



**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament

**Wednesday 27 November 2024**

**Session 6**



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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 27 November 2024

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is rural affairs, land reform and islands.

#### Agricultural Support Funding

**1. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government, regarding the impact on agriculture in Scotland, what its response is to the removal of ring-fenced agricultural support funding for devolved nations by the United Kingdom Government. (S6O-04005)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** I greatly welcome Willie Rennie's question. As I set out in the chamber last Wednesday, the decision to remove ring-fenced funding and impose the population-based Barnett formula fails to recognise Scotland's unique relationship with the land and the significant contribution that our farmers and crofters make to the nation, especially to the rural economy. It also ignores our on-going commitment to active farming and direct payments, and it risks our efforts to transform our industry for the future.

We will press for a fairer settlement in the UK spending review, including explicit multiyear certainty, as we had when we were in the European Union.

**Willie Rennie:** The minister has said clearly that the £620 million allocation in the UK budget is inadequate, so I assume that that means that the Scottish Government is committed to spending every penny of that agricultural funding allocation on agriculture every year.

**Jim Fairlie:** The background to Willie Rennie's question is the ask for the Scottish Government to guarantee multiyear funding. We can guarantee funding in any individual year, but we cannot provide multiyear funding, which is what Willie Rennie is alluding to.

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** One of the farming industry's biggest fears was always the removal of ring fencing and the Barnettising of funding, and history will record that it was the Labour Party that did that. Farmers are fundamental to our food security and to the future

of our rural economy. Does the minister agree that every party in the chamber should unite in calling on the UK Government to reinstate the ring-fenced multiyear funding that Scotland's farmers used to have and should still have?

**Jim Fairlie:** Absolutely. Imposing Barnettised agricultural funding through the Scottish block grant means that the overall size of such funding is a product of any changes in public expenditure that the UK Government makes. That means that, year on year, the amount of resources that are available to the Scottish Government can change, and that now includes funding that was previously ring fenced for agriculture and rural development.

I whole-heartedly agree that it is incumbent on all parties in the chamber to unite with the industry in pressing the UK Government to reinstate ring-fenced multiyear agricultural funding, which will deliver the certainty and market stability that our farmers deserve.

**Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Although I have sympathy with what the minister has said about what is going on in the UK, all eyes are now on Scotland. You could give a guarantee that the £620 million will be ring fenced, on the basis that the Scottish Government will continue to get that funding from the UK Government. Will the minister give an assurance that he will deliver that £620 million for the foreseeable future?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Always speak through the chair.

**Jim Fairlie:** Clearly, budget discussions are on-going. I absolutely take the point that Tim has made, but we have to bear in mind that we do not get multiyear funding, and the funding is now hidden in our main budget. The Scottish Government will always try to support our agricultural community to the best of our ability, but certainty has now been taken away by the UK Government.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We always refer to members by their full names.

#### Land Reform (Scotland) Bill

**2. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill will empower local communities and ensure that land is being used to their benefit. (S6O-04006)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill sets out ambitious proposals to ensure that the benefits of land ownership and decisions on how land is owned, managed and used are more widely shared. If it is passed, the bill will prohibit certain sales of more than 1,000 hectares of land until ministers can

consider the impact on the local community; it will introduce advance notice of sales, which will give communities more opportunities to own land; and it will introduce ministerial powers to place obligations on landowners to produce land management plans and engage with local communities, which will allow communities to have more say in how land in their area is used.

**Emma Roddick:** The cabinet secretary is well aware that Scotland has one of the most concentrated patterns of land ownership in the world, so I am looking forward to seeing a bill passed that ensures that local communities have a much greater say over how the land around them is used. Can the cabinet secretary speak to how provisions in the bill about breaking up large landholdings and giving communities advance notice of certain sales will tackle rural depopulation, which is still far too common in the Highlands and Islands?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Emma Roddick raises some really important points in her question. I want to highlight that, as part of the proposals in the bill, particularly the transfer test, we would pause sales of some of the large-scale landholdings to allow ministers to decide whether circumstances warranted the landholding being sold in lots if it was shown that it would support community sustainability. An example of that would be making more land available for housing, because we know that lack of housing is a key driver of depopulation.

The pre-notification provisions will ensure that communities are notified of any upcoming sales of land from large landholdings in their area. That will give them a better chance to make a right-to-buy application and own land that can benefit their communities.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** Given the Scottish Government's target outcomes for agricultural production, climate change, biodiversity and people, does the cabinet secretary agree with NFU Scotland that the land reform agenda must shift from ownership to how the land is managed by those who own and rent it?

**Mairi Gougeon:** Some key provisions in the bill are looking to address some of those issues. The second part of the bill and what we are trying to do through the reform and modernisation of tenancy and land for small landholders have the potential to make a real and positive impact.

The bill is currently working its way through the Scottish Parliament and is being scrutinised by the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. We are listening to all the views that are coming through that process, and I look forward to appearing in front of the committee to give my own evidence, which I believe will happen next year. It

is important that, in this phase, we continue to listen to people, engage with stakeholders and ultimately see how we can improve and strengthen the legislation.

#### **Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):**

The land management plans that are proposed in the bill have the potential to create more opportunities for communities and to tackle local problems. What steps can a community take if an agreed plan changes or is not implemented without consultation with it first?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I agree with Rhoda Grant's point about the importance of land management plans. Various provisions in the bill set out the steps that could be taken and what would be expected. I am more than happy to follow up with particular information on the query that Rhoda Grant has put to me today, but I emphasise that land management plans have strong potential and it would be great to see them introduced. The community engagement part of that is critical.

#### **United Kingdom Budget (Impact on Farming and Food Production)**

**3. Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the potential impact of the UK budget on farming and food production in Scotland. (S60-04007)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** We are deeply concerned about the agricultural property relief changes and the imposition of Barnettised agricultural funding. I have called on the United Kingdom Government to undertake and publish impact assessments on the cumulative impact of its budget proposals on farmers and crofters in Scotland. We are now working to understand the full implications of the changes and we will continue to engage with Westminster to press for a fair and just settlement.

**Evelyn Tweed:** Following the UK budget, inheritance tax will now be payable on farm estates, with revenue going directly to the Treasury. Will the Scottish Government engage with the UK Government to ascertain whether any of that revenue will be used to support Scottish farming?

**Jim Fairlie:** The combined budget choices that have been made by the UK Government will see Scottish farmers paying far more to the Treasury, with no guarantee of getting any of that fair future funding settlement back. As we have already talked about, taking away the multi-annual ring fencing takes away that guarantee. We will continue to press the UK Government to provide clarity on the future funding, including that additional revenue, and we will continue to push for a fair and just settlement for Scottish farmers

and crofters, largely through the interministerial group for environment, food and rural affairs, which we attend on a regular basis.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** Tomorrow, grass-roots farmers will rally outside the Parliament about the Scottish budget. Tim Eagle is absolutely correct: all eyes are on Scotland, and the Scottish Government can use its block grant as it wishes. First, will the cabinet secretary assure the Parliament that she will return the £46 million in next week's budget? Secondly, will she make sure that the case for food and farming is made in the Cabinet discussions and that the rural budget is not used as a pot to raid?

**Jim Fairlie:** I will respond, rather than the cabinet secretary. We have agreed to return that £46 million—that will be done as soon as the budget is sorted out.

I do not need to tell Rachael Hamilton that this Government will stand up for the farming community. We have done that for decades, and we will continue to do it, because it is in our DNA to support rural Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 comes from Katy Clark, who joins us remotely.

#### **Cumbræ (Support for Residents and Businesses)**

4. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government, in relation to its cross-Government co-ordination on islands policies, what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding what more it can do to support residents and businesses on the isle of Cumbræ. (S6O-04008)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** Work is under way across portfolios to support communities on Cumbræ, in line with the objectives of the current national islands plan.

Through the islands programme alone, more than £1.7 million has been invested in critical infrastructure on Cumbræ since 2021-22. In addition, more than £400,000 has been invested through our carbon neutral islands project, which works alongside Cumbræ's communities to reduce local emissions, since 2022-23. We are also co-funding senior islands officers in North Ayrshire Council to support the implementation of the Cumbræ local island plan.

We will continue to work with Cumbræ and other islands to inform the new national islands plan.

**Katy Clark:** Residents on Cumbræ and groups such as the Cumbræ ferry committee and Cumbræ community council have raised their concerns about the impact of reduced visitor

numbers, which have gone down 21 per cent since 2019, and issues such as higher ferry fares, which are affecting islanders, and the poor ferry service when there are events on the island. What more can be done to ensure that the local community is listened to and that policies are put together on a cross-governmental basis to ensure that those issues are addressed?

**Jim Fairlie:** I reiterate that there is a national islands plan and that, across Government, we have a very rural-focused lens on all those issues. I also point out that ferry fares are cheaper now than they were when the Scottish National Party Government came in, in 2007.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** The Scottish Government is investing £38.4 million in Millport's £48 million flood prevention scheme. How significant is that investment, which amounts to more than £40,000 per islander, in securing the sustainability and prosperity of the island of Cumbræ?

**Jim Fairlie:** I thank Kenny Gibson for giving me the opportunity to mention the fact that we are absolutely delighted that Millport's coastal flood protection scheme is nearing completion. In providing improved flood resilience to more than 600 properties, the scheme will be a vital asset to the community. I thank North Ayrshire Council and everyone involved for delivering it.

Our changing climate brings more frequent and more intense storms. Improving flood resilience is therefore a priority for this Government and is our biggest adaptation challenge. Later this year, we will publish our flood resilience strategy, in which we will set out Scotland's long-term goal for flood-resilient people, places and processes.

#### **Rural Food Production (Economic Activity)**

5. **Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans it has to ensure that critical rural food production economic activity is viable, sustainable and attractive to the next generation of farmers, crofters and fishers. (S6O-04009)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** I thank Ash Regan for asking that question, as it allows me to mention the fact that the First Minister recently highlighted agriculture's vital role in the rural economy at AgriScot.

In 2025, we will implement the first set of measures to help farmers to create a sustainable agricultural sector in Scotland and to inspire future generations. Working closely with farmers, crofters and land managers, we are reforming agriculture payments to achieve five strategic outcomes: support for a just transition, high-quality food production, thriving agricultural businesses, climate mitigation and adaptation, and nature

restoration. That will deliver our vision for agriculture, which is one of supporting rural communities and economic growth while tackling climate change and biodiversity loss.

**Ash Regan:** Last week, I met NFU Scotland, which I think needs an assurance in relation to the land reform proposals that Scotland's productive land and seas will sustain those industries for the future. What plans does the Scottish Government have to secure the future of food production and ensure that it is economically viable by addressing issues such as exploitative pricing, which is driven by a few large food companies?

**Jim Fairlie:** As I have said a number of times during the session, we are absolutely committed to supporting the rural community. We have a food resilience group, which the cabinet secretary established. The member has raised a point about the groceries code adjudicator and ensuring that farmers have a fair and reasonable relationship with the people who sell our food. That situation is improving, but I still think that we could do more.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** NFU Scotland has warned that the United Kingdom Government's proposed changes to inheritance tax for agricultural land might impact on food security by preventing the next generation of farmers, including some of our tenant farmers, from taking over family farms. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the impact of the UK Government's inheritance tax changes?

**Jim Fairlie:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer's decision to reform exemptions to agricultural property relief for inheritance tax has clearly led to unacceptable levels of stress, worry and uncertainty among farmers in Scotland. We have called on the UK Government to commit to undertaking and publishing impact assessments on the effect of its budget proposals on farmers and crofters in Scotland. Fundamentally, we want a tax system that supports rather than hinders planning, orderly succession and the transfer of land to the next generation of custodians. It is deeply disappointing that the chancellor chose not to work with the Scottish Government before acting on the matter.

