visiting Scottish Opera's production studios in Glasgow. I thank Alex Reedijk and his staff for a wonderful tour of the props, wardrobe and set design and for the opportunity to observe a rehearsal of "La Traviata", which will shortly be performed in Edinburgh and Glasgow. The production began in 2008 and has been seen around the world. It was developed in conjunction with Welsh National Opera, and it has also been staged, with Scottish Opera's costumes, arrangements and set, by the Palau de la Música Catalana in Barcelona.

Michelle Thomson: I, too, made that trip, and I found it most illuminating. I was struck by the innovation that Scottish Opera is carrying out as a company in renting out its sets, costumes and so on. Does the member agree with that?

Clare Adamson: Yes, I absolutely agree. As convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, I have seen that with many of our performing companies. Indeed, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra's studios are used for the Scottish games industry. Such innovation is very important, and we should all look to those examples of what we can do.

Scottish Opera frequently performs in New York, demonstrating the very best of a world-class opera through collaboration and touring. It is an exceptional example of a regularly funded organisation, and it is part of the Edinburgh international festival this year, as it has been in many previous years. That is just one of the world-class companies and cultural offerings from Scotland. As the cabinet secretary has said, the Met in New York—

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I would probably agree with everything that the member has to say about Scottish Opera, but is she therefore not slightly disappointed and surprised that, in the 29 pages of the Government's international culture strategy document, it is mentioned only once, in footnote 3 on page 3?

There is nothing else—nothing of what the member has said and nothing at all about Scottish Opera's international role or contribution to Scotland.

Clare Adamson: The member should remember that it is a strategy paper—it lays the framework for how the strategy will be delivered.

I do not think that anyone in the chamber who has seen Scottish Opera, let alone the cabinet secretary or the minister, would think anything other than that it is so important to our cultural offering.

As the cabinet secretary said, we have just had Scotland week in New York, which is supported by the international office of the Scottish Government in New York, which promotes not just the cultural aspects of Scotland but Scotland the brand, which is so important. Companies such as Scottish Opera, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, along with our folk and contemporary artists, music performers and the Scottish screen and games industries, are all there to promote Scotland.

We also have a world-class further education sector, and, as Mr Bibby mentioned, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is ranked in the top 10 performing arts schools in the world.

The international strategy, "Inspiring Connections", will encourage further connections from all levels of our cultural sector to the wider world, but that will not be without its challenges. As has been mentioned, the European Movement in Scotland launches its face the music campaign today. It will be marching down the Royal Mile and will gather outside the Parliament very shortly. The campaign is about the impact of Brexit on our musicians and the problems that they have in touring Europe. Its petition, which has more than 24,000 signatures, states:

"Music is a central part of our cultural identity; it champions diversity and supports our local communities. We must act now".

The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, of which I am convener, has been carrying out an inquiry that has included a session with musicians from the Musicians Union, the RSNO, Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland and Active Events. The RSNO talked about the problems of carnets and cabotage, which have been mentioned. It said:

"We need to access the European labour market to get the very best musicians and keep the national orchestra at an international level, but the combination of low salaries, increased complexity and visa costs is making it extremely difficult to recruit from outside the UK."

Although it does not believe that it has had an impact to date, it says that

“it is inevitable that, through time, it will.”—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 16 November 2023; c 28.]

As convener of the committee, I also attend the UK-EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly on behalf of this Parliament. The PPA has been discussing how we might take forward some of the issues around Brexit, but no one is talking about doing something for our cultural sector as a whole. The conversation in Europe is very much about youth, mobility and emerging artists—that is, people under the age of 28. Our sector is not going to be looked at in any way in Europe in the near future. While Europe is looking to the east and is more concerned about the threats to the European Union, we are very much being marginalised by Brexit. Our wishes and what we want do not seem to have a high priority in Europe and, quite frankly, I do not blame it.

Alice Black of Bectu said that it is not only about the musicians, because a tour involves technicians, crew, producers, tour and production managers and drivers. We cannot talk about a tour without considering the ancillary staff, who are absolutely vital.

We have also been told that if Denmark or France wants to book a Celtic artist, it is easy to bypass Scotland and programme one from Ireland, which, of course, has its own cultural body. As a small independent nation in Europe with a £9.6 billion surplus, it is able to use its 92 diplomatic and consular offices to support its cultural strategy—we can only look on in awe and envy, but, with luck, we can aspire to that in an independent Scotland.

15:54

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): That speech summed up the head-in-the-sand approach that the Government takes on these issues. Clare Adamson is keen to talk about Ireland’s strategic approach to its creative sector. Has Screen Ireland or Creative Ireland seen a 10 per cent real-terms cut to its budget since 2014, as we have seen in Scotland as a result of decisions made by her front-bench colleagues? We will perhaps find out in the course of the debate.

I always welcome a debate in the Parliament on culture. In some cases, there is plenty to agree on with the cabinet secretary. We have a shared professional background in creative industries and a shared interest, and I was a member of the Parliament’s Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee. The cabinet secretary is right to address some of the real concerns that creatives in Scotland face, many of which are shared across the UK and beyond, and I welcome any Government report that seeks to address or resolve those issues. However, I have gone

through all 29 pages of the report and, unfortunately, it fails to do so. It is okay to be ambitious about Scotland’s culture and creative industries but, arguably, the Government has had 17 years to be ambitious about Scotland’s creative industries. If it were ambitious about them, we would be debating a success story today; there would not be the sort of speeches that I have heard this afternoon, which have lamented some of the issues that the industry faces.

Covid has, of course, been the industry’s main problem. We can never overestimate the effect that Covid had on the creative arts or people’s ability—financial, physical, health or otherwise—to attend mass gatherings. It is good that footfall is on the rise, but it is clearly still not at the levels that it was at.

In his report, the cabinet secretary rightly identified that rising costs mean that it is more difficult for artists to perform. That is undoubtedly true. The Edinburgh fringe issue is a direct result of that. Anyone trying to perform at the Edinburgh fringe will know that it is fast becoming the exclusive realm of artists who can afford to perform at it, with those who simply cannot afford it being excluded. We cannot let that happen. The fringe must be the nurturing ground for people who have creative talent and ability and a desire to perform, even if not for monetary value. That is disappearing, and it is disappearing fast.

The point has been well made that accommodation costs are among the main costs that arise, and the reduction in available and affordable accommodation has been widely cited as one of the problems. When the Parliament passed legislation to restrict short-term lets, the fringe festival said that that would reduce the affordability and availability of temporary accommodation in the city. We need around 25,000 beds during the festival period to accommodate everyone, and there simply are not enough beds. Once again, it is a shame that the Government is hindering the situation and not helping it. Perhaps we can reflect on that. I would like to hear more about that in the closing speeches.

The sector is in a time of deep crisis. Anyone who speaks to people in our creative sectors knows that that is the reality. That is not talking the sector down; it is about having an honest conversation with the sector. It is telling us right here, right now, that it is struggling. It is telling us that it needs funding. It is telling us that grassroots organisations are struggling. It is all very well to pontificate about an international strategy and about what we want to do in tartan week, but what about what is happening in Greenock, Gourock, Livingston and the Highlands and Islands? Grass-

roots organisations and small local festivals are closing.

In the past couple of weeks, we have heard much about the Aye Write festival. It should not take an intervention from a former First Minister to put that sort of thing on the agenda. There are not enough former First Ministers to take umbrage with the closure of all those festivals. For that reason, the Government needs to have a very serious conversation with grass-roots creatives.

That is not a huge surprise, because, apart from the national funding cuts to the creative sector, local government, which often supplies the majority of local funding, has seen a huge cut in funding. There has been an estimated 20 to 30 per cent cut across different local council areas, which has a massive effect on small local organisations.

What about our tourism sector, which is our biggest asset? I would say that VisitScotland is the standard bearer for Scotland's culture, but it is set to close all its visitor centres after another £5 million raid on its budget.

On what the cabinet secretary said and some of the speeches that we have heard from the SNP about the EU, Scotland's average culture spend compares with the lowest in the EU. We do not need independence to resolve that issue; people just need to sit around the Cabinet table and resolve it.

If I had more time, I would talk about the report itself. However, I point members to page 7, which is about the national performance framework and the Scottish Government's so-called "vision". It is very clear to everyone who has read the report that it completely misses the mark. I mean no disrespect to the civil servants, who put a lot of work into it. There are a lot of outcomes, there is a lot of ambition and there are a lot of statements of intent, but none of those is measurable. It is a shopping list of box-ticking phrases rather than an actual strategy with actual money behind it.

Angus Robertson: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: I am in my closing seconds, but I look forward to hearing how much money the cabinet secretary is actually going to pump into the sector.

The creatives and artists across Scotland are not pondering the details of the next American tour; they want to know how the Government will support them right here, right now. They want support from the Scottish Government to grow and develop in their communities. We have always punched well above our weight when it comes to international culture, and we will continue to do so, but I would argue that that is despite, not because of, the Government's strategies.

16:00

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I welcome the publication of "Inspiring Connections: Scotland's International Culture Strategy 2024-30", and I encourage everyone in the sector to read it. I also welcome the breadth, quality and depth of Scotland's cultural offering—we punch well above our weight around the world.

Today, I will make a few comments on music, as a graduate of the world-leading Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, which I again congratulate on being ranked sixth in the world. I am also a former professional musician and convener of the cross-party group on music.

We cannot get away from the Brexit question, no matter how much people want to avoid it, and I stress the urgency and importance of rejoining the EU, which is fundamental to the sector. No sector has been more damaged by Brexit than the culture sector—so much so that, as has been mentioned, I have, in conjunction with the European Movement in Scotland, arranged a busk against Brexit day today. To that end, I apologise to members in advance that—as I notified, Presiding Officer—I will need to pop out of the chamber for a short while to welcome the buskers outside the Parliament.

I am also hosting a round-table event tonight with prominent individuals in the music sector, to hear in more detail about their challenges and their ideas to make matters better. Such is the concern that I anticipate that the event will be well attended.

The fact that the UK Government refused concessions by the EU and the fact that the Labour Party continues to support Brexit are noted. I will briefly examine some of the issues.

As has been mentioned, for many musicians, touring is imperative. They are performers first and foremost, and taking their product to other locations and cultures is emotionally fulfilling and builds their audience and brand, yet the additional costs, paperwork and red tape, such as carnets for each country, now act as a real blocker. I have met with bands and larger organisations who are either cutting their touring or stopping it altogether.

There are multiple issues, not just with musicians touring but with trying to welcome them here, as a result of immigration being reserved. How many examples can we cite of musicians having their visas declined, with an outcry ensuing before a change of heart? That damages the profession and our international brand.

We should never forget that our brilliant artists take not just themselves but Scotland to the world. They take to the world Scotland's brand, which—as I know from primary research that I undertook a

few years back—is strong and filled with integrity and quality, and its provenance and authenticity opens doors. Our sense of fairness, ethics and capacity for innovation resonate, too, and all of that shines through in the culture strategy. The Scottish Government has previously noted our egalitarian social values in relation to culture, which is written in our DNA and is another part of Scotland’s story.

Another point to make—I do not know whether it has come through clearly enough in the debate yet—is that musicians, bands and orchestras are all small businesses. We do not often hear them talk about their margins, their cost base and so on, but that is the fact of the matter. In addition to Brexit, therefore, the cost of living crisis—which, of course, has a relationship with Brexit—has affected them hugely. Our music infrastructure is struggling, and I know, given my music contacts, that that is the case across the UK. For example, many of the music venues that operate as small businesses are closing. If, at a local level, musicians cannot perform or tour, how do they sell their product aside from through streaming, which is subject to multiple issues? Thank goodness, therefore, that the SNP has worked so hard to protect the arts.

I openly admit that I can be critical of the Scottish Government on occasion, but I have seen at first hand the determined attempts to protect our music infrastructure via the likes of the youth music initiatives including Sistema Scotland to keep instrumental instruction available and free—I cannot overstate just how important that is—and, of course, to keep our funding commitments.

Some people might not like this, but independence and rejoining the EU are the answer. That is because it is normal to be able to set immigration policies that allow the best and brightest talent to visit our country. It is normal to create embassies that act as a focal point for all our cultural assets and our diaspora. It is normal to take one’s place in the world. When a country has such a strong brand as Scotland has, it is positively abnormal to want to diminish that by clouding it under something else.

More important, and related to what I said about business, it is normal to have the power to create funds—to create hypothecated taxes, for example—and to create tax incentives. That is a really important point. When people claim that we could be doing something, they do not give examples related to the limited powers that this Parliament has.

It is normal for a country to decide how much money it spends in what ways and on what priorities. I would love to hear someone in this debate who is saying that we should spend more money on this area set out what they would

propose cutting to get that increase in spend. I very rarely hear that from the Opposition.

It is normal and highly desirable to encourage and support diversity in music and the arts. I will never forget the difference that it made when musicians, many of whom were from the EU, joined our Scottish orchestras. The new sounds, especially in the strings but across many sections of the orchestras, made a huge difference.

Given the limitations on budget, macroeconomic powers and immigration, and given the madness of Brexit, it is a miracle that our arts and culture and creative sectors thrive in the way that they do. I salute them all and encourage them to read the strategy and to imagine what could be.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that we have no time in hand.

16:07

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): We are having this debate on Scotland’s international cultural strategy at a time when artists, writers and film makers have expressed their fears for the future of Scottish culture following the closures of a film project, a book festival and an arts magazine within days of one other.

I am very passionate about local arts and engage regularly with an independent theatre in my constituency, as well as with other arts groups and enterprises. I absolutely agree that the arts and culture sector is incredibly important not only for the benefits that it provides for participants in enriching their lives but from a business point of view and for the contribution that the sector makes to our economy.

However, let us be clear: there are serious issues and concerns across the sector in Scotland. The Musicians Union has sent a brief for today’s debate, and I believe that it is important that its points are put on the record. It reiterates the point that

“the international cultural strategy is welcome”

and that it is important that the value of Scotland’s arts and culture industries is recognised and celebrated by Government. However, the union argues that the strategy glosses over concerns about culture strategy at home. It states:

“Unfortunately, this strategy is heavy on aspiration and light on detail—and crucially funding.”

The key points from the Musicians Union are that the strategy rightly notes that

“public sector support”

for arts and culture

“has been under pressure”

but does little to address specifically how the aspirations in the strategy will be funded and delivered. National performance companies continue to cut their touring in Scotland, and the idea that they will find resources and capacity to increase international touring on the back of those warm words is optimistic.

When Scottish Ballet tours internationally, it will often leave the orchestra at home, depriving musicians of work and income. National performance companies, which have faced a 20 per cent real-terms cut in the past 10 years, have been offered a 3 per cent inflationary uplift in the 2024-25 budget. Although the uplift is welcome, it does not come close to reflecting the cuts that they have faced.

The additional £100 million per year for arts and culture over the next five years, which was announced by the First Minister last year, is welcome, but it should be viewed in the context of standstill budgets over the past decade or more and as a restoration of funding. Musicians Union analysis has shown that Scottish Ballet has the lowest ballet orchestra rate in the UK, that Scottish Opera has the lowest opera orchestra rate and that the RSNO has the second-lowest tutti rate. Only the RSNO is a full-time employed orchestra. For the national performing companies, there should be an aspiration to do better.

Creative Scotland also faces static budgets and huge demand for its multiyear funding and open funding programmes. Demand has grown substantially since the pandemic, but resource has not kept pace. Insecurity of work, precarious funding and comparably poor pay must be addressed if the Scottish Government is to meet its commitments to fair work and the wellbeing economy and the aspirations of a culture strategy for Scotland.

The Scottish Government should be focusing on tangible actions that will directly impact the working lives of musicians and artists. "A Cultural Strategy for Scotland: Action Plan", which was published last year, was too inward looking, focusing on Government actions, and "Inspiring Connections: Scotland's International Culture Strategy 2024-30" lacks detail on how the strategy will be delivered. The sector reference group should include representatives of all the creative industry trade unions to ensure that the worker voice is fairly represented.

I urge the Government to listen to people in the sector. I do not believe that anyone will disagree with the vision that is set out in the strategy, which is that the Scottish culture and creative sector should be globally connected, with the means and opportunities to achieve its international ambitions and potential and to contribute to Scotland's cultural, social, economic and environmental

wellbeing through its international work. The problem is that a strategy without sustained resources is just another publication to add to the many publications from this Government that will gather dust on the shelf, deliver very little of the ambition and amount to no more than rhetoric and wishful thinking.

16:12

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this debate on Scotland's international culture strategy. Scotland and its worldwide connections have been on my mind recently, and I think that our international strategy is important.

I was lucky enough to be invited by the Presiding Officer to spend some time during the recess as part of the Parliament's delegation to the tartan day celebrations in New York. Tartan day is a chance for people around the world to celebrate their connections to Scotland. The first tartan day was celebrated in Canada in 1987, and the event is now marked annually around the world. With streets closed for the parade, pipers and dancers, tartan on every corner and even a model Empire State building built from Scottish shortbread, I was left in no doubt about Scotland's place on the global stage. The atmosphere was electric, with people celebrating everything Scottish, and it was amazing to see the number of people closer to home who had come to New York to celebrate with us.

I must give a special shout-out to the Vikings from Shetland. It was great to meet them and their families and friends and to see so many of them in New York. I have their badge on today.

The theme of the Government's strategy is "inspiring connections". Indeed, our connections are strong and global. We accompanied actor Dougray Scott, the grand marshal of the tartan day parade, who recently presented a BBC documentary on Scotland's role in creating modern football.

The documentary also starred the world's oldest surviving football, found in the rafters of Stirling castle, which was made around 1540. It now resides in the Stirling Smith museum and if people get a chance to come and see the football, I can tell them that it would not be allowed in the game today.

That example of our part in a global phenomenon is illustrative of a general theme in Scotland's contribution to arts and culture. Creative Scotland and the British Council undertook a two-part research project called "To See Ourselves" and "As Others See Us", which aimed to understand how the sector is perceived both internally and externally. The project found

that the culture and arts sector is recognised both at home and overseas as ambitious and driven, and as punching above its weight on an international stage. Innovation was cited often, especially in relation to site-specific arts and the unexpected use of venues.

I can think of several examples of that in my constituency, from the City Walls bar, which is built into the city walls, to Creative Stirling's latest endeavour in an old water mill in Killin. There are venues with stunning backdrops—for example, the Summer Sessions that are billed for Stirling will have the castle setting the scene. I remember seeing REM at Stirling castle, and it was one of those amazing memories that will stay with me for ever.

Who can forget the exciting and challenging finishing line that the climb up to Stirling castle provided during the UCI—Union Cycliste Internationale—cycling world championships? As well as cultural gains, that event brought around £4.5 million into the Stirling area—another example of the economic benefits of Scotland playing host to international events. As convener of the cross-party group on tourism, that makes me very proud. Those beautiful landscapes and urban environments are key cultural assets and a real driver for visitors.

On my recent trip to New York, I was also struck by the strong emotional connections that many people have to Scotland. As with the Scottish connections framework, we welcome anyone who feels a connection to Scotland, no matter who they are. We are an open and welcoming nation, and it is great to see the Scottish Government promote those connections.

As Angus Robertson highlighted recently, more and more people are taking DNA tests to establish the story of their ancestry. As a result, more African Americans are learning that they, too, have Scottish connections. Some of those connections might be a result of Scotland's role in the transatlantic trade of enslaved people, so it is vital that we work to understand and address any negative historical impact.

I am glad to see the links being addressed and their future potential celebrated through a strategy that aims for an internationally connected and diverse culture sector that contributes positively to people and communities. Those connections have a positive impact on our economy. VisitScotland says that the American visitor market to Scotland made a strong recovery following the pandemic, surpassing pre-pandemic levels for both visits and spend. Scotland was the only UK region to record an increase in visitors from North America last summer. In 2022, American visitors spent nearly £1.2 billion here. Our culture and arts sector provides a great deal to us and our visitors and we

must do everything that we can to allow it to flourish.

I welcome the Government's commitment to increasing funding to the culture and creative sector by £15.8 million in the next financial year. That resource will allow our culture sector to continue to flourish and inspire even more and greater connections worldwide. That is good for Scotland, our cultural links worldwide and our growing economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Fulton MacGregor, to be followed by Jackson Carlaw, to speak for up to six minutes, and I ask members to stick to their speaking time allocations.

16:19

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I appreciate your calling me to speak, Presiding Officer, because I was a last-minute addition to the list of members who are speaking in the debate, which I am absolutely delighted to do.

I was at the REM gig at Stirling castle that Evelyn Tweed mentioned. I think that it was actually my first gig—I was 19 at the time—and it was a really good event. Evelyn Tweed talked about her constituency and how well some of the cultural stuff is doing. On Friday, I tried to make a last-minute booking for the kids at the Bannockburn experience—I think that Bannockburn is in her constituency—but found it fully booked up. That is a good sign generally, although not for me on that particular day.

Three weeks ago, the Scottish Government published "Inspiring Connections: Scotland's International Culture Strategy 2024-30". The strategy is an outward-looking one that seeks to develop and advance Scotland's excellent creative sector by way of international collaboration and engagement. Currently, Scotland's culture sector employs 155,000 people, who, in 2020, contributed £4.4 billion to Scotland's economy. Of all registered businesses in Scotland, 7.5 per cent are registered as part of the creative industries growth sector.

Scotland punches well above its weight on the international cultural stage. Our Celtic Connections and fringe festivals bring a huge number of tourists to Scotland annually. Music, film, theatre, video games, literature and performing arts are just a few of the cultural areas where Scotland has excelled globally.

Every member in the chamber will have cultural assets in their constituencies, and we have already heard about many of them. For example, in my constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston, the television studio facility Nightsky Studios

opened last year. In relation to that multi-studio film and TV complex, it has been asserted that

“Scotland has been at the forefront of storytelling culture throughout history”,

and that the best storytelling technology should be based in

“its natural home, in Scotland.”

It is that sort of attitude that has resulted in our cultural sector being so successful.

I recently visited Nightsky Studios, and I received a warm welcome. I see that the cabinet secretary is nodding, so perhaps he has had some contact with the people there, too. I think that he would be fascinated by a visit, and I encourage him to do that if possible.

With such a rich, diverse and vibrant sector in our country, it is important that we devise a strategy that will best suit the sector’s needs and allow it to flourish. As we have heard, the strategy was born out of a consultation that was launched in early 2023 that sought to gather views on sectoral needs, aspirations and motivations in terms of international activity in order to shape the strategy. Respondents overwhelmingly underlined the globally interconnected way in which the Scottish culture sector operates today. Although many respondents noted that their cultural endeavours have global reach, Europe and North America are the most common regions for international activity.

With that in mind, recent years have shown the tremendous obstacles that events such as Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK’s on-going cost of living crisis have inflicted on our culture sector. Those events have undoubtedly curtailed the sector’s ability to engage internationally. The recognition of the international collaboration that happens within our cultural organisations and the need for improved resilience in the face of challenges such as the ones that I have just mentioned are the two key tenets that have shaped the three goals of the strategy.

Those goals are: to foster

“An innovative, more sustainable and economically stronger culture and creative sector”;

to invest in

“An internationally connected and diverse culture and creative sector that contributes positively to people and communities”;

and to advance

“An enhanced international reputation for culture and creativity, including Scotland’s response”

to the various global challenges that have been mentioned.