### Rural Economy

**6. Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to boost the rural economy. (S6O-04010)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call the cabinet secretary—

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** The Scottish Government is committed to building a vibrant, sustainable and inclusive rural economy

that meets the goals of achieving a nature-positive wellbeing economy for future generations. We are taking a range of action to support the rural economy, such as through our support for our rural enterprise agencies, through digital connectivity initiatives such as our Scottish 4G infill programme, and through our investment of more than £1 billion in the 2024-25 rural affairs, land reform and islands budget.

**Daniel Johnson:** I admire the cabinet secretary's eagerness to answer my question. I am sure that she will agree that much of what makes the Scottish economy distinctive and competitive is based on what we produce in remote and rural areas. That, in turn, means that we are very reliant on infrastructure—roads, rail, cables and pipes—to get those products to domestic and international markets. For example, world-class aquaculture products are farmed in the Highlands and Islands but processed in the central belt and exported to places as far away as Vietnam, and whisky is distilled in the Highlands and Islands, bottled in the central belt and exported at a rate of 43 bottles a second.

Does the Scottish Government have an approach or methodology to calculate the gross value added that has been lost because of inadequate infrastructure in which it has underinvested, such as the A82, the A9 and the ferry services?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I have to admit that, on such a broad question relating to transport issues, I absolutely take the member's point about how critical our infrastructure is across our rural and island areas. I would be happy to raise some of the specific points that he has made with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, but I recognise the matter.

In my position, I must work across Government and with my colleagues. We see that through the work that we take forward in the national islands plan, which focuses on issues such as housing and transport, and in our work across rural Scotland more broadly. If we want to tackle some of the issues that we see in rural areas—depopulation is one example—it is in all our best interests to recognise the huge importance of our basic infrastructure. I will raise Daniel Johnson's specific points with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and get back to him.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** The anxiety and stress that the Labour Government's budget has caused throughout rural Scotland will do nothing to boost our rural economy. Scottish Labour members have a brass neck to ask about giving a boost to rural Scotland while their colleagues make choices without even undertaking impact assessments of their budget proposals. Does the cabinet secretary agree that,



if Scottish Labour members want to boost Scotland's rural economy, they should call on their UK colleagues to restore the ring-fenced funding that rural Scotland had?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I could not agree more with Emma Harper. We have heard concerns expressed in the chamber throughout this question session. As the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity and I set out in the chamber last week and in the various debates that we have had, removing ring fencing and imposing the population-based Barnett formula completely fails to recognise Scotland's unique relationship with our land and the significant contribution that our farmers and crofters make to our nation and, especially, to our rural economy. It ignores our ongoing commitment to active farming and direct payments and, ultimately, it risks our efforts to transform the industry for the future. We will continue to press for a fairer outcome from the United Kingdom spending review, including for explicit multiyear certainty, which we had when we were in the European Union.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** Given that the rural affairs portfolio is now completely the responsibility of this Scottish National Party Government with no strings or ring fencing, will the cabinet secretary give her assurance that an adequate and increased funding package will be provided to support agriculture and rural communities, unlike in previous budgets, where this Government slashed the rural affairs budget more than any other?

**Mairi Gougeon:** I am sure that Finlay Carson appreciates that I am not going to set out the detail of the Scottish Government's budget today. It is not possible for me to do that, and it has to be presented to Parliament in the proper way.

We invest more than £1 billion each year in our rural economy in Scotland. We have continued to provide direct payments for our farmers and crofters because we recognise the hugely important role that they play in providing food for our country as well as helping us to tackle the huge climate and nature challenges that we face. As we have already set out today, we will continue to do what we have always done, which is to stand up for our farmers and crofters in Scotland and ensure that they get the best deal that is possible.

### Community Right to Buy (Review)

**7. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide further details of the reasons why it decided against externally reviewing the community right to buy scheme. (S6O-04011)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** We are

currently taking forward that important piece of work. The review is being led by the Scottish Government community right to buy team, because that was selected as the best and most cost-effective way to conduct the review.

**Sarah Boyack:** The community right to buy scheme is scheduled for a much-needed review, but the answer to a recent freedom of information request revealed that the Scottish Government did not have one single meeting or discussion about who should conduct the review and just went for the internal approach.

Given that the community right to buy scheme is not fit for purpose and desperately needs reform, why does the Scottish Government think that it should be able to mark its own homework? Will the cabinet secretary commit to an external review to ensure that communities are properly empowered to invest in the places where they live?

**Mairi Gougeon:** First, I want to highlight that the review will be comprehensive and will look at the community right to buy scheme from a legislative and procedural point of view, which the officials in the community right to buy team are adequately equipped and resourced to undertake.

The review will be extensive, and there will be various phases to it. The review will involve early engagement with all our key stakeholders, as well as communities and community groups who have been involved in the right to buy process so far—those who have been successful and those who have been unsuccessful.

It is also important to point out that the Scottish Land Commission is convening a reference group that is supporting the review of community right to buy, which will comprise the community land leadership group and additional membership to reflect the appropriate range of interests and expertise. For the duration of the review, the Scottish Government will draw on that reference group to provide scrutiny, challenge and advice to inform it. There will also be a formal consultation as part of the overall process.

### Food Security Unit

**8. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work of its food security unit. (S6O-04012)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** Over the past year, the food security unit has implemented its monitoring system, established key relationships across industry and Governments in the United Kingdom and internationally, and hosted Scotland's first international food security summit.

We have enshrined a commitment to making a statement on food security in Scotland at least every three years in the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024. Delivering that statement will be the unit's next focus.

**Clare Adamson:** Farmers are a basic prerequisite to food security, which is relevant to every corner of Scotland, including my constituency. However, both the Conservative and Labour Westminster Governments have treated Scotland's farmers very poorly, for example by taking away pillar 2 funding from our hill farmers, and through the recent changes in employer national insurance contributions and inheritance tax laws. How will the Scottish National Party Government continue to support farmers in the interests of food security? *[Interruption.]*

**Mairi Gougeon:** I could hear some disquiet from those on the Tory benches. They are calling for multiyear funding, but they forget that their Government did not supply any multiyear funding. You froze the budget and did not give an inflationary increase during the course of six years. You can point your fingers at those on the other benches, but you have a lot to be ashamed of.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Always speak through the chair, cabinet secretary.

**Mairi Gougeon:** We have been clear on many occasions that the Scottish Government is committed to maintaining direct payments, ensuring that there are no cliff edges of support and a that there is a just transition that is in line with our route map. Cliff edges of support have been accelerated due to the measures that the Labour Government has introduced down south.

We recognise that our farmers and crofters produce high-quality food, undertake climate and nature restoration and, ultimately, support thriving rural communities. That is why, in our Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024, the Scottish Government enshrined those activities as objectives of Scottish agricultural policy.

As I have already set out, the Scottish Government will continue to do what it has always done: it will represent and stand up for farmers and crofters in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs, land reform and islands.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer, it was apparent during the previous question session that, in response to a number of questions—particularly those from back-bench Scottish National Party members—those on the Government front benches appeared to read

answers. Given that the questions are meant to be supplementary questions, it should not be possible to script answers to them.

I would be grateful for your view on whether that is in line with standing orders and, more importantly, whether that is in line with parliamentary practice and procedure. We should expect courtesy from one another in the answering of questions, rather collusion with members on the back benches and the provision of scripted answers.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am not in charge of the way in which members seek to pose their questions; that is a matter for individual members. I was satisfied that the questions that were asked by all members, from across the chamber, from whom I selected a supplementary question were supplementary to the question on the business bulletin. That is my role, and that is what I duly discharge. I trust that the member is not trying to suggest otherwise.

## Health and Social Care

### Influenza and Covid-19 Vaccinations

**1. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on this winter's flu and Covid-19 vaccinations. (S6O-04013)

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** As of 17 November, more than 2 million flu and Covid vaccines have been administered. Uptake in the highest-risk groups, such as care home residents and those aged over 75, remains strong.

**Liz Smith:** If I am not mistaken, new statistics are due tomorrow.

I asked that question because there are constituents in the Strathearn area of my region who, as a result of the Crieff medical campus no longer administering the vaccinations, are having to travel quite a distance into Perth for them. Obviously, the weather has been extremely inclement recently. If those constituents are not on the list for home visits, they absolutely have to make that journey. The current statistics show that, at this time, there is less of an uptake this year than there was last year. Is there anything that we can do to encourage more people to be able to access vaccination centres that are often far away from their home?

**Jenni Minto:** I thank Liz Smith for her question and recognise, from my constituency, the issues that she articulated.

We have started a campaign to alert people about the importance of flu and Covid vaccinations, which included the First Minister

getting his vaccination in Blairgowrie community hospital at the beginning of this week. Liz Smith might have written to me on this subject, and I am happy to take it away and then give her a fuller response.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I hold a bank nurse contract with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

I welcome the figures that show that last year, Scotland had the highest uptake in flu jags from those aged 65-plus in the whole of the United Kingdom. Can the minister provide an update on how the Scottish Government is working to encourage our older population to receive those crucial vaccinations?

**Jenni Minto:** Everyone who is eligible for a winter vaccination will have been sent a note describing the date and venue, and their ability to reschedule it. Public Health Scotland has also developed a range of communications to encourage older people to come forward for their vaccinations this winter.

The national vaccination helpline has been helping health boards by calling some of our more vulnerable citizens to encourage them to come forward. In addition, health boards continue to signpost within various healthcare settings.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** People living with long Covid risk having their condition worsen if they catch Covid-19 again, yet the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has taken the decision not to grant that group eligibility for the Covid-19 vaccine this winter.

What action is the Scottish Government taking to protect those vulnerable people, and what is it doing to prevent a two-tier system from emerging as a result of some people being forced to pay to access a Covid-19 vaccination privately?

**Jenni Minto:** As Jackie Baillie will recognise, the JCVI, as a UK-wide group, has the responsibility for making those decisions. We have followed its advice with regard to who should be eligible for Covid-19 and flu vaccinations.

### Hearing Tests (Frequency)

2. **John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government for what reason routine eye tests are conducted more frequently than hearing tests. (S6O-04014)

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** Regular free national health service eye examinations are deemed important to protect people's vision. The examinations are carried out at intervals dictated by a patient's clinical need. They provide a comprehensive eye health assessment, helping with early detection of

sight-threatening conditions and also with general medical conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Currently, statistics on the frequency of NHS hearing tests are not collated centrally. As links between hearing loss and cognitive decline, social isolation and dementia become better understood, we remain committed to our vision for an integrated, community-based hearing service in Scotland.

**John Mason:** About a year ago, I had a problem with my eyesight, and I was due a normal test with my optician. They were fantastic. I was in at half past 9, they phoned Gartnavel general hospital at quarter past 10, I had an appointment at 12 pm and I got a diagnosis by 1 pm. It was absolutely superb.

Unfortunately, I get constituents coming to me with hearing issues who are having to wait quite a long time for a test. There does not seem to be much testing in the community.

**Jenni Minto:** I recognise what John Mason has just described. Last year, I visited the community glaucoma service, which has made major inroads into waiting lists and suchlike. I am now working with officials to look at what possibilities there are—given the budget constraints that we are in—for a similar service with regard to audiology support.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** I make a declaration of interest as a practising NHS general practitioner. When somebody needs glasses, they simply get an eye test and then get their glasses via the NHS on the high street. However, if somebody needs hearing aids, they face a long wait for audiology. Given that hearing aids protect against dementia, why can people not have, for example, an NHS voucher to get their hearing aids on the high street?