The strategy is not inert and has been devised to be adaptable to any future constitutional changes. The Scottish Government’s paper “Building a New Scotland: Culture in an independent Scotland”, which was published last February, sets out how independence would open new avenues to support international cultural activity, including visa powers and access to transformative EU and United Nations programmes. For example, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency offers a multibillion euro grant scheme via its creative Europe programme.

The strategy also recognises the need for organisations to have skills, knowledge, expertise and networking opportunities if they are to thrive in an international context. On that point, the largest structural obstacle by far is the UK’s exit from the EU. I am sure that even colleagues on the Conservative benches would agree that Scotland’s culture sector would be greatly enriched if Scotland had full powers over migration and employment and were to return to the EU single market.

There is little confidence that the Tories or Labour at Westminster have plans to reverse the untold damage caused by Brexit, but the SNP will continue to advocate for the sector by urging the UK Government to organise visa-free arrangements for touring artists; by facilitating cultural export and exchange through programmes such as the festivals expo fund; by promoting access to international platforms such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; and by advocating for renewed connections with the EU, such as by pushing for a return to its creative Europe programme, which I mentioned.

I have outlined the importance of international connections in our cultural sector, but the strategy can only succeed with real investment. That is why I was pleased to see the Scottish Government increase cultural and creative funding by nearly £16 million to bring the total funding this year to just under £200 million. That investment is the beginning of the Scottish Government’s commitment to increase that funding by at least £100 million by 2029. As well as that increased funding, ensuring that the strategy is successful will be monitored via an on-going review process.

The strategy applies from 2024 to 2030, and it will be delivered in close collaboration with the Scottish Government, international networks, national bodies and the strategic cross-organisational partnership board Scotland. As well as those collaborative efforts, it will also closely align with work to implement the recent Scottish co-ordination framework—

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

Fulton MacGregor: —which seeks to engage with Scotland's wide and vibrant global diaspora. I have a bit more to say, Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are not going to be able to say it, Mr MacGregor. I now call Jackson Carlaw to be followed by Keith Brown. You have up to six minutes, Mr Carlaw.

16:25

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): Please, God, spare the arts from politicians. I was so full of enthusiasm at the prospect of this debate. When I heard before the recess that we were going to be debating culture after years of neglect, I said to my team to put me down for it because I really want to be in a debate where we celebrate, nurture and encourage Scotland's arts. I was so hopeful. The cabinet secretary has written an uplifting, enlightened and inspiring book about Vienna, where Mozart performed—Vienna, the home of Schubert, Gustav Klimt and the Spanish Riding School. I was so full of hope and expectation.

I cannot therefore believe, having read this dry-as-dust document, that it is the cabinet secretary's own work. It does not sparkle, as did his book on Vienna. This is the dead hand of civil servants falling on the arts and is a complete travesty of the ambition and enterprise that we would hope to see. It is a polemic on independence and Brexit. It is Stalinist in its direction of the arts. It says, "You will celebrate climate change and you will talk about our colonial past".

I do not want the arts to be told what to do. If artists want to discuss, celebrate or perform those issues, I want them to do it organically. I do not expect the Government to tell them any more than I expect it to tell them about tractor production factory figures. That is not what politicians should be doing. As I have pointed out, in 29 pages, our five national companies are mentioned in a footnote on page 3, which simply says what they are.

The strategy does not talk, as Clare Adamson did, about the enormous contribution that Scottish Opera has made with its productions of "Ainadamar" and "Il tritico" directed by Sir David McVicar, which are now being performed in different continents of the planet. It does not talk about the work that we are seeing being done by other production companies. I hope that Scottish Opera will perform in the Parliament later in the year, as will the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

It does not talk about the pressure on the Edinburgh festival. I heard Brexit mentioned time and again. I have here the programme for the

Edinburgh festival, which includes major companies from Germany, Amsterdam, Berlin, France and Ireland. I remember the debates that we had on Brexit in the previous parliamentary session. None of them were going to be coming. They were all going to be unable to perform here in the United Kingdom, and here they are all coming.

Angus Robertson: Will the member give way?

Jackson Carlaw: I recognise the on-going challenges that there are as a result of Brexit, but major companies are overcoming those challenges to come here and our major companies are overcoming those challenges to go elsewhere.

As Michelle Thomson said, there are far smaller companies that we want to encourage and nurture, so let us work together because I think that we probably all generally agree that we want to see a visa scheme for the arts to ensure that as many companies can perform wherever they need to perform around Europe.

I give way to the cabinet secretary.

Angus Robertson: Will Jackson Carlaw perhaps spare a second to reflect on a specific suggestion? He might not like the wording—it might not sparkle enough—but it is an important and deliverable suggestion that there should be a support service for cultural export and exchange. None of his colleagues have yet mentioned that. The suggestion comes from the sector, and we are very interested in delivering it. Will he and his colleagues welcome that suggestion?

Jackson Carlaw: I am happy to work with the cabinet secretary on such matters, but he should also understand that, as well as Brexit, the changes in rent arrangements on short-term lets are having an impact on the ability of artists to come and perform here. Although I do not want to dwell on it, because it is a controversial subject, we have heard from artists who are concerned that other recent legislation might inhibit their performance.

We know that there could be a potential tourist tax. That, too, could have an impact on our arts and crafts sector. The Aye Write festival being cancelled, as Neil Bibby said, is a dangerous sign.

Yes, the UK Government has intervened with the theatre tax. Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber said that it is a once-in-a-generation transformational change that will ensure that Britain remains the global capital of creativity, as has the director of the James Bond films "Skyfall" and "Spectre", Sir Sam Mendes.

What we lost the opportunity to do in the previous session of Parliament, which I hope that we can yet recover, is to capitalise on the opportunity that there is in the modern streaming

sector for film and television, when we failed to back the Pentland integrated film studios initiative. We need an integrated film studio here in Scotland—not just studio capacity, but post-production and the ability to see, from soup to nuts, major film productions produced here in Scotland.

We have the scenery and the talent, and in the creative arts sector, as Clare Adamson's visit to the Scottish Opera production studios demonstrates, we have the ability to create a whole flourishing employment sector for young people in the creative arts in Scotland, so we need to get behind that.

I realise that time is short, Presiding Officer.

"Do you hear the people sing?"
Singing the songs of angry men?
It is the music of the people
Who will not be slaves again!"

People do not want the creative arts to be told by Government what they want to do.

Alex Cole-Hamilton will be thrilled that the UK Government has backed the Edinburgh film theatre. Our former colleague Donald Cameron was there just a few weeks ago with £1.5 million of money to open it up.

I want the international audience to be moved by Scottish song. I want them to be marvelling at Scottish dance, to be inspired by Scottish acting, to be challenged by Scottish paint and sculpture, and to be provoked by Scottish writing. Let us not lead the artists—let the artists lead us. Our job is to back them, not to direct them. They do not need pamphlets. They need practical support, and that is what this Parliament should be celebrating and delivering.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Keith Brown is the final speaker in the open debate.

16:32

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): It is a point of consensus, I think, that Scotland has always been one of the world's most culturally identifiable and, indeed, most culturally prolific countries. Because of that, huge affinity with Scotland is felt around the world. As has been mentioned, the report is the first to outline Scotland's international culture strategy for the future, but it also outlines where we are now and it shows clearly that devolution has allowed Scotland to formalise that affinity, to turn it into a relationship between Scotland and those around the world who have an interest in Scotland, and to use it for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

Much of the debate has—perhaps inevitably—centred on funding. I give no credibility whatsoever

to those who argue that we should be spending more money on culture—and spending more money on transport, health and education—but who at the same time gleefully accept cuts from the Westminster Government or attack the Scottish Government's tax-raising initiatives. There is no credibility in taking that position.

It is also true to say—given the constrained environment that we all find ourselves in—that it is worth our while to look for ways in which additional finance could be raised. The only member who has done that is Michelle Thomson. I, too, would like to suggest a couple of things. The first is a plea to the cabinet secretary to ensure that imagination informs what we do—which is one of the points that Jackson Carlaw, I think, made. It would be useful to hear the cabinet secretary confirm that he is willing to push the various agencies that are involved—I am talking about Historic Scotland, VisitScotland and so on—to make the most of the assets that we have.

I will give a couple of examples of those assets. About 20 years ago, I was, believe it or not, responsible for taking the Wallace sword—or the "Braveheart" sword—to New York, as we sought to exploit the aftermath of the movie, although I understood that if the sword was lost I could never return to Scotland. It was hugely well received and there were queues around the block of people coming into Grand Central terminal to see it. Afterwards, the benefits from that meant that the renovation works that were needed at the Wallace monument were basically funded by increased visitor numbers because of the interest that the sword and—of course—the movie had created. I think that such things could be done in many more areas.

In the mid-1980s, I wrote to British Telecom, which had then been newly privatised and was £2 billion in profit. I suggested that it buy the house in which Alexander Graham Bell was born—which is only a stone's throw from Bute house in the new town—and develop it. I suggested that it perhaps use telecommunications—or whatever it is called these days—students to explain to people the development of the technology that had allowed Alexander Graham Bell and Marconi to do what they did with the invention of the telephone, and that it use an international pool of people who could come to do that. There are two visitor centres for Alexander Graham Bell in Canada and one in the United States, but he was born in Edinburgh, where that has not been exploited, although it could be. The same applies to John Logie Baird and what he achieved—albeit that he did it when he was in London. There is massive potential for us to capitalise on such things.

As the committee heard, there are buildings all round the country, that for a variety of reasons,

provoke niche interest around the world, including clan-based interests. I do not think that we are properly exploiting them, but if we did, perhaps by niche advertising, we could massively increase the number of visitors to Scotland and to those buildings and sites. That, in turn, could help to fund development when it is very hard for the Scottish Government find the money for that.

It might not be the done thing to say this in a debate about culture, but given the constrained financial circumstances that we find ourselves in, a more imaginative commercial approach could pay dividends. The money that would be raised could fund other initiatives and free up money to do some of the things that have been mentioned in the debate.

The Edinburgh festival and the fringe festival have been mentioned. I was born in Edinburgh and have been going to festival and fringe events for more than 40 years, but there is more to Scotland than Edinburgh and lots of other parts of Scotland also need investment. We must confront the choices that have to be made because of financial constraints. There is no point in imagining that that is not an issue. Other parts of Scotland must have their say. I want to see the festival, the fringe and the various other festivals that go along with them, prosper. We all do, but we must also acknowledge that there are other parts of Scotland.

Jamie Greene made a comparison with Ireland, but there are pretty big differences that help to explain the different approaches. First, Ireland has a budget surplus. It would be nice to have billions of pounds of budget surplus. Also, Ireland has not had to deal with Brexit, but is a member of the European Union and it is, of course, independent.

If members want to see the effect of that, they should look at the effect that Brexit has had on people from Scotland's ability to tour across the EU. We have heard many examples already. Our space has been taken up by Irish initiatives. The committee heard that it is often the case that Scottish artists get to go to Europe only because Irish artists are willing to help them to get across—in particular, to Germany but also to venues in other countries. In my view, that shows the benefit of being part of the EU and of being independent. Some acknowledgement of that would have helped the debate.

The committee has heard evidence about the long-lasting effects of Brexit on artists whose careers have been put in jeopardy because of their inability to get into European countries, which happens for various practical reasons that we have heard about—mainly visas, but also cost and other difficulties. It will be very hard to reverse that and it will take a long time.

Meghan Gallacher: Will the member accept an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: The member must conclude.

Keith Brown: I am about to conclude.

If we want to have a real debate, we should all start from the same place—understanding the financial pressures and not pretending that they do not exist, or that they exist in Wales but not in Scotland. We must start from an honest place if we want the sector to thrive.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the winding-up speeches.

16:38

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): As we have heard today, Scotland's culture and creative sectors are world class. As Michelle Thomson said,

“we punch well above our weight”

when it comes to influence and global recognition, whether in our world-leading festivals and our food and arts sectors.