**Jenni Minto:** Sandesh Gulhane raises a reasonable point. As I said in my previous answer, the Scottish Government is committed to an integrated and community-based hearing service, and we are currently working through possible options.

### "Stroke Improvement Plan 2023"

3. **Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the progress towards implementing the key priority areas highlighted in its "Stroke Improvement Plan 2023". (S6O-04015)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** We are making good progress towards implementing the key priorities in the stroke improvement plan, which is being led by clinicians and others across Scotland. We have

increased access to the thrombectomy service, with most national health service boards now referring patients, following investment of more than £38 million to date. Each NHS board has an accountable individual who is responsible for stroke services and the national stroke engagement forum has now been established. Rehabilitation and post-stroke care is assessed in significant detail at board reviews and a tool for empirical assessment of rehabilitation provision has been developed. Measures of patient experience of stroke care are in development.

**Roz McCall:** I note the cabinet secretary's comments. However, my constituents in Mid Scotland and Fife can access the potentially life-saving thrombectomy service only if they happen to have a stroke during the week. At weekends, the service is not available; it is available only in NHS Lothian.

Priority 5.3.1 of the stroke improvement plan commits the Scottish Government to publish a plan for the

"further development of the national thrombectomy service, with a focus on increasing"

the quality

"of access across all regions"

by the end of 2023. It is now the very end of 2024—a year later than that, and there is no sign of a detailed plan.

When will the Scottish Government speed up progress on the issue, so that more of my constituents and others across Scotland do not lose their lives to treatable strokes?

**Neil Gray:** First, I recognise the challenge that still exists. As I did in my initial answer, I recognise the progress that is being made but note that there are still areas in which we need to make improvements. I also recognise the work that Roz McCall has done and the interest that she shows in the area, in particular as she lodged a motion on stroke awareness for debate in the Parliament last week.

We have invested £38 million to date, and further funding will be coming to seek to ensure that there is wider access to thrombectomy services. We will respond in due course in those terms.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** Recognising the symptoms of a stroke in its early stages is crucial to saving lives and improving patient outcomes. What further steps are being taken to help to train staff across primary and emergency care sectors to recognise stroke symptoms?

**Neil Gray:** Following a positive meeting that I held with Alexander Stewart and the Bundy family,

I asked the specialty adviser for stroke to review the education for clinical staff to reflect on the concern that symptoms may be getting missed and to consider how health services can recognise and manage that. The review has informed the development of an education package that is funded by the Scottish Government and will be delivered by Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, to which I am very grateful, to staff in general practitioner practices, emergency departments and the Scottish Ambulance Service. Although the education package will focus on face, arms, speech, time—or FAST—symptoms, it will also cover the less common presentations of stroke, including symptoms related to visual field defects and certain presentations of loss of balance.

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I note what the cabinet secretary said in reply to Roz McCall, but for those in rural and island areas, travelling to stroke hubs for thrombectomies causes unnecessary delays and can make the difference in outcome between a good recovery and a not-so-good recovery. For my constituents, it means travelling from Shetland to Dundee. When will the Scottish Government address the health inequalities between Scotland's health boards and ensure that there is swift access to thrombectomies across the country?

**Neil Gray:** I very much recognise what Beatrice Wishart narrates. I have family members in Orkney and, as I set out last week in the debate, in the summer, a family member suffered a stroke, so I recognise the challenge that there always is in delivering services in island and rural communities and the necessity for residents to travel to access services.

I specifically understand the need for us to have swift access to rehabilitation services. I have already pointed to the investment that has been made. In 2024-25, £11 million was put into the development of a national thrombectomy service in Scotland and stroke policy development via the stroke improvement plan. Obviously, the budget will be a further opportunity to look at what more can be done in that space, with a particular focus on rural and island communities.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** One of the issues that was raised last week in our debate was that of people presenting themselves to medical professionals with lesser-known stroke symptoms, such as issues relating to balance and eyes, and a concern was raised about the possibility that the numbers of people presenting themselves would be too much in terms of the capacity of our healthcare professionals. Will the cabinet secretary take this opportunity to make it clear that anyone who is experiencing such lesser-known symptoms of a stroke should present

themselves to a medical professional without any hesitation?

**Neil Gray:** Absolutely—I have no hesitation in saying so. Obviously, we have to acknowledge that our services are under pressure through demand, but, clearly, if somebody is presenting with the FAST symptoms or some of the less-common symptoms around balance and eyes, they should seek medical help.

#### **Employer National Insurance Contributions (Primary Care)**

##### **4. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):**

To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the potential impact of increased employer national insurance contributions on primary care providers in Scotland's national health service. (S6O-04016)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** As set out in the Scottish exchequer fact sheet, primary care contractors in Scotland will face an estimated £40 million increase in costs from April as a result of the United Kingdom budget changes. That represents costs to general practitioners, dentists, pharmacists and community eye care services.

The fact sheet that was published on 20 November coincided with a parliamentary debate on the issue. In my remarks, I set out that the changes risk jobs and NHS delivery now, and jeopardise our on-going programme of reform in primary care. Those concerns have been shared by key stakeholder representatives. I think that the Parliament was—almost—united in calling on the UK Government to go back and think again.

**Tess White:** GPs in the north-east have raised serious concerns with me about the Labour UK Government's short-sighted and disastrous decision. I am told that the rise will cost GP practices tens of thousands of pounds in some cases—the cost is equivalent to a GP's salary. It will impact the services that are available to patients through primary care and the sustainability of general practice at a time when contracts are already being handed back.

Ultimately, the Scottish Government has a decision to make. Will it protect primary care providers and mitigate that financial burden?

**Neil Gray:** I recognise the challenges that Tess White narrates on behalf of primary care providers and GPs in her region—of course I do; in the visits that I have been conducting, I hear about those challenges directly from GP representatives.

Alongside the exchequer handout that was published last week and the further discussions that have been had on the issue, we must recognise that, if what has been set out in the

media reports comes to fruition, the UK Government will provide around £300 million to support the national insurance contributions that arise from directly employed public service employees, which will still be more than £200 million short of the actual cost. Further, if we include private contractors—GPs, social care providers, pharmacists and a range of others—the cost comes to more than £700 million. Tess White is asking me to take money from other aspects of the public sector to finance a Treasury decision that has been taken at Westminster. It would be far better if we united and asked the UK Government to think again.

#### **Cold Weather Health Risks (Protection for Older People)**

**5. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is working to protect older people from heightened health risks in colder weather. (S6O-04017)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** The "Health and Social Care Winter Preparedness Plan 2024/25", which was published on 24 September, sets out a number of actions that support health and social care services in their work to protect older people from heightened health risks in colder weather, including the roll-out of the vaccination programmes to prevent flu, Covid and other respiratory viruses for older adults; expanding the hospital-at-home older people service, which will enable people to be treated at home where appropriate; and signposting available resources such as the Scottish Government's cost of living website.

**Marie McNair:** The cabinet secretary will be aware that last week saw Scotland's coldest early winter night since 1998, with temperatures falling as low as -11°. Does he share my concern and that of stakeholders such as Age Scotland that the health of older people across the country will be jeopardised as a result of the UK Government's cruel decision to cut the winter fuel payment?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, you may answer on matters that are within your portfolio.

**Neil Gray:** I agree that the UK Government's decision to cut the winter fuel payment was taken without consultation with the Scottish Government, and it has had a devastating consequence for our launch of the pension-age winter heating payment. We have repeatedly urged the UK Government to reverse that decision, and the Scottish Parliament supported us in doing so. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice intends to provide an update to Parliament tomorrow on our plans to mitigate the UK Government's harmful decision to cut the

winter fuel payment and to provide support to older people who have increased heating costs.

### **ADHD and ASD Diagnosis and Treatment (Access)**

**6. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to ensure equality of access for adults to the diagnosis and treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism spectrum disorder, in light of the finding in a national autism implementation team report in 2021 that the current thresholds for mental health services do not meet the needs of those who have been referred. (S6O-04018)

**The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd):** There have been significant increases in neurodivergent people seeking a diagnosis and support. The Scottish Government is working to ensure equality of access for adults to diagnoses of ADHD and autism, support and, where appropriate, treatment options. We are working closely with NHS health boards and local authorities to improve services and support for neurodivergent people.

We are also working to implement the recommendations from the report on adult neurodevelopmental pathways to improve diagnosis and support for neurodivergent adults. We have allocated £1 million annually to the autistic adult support fund to deliver support for autistic people.

**Michelle Thomson:** I thank the minister for her response and I recognise the progress that has been made thus far. However, people who are seeking a diagnosis still find it difficult to obtain one because the pathways for adults are complex and sometimes restrictive. Those who are fortunate enough to be able to afford a private diagnosis are then unable to receive treatment on the NHS, because health boards state that they have difficulty in determining the quality or veracity of assessments that are undertaken in the private sector.

I appreciate that health boards are responsible for developing their own pathways. However, given that independent clinics are regulated by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, does the minister consider that health boards could or should be open to accepting private diagnoses from regulated clinics in order to relieve the pressure on NHS waiting lists?

**Maree Todd:** I hear the member's suggestion, but there are a number of challenges involved in doing as she asks. In April 2022, NAIT published guidance on prescribing ADHD medication to adults following a private sector diagnosis in Scotland. The guidance was drafted in

consultation with practising psychiatrists, the Royal College of Psychiatry, the Royal College of General Practitioners and individuals with ADHD. The guidance highlighted that, in order for a shared care arrangement work properly, everyone involved must communicate effectively, and recommendations from specialists for on-going prescribing in the NHS need to be made at an NHS consultation in NHS specialties. Some NHS boards have shared care policies, but it remains at the clinical discretion of individual GPs to decide the best course of action for their patients.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** I have been contacted by multiple constituents who are on waiting lists for assessments for ADHD and autism in Glasgow. Recently, a constituent told me that the waiting time for an ADHD assessment is now three years. The minister mentioned the £1 million fund, but can she confirm that she has challenged NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde on those unacceptable waiting times? What support is available to my constituents while they struggle as they wait on a diagnosis?

**Maree Todd:** The cabinet secretary held an annual review of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde on Monday, so there is on-going engagement with that health board, and my officials are engaging with health boards all over the country.

The member will understand that there has been a dramatic increase in requests for diagnosis—the increase is of up to 1,500 per cent in some areas, which is a challenge. Added to that is the fact that there are medication shortages, particularly for ADHD. The guidance has been to not initiate medication for patients for whom medication might be appropriate because of the global shortages of ADHD medication. I expect that situation to improve over the course of the next year, but the member will understand that there are real challenges because of increased demand and medication shortages.

### **HIV (Stigma and Transmission)**

**7. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide further details of the work that it is doing to tackle stigma around HIV and to eliminate new HIV transmissions by 2030. (S6O-04019)

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** The Scottish Government remains committed to eliminating HIV transmission and supporting people with HIV to enjoy happy and healthy lives, without stigma. Last year's landmark anti-stigma campaign had a significant impact and helped to change negative attitudes. Building on that successful campaign, we are funding further training for health and social care staff to increase awareness and reduce stigma. That is just one element of our comprehensive

approach. Our HIV transmission elimination delivery plan, which was published earlier this year, details 34 key actions that are being taken in the short, medium and longer terms to ensure that we reach our 2030 goal.

**Jackie Dunbar:** The minister will be aware that this Sunday marks world AIDS day 2024. I am proud that, since 2017, the annual number of first-ever HIV diagnoses recorded in Scotland has nearly halved, decreasing from 226 to 126. However, that number is still too high. Will the minister outline how the recently published HIV transmission elimination delivery plan will work towards our shared goal of eradicating new HIV transmission in Scotland completely?