International cultural engagement can bring a world of benefit to Scotland. As Alex Cole-Hamilton said, our vibrant and diverse culture attracts tourists from around the globe. An international strategy can deepen relationships with our international partners and increase opportunities for collaboration. Many members have said that we should welcome the importance of international engagement to Scotland's cultural sector.

The struggles that are faced by touring artists since Brexit are noted. As Clare Adamson pointed out, the increased regulation and costs that are associated with touring are hurting artists and making Scotland less attractive as a cultural destination. If cultural collaboration is to remain strong, the regulations that are placed on artists and creatives must be made simpler. As my colleague Neil Bibby said, a UK Labour Government will push for a touring agreement with the EU to keep Scotland as a premier place for global talent.

Angus Robertson: Will the member take an intervention?

Foysoil Choudhury: I will in a minute. I have a lot to go through.

Today, however, the warm platitudes that the culture sector is given do not reflect the situation on the ground. Last year, the Scotland + Venice project, which facilitates Scotland's participation in the Venice biennale, had its funding paused by the

Scottish Government. The project's mission statement is that it will

"promote the best of contemporary art and architecture from Scotland on the world stage",

but it has had to petition the Scottish Parliament to fight for its participation in that international festival. That does not align with the sentiment of the Government's motion or the strategy.

The Scottish Government has neglected the culture sector for too long and the sector is feeling the effects of that. Meghan Gallacher mentioned the 10 per cent cut to Creative Scotland; there have also been standstill budgets for our national performing companies, and funding has been pulled from Edinburgh Deaf Festival. None of that points to a Government that appreciates the value of Scotland's deep and rich culture or to one that wishes to make it accessible for all.

As the cabinet secretary, Angus Robertson, said, the sector has been hit with various pressures in recent years, but we must understand that it is during such times that Government co-operation is key. In Edinburgh, the Filmhouse will be able to reopen its doors after getting an award from the UK Government's community ownership fund, and the King's theatre has received funding that will go towards making that facility accessible for all. Those projects will mean revitalisation of a community hub and they will mean culture being made accessible to people who were previously shut out. They are examples of what we could achieve if the Scottish Government were to fully support the sector.

Scottish cultural institutions must have sustainable and predictable funding, and should not have to rely on philanthropy in order for them to operate. As my colleague Neil Bibby said, if we want our culture to continue to be strong abroad, we must have a strong culture sector domestically. The extra funding that will be available for culture over the next five years will help to support the sector, but the work must not stop there. We cannot allow one of our greatest assets to be let down by SNP inaction. That is why Scottish Labour's amendment calls on the Scottish Government

"to convene an urgent summit with the culture sector to discuss how to protect and support Scotland's festivals"

over the coming years. As Neil Bibby outlined, Scottish Labour is committed to using the culture sector to grow Scotland's soft power globally.

The focus on promoting Scottish culture and the recognition of the importance of international collaboration are welcome. However, as has been made clear today, if we are to be strong internationally, we must support the culture sector at home.

16:44

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)

(Con): I am pleased to close on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. I will support the amendment in the name of Meghan Gallacher.

When it comes to the culture sector, Scotland is truly able to punch above its weight on the world stage. We have heard that today from many members. Culture is a fantastic area; the international footprint of Scotland is renowned and continues to be so. We have heard comments about Brexit, but international individuals are still coming to Scotland and we are still sending people to other parts of the world. I look forward to seeing that continue.

The Scottish Government's international culture strategy follows publication of its 2020 culture strategy. The strategy includes the opportunity that the Government wants to promote. It is the first time the Government has published an international cultural strategy of this kind. I welcome the fact that, today, in our debate, we get the chance to talk about the positives of the sector.

Certain aspects of the strategy—for example, the value of the international cultural exchanges and knowledge exchanges, and the engagement with the cultures of many countries—are vitally important. The strategy talks about the bodies that we have in Scotland, including Creative Scotland, Museums Galleries Scotland and the British Council in Scotland. All those have important parts to play, along with Historic Environment Scotland, which looks after hundreds of significant sites across the country. We know that many of those sites have suffered of late because of the pandemic, but they are now starting to develop and move forward.

The strategy highlights the generation of £4.4 billion for Scotland's economy and support for nearly 70,000 jobs across Scotland. That is good for us and good for the sector. It is important that we analyse that and look at what we can achieve, as we go forward.

As I said, the pandemic had a massive impact, as the sector told us when it came to committee. It talked about areas of concern and the closures and difficulties that it has to deal with. The Government has had to listen to that, and we have to acknowledge it when we talk about what is happening in the process. Conservative members understand the importance of the sector and the opportunities that we need to give it to ensure that we continue to have fantastic worldwide potential that expands and goes forward.

We have heard many contributions to the debate. The cabinet secretary talked about the importance of the cultural sector, funding and the

realisation that we need to have opportunities. However, they need to be funded. He has heard, as we all have, that there are still areas of real concern across the sector.

My colleague Meghan Gallacher talked about the deep-rooted culture in this country and our need for a business model that is successful and inspiring. VisitScotland has a chance to do things, but closing its information centres is the wrong direction to go in and the wrong message to send out to our communities and the world at large. Funding is vitally important.

Neil Bibby talked about a sector that is struggling. He said that it has had a crisis and a perfect storm. We on the committee have also heard that. People have come forward and told us about the power that we have, the way in which it is managed, and the fundamental problems that the sector faces. All those issues are important.

The convener spoke about Scottish Opera and the RSNO. They are great, but—as was alluded to—they are footnotes in the strategy. That needs to be looked at. We cannot talk from the rafters about the things that we have if we do not give them our full support. I am inspired by those organisations because they work really hard to achieve on many of the issues—sometimes, with one hand tied behind their back.

Jamie Greene gave a good speech about how the Scottish Government cannot put its head in the sand: it cannot blame other people. It has been running the country for 17 years. The running costs of the Edinburgh fringe, its affordability for performers and the availability of accommodation are very important to any organisation. The Government has heard from the grass roots about where we are on that, and about how cutting funding for local government has had a massive impact on many sectors.

Jackson Carlaw gave a passionate speech, as we would expect, and showed where the priorities should be and how we should realise them. We have five phenomenal national companies that give us opportunities and real pride, but they need to be supported, as do the ideas that we are trying to achieve in the coming years.

It is worth looking at our international culture strategy. I repeat many of the things that have been said in the debate. The Scottish Government has a role to play in that. The strategy boldly claims that independence would open new opportunities. We have heard that many times before. In reality, we know that that could be an issue when it comes to funding. The United Kingdom's international influence and its broad financial shoulders could be risked in that process. We already know that.

It is right that the Parliament debates what Scotland's fantastic culture sector is built on. It has a worldwide reputation. However, the strategy fails to show the ambition that the culture sector wants and needs, following years of being treated as an afterthought. At the moment, the Government is playing with some of that; it is attempting to show that there are opportunities, but at the same time it is giving individuals, companies and organisations a difficult strategy to manage.

I want to see ambition, but that ambition needs to be realised and to have opportunities behind it. It cannot be the strategy that makes things happen; the public and the processes need to make them happen.

The creative sector is innovative and sustainable, and it has a strong cultural impact, but the Government must turn that narrative into reality. It must provide support and put its money where its mouth is if it is going to ensure that the strategy, our culture and the environment around it are to succeed. We want all that to happen, and we have the ability to make it happen, but it needs to be endorsed by the Government and the Parliament. If we can do that, success will breed success.

16:51

Angus Robertson: Before I respond to the points raised, I thank all members who contributed to this afternoon's debate, which I think has been positive. I also thank all the cultural organisations and individuals from across Scotland who contributed to the development of the strategy.

The knowledge and expertise of those working in our culture and creative sectors is, as ever, invaluable in ensuring that the proposals that we take forward have the interests of the sector at their heart. That is exactly what this document is—it is a product of co-operative working between the Scottish Government and the cultural sector.

As I noted in my opening speech, creativity is critical in finding new ways to build international partnerships and in building on our international cultural links, which is a priority for the Scottish Government. We remain an open and outward-looking country where people from around the world can come to enjoy our wonderful and unique music scene. We want our creative professionals and organisations to be able to take their work to audiences and markets around the world and to build those partnerships.

Our culture is informed and inspired by our global connections. The experience and knowledge gained by travelling to other countries is important, but the skills that are developed through collaboration and special friendships

deepen that understanding. Those principles underpin our international culture strategy.

The starting point for this work was always the needs and interests of Scotland's cultural and creative organisations and professionals in their international engagement. The development of the strategy was informed by in-depth consultation and engagement with stakeholders throughout the sector, drawing on their knowledge and direct experience of the impacts that international activity can have and the barriers that exist to developing it.

As we work to deliver the strategy, we will continue to collaborate closely with stakeholders to ensure that activity under it reflects their priorities and that there is joint ownership.

Neil Bibby: Will the member take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I have not even got to my feedback on Mr Bibby's contribution, so I will give him an opportunity to intervene after I do that.

The Scottish Government is also making resources available to carry out the work. We have committed to increasing funding to the culture and creative sectors by £100 million by 2028-29.

A number of members raised specific queries about the recovery and flourishing of the culture sector. Given the challenges, discussions with cultural organisations are on-going constantly—including with the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society. We take all those concerns seriously, but we also take the opportunity to echo the predictions of, among others, Shona McCarthy, who talked on the radio this morning about her confidence that this year's fringe will be a tremendous event. We remain seized of the need to ensure that it continues long into the future.

I did not take the opportunity to welcome Meghan Gallacher to her place as her party's spokesperson on culture; I look forward to working with her in the years ahead. She made no mention of the fact that the Scottish Government is increasing funding for culture, in contrast with the UK Government, which is cutting the budget of the department that is responsible for culture by more than 25 per cent—not even the Labour cuts to culture in Wales get anywhere close to that. Unfortunately, if we look at the record, as opposed to the rhetoric, of the Opposition parties in the chamber, we see that they never confront the fact that their record on culture funding is, frankly, appalling.

Similarly disappointingly, nothing was said about the strategic proposals in the document, including those from the sector, for the development of a support service for cultural export and exchange.

Meghan Gallacher: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: I am glad that we heard that from members on the Conservative back benches. Perhaps Meghan Gallacher would now like to confirm it from their front bench.

Meghan Gallacher: The point that I was trying to make in my contribution was that there is not enough emphasis on what we need to do domestically, here in Scotland. Support from the Government is exactly what our culture sector needs. The cabinet secretary has heard that right across the speeches in the debate. What will he do to make improvements here instead of focusing outwards?

Angus Robertson: Unlike Meghan Gallacher, I have the ambition to promote Scottish culture internationally as well as domestically. One way to do that is by introducing a support service for cultural export and exchange. I think that Ms Gallacher has now had two or three opportunities to confirm whether her party would support that, but we still are none the wiser.

The issue of Creative Europe has also been raised and has yet to be answered. Neil Bibby wanted to intervene earlier. Perhaps he will now clarify whether an incoming Labour Government will accede to membership of Creative Europe.

Neil Bibby: The cabinet secretary might pontificate, but what people want to hear from him is a response to the call for an urgent summit on festivals. Some festivals are being cancelled and others are under threat. The sector has called for the Scottish Government to hold an urgent summit on funding for our festivals this year. Will the cabinet secretary hold that summit—yes or no? That is what people in the sector want to hear.

Angus Robertson: After seeking clarification from the Labour Party for the second time—or perhaps it is the third—on whether an incoming Labour Government would seek to rejoin Creative Europe, we still have absolutely no answer.

I am pleased that Alex Cole-Hamilton's party will support the Government's motion. It is a sensible motion that everybody should buy into, not least because the strategy has been developed with the culture sector.

Neil Bibby: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: No, I will not.