**Jenni Minto:** World AIDS day is a time for us to remember those whom we have lost to the virus and to look forward to a future with no new cases and no stigma around living with the virus.

Many of the 126 new HIV diagnoses in Scotland last year were infections that were acquired elsewhere. Indeed, since 2017, new diagnoses where exposure was recorded as happening in Scotland have decreased from 145 to 37. That highlights our successful approach to HIV prevention.

The HIV transmission elimination delivery plan builds on that excellent progress, including through further development of our world-leading pre-exposure prophylaxis programme and our e-PrEP clinic pilot, which is now seeing its first patients. I look forward to sharing further updates on our actions to end new transmissions in Scotland in due course.

**Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** In advance of world AIDS day this Sunday, it is good to hear the minister reaffirm the commitment to end HIV transmissions in Scotland. We know that levels of stigma can often be higher in low-prevalence areas, such as many of the rural and island communities that I represent, where there is less awareness and additional barriers to accessing healthcare. What specific action is being taken to increase access to HIV healthcare and education in rural and island areas of Scotland, so that we can meet the 2030 target?

**Jenni Minto:** I recognise the issues and situations that Emma Roddick speaks about. They are exactly why we are funding services such as postal testing and Waverley Care's digital information project, which can be particularly valuable for those in rural and island areas.

We have also funded a national HIV co-ordinator in Public Health Scotland, who is working with a network of champions from all national health service boards to disseminate best practice and support delivery of excellent care nationwide.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** My question is in a similar vein—it is about rural communities and the particular stigma there. We know that it can be more difficult to get specialist healthcare staff, so is work on-going in primary care in rural areas to make sure that our practitioners in those areas have the skills and competencies that they need?

**Jenni Minto:** A similar point was raised when the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee asked about educating healthcare staff around HIV, and I am pleased that that work is being progressed. I was recently in a meeting with Waverley Care and the Terrence Higgins Trust, where I spoke with an HIV specialist from NHS Tayside. I also recently spoke with an HIV specialist from NHS Highland. Therefore, that work is happening.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can squeeze in question 8, if I have brief questions and answers.

#### **Mental Health Services (NHS Lothian)**

**8. Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support mental health services across NHS Lothian. (S6O-04020)

**The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd):** The Scottish Government and national health service boards continue to support spend in excess of £1.3 billion for mental health services. In addition to that core funding, boards were allocated an additional £120 million in 2024-25 via the enhanced mental health outcomes framework, with NHS Lothian receiving more than £18 million. That flexible funding stream gives local areas such as NHS Lothian greater choice in how services are configured and organised in order to deliver better outcomes.

**Sue Webber:** Veterans First Point—V1P—Lothian is a vital service that supports veterans with their mental health and wellbeing. On 28 October, following NHS Lothian's decision to withdraw its joint funding of the service, all new referrals to V1P were paused and the service faces an uncertain future. What discussions has the Scottish Government had with NHS Lothian about that vital mental health service? Will the minister provide me with an update on the future of V1P Lothian?

**Maree Todd:** My officials are in discussion with NHS Lothian on the matter. The health board is reviewing what service provision is possible within the remaining budget for the rest of this financial year. Veterans who are already with the service will continue with assessments and treatment, and others who are affected by the change have been

advised to contact the team at NHS Lothian to discuss alternative support.

As a Government, we remain committed to implementing the principles of the “Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Action Plan”, and to ensuring that all veterans living in Scotland are able to access the best possible care and support, including safe, effective and person-centred healthcare.

I am very happy to pick up with the member offline anything that I can do to help her in putting the case to ensure that our veterans are well cared for by our local health boards.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes health and social care portfolio questions. My apologies to those members whom I was simply not able to squeeze due to the time constraints.

## Social Care

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-15613, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on addressing the crisis in social care now. Members who wish to participate in the debate should press their request-to-speak button.

14:57

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** The Scottish National Party Government has been in power for 17 years. It has had 17 years to come up with a sustainable plan for social care, but it has simply failed to do so.

The national care service was a Labour idea that arose more than 13 years ago, following the *Clostridioides difficile* outbreak at the Vale of Leven general hospital, where people were discharged straight into care homes without testing. The parallels with the treatment of older people during Covid are self-evident. Had the SNP reformed social care—as we told it to do all those years ago—the outcomes for older people during the pandemic might have been better.

The failure to reform means that, on the SNP's watch, things have simply got worse. Delayed discharge has risen to a record high, care homes have reduced by a fifth, and 9,000 Scots are waiting for assessment and care packages. There is rising unmet need, which has led to a crisis in community health and social care. Existing care packages are being cut. Just last—

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** Will Jackie Baillie give way?

**Jackie Baillie:** Let me finish my point first.

Just last week, I heard of an older person who is nearing end of life and is unable to get a care package at home. Cabinet secretary, what kind of society are we that we cannot provide care in such circumstances?

**Neil Gray:** Clearly, that is why we need reform. The critical issue that we have before us, which Jackie Baillie and I were able to hear directly from Scottish Care at its conference, is finance and financial sustainability. The biggest issue in that regard is the United Kingdom Government's employer national insurance contributions grab on Scottish public services. Is it Labour's position—

**Jackie Baillie:** This is a speech, not an intervention.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Briefly, Mr Gray.

**Neil Gray:** Is it Labour's position that Scottish public services should be funding a Treasury tax



grab, or can we unite to say that the UK Government needs to think again?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Jackie Baillie, I can give you the time back. Interventions will need to be briefer.

**Jackie Baillie:** I am grateful to you for giving me the time back, Deputy Presiding Officer—that will probably come out of the cabinet secretary's speech. The SNP Scottish Government has had 17 years to carry out reform, but it has failed the social care sector for those 17 years. It has responsibility right now, and that is the legacy of the SNP.

Let us take integration joint boards. *[Interruption.]* If the minister would be quiet for a minute. IJBs, which are responsible for the delivery of social care, are facing huge deficits. In quarter 1 of this year alone, more than £160 million has been overspent. It will be much worse as we enter the end of the year, and the cuts that they are making will have a direct impact on those who require care the most. That is happening now, on the cabinet secretary's watch.

In that context, £30 million being wasted on the failed National Care Service (Scotland) Bill is a travesty. More than £2 million has been spent on private consultants, but not one single penny has paid for an extra carer. Instead of delivering the reform that is at the very heart of the Feeley review, the SNP is delivering a master-class in stubbornness, preferring to waste even more time and money rather than admitting that it got it wrong.

The bill is one of the worst examples of legislation that I have seen. At stage 1, reservations were brushed aside, and the committee was presented with stage 2 amendments that amounted to 41 pages, when the original bill was only 38 pages long. Every part of section 1, on the principles of the care service, was changed; in fact, little in the bill remains unscathed.

The bill is now, in effect, a brand new bill, which is preventing proper scrutiny and flouting the parliamentary process. It shows that the Government has no vision and lacks direction. If members do not believe me, perhaps they will believe Scott Wortley and James Mitchell, who are two experts in policy and law making. They described the national care service bill as

“policy-making on the hoof.”

I think that they were being unduly generous, because they were not to know that, just days before the stage 2 deadline, the Scottish Government would pause the bill again. Meanwhile, unpaid carers, care workers and

disabled and older people continue to struggle in a broken system.

The Government should urgently publish a timetable that sets out how it will deliver much-needed social care reforms. The SNP repeatedly states that people who rely on social care want the bill to succeed—but not, I am afraid, in its current form.

A statement from the national carer organisations this week called for investment in social care in the upcoming budget and the delivery of a commitment to remove care charging, which was promised in the SNP's manifesto three years ago but not delivered. The statement also called for the delivery of priorities such as Anne's law and a right to a break from caring. It called for agreement on a shared strategy for improving the provision of social care by supporting the development of a wider market of providers across all sectors. All those things can be delivered without the national care service bill, which even the minister finally conceded at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee yesterday. There is therefore no excuse for not acting now, rather than trying to cover the SNP's embarrassment over its confused bill.

The UK Labour Government has delivered a record budget settlement for Scotland, which includes £789 million of health and social care funding this year and an additional £1.72 billion for next year. That is a fact. There is also up to £330 million extra for national insurance contributions. However, it is up to this SNP Government to spend it wisely and, frankly, its track record is not very good.

The SNP must address the mounting pressure on IJBs or there will be devastating consequences for people who rely on care services and for our entire healthcare system. It must deliver for front-line health and social care staff. It is time to stop spending millions of pounds on failure. The SNP Government has had years to deliver the reform of social care that is so necessary. I have been here long enough to remember the endless Government working groups on ending the postcode lottery of care. There have been lots of warm words but little action. The time has long passed to deliver real change in social care. Instead of trying to save face, the Government should get on with what it can do now.

It should deliver a right to respite for carers, through the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016; ethical commissioning, through the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014; collective bargaining, through the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2015; a national social work agency, which does not even need any legislation; and Anne's law, through the Social Care and Social Work

Improvement Scotland (Requirements for Care Services) Regulations 2011.

Reform can start today, but the SNP is making a choice to delay. Those proposals command support across the chamber, and the Government should get on with delivering them.

I move,

That the Parliament notes that the Scottish Government formally committed to introduce a National Care Service (Scotland) Bill in September 2021; further notes that the Scottish Government's proposed amendment to part one of the Bill setting out the establishment of a National Care Service board has been roundly rejected by stakeholders; understands that the cost to date is £30 million, without a single penny being spent directly on care; urges the Scottish Ministers to accept that the Bill now has no realistic prospect of success in its current form; calls on the Scottish Government to take immediate steps to alleviate the crisis in social care, including delivering sufficient support for health and social care partnerships, and further calls on the Scottish Government to set out a timetable, before the Parliament's Christmas recess, for progressing reforms, including a right to respite care, Anne's Law, ethical commissioning, collective bargaining and the establishment of a National Social Work Agency.

15:04

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** Over the course of our lifetimes, every one of us will be touched by social care, social work or community health support, whether we access care directly or have family or friends who do so. It is the backbone of a thriving civic society. In Scotland, our unpaid carers and paid social care workforce do an outstanding job in providing care and support to those who need it.

More often than not, however, they are working in a system that feels as if it is working against rather than for them. I know that that was reflected to the minister and to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities lead, Councillor Paul Kelly, at the carers parliament this morning. I also hear that point time and again from people who access services, which was something that Jackie Baillie's speech ignored.

There are pockets of good and excellent work taking place locally and across the country but, despite that, there are fundamental issues that urgently need to be addressed if we are to ensure that the sector is fit for purpose for future generations, to end the postcode lottery of care provision and to ensure that we are delivering for people who are in receipt of social care.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** All of that is well and good, but what is the cabinet secretary going to do about the massive deficits that are accruing in all the health and social care partnerships across Scotland, to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds?

**Neil Gray:** We have invested an extra £1 billion in social care over this session of Parliament. We are providing a substantial investment to health boards and local authorities. Clearly, there is a budget next week in which we will seek to ensure that we provide the support that is required to our communities.

This is what Derek Feeley found during his work leading the independent—

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

**Neil Gray:** I will need to make progress, but I will try to come back to Ms Duncan-Glancy if I can.

Derek Feeley recommended that we establish a national care service, underpinned by a human rights-based approach, giving voice to people with lived experience at every level. That was accepted by the Government in full, and we have been working to fulfil that commitment ever since. Thousands of people told Derek Feeley then what they are telling us today: that things need to change. Last week, disabled people's organisations published an emotional and powerful open letter in which they highlight that

"wholesale reform is so urgently needed."

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland, which is a collective of third sector providers across Scotland, said that it is

"committed that as long as there is a Bill, we'll work to make it as good as it possibly can be."

Age Scotland said:

"The Bill is absolutely vital and it can be better, there can be more detail of course, but I think everybody has to think about what more they can do to deliver good quality social care."

Our communities across Scotland are begging us to do the right thing. We need to get on and deliver what people want, which is a rights-based system that puts people at its heart and that allows for greater monitoring, consistency and oversight.

As outlined in the amendment that I have lodged, it is clear that there is unacceptable variation in performance across Scotland, and it is the people of Scotland who are paying the price for that. Our work on delayed discharge has shown that people are more than 10 times more likely to be delayed in hospital in the worst-performing area in Scotland than in the best.

Colleagues might be interested to know that, for example, in Ayrshire, which spans three integration joint boards and a single shared health board, delays vary from 25.5 per 100,000 in East Ayrshire to 98.2 per 100,000 in South Ayrshire. That is an absurd and unjustifiable level of variation. It is simply not good enough, not least

for those who should really have been at the heart of the discussions: those who receive social care.

I will give way briefly to Pam Duncan-Glancy and then I need to conclude.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** One area that the cabinet secretary has not picked up on in the letter that was shared with him this week is the comment that,

“As we wait for reform, members of our Movement are reporting that they cannot get washed, dressed, go to the toilet or eat”.

That is what is happening in social care services across Scotland today. What does the cabinet secretary have to say to disabled people today who cannot get washed, dressed or go to the toilet?

**Neil Gray:** I say that that is totally unacceptable, which is why we need reform. We need investment to be delivered where it can make the best possible change for disabled people and those who require social care.

Anyone who is trying to frustrate the process of reforming social care needs to reflect on those facts. The system is not working. We need to focus our energies on accelerating the process and making progress in the areas that we can agree on, but challenging ourselves on the areas where there is not agreement.

Ensuring that we provide a social care and community healthcare system for the future is an investment for us all. Contrary to Labour’s factually inaccurate motion, we have increased the investment that is going into social care by £1 billion in this session of Parliament. However, investment alone has not driven the kind of improvement that people need and expect.

The danger of the employer national insurance contribution calamity looms large across the social care sector, which will need to find an estimated £84 million to survive. Frustrating the progress of social care reform through the development of a national care service is to ignore the pleas of the very people who are desperately calling for change, and accepting crippling and punitive taxation through ENICs is to actively work against them. For too long, individuals have been telling us that social care needs reform. Now is the time for the Parliament to exercise its duty to listen and to act in the best interests of the people of Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-15613.4, to leave out from “formally committed” to end and insert:

“introduced the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill in June 2022 to address the substantial concerns highlighted from the Feeley review, which noted poor and variable levels of social care around the country and the need for nationally enforceable standards of care; further notes that

the Bill includes a right to respite care, Anne’s Law and ethical commissioning; welcomes that the Scottish Government is developing a collective bargaining approach for social care in collaboration with local government, trade unions and social care providers and its continued commitment to establishing a National Social Work Agency; acknowledges the open letter from disabled people’s organisations, which states that wholesale reform is so urgently needed; agrees that the service users, their families and carers should be the focus of a National Care Service; deplores that the increase in employer national insurance contributions from the UK Government will negatively impact on care services by increasing the cost to third parties contracted to deliver adult and children’s social care services by almost £90 million and, according to COSLA estimates, to local government by £265 million, and agrees that, if the UK Labour administration does not reimburse this in full, it is the provision of these services that will feel the brunt.”

15:10

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** I declare my interest as a practising national health service general practitioner.

The motion that is before us highlights the SNP’s mismanagement of its flagship National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. At the heart of the failure is Maree Todd, the minister who is in charge of social care, who told me yesterday that she was in charge of the bill, although she was, seemingly, not trusted to lodge the Government amendment today. Time and again, the minister has assured us of her commitment to reform, but her actions tell a different story.

The handling of the bill has been a shambles. So far, it has cost the taxpayer £30 million—money that could have gone towards delivering care for our most vulnerable people. The money could have paid for a million hours of social care, or it could have funded 1,500 care workers for one year. Instead, the bill is dead in the water and has been rejected by stakeholders, experts, trade unions and councils.

How did we get here? The SNP has had 17 years to address the issues in social care, but it has squandered every opportunity. The best part of four years has been wasted on the flawed bill, which has caused more uncertainty than progress. Instead of improvement, we have chaos. The minister’s approach has been one of denial and deflection. She has tried to pit one group against another.

In yesterday’s Health, Social Care and Sport Committee meeting, I asked Maree Todd whether she had been entirely truthful about her dealings with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the representative body for local authorities, and she claimed that she has been. COSLA has been clear since February—which was nearly 10 months ago—that serious issues with the bill remained unresolved, so its withdrawal of support

two months ago was no surprise to anyone, except Maree Todd.

By June last year, there were three outstanding matters on which the Scottish Government simply refused to listen. The Government produced its draft amendments to the bill, which COSLA was not shown until one hour before they were made public. The amendments caused further significant concerns, which showed, again, that COSLA was simply not being listened to.

A particular sticking point was the SNP's decision to include children and justice social work services, directly against COSLA's wishes. Council leaders repeatedly warned the SNP that such changes required more consultation and agreement between the various spheres of government, but their concerns were simply ignored.

The SNP's mishandling extends beyond the bill itself. Scotland's hospitals remain gridlocked, and families who are seeking respite care are left unsupported. Meanwhile, morale among care workers is at rock bottom. Maree Todd's leadership has failed to deliver not just the policy, but basic immediate solutions for those who are in need.

Under Labour-backed policies at Westminster, employer national insurance contributions are set to rise while the salary threshold for employee contributions is lowered. The changes are already hitting care organisations that are struggling to recruit and retain staff.

Let us be clear: by her own admission, Maree Todd is responsible for the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, so she bears primary responsibility for the crisis. If the minister is actually in charge, she has shown gross incompetence. The bill is a costly distraction and has failed to gain public confidence. As the cabinet secretary said, we need to make things better, but Scotland deserves better than this parade of incompetence.

I move amendment S6M-15613.2, to insert after "directly on care":

" , despite over 6,000 people in Scotland currently waiting for a social care assessment to enable them to live independently at home or in the community".

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Gillian Mackay, who joins us remotely.

15:14

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and will reiterate points that have been expressed by colleagues.

It comes as no surprise to us that the social care sector is in crisis and that we must address the

pressures as a matter of urgency. The ambitions and efforts behind the introduction of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill were driven by a profound recognition of that urgent need. Its core aim was to address the long-standing issues that are plaguing the system, including unequal access to care, inconsistent standards and lack of fairness and sustainability in the delivery of care across Scotland.

Initially, the plans followed a bold commitment to delivering compassionate person-centred care, with the aim of ensuring reform in key areas, including enhanced support for unpaid carers, care home visitation rights and efforts to improve the experience of the social work and social care workforce.

Back in June 2023, COSLA leaders and Scottish ministers reached an initial agreement on shared accountability for the NCS that would have seen councils retaining their core responsibilities and workforce, while a new NCS national board would be created to provide enhanced strategic leadership and oversight. I mention that to underline the fact that those developments were part of a larger process and efforts to ensure support across the board.

Although I welcomed and consistently demonstrated my support for the ambition to create a fairer system, the bill in its current form raises significant concerns. It lacks clarity on how statutory responsibilities will be shared between national and local bodies, and it leaves questions about accountability and service delivery. The bill risks the removal of key local decision making and local accountability, while introducing new complexities that risk further aggravating the situation. The past months have seen increasing opposition to and concern about the NCS bill from key partners, and I believe that any reform must be backed by key stakeholders, and that its being unable to move is to their detriment.

I will also take a moment to acknowledge that several organisations are disappointed by the further delays to the bill and by a process that has come to resemble a bureaucratic dispute between different levels of government and parties. We cannot afford to let the situation slip, but must ensure that we remain focused on delivering on the commitments and pledges that have been made throughout the process.

The establishment of a national care service must be informed by the voices of lived experience, including those who access support and care, the workforce and unpaid carers. Progress in fair work for the social care workforce must continue as a priority, in tandem with any potential transformation.

The plans must also enjoy broad support from stakeholders who are meant to be at the forefront of delivery. We also want to ensure that ethical commissioning is a core part of the service and we are concerned about that not being included in amendments at stage 2.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** Can Gillian Mackay confirm the stance of her party on the continuance of the national care service bill? I read in the press that the Greens had reversed their support for the bill.

**Gillian Mackay:** I thank Mr Cole-Hamilton for his intervention.

At my party's conference earlier in the autumn, the party voted for a motion that removed support for the bill in its current form, but expressed that we want to continue to support the provisions that will make progress for unpaid carers and the workforce. We are willing to work with the Government to see which of the issues that we all agree on we can continue to progress. I urge all parties to make sure that social care reform is their top priority and to bring forward alternative proposals and say what they would be willing to see to ensure that we make progress in social care reform.

I am coming to the end of my time, so I will leave it there for now.

15:18

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I am grateful to Jackie Baillie for making time for the debate. She hit the right tone with her opening remarks and did well to remind members that, for this Government, social care is often an afterthought. That was never more true than it was during the pandemic. The tragedy of Scotland's pandemic stories is, indeed, found in our care homes.

Although I am grateful that I am speaking in the debate, I sincerely hope that this is the last time that we will have cause to debate the ill-fated national care service. To paraphrase Monty Python, I say that this is a dead parrot of a policy. It has joined the choir invisible. The only reason why it is not pushing up daisies is that it has been nailed to its perch.

If we are honest with ourselves, we accept that the Scottish Government has now moved from adaptation to damage limitation to just trying to save face—and I fear that it might even be beyond that, because nobody wants the bill any more. The Government has lost the dressing room. In Gillian Mackay's response to my intervention, we heard that even the Green Party has recognised that the idea is toast and that there are aspects that are

contained in the bill that we can adapt through other means. I will come to that later.

**Neil Gray:** It is not true to say that no one wants the bill. The letter from disabled people's organisations was very clear, and I am sure that Mr Cole-Hamilton is receiving the same representations as I am receiving. Does he not accept that, at this stage, it is best for us to work together to achieve the maximum possible consensus on reform, and for political parties to put differences to one side and to move forward to bring about reform for our service users?

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** When disabled people's organisations learn that £30 million has already been wasted on this bureaucratic exercise—that is the equivalent of 1,200 care workers' salaries—they are astonished and outraged. That is why the Government has lost the dressing room. The bill has been roundly rejected by trade unions and councils, which have been joined by members of the care sector in saying, "No thanks," to the Government's plans, which, in the cold light of day, amounted to very little more than a bureaucratic centralisation and a ministerial power grab.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats is the only party to have been against the Government's proposals from day 1. Right out of the traps, we saw them for the mistake that they were. We are pleased that every other Opposition party, including the Green Party, which was once squarely behind the bill, has now reversed its support. Two years since being introduced, the Government's national care service proposal is dead in the water, with nothing to show for itself, other than the £30 million black hole in our public finances that I mentioned in my response to the cabinet secretary.

If ever we were looking for an example of Government mismanagement, it is this. Our social care service is in dire need of attention and reform. It is in crisis, yet not a single penny of the £30 million has been spent on solutions to the problems. How galling that must be for the thousands of people in this country who rely on social care or who, for years, have worked in the service under immense strain. Those workers, who care for the people whom we love, who did so much during the darkest days of the pandemic and who have been underpaid and undervalued for so long, have been roundly ignored by this Government. All of what has happened is a slap in the face to them.