We will continue to develop the strategy with the sector in the future.

Clare Adamson mentioned feedback from Scottish Opera, which is one of the big hitters and one of the jewels in our cultural firmament. Its

ambition to work more internationally is one that I whole-heartedly support.

Jamie Greene spoke about Creative Scotland but, sadly, failed to acknowledge its strengthened financial position, which has happened since he left the committee. Perhaps he has just not been reading the updates on all that.

I say to Michelle Thomson that it is excellent to hear a colleague with such a professional cultural background making interventions and highlighting the real damage that Brexit has caused.

Alex Rowley welcomed the international culture strategy, which is a good thing. I stress again that it is crucial to have domestic cultural recovery and support. We have to do both. It is not about having one or the other—it is about both.

Evelyn Tweed rightly highlighted the advantages of the cultural and economic benefits that we derive from international engagement, whether it be through tartan day—or tartan week, as it is now becoming—or through sporting events such as the UCI championships.

Alex Rowley: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: Forgive me, but I do not have enough time.

Fulton MacGregor suggested that I should visit the Nightsky studio in Coatbridge. I have already done so. I agree that it presents a positive reflection of the massive growth of the screen sector.

Sadly, Jackson Carlaw clearly had not even made it to page 3 of the strategy, which talks about Scotland's five national performing companies. I am sorry that he does not know what those companies are. They are the National Theatre of Scotland, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra—

Jackson Carlaw: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: No, I will not.

They also include Scottish Ballet, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Scottish Opera. Mr Carlaw should use his time a little more constructively. I am delighted that he has read my book on Vienna, but perhaps he should read the strategy that we are debating.

Jackson Carlaw: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angus Robertson: No, I do not have enough time.

I stress again that the strategy has been developed with the sector; it is not a top-down exercise.

Keith Brown made two specific suggestions. The first was that we should have imagination and that our agencies that are involved in supporting the arts, whether that be Historic Environment Scotland, Creative Scotland or others, should be imaginative in delivering and thinking new thoughts about how we can support the sector. I absolutely agree with him and look forward to working with them. Many initiatives are already under way, and we could support many more. Secondly, Mr Brown underlined a point that must lie close to the hearts of MSPs representing the broadest of swathes of Scotland, which is that we need culture to flourish in all parts of the country.

Foysoyl Choudhury called for a discussion with the sector—and the point was made a number of times by Neil Bibby in interventions—almost suggesting that there is not an on-going discussion with the sector at the present time, but there is an on-going discussion with the sector. It is not about headline grabbing; it is about meeting day in, day out and week in, week out, talking about the challenges that the sector faces.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude, cabinet secretary.

Angus Robertson: I can confirm that we are already having that discussion, and we will continue with it.

To finish on Alexander Stewart's summing-up speech, Mr Stewart welcomed the international culture strategy, and I think that that is a profoundly good thing. We look forward to all parties and all MSPs supporting the promotion of Scotland and its culture internationally. I look forward to Alexander Stewart doing that, and I will be happy to work with him and colleagues in all parties across the chamber in doing just that.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on Scotland's international culture strategy.

Automated Vehicles Bill

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-12834, in the name of Jim Fairlie, which is a legislative consent motion on the Automated Vehicles Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. Regrettably, the minister is not yet in the chamber, despite the fact that Parliament agreed the timetable.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could give the response of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee first if that would be helpful.

The Presiding Officer: I appreciate that, Mr Mountain.

Edward Mountain: I see that the minister has now come in.

The Presiding Officer: I will allow the minister to begin his speech after he has apologised to the Parliament.

As I was saying, the next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-12834, in the name of Jim Fairlie, on a legislative consent motion on the Automated Vehicles Bill, which is UK legislation.

17:02

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

(Jim Fairlie): First of all, I offer my apologies, Presiding Officer: I misjudged what I was about to do. I offer my sincere apologies to you and to the Parliament. Thank you very much for this opportunity, Presiding Officer.

This afternoon, we are debating a motion on the UK Government's Automated Vehicles Bill. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of autonomous vehicles and of keeping pace with advances in technology in a fast-changing market. Self-driving vehicle technologies and services will not be successful in the UK without a regulatory framework that provides certainty for innovators and investors and that gives the public confidence that the technologies are safe, secure, accessible and inclusive and that they work in the interests of society.

The bill implements the recommendations of a four-year review of the regulation of automated vehicles that was carried out jointly by the Law Commission of England and Wales and the Scottish Law Commission. The bill sets out a new comprehensive regulatory, legislative and safety framework for the safe deployment of self-driving vehicles in Great Britain. A suite of implementing

regulations will be developed by the UK Government, and the Scottish Government will work closely with the UK Government, stakeholders and safety groups throughout the development of the regulations. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport and I welcome their support, which is necessary for the legislative framework.

The motion covers the clauses of the bill that, as is set out in the supplementary legislative consent memorandum, fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of Scottish ministers. The Scottish Government recommends consent to all the provisions that are outlined in the supplementary legislative consent memorandum other than clause 50, the reasons for which I will explain later. UK ministers have requested to meet the cabinet secretary to discuss that clause, but the fact that the bill is moving at pace through Westminster means that we need to present our views as a Government now.

I will explain the clauses that are outlined in the supplementary LCM in turn. Clause 40 is the power to require reports from the police and local authorities. It permits the Secretary of State for Transport to make regulations that will require Scottish ministers to provide reports on incidents involving autonomous vehicles in Scotland. That is to ensure that the secretary of state has the relevant information to decide whether enforcement action should be taken. The Scottish Government already shares information with the Department for Transport, as it informs an annual publication on road casualties in Great Britain.

Clauses 46 to 51 establish the legal liability of the user in charge of an automated vehicle. Those clauses provide immunity from driver-related traffic offences for individuals operating a vehicle in automated mode. When the self-driving feature is engaged, the user in charge will not be responsible for the way in which the vehicle is driven, but they must be ready to respond to a command to take back the operation of the vehicle. They will also retain responsibility for issues not linked to the way that the vehicle is driven—for example, appropriate car insurance, parking legally and paying tolls and charges.

The UK Government considers those clauses to be reserved because they relate to the Road Traffic Act 1988, which is mostly reserved under the Scotland Act 1998 and is concerned with the use of vehicles on roads. The UK Government acknowledges that those provisions will apply to devolved driving offences but considers that the impacts on devolved matters are incidental to that reserved matter.

The Scottish Government considers that the UK Government has taken too broad a view of what is

reserved. Any and all regulation of the use of conventional vehicles is not reserved. For example, traffic regulation under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 is not reserved, and therefore any and all regulation of the use of automatic vehicles is not a reserved matter. The Scottish Government's view is that determining the liability of any user in charge or any other person for devolved driving offences has a devolved purpose and sits within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Government is content with the policy position of the user-in-charge immunity clauses on the basis that the Law Commission has undertaken an extensive multiyear, expert-led review on the principle of those clauses, which aligns with the recommendations of the joint report.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Jim Fairlie: If the member allows me to finish this point, I will come back to him.

However, the Scottish Government recommends withholding consent to clause 50 because it provides the secretary of state with the power to change and/or clarify how existing legislation, including acts of the Scottish Parliament, will apply to the user in charge of an automated vehicle without a mechanism to seek consent from or even consult the Scottish ministers or the Scottish Parliament.

Graham Simpson: I thank the minister for taking the intervention. I think that I heard him say that UK ministers had asked to meet about clause 50. If I heard him right, can he tell us when that meeting will take place?

Jim Fairlie: The Scottish Government does not have a date from the UK Government, so we are still waiting for that meeting to be arranged.

I will return to the point that I was making.

That may include devolved legislation in the criminal sphere in relation to driving offences, as well as, for example, legislation on matters such as low-emission zones, parking in bus lanes and bus lane contraventions.

Despite the significant engagement between the Scottish Government and the UK Government, we have been unsuccessful in reaching an acceptable position. However, I thank the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee and the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee for considering the LCM and for setting out their views and recommendations, specifically those relating to clause 50. We hope that discussions with UK ministers will be meaningful and that agreement can be reached on clause 50 with respect to the devolution settlement.

Clauses 82 to 85 and 87 to 90 and schedule 6 permit automated passenger services and civil sanctions for infringing passenger permit schemes. Clauses 82 to 90, excluding clause 86, provide for new powers for Scottish ministers in relation to interim passenger permits for use of automated vehicles within a private hire and taxi regulatory regime. Those powers reflect the devolved nature of private hire and taxi licensing, and they are needed because the existing regulation is based on drivers being in vehicles when providing passenger services. New regulation is needed when vehicles no longer have drivers, which will allow the relevant national authorities for Scotland and the Scottish ministers to develop an appropriate regulatory regime.

I welcome the collaborative engagement between the Scottish Government and the UK Government on those clauses—specifically clause 88, which was amended to ensure that Scottish ministers operate the regulation-making power where it relates to matters within their devolved competence, with accountability to the Scottish Parliament.

Autonomous vehicles will be part of the transport system of the future, and we need to ensure that the technologies are safe, secure, accessible and inclusive and that they work in the interests of society. That is why we will continue to engage with the UK Government and a wide range of stakeholders as regulations are developed. I welcome today's debate and ask members to vote for the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions in Part 1, Chapter 6, clause 40, Part 2, Chapter 1, clauses 46 to 49 and 51, Part 5, clauses 82 to 85, 87 to 90 and Schedule 6 of the Automated Vehicles Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 8 November 2023 and subsequently amended, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

17:09

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased to speak in this debate as convener of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. I draw members' attention to the committee's report on the bill.

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee recognises the need for the bill to provide regulation in relation to innovative technology use, which may be expected to increase. It also recognises that the bill is the result of four years of careful joint work by the Scottish Law Commission and the Law Commission of England and Wales, alongside other consultation and policy development. Unfortunately, there was very limited

time for the committee's scrutiny, but I would like to highlight the key points that arose during our consideration.

The committee's consideration related principally to clause 50 of the bill. There is a dispute about that between the Scottish Government and the UK Government. The clause gives a power to the secretary of state to clarify the application of legislation to the user in charge of an automated vehicle. As I understand it, the dispute between the Governments centres on whether the provision is reserved or devolved. As we have heard from the minister, the Scottish Government's objection to that clause is that the power can be exercised in devolved areas without the UK Government having to seek the consent of the Scottish ministers and without its having to consult them. The UK Government considers that a requirement to seek consent or to consult would be unnecessary, as the provision relates to a reserved matter.

The committee is in no position to adjudicate disputes on the dividing line between devolved and reserved competence. However, we noted in our report our disappointment that both Governments could not reach a solution on the matter that satisfied everyone. It appears that there is little dispute in relation to the policy behind the bill. It is therefore unfortunate that, even though that is the case, the Governments have been unable to reach agreement.

As I have said, the committee cannot determine whether or not clause 50 relates to devolved matters. However, we agree in principle with the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee's recommendation that the Scottish Parliament should have an opportunity to effectively scrutinise the exercise of all legislative powers within devolved competence.

The committee explored the Scottish Government's specific concerns about the potential use of clause 50. Those concerns relate to the potential for the creation of a two-tier approach to driving offences, with one set of rules applied to conventional vehicles and one set of rules applied to autonomous vehicles. The committee understands that the Scottish Government has concerns that that could potentially complicate the law on road offences in a way that might not have been intended.

Jim Fairlie: Will the member take an intervention?

Edward Mountain: I will take an intervention. However, I am limited in what I can say.

Jim Fairlie: I want to clarify a point. Edward Mountain talks about a question being raised about a two-tier system. That was not the point that the Scottish Government raised concerns

about; it was about the lack of legislative scrutiny by the Scottish Parliament.

Edward Mountain: That is the point. It is about where the dividing line is, where scrutiny is needed and whether the UK Government and the Scottish Government agree in relation to autonomous vehicles.