Many of those workers are not even on permanent contracts—many of them are on zero-hours contracts—while poor terms and conditions contribute to rising absences as a result of sickness and burnout. It is no wonder that there is such a large vacancy rate across the entirety of the care workforce. The wasted £30 million is

money that could have funded 1,200 care workers, whom we desperately need, given how high delayed discharge continues to be in this country.

My party wants hard-working social care staff to have the better pay and conditions that they deserve, right now. In fact, we wanted them to have it years ago, before the Government embarked on its ill-fated misadventure. We want them to have access to the collective bargaining and standardised career progression that would put them on a par with teachers and nurses, and would go some way towards making social care a profession of choice once again.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** We do not need the bill in order to introduce the key vital aspects that the Labour Party has identified in its motion. We can find other mechanisms to do so, and we should.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. I advise members that we have no time in hand. In fact, we are already behind schedule.

I call Paul Sweeney, to be followed by Clare Haughey.

15:23

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to support the motion.

The cabinet secretary is right to highlight the fact that the national care service, or its concept, is essential for the future of Scotland. Social care is so critical to all aspects of our civic society that most families in Scotland will have experience of care requirements in their own households. Therefore, it is essential that we get this right. Unfortunately, it seems that no good idea can survive contact with the calamity of this Government's administration of it.

Time and again, all parties have offered good will to the Government in an effort to get the bill right. Numerous months have been spent in committee trying to support the Government to get the bill right, but we have ended up in a position in which key stakeholders across local government, the trade unions and the social enterprise sector have withdrawn their support. That is a disastrous performance by the Government, and it should be reflecting on it with humility instead of simply trying to deny reality.

The commitment to establish a national care service was made by the Scottish National Party Government in 2021, in the wake of the pandemic, but, in the three years since then, £30 million of public expenditure has delivered precisely nothing of any real value to the people of Scotland. We are

no further forward, and the crushing issues in the social care sector persist: rising delayed discharge rates in the national health service, low pay, poor working conditions and a lack of choice and agency for people who receive and provide care.

In pursuing the bill, the Scottish Government has tried and failed to be all things to all people. It has lacked decisiveness, grit and a vision of what the national care service should look like. It should have learned the right lessons from the creation of the national health service. When Aneurin Bevan steered that legislation through the UK Parliament, it was not some immaculate conception; there was immense challenge and dispute around the creation of the NHS. It took grit, determination and a decision on what it would be—it would not happen in local government or in privatised hospitals but would be a national service. At least, at that time, the Government made a decision; the minister, the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government have not had the gumption to do that on this occasion.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Paul Sweeney has made a really good case about the SNP trying to dress up the NCS in the clothes of the much-loved national treasure that is the NHS. Does he also recognise that the NHS is free at the point of use, whereas nothing about the NCS would make that true of social care?

**Paul Sweeney:** Mr Cole-Hamilton has made an astute point. In fact, the Scottish Trades Union Congress has highlighted the fact that more than £100 million a year leaks out of the social care system into profiteering. The Government does not mention that point often when it is tackling the issue of efficiency in public expenditure, nor the fact that people often have to sell the assets that they have worked their whole lives to build up to fund social care. Private profiteering of asset sales is a challenge in our society today.

Three years into a Parliament that was meant to introduce a national care service bill, it is no further forward. Indeed, the number of care home places has dropped by 6 per cent in the past decade. Precious time has been wasted when the Government could have been acting to deliver the immediate changes that are needed in social care—the minister conceded as much at the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee yesterday. We have no Anne's law, no right to breaks and no collective bargaining—the list goes on.

Those changes could have been introduced long before now. We could have been building the framework of the national care service without holding it hostage to one grandiose piece of legislation. Indeed, the minister mentioned yesterday that the recommendations in the Feeley review could have been implemented without

primary legislation. However, the end of this parliamentary session is fast approaching and instead of taking those steps, the Government remains devoted to pursuing change through one labyrinthine bill that has unfortunately run out of steam.

Labour remains committed to a national care service and open to collaboration to reform social care. However, the minister should accept that the bill in its current form is simply not salvageable and is not the way to deliver that change. The Parliament cannot afford the public expenditure required for us to spend more time considering the bill in its current form. I urge the Government to return to the drawing board with a focus on the actions that we can take now to realise areas of consensus and effect crucial change in the social care sector.

15:27

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** It is difficult to overstate the importance of our social care services. They are absolutely vital to individuals who receive care, their families, our communities and our society as a whole. Most of us will need the social care system at some point, for ourselves or a loved one, and I am extremely grateful for the commitment and compassion of the hundreds of thousands of paid and unpaid carers who support others.

Last week's open letter from the disabled people's movement criticises how the national care service has become a "political tug-of-war" and I agree that it is hindering crucial progress. However, many areas of the draft amendments have broad support across the chamber and across stakeholders—the devil is in the detail of others.

It is abundantly clear that the status quo cannot continue and that the social care system needs fundamental reform. Last week in the chamber, and yesterday in committee, the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport reiterated that point.

The conversations that the minister, her colleagues, and many of us will have had with constituents underline the reasons why change is necessary. They are around access to high-quality, consistent services where and when they are needed, and around ending a completely unacceptable postcode lottery and huge variation across the country. They are around oversight—this year, the Government has increased investment in social care by £1 billion, yet we have not seen the improvements that we would have hoped to see, and we must understand why. Governance and planning must change and must

include people with lived experiences in a meaningful way.

Those conversations are also around valuing social care and the social care workforce, which is largely—more than 80 per cent—female, many of whom work part time. The minister reported last week that good progress is being made towards sectoral bargaining, which is a vital tool in tackling wider issues such as in-work poverty that have a disproportionate effect on women.

I will briefly touch on the issue of the UK Government's changes to employer national insurance contributions, which could cost the sector £80 million each year. The minister has warned that that impact could be catastrophic, especially where systems are already precarious. That is not £80 million for one year—it is £80 million for every subsequent year.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Clare Haughey:** I do not have time.

We should not forget, of course, that staffing in the sector continues to be deeply impacted by the on-going effects of Brexit, about which the UK Labour Government continues to bury its head in the sand. I have written to the chancellor to express my deep concerns regarding the national insurance changes, which seem to have stemmed from a lack of detailed modelling or any consultation on social care in Scotland. The sector must be exempted from that tax rise as a matter of urgency, and I urge those on the Labour benches to press that point with their UK colleagues.

I will finish with a quote from the open letter from the disabled people's movement, which has been mentioned in the debate. It states:

"The Movement and its members, alongside the third sector and carers, have invested huge amounts of time, energy and emotion in trying to develop a truly participative and positive National Care Service; one which will value the user as well as the workforce; one which will be the envy of the UK and the world. This must not be wasted."

Our social care system requires fundamental systemic change, and those changes and the human rights approach that they encompass need to be embedded deep in our legislation.

15:31

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Last Thursday, the minister in charge of the bill reported her total failure to the chamber without a word of apology. Four committees of the Parliament told her that the bill was flawed. Every major stakeholder told her that they had no confidence in the bill. Thirty million pounds of taxpayers' money was squandered. What made it

worse was her unwillingness to accept any ministerial responsibility or to apologise.

In my professional experience, any employee in any other job or walk of life would have left the building with their belongings in a cardboard box. However, when I put that to the minister, she told me:

"To be fair, that is exactly what I would expect from Stephen Kerr. The Conservatives have opposed the change at every turn. By their very nature, they like things to stay the same; that is the essence of conservatism."—*[Official Report, 21 November 2024; c 65.]*

That is not true.

My mother had dementia. The carers in the home that she was admitted to were exemplary—they were truly wonderful people doing a difficult job with tact, love and good humour. That is why I want how we value care and carers to change. In time, my sister and I had to sell the family home that we grew up in to fund my mother's care. My wonderfully decent parents always lived modestly. They paid their taxes and saved, but, at the end of the day, every penny that they had saved, including their principal asset, their home—the council house that they had bought—was needed to pay the bills. My parents wanted to pass something on to their grandchildren, to help them with the start of their adult lives, but it did not quite work out like that.

My family is far from unique. We all want our parents to have the dignity that they deserve in their senior years, especially when they become dependent on others. The Scottish Conservatives want to end the disparities in choice and quality of social care across Scotland. The SNP says that it recognises the need to address those inequalities, but its execution has been disastrous. It wanted, as in so many of its so-called reforms, to take power from local communities to the centre. Here is what COSLA said in 2021:

"Council Leaders together voiced their opposition to the recommendation which proposes the removal of local democratic accountability from Adult Social Care and the centralising of the service under a National Care Service with accountability falling to Ministers, a move that they described as being detrimental to the local delivery of social care and its integration with other key community services."

Nearly three years ago, the Finance and Public Administration Committee was

"not confident that the figures presented in the updated financial memorandum and the accompanying shared accountability paper are an accurate reflection of the final costs of the bill."

Last month, the Scottish Trades Union Congress general secretary—not someone I, as a Scottish Conservative, would normally quote—said:

"Care workers are on their knees trying desperately to cover shifts and visits to those in need.

There is a shortage of staff across Scotland with local councils and employers all struggling to deliver the vital social care. Yet the government is ploughing on with the National Care Service Bill which fails to address fundamental issues about how care is delivered ... The Scottish Government seems hellbent on repeating the mistakes of the past."

The SNP Government has ignored expert advice, prioritising central control. Meanwhile, health and social care partnerships across Scotland are heading towards certain bankruptcy.

The Government is out of ideas and out of time, and at times—the minister should listen to this—it is out of decency. Whoever follows those ministers into office will inherit a total shambles from the most incompetent and economically illiterate Government that Scotland has ever endured.

15:36

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** At the height of Covid, a day rarely passed when I was not contacted by a constituent who raised a heartbreaking story. Families did not have access to loved ones in care homes because we could not get our act together on testing. Social care packages were being removed. There was pressure to sign do not attempt resuscitation orders. Covid inflicted an appalling toll on our care and nursing homes and the human rights of older people were cast aside.

The Covid crisis has now been replaced by a care crisis, and the number of heartbreaking cases grows. Constituents have older relatives who are stuck in hospital because we do not have carers to allow them to go home. Mums and grans are sent to care homes miles from their families so that the delayed discharge figures can be fiddled when they only want to be cared for in their own homes. I spoke to a cancer patient in Dumfries whose last wish was to die at home, but they were not able to do so because there were no carers, so they had to go into hospital for their final days. A granddad from Wigtownshire was sent to hospital in Kilmarnock because the local community hospital in Newton Stewart was closed and he could not access a palliative care bed locally. His wife had to make a 100-mile round trip to visit him on each of his dying days.

I do not need to be told that our social care system is broken to be convinced that change is needed. I welcomed the Government's pledge to build from the Covid crisis a positive legacy of a national care service, to put social care on the same level as the NHS and to create parity to ensure that services are properly funded and staffed. I saw it as an opportunity to deliver national standards wherever people live—in urban and rural areas—but with services being delivered locally and being accountable to local people. I



saw the bill as a chance to drive up care and, crucially, the terms and conditions of care workers. I saw it as a chance to move the dial away from the privatisation of care to a public service that is publicly delivered.

However, the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill does not do any of that. Any lingering support and any hope that it could do those things have all but collapsed, yet the Government remains in complete denial. The botched bill has been slated by the Parliament's committees. The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, the Finance and Public Administration Committee, the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee, the Education, Children and Young People Committee, the Criminal Justice Committee and the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee have all raised serious concerns. The bill is opposed by COSLA, the STUC, the GMB, Unison, Unite and the Royal College of Nursing. NHS board chairs and chief executives have warned that the bill will not address the challenges that social care faces.

The unsavoury sight of ministers in the chamber constantly pitching those who are cared for against care workers and the unions is not acceptable. Claiming that national Government will be the saviour for failings in local government will not win any support inside or outside the Parliament. However, the Government can secure the support of Parliament and stakeholders if it focuses action and resources on tackling the current crisis and delivers at pace the things that we all agree on. That means getting on with providing the right to respite care.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Colin Smyth:** I will take an intervention if I will get the time back.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You will not get the time back, Mr Smyth.

**Colin Smyth:** I apologise to the member, but I will have to continue.

We need to get on with providing the things that we all agree on—the right to respite care, Anne's law, ethical commissioning, collective bargaining and the establishment of a national social work agency. As we have heard, all those things can be delivered using existing laws.

The Government launched its plans for a national care service with much fanfare. Parallels were even drawn with the creation of the NHS, but just saying something in a press release does not make it so. There is no rescuing this proposal. The Government should scrap the bill and get serious about dialogue to create something that will really

be a national care service, rather than just something that is called a national care service.

15:40

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** This is one of those debates where we come in and think that we are going to say one thing, but we are actually going to say something completely different.

I remind members in the chamber that we were all elected to represent people, and people have told us loud and clear that they want radical change in care delivery. People want an end to the postcode lottery, they want national standards that apply everywhere and they want a human rights-based approach to the delivery of care.

However, what we have had of late is many in this place ignoring the wishes of people the length and breadth of the country who are care service users. We have a situation in which the debate is all about politics, power and resources and not—as it should be—about people. I hope that folks in the chamber today will listen much more to the calls from the voices of lived experience about what they want to see. The cabinet secretary and Ms Haughey mentioned some of those folks, who have made it quite clear what they want, including the disabled people's organisations that say that wholesale reform is needed and Age Scotland, which says that the bill is vital.

On Monday this week, I went to visit a constituent at home—a disabled constituent who is about to have part of their care package removed. That will mean that that person is no longer able to live a free and independent life in their own home. It is a decision—

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Kevin Stewart:** I do not have time.

It is a decision that has been taken without due regard to that person's human rights, their independence or their freedom. At the end of our conversation on Monday, we started to talk about the rules that local authorities and health and social care partnerships follow—often, rules that they apply themselves. That person called for change and for national standards to be applied everywhere, with no postcode lottery.

I said that this debate is now more about politics, power and resources, and there are folks who want to keep the power and resources. COSLA has gone about handling this in entirely the wrong way. It has failed to listen to the voices of lived experience, many of which have no confidence whatsoever in councils because of how they have been treated.

My appeal in all of this is to say, “Let us cut the politics, move the power more towards the people through a human rights-based approach and use the resources in the way that is required to ensure that people continue to have independence and freedom.” Let us cut the politics, give the power to the people and make sure that we target the resources properly.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the closing speeches.

15:44

**Gillian Mackay:** I do not know what hope the debate will have given to anyone who is concerned about their care or that of a loved one. They will have watched MSPs shouting at one other and talking about parliamentary process rather than the vision that we should have for social care reform and, crucially, what we are going to do individually. I am committed to ensuring that we see reform and that there is equality across local authorities in what people are entitled to.

No one can argue that money is not hugely important but, as I stated at stage 1 of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, we do not need money to change the culture. The culture is a huge part of the issues that we have. We should have made an awful lot more progress on a great many things long before now. Jackie Baillie noted where we could amend other legislation to give effect to those things that the Parliament agrees on. The time that it could take to do that is one of my big concerns, especially as the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee is hugely busy and has a massive legislative load. I appreciate that the bill has been paused, but I still believe that substantial amendment and passing the aspects of the bill that we agree on would be the most expedient way to make changes. A great many stakeholders and individuals have put in time and effort on some of the provisions in the bill, and I remain hugely concerned about how demoralising it must be for those who have given their views in the process and how badly social care reform could be set back if we do not do something quickly and give those people hope.

The cabinet secretary mentioned disabled people's organisations. I had the pleasure of speaking to some of them after our party conference and they were rightly angry that the bill is being used as a political football. They told me that although, for us, it is a legislation-making process, for them, it is their lives. It was hugely emotional, and I am very grateful to them for sharing their experiences, which have certainly stayed with me.

Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned the workforce. As I reflected on early in my time in the Parliament, that is one of my biggest drivers because of my experience as an unpaid carer for my grandpa. Social care staff are hugely skilled and they deserve recognition and pay for what they do. We should have collective bargaining, as Paul Sweeney mentioned, as well as maternity pay, sick pay and clear career progression and training opportunities. I hope that the minister or the cabinet secretary—whoever will be closing in this debate—will be able to point to any progress that is being made in that area.

**Kevin Stewart:** As Ms Mackay well knows, I was horrified when I was the minister to find that people were not receiving maternity pay in the 21st century. To a degree, that was fixed. The amount of negotiating that it took to get maternity pay in play was quite unbelievable. We need a national care service so that we can ensure that we do not have difficulties in securing fairness for the workforce.

**Gillian Mackay:** I know the negotiating effort that that took, but there are other things that we should be exploring, such as ethical commissioning. That would allow us to put in some of the provisions so that organisations do not take advantage of their staff or have profit leak from the system. We need to ensure that there is fair funding for all in the social care sector.

This week, many colleagues will have had emails about hospice funding. Many third sector providers are concerned about how their care homes are going to continue to operate. We also need to acknowledge the issues that the national insurance changes have caused for the sector. I know that Jackie Baillie heard about that at the conference that we both spoke at.

I am privileged to be the convener of the cross-party group on carers. I will be looking to amend some of the provisions that relate to unpaid carers in order to strengthen the access to carer support plans, and many other things.

I am aware that I am running out of time, Deputy Presiding Officer. There are many other issues that we need to solve, and I do not think that we have gotten anywhere close to them in the debate.

The recommendations of the Feeley review remain relevant. Today, indeed, they are more relevant than ever. It is vital that those recommendations are implemented to the greatest extent possible.

15:49

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I start with a point of consensus. I know that everyone in the chamber recognises the growing crisis in our

social care sector; it not only impacts that sector but has a significant knock-on effect on service delivery in our NHS, which is also under intolerable strain. We are all desperate to see positive outcomes for social care and our NHS, and I absolutely believe that the cabinet secretary and the minister share that view.

When summing up a debate, I am normally able to say that the debate has been interesting, robust or, at the very least, enlightening. Unfortunately, listening to this debate has been nothing but frustrating because, as we have heard, since the bill's inception, there has been nothing but robust pushback against it.

Apart from every Opposition party in the chamber consistently warning against the proposals, we have had four parliamentary committees saying that the bill was not fit for purpose. Councils have said the same thing, and COSLA withdrew from the negotiating table—for which, I may add, the minister and the cabinet secretary blamed COSLA. What on earth are they listening to? What are they hearing?

I found it extraordinary to listen to the cabinet secretary talk about the disparity in service delivery by the three councils in the NHS Ayrshire and Arran area. Has he asked them why that is? The Government has had four years to find out. It has never said what the problem is. However, I asked on Friday and was given an answer. In the committee meeting the other day, the minister talked about the difference between Argyll and Bute Council and Highland Council, which have similar demographics. However, I did not hear an explanation for that.

The reality is that, to come up with an effective plan, we must identify the correct starting point. If we do not understand the problems that we are trying to solve, we end up with bad policy. That costs the public purse and eventually has to be changed by future Governments. That is the *modus operandi* of the SNP Scottish Government: it starts with a solution and then works its way back to find a problem that fits it.

**Neil Gray:** In the process ahead, we are genuinely trying to find consensus. On the basic principles, Feeley gave us the answer, which is about national standards. Do the Conservatives agree that we should have national standards that are implemented across the country?

**Brian Whittle:** Of course we want high standards across the country. However, the problem is that there are different issues in rural and urban areas. I was at the same conference that the cabinet secretary said that he and Jackie Baillie attended, when we heard about the lack of capacity in care home beds for step-down care in urban areas, where capacity has been reduced by

20 per cent, and then we heard that there is a lack of staff in rural areas to deliver the necessary capacity, because of rural to urban migration, which has never been recognised by this Government. In Dumfries and Galloway, 90 beds are empty because there are insufficient staff.

As we heard in Stephen Kerr's passionate speech, the problem in the independent care sector comes from the fact that there is unfairness in its treatment in comparison with the public sector. Providers are told what they can charge and what they will receive, all while ensuring that they staff safely. They have no flexibility or ways to compensate for Scottish Government policy. This is the deal: a week's stay in a hospital bed costs £1,900, but a week's stay in a care home bed costs £900. I tell the cabinet secretary to do the maths. He should increase care home places in order to reduce delayed discharge and he should allow for an increase in carers' salaries, so that we can encourage recruitment and retention in the sector.

I have much more to say, but I will leave my comments there.

15:53

**The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd):** The Government's vision for the future of social care has people, not structures, at its heart. Throughout the development of the national care service and our on-going reforms, engagement with those who are accessing or delivering services has been consistent, positive and productive. What have we heard? That the status quo is not an option and that the social care system in Scotland is broken.

The Government is doing all that it can to protect the social care system while pushing for long-overdue reform. Our work is ensuring that we get accountability, scrutiny and flexibility into that system. Collectively, we invest more than £5 billion annually in social care, but there needs to be greater transparency and oversight to ensure that that investment is going to the places where it is needed. Under our current proposals, a national care service will provide the support that is needed in local areas and a clear, structured route to intervention when local performance is not meeting needs or standards.

Underpinning all our reforms is our commitment to ensuring that human rights are at the centre, so that people are heard and conversations are honest and realistic and so that, when things go wrong, we acknowledge that and have a clear idea of how to work together to do all that we can to improve things.

The path that the bill has taken has not been an easy one. That is often the case for the most

important pieces of legislation. When I heard my colleague quote Nye Bevan and his work on bringing the NHS to life, I was reminded that Nye Bevan said that he stuffed his opponents' mouths with gold. That option is not open to me. *[Interruption.]* We have often had to work to find a path through, but this work is far too important for us not to consider where we could or should compromise when that is required. This should not be about party politics or parliamentary arithmetic—we need to put those aside. Social care should not be seen as a drain; it is an investment, and, collectively, we must have a shared will to make things better.

Let me assure Jackie Baillie, as she shouts from a sedentary position that we are not investing in social care, that we have invested—

**Jackie Baillie:** Presiding Officer, I was not shouting.

**Maree Todd:** —more than £1 billion this parliamentary session in social care.

**Jackie Baillie:** What the minister does not say is that demand has risen and that, with regard to integration joint boards, which deliver care right across the country, there was an overspend of £160 million in quarter 1, and that has got worse. That is what is happening now.

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

**Maree Todd:** It is impossible to understand how a national insurance contribution increase of £84 million next year and every year will improve that situation. Let us all acknowledge the strain that is being experienced in our social care system and the fact that a national insurance hike on top of that strain is likely to be catastrophic.

We agree on many areas, so let us focus on the areas where we disagree and decide on a different approach that will help us to bring the Feeley review's recommendations to life. Scotland has an ageing population, which means that more pressures will be placed on the healthcare system and workforce in the coming years. The Feeley review highlighted the projected increase in the number of people who are living with dementia, which means that we need to start planning now.