The potential for unintended consequences has been discussed in other contexts—for example, in relation to accessibility and the impact on taxi services from an employment perspective. The committee is glad that consideration has been given to the potential for unintended consequences in what is a developing area. We encourage constructive and effective engagement between both Governments to further minimise the risk of any conflict.

Although there have been disagreements in relation to the drafting of the bill, I hope that we will see effective co-operation when it comes to its implementation, to ensure that there is a fair and clear system for everyone.

The Presiding Officer: I call Graham Simpson, who has up to five minutes.

17:14

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I assure members that I will take nothing like five minutes to deal with this matter, so we may have an earlier decision time.

Given the debate so far, it is clear that this is potentially a complex area of law and that there are a whole range of issues to be considered. With regard to clause 50, I note that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's excellent report dealt with the issue in some detail. The committee received evidence that it could lead to a two-tier system, and that concern was raised at committee by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, so I think that the minister is wrong to ignore it.

I share the committee's concern that it is not in a position to properly say whether the Scottish Government or the UK Government is correct on the matter of clause 50. In general, we have, time and time again, come across the same issue. Where the Scottish Government and the UK Government disagree on whether something strays into the area of devolved competence, in my experience, committees of this Parliament get to hear only from the Scottish Government, and that is the case in this instance.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): It might interest the member to know that one of the reasons why it is so difficult for committees such as the one on which I serve to hear a perspective from the UK Government is that it not only refuses

to turn up when it is invited but refuses to answer our letters.

Graham Simpson: In this case, I am not even sure that the UK Government was asked for its opinion.

That gives parliamentarians in the Scottish Parliament a problem, because we have only one side of the story. It may be that the Scottish Government is right, but, unless we hear both sides of the story, how are we to judge?

That frustration—my frustration—is echoed in the report from the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. The committee is quite clearly not in a position to say who is right and who is wrong, and it calls for further talks between the Governments. We have heard from the minister today that UK ministers have now reached out—perhaps it is late in the day, but they have asked for a meeting. That meeting has not yet taken place, and it should have taken place much earlier.

I am not interested in whose fault it is. Both Governments ought to be working together to resolve these matters—in essence, I share the committee convener's frustration. Having said that, however, we will support the motion.

17:17

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am pleased to speak on behalf of Scottish Labour in this debate on the Automated Vehicles Bill, and I am grateful for the work that the two committees have done in considering the bill's implications.

The Automated Vehicles Bill, which was introduced by the UK Government last year, is intended to regulate the use of automated vehicles and to

“set the legal framework for the safe deployment of self-driving vehicles in Great Britain”.

There should be little argument as to whether the proposed legislation must be put in place. The pace of technology greatly outstrips the pace of legislation, so it is welcome that the UK Government recognises the development of automated vehicle technology and is seeking to ensure that we have in place an initial framework of regulation to govern that.

It is also important to note that the bill does not in itself allow automation to happen. Progress in automated vehicle technology will happen with or without the bill, so it is necessary that we have in place some form of regulation that sets the parameters of what is considered safe in the field.

I am aware that the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee considered the Scottish Government's concerns about clause 50 of the bill.

According to the committee's report, the Scottish Government objects to clause 50 as it

“gives the Secretary of State a regulation-making power to clarify the application of other legislation to the ‘user-in-charge’ of an automated vehicle.”

The report goes on to note that

“The Scottish Government's objection to this clause is that the power can be exercised in devolved areas without the UK Government having to seek the consent of, or consulting, the Scottish Ministers or Scottish Parliament.”

I note that the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee also commented on that aspect, highlighting

“the apparent contradiction between the statement in the DPM that the Scottish Parliament will be able to scrutinise the use of this power and the absence of any mechanism in the Bill that would enable such scrutiny”.

As a supporter of devolution, I believe that it is important that, if legislative powers are to be exercised in an area of devolved competence, the Scottish Government must have the opportunity to scrutinise that. I am disappointed that the bill includes no mechanism to enable that and that there has been no resolution to the issue through co-operation between the UK and Scottish Governments. I urge both Governments to work together to resolve that important issue, no matter how small its application might be in reality.

The topic of the bill lends itself to greater discussion of the role of automation in our future economy. As I have already stated, the bill does not allow vehicle automation to take place; it merely sets out a regulatory framework for it. However, if the automation of vehicles is to increase in the near future—as the necessity of introducing the bill seems to suggest will happen—it is crucial that we consider the impact of automation on workers who are employed in driving roles and in other areas.

Although the discussion on a just transition for workers relates to industries that are impacted by net zero targets, it needs to be widened to include workers who will be impacted by the greater introduction of automation and the question of what our plan as a nation is to protect livelihoods in the face of technology that will remove the need for workers in certain sectors.

17:21

Jim Fairlie: As we draw today's deliberations to a close, I thank members from across the chamber for their contributions to the debate. I reiterate that UK ministers have requested a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport in an effort to come to an agreement on clause 50 that respects the devolution settlement.

We welcome the UK Government's bill, which takes an important step and a proactive approach to integrating cutting-edge technology into our transportation landscape. I take the opportunity to recognise the extensive work that the Law Commission of England and Wales and the Scottish Law Commission carried out, which concluded in a joint report on automated vehicles.

The bill establishes a legal framework for the testing and deployment of autonomous vehicles, ensuring safety and accountability. We appreciate that the bill allows for companies to be held firmly accountable once vehicles are on the road, while protecting users from being unfairly held accountable.

In addition, we recognise the need to share data, to safeguard privacy and security, and to investigate and learn from incidents. I take Edward Mountain's point about the time that the committee had available to it to scrutinise the LCM. However, the Scottish Government was made aware of the bill being introduced only in November 2023, and it was given weeks to give consent, with no meaningful engagement. Therefore, we needed time to consider the devolution position—hence the need for the two legislative consent memorandums.

To respond to Alex Rowley's point, automated vehicles are already available, and the Scottish Government recognises that autonomous vehicles will be part of the transport system in the future. That will not be successful in the UK without our having a robust regulatory framework in which we can foster the development and deployment of such technologies, thereby enhancing mobility options and driving economic growth. However, I very much take Alex Rowley's point that some people may no longer have work if vehicles are autonomous.

We hope that the legislative framework will pave the way for a future of self-driving vehicles. As always, the devil will be in the detail as the secondary legislation is developed. We will continue to work collaboratively with the UK Government and key stakeholders in the sector. We must provide certainty for innovators and investors, as well as instilling confidence in the public that the technologies are safe, secure, accessible and inclusive, and that they will work in the interests of all of society.

There has been general consensus that the proposed legislation should lead to safer roads. We all want to reduce the number of accidents, injuries and deaths on the roads, and we hope that the framework will lay the foundation for the safe deployment of self-driving vehicles in the UK. As we move forward, let us remain vigilant in addressing concerns regarding safety, privacy and accessibility, and let us ensure that we embrace

innovation. We do so with the wellbeing of our citizens at the forefront of our minds.

As we note the importance of the bill, I once again ask members to support the motion that was lodged by the Cabinet Secretary for Transport. Let us continue to collaborate, innovate and lead the way in shaping a future in which we remain at the forefront of technological progress while upholding our values of safety, accountability and inclusivity.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:24

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-12865, on committee meeting times. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 2.00 pm and 5.00 pm on Thursday 18 April 2024.—[George Adam]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Motion without Notice

17:25

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 11.2.4 of standing orders, that decision time be brought forward to now. I invite the Minister for Parliamentary Business to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time be brought forward to 5.25 pm.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:25

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-12845.2, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12845, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's international culture strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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

17:26

Meeting suspended.

17:30

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-12845.2, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12845, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's international culture strategy, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Dunfermline) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Somerville. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was not able to connect to the digital platform. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote has been recorded, Ms Haughey.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. May I check that my vote has been recorded as well?

The Presiding Officer: You may indeed, and your vote has been recorded, Mr Macpherson.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)

Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

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

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

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (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)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12845.2, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, is: For 29, Against 70, Abstentions 19.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-12845.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, which seeks to amend motion S6M-12845, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's international culture strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)

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

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 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)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-12845.1, in the name of Neil Bibby, is: For 23, Against 93, Abstentions 1.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-12845, in the name of Angus Robertson, on Scotland's international culture strategy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 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)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)

Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

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

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-12845, in the name of Angus Robertson, is: For 66, Against 29, Abstentions 23.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication on 28 March 2024 of *Inspiring Connections: Scotland’s International Culture Strategy*; recognises the central importance of international engagement, collaboration and exchange to Scotland’s culture and creative sector, cultural innovation and financial health; further recognises that the impacts of Brexit and inflation pressures driven by UK Government decisions have had a detrimental impact on the sector’s international activity; acknowledges that COVID-19 has also exacerbated these impacts; notes the strong starting position for this strategy, with Scotland’s culture and creative sector’s global reputation and existing

connections; further notes that this strategy recognises the challenges posed by the importance of international cultural activity and the need to achieve net zero by 2045; recognises the role that the culture and creative sector can play in addressing Scotland’s role in colonialism and slavery, and agrees that this strategic approach to supporting international connections can play an important role in the sector’s long-term development.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-12834, in the name of Jim Fairlie, which is a legislative consent motion on the Automated Vehicles Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions in Part 1, Chapter 6, clause 40, Part 2, Chapter 1, clauses 46 to 49 and 51, Part 5, clauses 82 to 85, 87 to 90 and Schedule 6 of the Automated Vehicles Bill, introduced in the House of Lords on 8 November 2023 and subsequently amended, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-12865, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on committee meeting times, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 2.00 pm and 5.00 pm on Thursday 18 April 2024.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Putting Langholm on the Map

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-12617, in the name of Oliver Mundell, on putting Langholm on the map. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite those members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the outstanding efforts of local campaigners in the Muckle Toon to ensure that Langholm is not forgotten when it comes to vital road signage on the trunk road and motorway network; celebrates what it considers the passion and dedication of many local individuals and organisations who work tirelessly to raise the profile of Langholm; understands that it has an extremely proud history and many claims to fame, including its Common Riding, textile heritage, links to Neil Armstrong, the Border Reivers, natural capital, including incredible scenery, walks and wildlife, and what it sees as a number of outstanding local businesses, such as Latimer's of Langholm, as well as being home to the Eskdale & Liddesdale Advertiser and so much more; considers that Transport Scotland does not have sufficient flexibility when it comes to making sure that trunk roads work for local people and understands that this has caused frustration among local residents; recognises the reported concerns voiced by many smaller, more remote and rural communities that they are often not served well by the trunk road network; notes the calls for Transport Scotland and operating companies to do more to support communities in encouraging drivers to stop and take advantage of the many services and visitor attractions available; welcomes that some progress has been made in relation to enhanced signage for Langholm but understands that the town is still absent from signs on the M74, and that residents believe that the signage remains inadequate on the A7 itself; notes the belief that all communities on trunk roads should be better supported and funded when it comes to brown tourism signs; further notes the view regarding the A7 corridor that more work is needed to promote the Borders Historic Route and all its communities and attractions; recognises what it sees as the importance of the visitor economy and tourism in protecting local livelihoods and addressing rural depopulation, and notes the view that there are many untapped opportunities for the Scottish Government and its agencies to do more to get behind proactive communities like Langholm.

17:39

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): While a day out of Langholm is a day wasted, I am delighted to have brought the debate to the chamber, with support from members on all sides. It is an opportunity to put Langholm on the map, in the Scottish Parliament at least.

Langholm is a proud community, and rightly so, with a rich past and equally vibrant present. The muckle toon, as it is known locally, is said to have taken its name from the many large textile mills that were once based there and the booming

population and bustle that accompanied them. Sadly, however, the subsequent years have seen many changes as that industry and other traditional industries have declined, with only a handful of connected businesses remaining. However, one thing is for certain: the sense of community, heritage and spirit that has been fostered over the years has not left—if anything, it has been reignited in recent years. Community efforts are now firmly focused not on halting decline, but on reversing it.

This is rare praise from me, but I give credit where it is due: pre-Covid, a visit from John Swinney, although it did not deliver the funding for which many—including myself—had hoped, nonetheless focused minds, and eventually led to the formation of the Langholm Alliance and the community forum, which has brought the whole community together. That has been very much a community-driven effort, much like the Langholm moor buy-out and many other success stories. Again, however, we cannot downplay the importance of on-going support from South of Scotland Enterprise, which has been invaluable in funding roles to co-ordinate that activity.

Following a meeting on Thursday, at which the community hosted the South of Scotland Enterprise chair, Russel Griggs, it was helpful to be able to ask for support from the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity in addressing Langholm's very real concerns that, because of the success of the Langholm Alliance, SOSE might now be looking to pull the plug. That would be entirely the wrong decision and would represent poor value for taxpayers when just another 12 months of support, at around £50,000, would give a number of key projects, such as the old primary school hub, a real prospect of being delivered. I would be grateful for confirmation this evening that the Scottish Government will take an interest in securing the support that the community deserves.

It would be easy to fill the remainder of this contribution many times over in talking about Langholm and the many projects, individuals and community groups that make it Langholm. Some of those are touched on in my motion, although it barely scratches the surface. The town has been called, among other things, Scotland's chilli capital, given the number of members of its chilli-growing club. That is before we even get to its well-advanced plans to move into a new brand of horticulture, with a large facility for growing medicinal cannabis situated nearby—for the colleagues sniggering behind me, I stress that it is entirely legal.

Langholm is many things, but it is always full of surprises, and new ideas and new thinking, which

sit alongside its many proud traditions and customs.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): Would Mr Mundell like to declare any personal interest in the cannabis factory in Langholm?

Oliver Mundell: Mr Carlaw makes an interesting point. *[Laughter.]*

Shares were available to the community, but I declined to take them up, primarily because I felt that it would limit my ability to lobby the Home Office for a licence, and the Scottish Government for the financial support that is needed, to build what is an incredible facility that will bring jobs and opportunities to the community.

I turn to the past, and to some of the customs and traditions that make Langholm special. The most notable of those is undoubtedly its historic Borders common riding, which is truly Langholm's greatest day and a spectacle to behold. It is best experienced on horseback, and it remains one of my own personal achievements to have successfully ridden the common riding, including the gallop up the Kirk Wynd, as a member of the Scottish Parliament. I have committed to doing so again, but only on the condition that Emma Harper takes part too. This seems an appropriate point to thank her for supporting my motion; I know that she had wanted to speak tonight, but she is away on British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly business. I am sure that if Emma had been here, she would have been willing to confirm her willingness to take part. I will make sure to catch her later in the week.

Langholm has another major claim to fame, as the ancestral home of Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon. The town remains very proud of that, and it was honoured to make Neil Armstrong a free man of Langholm during his very special visit to the town in 1972. The relationship has continued through Neil's sons and their families, who were back in Langholm recently.

That was followed by a proclamation of kinship from Armstrong's birthplace of Wapakoneta in Ohio, which was unveiled a couple of weeks ago. Perhaps ironically in the context of this debate, Armstrong's famous 1972 visit even resulted in the *Chicago Tribune* publishing a front-page story featuring a map of the United Kingdom that showed only London and Langholm.

That fact takes me neatly on to the key ask of the debate. For all its many attractions and accolades, Langholm appears to have been forgotten when it comes to road signage. Anyone on the near one hour's drive between Longtown and Hawick, or, equally, on the whole of the M74 motorway, would be forgiven for thinking that Langholm does not exist: it is absent from major directional signage and there is very little to tell

people about the visitor attractions and facilities that are clustered around what is a major population centre for those who live and work in the Eskdale valleys or in Langholm itself. To someone sitting behind a desk in Scotland's urban central belt, Langholm might be small in terms of population numbers, but it matters to the people who live there, and it has so much to offer.

The Langholm Alliance, which I mentioned earlier, and many individuals and other organisations have worked tirelessly to promote the town. They are represented in the public gallery by Anthony Lane, who has worked hard alongside Sharon Tolson to drive forward the road signage project. Although there has been some progress south of the border in delivering some new signs between the M6 and Langholm—and there is a solitary new sign near Annan—efforts on the A7 in Scotland and on the M74 at junction 21 have hit a roadblock.

We have been told that Langholm is not a primary destination so it does not get to go on the signs. That characterisation is insulting and, even if it conforms to technical guidance, seems overly officious when there is plenty of room on the signs in question. It is not as though we are awash with other primary destinations between Longtown and Hawick; nor are there other communities between Kirkpatrick-Fleming and Langholm that are championing the case to be put on motorway road signs.

When we consider the disruption that is associated with having a trunk road roar through the high street of a small town, it does not seem that big an ask for the responsible authorities to be willing to acknowledge that the route goes through that community. What is more, I believe that there is an obligation on Transport Scotland and operators to get more involved in promoting such communities as somewhere to stop, visit and return to. It is not good enough to punt that on to the communities themselves and expect them to navigate the bureaucracy that VisitScotland has created around brown signage on the trunk road network.

As I close, I ask the minister to reflect on what more can be done to get behind Langholm to remove those roadblocks. Our smaller, more rural and remote communities have every bit as much to offer as other destinations—they are primary destinations for those who live there and the many visitors that they attract.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

17:47

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Oliver Mundell probably thinks

that I am a surprise contributor to the debate, but I am delighted to contribute and I thank him for lodging the motion. He is achieving the aims of the motion by bringing it to the Parliament, because I have had to learn a wee bit about Langholm today, as I am sure that others have done, so well done to him for that.

I am speaking mainly on behalf of my colleague Emma Harper, who, as Oliver Mundell said, would have spoken today but for the fact that she is out of the Parliament on other business. She is absolutely gutted to have missed the debate and has asked me to relay some points, some of which Oliver Mundell has already covered. Broadly, she agrees with everything in Oliver Mundell's motion. She talks about Langholm as a very close-knit community whose members support each other and the desire for better signage. She also stresses that, in her view, Transport Scotland needs to review its policy on directing people to destinations, and that Langholm should be a place that people are pointed towards rather than being a village that is just driven through. She also told me the story about Neil Armstrong, which is an absolutely fascinating bit of history. It has been great to learn about that.

Langholm sounds like a great place, and I will make efforts to visit it. As somebody who travels across Scotland with my kids, I think that they will definitely like some of the history there—particularly because one of my children is very into space stuff just now.

On the broader issue of signage, I think that we can all agree that it is very important to have signage in our constituencies. Other than in Glasgow, Edinburgh and some of the other cities north of the central belt perhaps, it sometimes feels that tourist attractions and suchlike can be missed out.

There is plenty of signage in the Coatbridge and Chryston area—the signage on the two major motorways surrounding my constituency is okay. On the M80, there is plenty of signage for places in Coatbridge and in the northern corridor areas, but it took the upgrading of the M8 just a few years ago to improve the situation there. The signage is really important, as it highlights places such as the Time Capsule, the Summerlee museum in Coatbridge and the Auchengeich memorial on the M80 motorway at the northern corridor.

Signage is very important; it is important that everywhere in Scotland, whether it is a small town such as Langholm or a medium-sized town or constituency such as Coatbridge and Chryston, benefits from tourism and that we do not just focus on Glasgow and Edinburgh, as important as those cities are—I use both regularly. The ethos of today's debate in relation to signage is very important. I thank Transport Scotland for the

signage in my constituency, which is in pretty good shape just now.

I will end my brief contribution by wishing Emma Harper and Oliver Mundell the best of luck in their continuing efforts for Langholm. I look forward to visiting Langholm and hearing more about it.

17:51

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I congratulate my friend and colleague Oliver Mundell on securing time in the chamber to promote the muckle toon that is Langholm. In his speech, Oliver Mundell highlighted the great characteristics of Langholm and set out many reasons why we should visit the town. Unsurprisingly, I will mention Langholm's great sporting heritage, especially as the town is steeped in Borders rugby folklore. I have travelled down to play rugby in the cauldron that is Langholm rugby club. The word "passionate" does not seem to cover the town's support, but, yes, most of us got out alive.

Oliver Mundell also highlighted that the town, like many communities in the south of Scotland and in rural Scotland as a whole, especially in the south-west, is poorly serviced by transport links. That is not a new topic in this place—members of this party and from across the chamber have continually brought it to the attention of the Scottish Government. The situation makes it difficult to attract businesses and visitors to those areas. If it is difficult to get workers in and out of rural Scotland and to access services, the attraction that rural Scotland undoubtedly offers in communities such as Langholm becomes difficult to justify for businesses and families.

Migration is a hot topic at the moment, but the Scottish Government has conveniently forgotten about the huge issues that Scotland has with migration from rural to urban areas, or even from west to east. In the past 10 years, migration numbers from the west of Scotland to the east of Scotland have been the equivalent of the population of the Inverclyde area. Moreover, much of that migration is from rural areas to urban areas.

Migration from rural to urban is reducing the need for services in rural areas, leading to services becoming more expensive to deliver, which in turn leads to a reduction in the provision of those services. Schools, healthcare, community sport and leisure are all services that councils are increasingly struggling to maintain. Class sizes are reduced to a point at which there are fewer and fewer teachers, which leads to more composite classes or even the closure of some schools.

Rural schools and general practitioner practices are struggling to recruit enough teachers and GPs

to service those communities. Accessing hospital care, especially emergency care, is precarious at best, with accidents on trunk roads often necessitating huge diversions on to B-class roads. If we lay on top of that a rural housing policy that does nothing to deliver rural housing, the Scottish Government is presiding over a perfect storm.

It is no wonder that rural Scotland is struggling to maintain its rural communities. Scottish Government policy has, for many years, been biased towards urban communities and their needs, to the detriment of communities such as Langholm. The lack of investment in our rural communities, which was detailed by Oliver Mundell, is continuing to cause a population drain, as it becomes increasingly difficult to deliver the connectivity and services that will reverse that trend.

If the Scottish Government continues to starve our rural communities of investment in transport infrastructure—let us face it, less than 0.05 per cent of the Scottish transport budget in the past decade has been invested in the south of Scotland—the inevitable conclusion will be a Scotland that is increasingly urban based. Fantastic communities such as Langholm, with such a rich Scottish history, will fade away. Would that not be a travesty? Once again, I thank Oliver Mundell for giving us the opportunity to speak on this topic in the chamber.

17:55

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Oliver Mundell for lodging his motion. It is a welcome opportunity to shine a light on a town that is often forgotten but whose community drive, passion and achievements are an example to others. Langholm was the birthplace of engineer Thomas Telford and the poet Hugh MacDiarmid. As home of clan Armstrong, as we have heard, it proudly made Neil Armstrong the first—and, indeed, only—freeman of Langholm on his visit in 1972, when he warmly told the crowds:

“I consider this, now, my home town.”

The muckle toon has a proud, rich history. It was once a thriving economy, with a population of more than 4,000 and bustling textile mills. However, the economic decline of the 1980s halved the population. The big employers closed or left town. The last, the Edinburgh Woollen Mill, which was founded in Langholm in 1946, moved its head office to Carlisle five years ago. Despite that decline and those challenges, the community is fighting back. It recognises the opportunities that exist in Langholm, from a focus on ecotourism to making the town a hub for small, growing businesses.

I spoke recently in Parliament about the quiet land reform revolution that is taking place on Langholm moor. The moor’s dramatic hills, native woodland habitat and stunning river valley are home to some of the best sites to see hen harriers and curlew, and they are right on the doorstep of the town of Langholm. In 2019, when the Duke of Buccleuch declared the moor surplus to his vast land portfolio, the community, through the Langholm Initiative, undertook a bold fundraising effort that put the town on the map, captured hearts around the world and raised a remarkable £6 million to undertake South Scotland’s biggest community buy-out, taking 10,000 hectares of the duke’s land under the protection and ownership of the people.

Now known as the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve, the community owners are improving the environment by pushing the boundaries of ecological and community restoration, in partnership with organisations such as the Woodland Trust and the John Muir Trust, and by building a far better economic future for Langholm by pursuing sustainable and responsible tourism. Their vision and plans for the moor are inspiring, and they sum up the community spirit that drives Langholm.

That optimism has also been captured by the Langholm Alliance and its community plan for the town—an ambitious but, I believe, entirely achievable long-term plan that aims to give the town a thriving, sustainable economy by 2030, including by bringing more visitors to the area to enjoy the moor and everything that Langholm has to offer.

However, as we have heard, the alliance has rightly identified that it makes it that bit more difficult to put Langholm on the map when Transport Scotland seems to have such difficulty even putting the town on its road signs. Thanks to the alliance’s campaign, we are seeing some progress south of the border, with proposals from the United Kingdom Government for new signage to Langholm on the roundabout at junction 44 of the M6, and from Cumberland Council for signage on the A7.

However, the Scottish Government needs to show more flexibility and common sense and to play its part, with far better signage to Langholm on the A7 and the M74 north of the border. The alliance has set out exactly where that could be achieved. I hope that the minister will respond positively to those calls in his closing comments and review the current outdated policy that holds communities such as Langholm back.

The alliance’s plan also rightly backs calls by the Langholm and district rail group that any feasibility study on extending the Borders railway line should include consideration of the route

passing through Langholm. The case to extend the line to Hawick is powerful. Further south is more challenging because there are fewer major population centres. Although there is a strong argument for extending the line to Carlisle to link with the west coast main line and provide an alternative to the east coast main line, the case for that extension would be even stronger if Langholm was included on the route, given that it is the largest town between Hawick and Carlisle. That, along with proper signage on the A7 and the A74, would put Langholm on the map.

17:59

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I thank Oliver Mundell for bringing forward this great debate and for his fantastic speech.

Not to be outdone by him, I, too, completed the Selkirk common riding on horseback. My horse was going so fast that I had to tuck myself right behind Stuart Coltherd, a previous standard bearer for Selkirk. It was the most frightening experience of my life and thank goodness we were going up the Three Brethren—it is worse coming down. As Oliver has done, I challenge my colleague Brian Whittle to join me.

Brian Whittle: No.

Rachael Hamilton: Although Langholm is not in my constituency, I represent the neighbouring communities across the Borders. Newcastleton, for example, is closer to Langholm than it is to Hawick. Some of the children of Newcastleton go to the Langholm school and some go to the Hawick school.

As Oliver Mundell has said, Langholm has much in common with its neighbouring town, Hawick, because it has a common riding. I support the common ridings. Tommy Morrison from Langholm was in the car with me as we drove round Hawick, waving to everyone as all the townsfolk came out. I thought that they were waving at me and saying hello, but no, it was Tommy Morrison from Langholm they were waving at, so I have just given him a shout out because he was far more popular than I was.

The core of the debate is about ensuring that we give communities the right tools and support to allow them to thrive. As many speakers have said, we need to ensure that people do not just drive through these areas on their way to other places; we need to ensure that they come and enjoy the fantastic towns and attractions that we have on our doorstep.

In Langholm and across the south of Scotland, tourism is a key part of the local economy. As of March this year, there were just over 890

businesses directly involved in the visitor economy, employing thousands of people across the Borders. I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests as the director of a local hospitality business in the Borders.

There were 2 million day trips to the Borders in 2022, and our towns and villages are the first to offer the best experience for tourists across the area. Millions visit the region every year to see attractions such as Sir Walter Scott's Abbotsford and our historic Borders abbeys. Sadly, however, as others have said, it is easy for travellers to miss those key attractions while driving through the region and not to enjoy what they have in the region because of the lack of effective signposting on roads such as the A7.

At this point, I would like to mention the A7 action group, because it is a group of people who have consistently, over the years, campaigned for signage to be improved on the A7 corridor. I also met Famously Hawick, which is a group of five premium luxury retailers who promote their local attractions and improve the visitor experience of the town—producers such as Johnstons of Elgin, the Borders Distillery, Hawico, William Lockie and Lovat Mill. Their concern was that there was no strategic approach to welcoming signage in the town and along the A7, which was resulting in missed opportunities for visitors. I agree with other speakers that improved signage along the A7 would undoubtedly provide a valuable boost to them and others in places such as Hawick and Langholm.

Finally, I was really disappointed by VisitScotland's decision to shut down the iCentre in Jedburgh. I do not think that the Scottish Government, at this stage and juncture after Covid, can afford to take the visitor economy for granted. Our communities are proud of their heritage and culture. It is only right that the Scottish Government does more to boost those communities and to save those iconic and special visitor centres.

Thank you to Oliver Mundell. Let us try to do more and get the Government to engage with communities by implementing effective signposting to local attractions and businesses.

18:04

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): I congratulate Oliver Mundell on lodging his motion, and I recognise the efforts of many people, including my colleague Emma Harper, in making sure that the community in Langholm is heard, and in creating opportunities for the town as a destination in the Borders. I emphasise that the Government recognises the

strategic importance of our towns and villages to ensuring that Scotland is a destination with huge diversity. Be it its cityscapes, landscapes or cultural heritage, Scotland offers it all.

Like other members, I recognise the attractions in Langholm. Again, I highlight that it is called the muckle toon and that cannabis is grown there—for me, that is a reason to get brown signs on the roads. Langholm is the birthplace of Hugh MacDiarmid and sits on the River Esk, which is another beautiful Scottish attraction. It has a connection to the reivers, whom I like to think of romantically as being of independent mind and spirit.

Common ridings have been talked about; Langholm would be worth a visit just to see Emma Harper going through the town on a horse. Langholm undoubtedly finds fame through the association of Gilnockie tower to Clan Armstrong and its having made Neil Armstrong a freeman of the town in 1972. We can add to those things the Buccleuch Centre and the Langholm moor raptor study.

There are, therefore, endless reasons why folk would want to visit the town, and I am sure that such visits would be welcomed by residents and tourism businesses alike. For all those reasons, it is clearly worth having this debate for members and the people of Langholm.

As far as road signage is concerned—signage is the foundation of Mr Mundell's motion—there are many things to consider, and lots of years of work and consultation have been devoted to Langholm. In closing the debate, I will outline some of the points and set out Transport Scotland's approach to, and current position on, road signage policy.

With regard to Langholm on the A7 trunk road, Transport Scotland has over the years held various discussions with local representatives including MSPs and MPs, members of the Langholm Alliance, Dumfries and Galloway Council, a number of north-west England road authorities and the United Kingdom Department for Transport. Transport Scotland has confirmed that it believes that the current strategic signage arrangements for Langholm are consistent with the nationally applied strategy. The trunk road signage policy governs directional signage on trunk roads in Scotland and throughout the UK's strategic road network.

Oliver Mundell: I thank the minister for what he said at the start of his speech, but what he is saying now is more of the same. It is very hard to believe that, although Cumberland Council and National Highways are able to put Langholm on road signs just south of the border, technical requirements prevent the same from happening in Scotland. As I said in my speech, that seems to be

odd because there are no other primary destinations. Such signs can have up to six destinations on them, but there are not six destinations on the signs in this case, so there is space. It seems to be a shame to hide behind technical requirements.

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

Jim Fairlie: I will complete the point that I was making. A detailed review of the existing signage on strategic roads has been conducted, which has resulted in Langholm's inclusion on northbound signs on the A7 in England and on additional signs on the A75 to the east of Dumfries.

Signage on the A74 motorway was also examined last year to evaluate the feasibility of incorporating Langholm on existing signs, but it was determined that the existing signage on the motorway complies with current design requirements. It is important to acknowledge that the motorway signs in question are relatively new and are large and expensive to replace. Consequently, it has been deemed to be prudent to defer consideration of the opportunity for Langholm's inclusion until the signs require to be replaced at the end of their serviceable life. As Mr Mundell has been advised in responses to previous parliamentary questions, there are no immediate plans to modify A74 signs.

It should be noted that other policies exist for consideration of new brown tourist-destination signage—if we want to talk about cannabis, there we go—that aim to promote businesses and attractions that are accredited through VisitScotland's quality assurance scheme. Given the wealth of attractions that I mentioned, perhaps Mr Mundell could explore that option with his constituents.

Transport Scotland's approach to the Langholm signage issue has been thorough and thoughtful, and I advise that, following engagement with the local community and stakeholders over the preceding year, the Langholm sign rationalisation initiative has been effectively executed along the A7 trunk road. The initiative seeks to enhance the pedestrian experience and to reduce visual clutter by minimising the number of signs, and it has resulted in optimisation of available foot space throughout Langholm.

Looking ahead to this year, I note that the focus will be on addressing the community's requests for new signage. The requests include signage for community facilities and catering for motorists and pedestrians, as well as provisions for parking, including electric vehicle charging facilities and gateway signage. Through on-going collaboration, that initiative will optimise signage in Langholm

while ensuring efficient use of space, to address the community's needs and requests.

Through Transport Scotland's road maintenance contracts, significant investment has been made in the A7. Since 2007, £64 million has been invested in initiatives including routine and cyclic maintenance, deeper road reconstruction, general minor improvement measures, active travel works, road safety enhancements and bridge maintenance.

In the past financial year, a total of £6.6 million has been invested in road maintenance for the A7. That funding has been directed towards projects including improvement of road markings and studs between Langholm and Hawick, as part of on-going efforts to improve the overall infrastructure and safety standards of the A7 corridor.

As far as our continued investment in the A7 is concerned, two significant resurfacing schemes are scheduled for this year. The first of those, which it is estimated will cost £130,000, involves a stretch of the road north of Langholm. That work is programmed for autumn 2024. The second scheme, which it is estimated will cost £970,000, involves a stretch of the road south of Langholm and is scheduled for winter 2024.

The Scottish Government's commitment to implementing, by 2025, 20mph speed limits on roads where that has been deemed to be appropriate was reinforced in the 2022 programme for government, which advocated expansion of 20mph zones in order to create safer streets and promote active travel. As part of that initiative, the A7 at Langholm has been identified as a potential location for reducing the speed limit from 30mph to 20mph on sections that meet specific criteria. Transport Scotland is collaborating with Dumfries and Galloway Council and Police Scotland to advance new 20mph speed limit areas where that limit is deemed to be suitable.

In the upcoming year, Transport Scotland is committed to enhancing end-to-end footway accessibility throughout Langholm town centre, with the objective of offering the most optimal walking and wheeling facilities in the area.

As well as continuing to support discussions on signage with aforementioned groups—including the Langholm Alliance and its tourism officer—Transport Scotland and its road maintenance operating company, BEAR Scotland, participate in all A7 action group meetings to foster close communication and collaboration with communities, including the Langholm community.

Colin Smyth: Will the minister give way?

Jim Fairlie: I will push on, because I am already over my time.

In addition, as part of its commitment to social value and community benefits, BEAR Scotland has proactively engaged with schools in the area. That outreach has been conducted in person and online, in order to ensure comprehensive coverage and accessibility. Furthermore, the community has been provided with on-going assistance for road network access during special community events, such as the Christmas lights display and the Langholm bonfire and fireworks event.

With all that in mind, I reiterate the Government's unwavering commitment to all the aspects that are raised in the motion and to ensuring that the A7 trunk road continues to support economic development in the south-east of Scotland and, indeed, across the country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. I suspect that Emma Harper will watch this evening's proceedings tomorrow with no little alarm.

Meeting closed at 18:12.

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