We need to shift from crisis intervention to prevention. We must work together to find and deliver the opportunities that will help us to address that challenge and to protect the sector for future generations. That must include a rethink of the crippling taxation measures that the UK Government is introducing. Each time that I have met the sector since the UK budget was announced, I have heard directly from care providers, who have told me that they simply will not survive the increase in employer national

insurance contributions. They genuinely do not know whether they will be in business next April. They tell me that the national insurance hike will be catastrophic, and they face the hike at a time of immense pressure, with few options to raise money to cover it.

In areas such as the Highlands, where I live, there is already market failure. NHS Highland has lost 200 care home beds in the past two years. Care-at-home contracts are being handed back. The extra hike in taxation, for me—*[Interruption.]*—as someone who has advocated loudly and for a long time for extra investment in social care is galling in the extreme—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Maree Todd:** To see that, although the system is crying out for extra investment, so much of that extra investment will go direct to the Treasury—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, minister. You need to conclude.

**Maree Todd:** I will finish with a quotation from Age Scotland—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You must be very brief.

**Maree Todd:** Age Scotland said:

“we ... have been talking for years”

about the

“need to reform social care. Right now, and to a degree”

the NCS

“is the vehicle to do that. There is not a single other vehicle on the road ... to deliver that reform ... It is on the Parliament, the Scottish Government and all the partners that are involved in social care services”—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Maree Todd:** I am quoting Age Scotland:

“to make the bill better and to come to the table with an open mind”.—*[Official Report, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, 8 October 2024; c 65.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You have to conclude.

I call Carol Mochan to conclude the debate.

15:59

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** When the parliamentary session began back in 2021, there was a genuine enthusiasm about the prospect of a national care service. Only three years later, the enthusiasm is simply dead in the water. The conclusion of today's debate can only be that the blame for that must lie solely at the feet of the Scottish Government. I wish that we could

have heard a bit of reflection on the Government's part.

**Brian Whittle:** Does the member agree that when the minister says that we should come to the table and give her our ideas, the Government must also listen to what everybody else is saying and take that into consideration?

**Carol Mochan:** We on the Labour benches have tried and tried to work together with the Government. However, as we have heard today, the Government proposed a national care service that was so unfit for purpose that nearly every stakeholder in the country—trade unions, councils and health boards—flatly rejected it. Conservative members opposite reminded us that four committees raised concerns. On top of that, the vast majority of carers whom we have spoken to simply do not recognise—

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Carol Mochan:** I will make progress.

They do not recognise the current plans as anything close to the promises that were made. They feel let down, and rightly so. I say to the cabinet secretary that that is the message that members in the chamber are getting. The loud and clear message is that we need delivery of a national care service. I ask the Government: what is power if it cannot deliver? The Government certainly cannot deliver.

We have heard from many members today, including the minister, that

“the status quo is not an option”.

Members across the chamber are saying that, but the Scottish National Party has had 17 years to fix our social care. It has had more than three years to get the bill right, and it has simply failed to do so. Yet, today, there is no reflection on that at all. The Government brushes it aside and seeks to blame others.

Despite many Scots being in urgent need of social care, after three years, three cabinet secretaries and three First Ministers, there is nothing to show for it. Now is the moment to get to work and take immediate action to start fixing Scotland's fundamentally broken social care sector. The minister—

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Carol Mochan:** Of course, if it is brief.

**Sandesh Gulhane:** Does Carol Mochan agree that Anne's law could be delivered now, without the national care service? Does she share my disbelief that Maree Todd said in committee that the Anne's law amendments were not ready?

**Carol Mochan:** In short, absolutely—I know that we are tight for time.

If the minister is actually in charge, she must show leadership. The poor performance from the minister in this matter cannot be overstated, and the discussion in committee demonstrated that.

To date, pursuing the bill has cost the taxpayer £30 million—money that has been wasted due to the incompetence of the minister and the SNP. Contrary to the minister's assertions today and over the past few weeks, the bill does not deliver the Feeley recommendations—it has never touched on delivering them. The minister would not take advice on that. We have seen no commitment to do that or to progress anything with real urgency.

The Government simply does not listen. Not only has it wasted millions of pounds, but it has used up hours of parliamentary time. Most important, it has let down vulnerable and disabled people, as well as their unpaid carers and staff. Yesterday, eventually, in reply to my colleague Paul Sweeney at committee, the minister said that many of the recommendations in the Feeley review can be implemented without primary legislation.

My colleague Jackie Baillie has, over many months, and again today, outlined the legislative vehicles for fixing social care now. We could move forward on collective bargaining, on the essential Anne's law and on the right to breaks, but what does the cabinet secretary do, and what does the minister do in committee? They talk. The Government talks; it does not deliver. Our communities would like to see action from this tired and out-of-touch Administration. For change to happen, the wheels need to be in motion now—in fact, they should have been in motion for the past few years.

The UK Labour Government budget has delivered £789 million of health-related consequentialia this year and will deliver £1.72 billion for our NHS and social care next year. This Scottish Government must decide how it will deliver change in Scotland.

I will close on this point, Deputy Presiding Officer, as I know that we are tight for time. People's care packages are being cut, delayed discharges are at a record high and staff are leaving in their droves. That is not about the UK budget, and it is not about the actions of another Parliament; it is about this Scottish Government in the here and now.

I would have liked to have said more, Deputy Presiding Officer. The reality is that we must work to get this right for the people in our communities, but it does not appear that this Scottish Government can deliver.

## Bus Drivers (Abuse)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-15612, in the name of Claire Baker, on tackling abuse of bus drivers.

I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button. I take this opportunity to advise members that the criminal matter that is referred to in the motion for debate is subject to the sub judice rule. Therefore, members should refrain from making reference to the specifics of the case.

16:08

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** I draw attention to my entry in the register of members' interests and my membership of Unite the union.

I send our deepest condolences to the family of Keith Rollinson. Everyone should be safe and respected at their place of work, and no one should have to endure abuse and violence in the workplace. I want to be clear that violence is never acceptable. It is a criminal matter and it should always be treated as such.

There was public shock at the attack on Keith Rollinson, and it has been sobering to read the survey of bus drivers from Unite the union, which highlights that violence, abuse and sexual harassment are not isolated incidents on buses but are frequent occurrences that are not being taken seriously.

Bus drivers are facing unacceptable health and safety risks, including verbal and physical assault, which are carried out by a minority of people, of all ages, travelling on buses. However, evidence suggests that that has been exacerbated by the extension of the concessionary travel scheme to people under the age of 22.

I emphasise that we support the young person's bus pass and recognise the significant benefits that it is delivering. It is enabling young people to access education and employment, encouraging a modal shift in transport and leading to investment in bus services. The behaviour of a minority of passengers should not impact on the success of the scheme, but we must not be complacent or ignore the impact of antisocial behaviour on our bus drivers.

Unite the union has conducted a survey of its members. The figures are sobering, revealing historically high levels of abuse and major concerns about safety on public transport. Of the respondents, 84 per cent said that abuse at work had increased in the past 12 months. Of those experiencing abuse, 83 per cent reported verbal

abuse and 16 per cent reported physical abuse. The low level of reporting is worrying: 79 per cent of the abuse was not reported to the police, while almost half did not report it to their employers. Of those who did, the majority were dissatisfied with the employer response. The lack of reporting devalues the abuse that is taking place. I thank Unite for undertaking the survey to show the extent of the problem. Finally, 51 per cent of bus drivers said that they do not feel safe at work, and 85 per cent said that they believe that it is now just part of the job. Abuse at work should never be just part of the job, and we must bring an end to this culture.

This is not the first debate on abuse of bus drivers. Almost a year ago, Graham Simpson led a members' business debate on antisocial behaviour on buses, which came at the publication point of the evaluation report on the young person's bus pass. Examples of aggression, intimidation and physical assault were highlighted in the chamber. When the case of an assault against a teenager was raised in the chamber in 2022, the then Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans, Keith Brown, said:

"I will raise the issue with those who are responsible for the bus pass scheme, to gather views on whether the option of withdrawing bus passes ... might present a solution."—[*Official Report*, 26 October 2022; c 19-20.]

I wrote to the Government in March, following bus drivers in my region highlighting to me the conditions in which they were working. The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, Jim Fairlie, said:

"Transport Scotland is continuing to look at what may be possible and appropriate in terms of providing a deterrent or sanction".

I then wrote to Transport Scotland, which, in June, repeated that position.

This week, Transport Scotland has gone further in response to our calls for stronger action, saying:

"We are working ... to develop further sanctions"

including

"a process for temporary suspension of concessionary travel cards."

We must see action now. Scottish Labour is clear that there have to be consequences for persistent abusive behaviour towards bus drivers and passengers. Aggressive and intimidating behaviour and vandalism are leading to the cancellation of bus services, which impacts on other passengers and increases costs to operators as buses are taken off service for repairs, and it negatively impacts on passenger numbers, because people—including young people, who are often the victims of assault and bullying connected to bus travel—choose not to travel by bus.

I remind the Scottish Government that we have seen little progress since the publication of a report that it commissioned into the safety of women and girls on public transport. If those recommendations were introduced, they would go some way towards addressing antisocial behaviour.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** The report's actions have been carried out. I hosted a summit on that with all relevant bus partners. If Claire Baker has not seen the actions that have taken place following that report, I am more than happy to send them to her.

**Claire Baker:** My understanding is that more could be done from the previous report, such as improving lighting, staffing, reporting and training for staff. If that was implemented across the public sector in relation to transport, that would go some way towards supporting bus drivers.

Today, we call for swift action to address antisocial behaviour and violence towards bus drivers. Ultimately, that must include the removal of access to concessionary bus passes from individuals who repeatedly carry out antisocial behaviour, regardless of their age.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** To be clear, does Claire Baker also support sanctions for fare-paying adult passengers who commit antisocial behaviour on our buses?

**Claire Baker:** Yes, I certainly do. The last line of our motion does not make a distinction in relation to the age of the person who would be sanctioned for their behaviour on buses. The reasons why I cannot support the Green amendment is that it would remove the reference in the motion to increased incidence and would take out the option of removing bus passes.

Those actions are what we call on the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to do today, and they must deliver a sanction scheme swiftly. I believe that they have the power to do so through the National Bus Travel Concession Scheme for Young Persons (Scotland) Order 2021 and that travel can be isolated from the card's other uses.

In addition to that sanction, which would make clear that there are consequences for those who abuse the benefits of the concessionary bus pass scheme, we must see progress on other measures to tackle antisocial behaviour on and around public transport. Unite the union has issued a road map to safety, with 15 practical steps for operators to take. There are highly regarded operators and, quite frankly, there are those that need to take seriously their duty of care to their workers. We need to see wider use of driver protection screens, closed-circuit television, robust staff training, panic buttons and mechanisms to alert and engage the police. We need to ensure that local authorities

and the police are resourced to increase the presence of community wardens and officers at hot spots for disruptive behaviour.

Unite also calls on the Government to consider the need for legislation to protect bus transport workers. We need to consider the effectiveness of current legislation and how we can ensure that workers are safe at work. I support Unite's call for a public transport safety summit involving key stakeholders.

Next week, along with Sue Webber and Mark Ruskell, I am holding a round table with Unite and key stakeholders. I understand that Jim Fairlie, the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, is able to attend. I want people to go to that meeting with a strong statement that the Parliament recognises the threat and abuse that bus drivers are facing at work and that we will take action. I urge parties to support our motion at decision time.

I move,

That the Parliament is deeply grieved by the death of Keith Rollinson following an assault at his place of work; agrees that workplace abuse is not acceptable and notes the serious concerns raised about levels of abuse in the recent mass survey of bus drivers in Scotland, carried out by Unite the Union; supports the union's campaign to improve driver safety, including its call for a public transport safety summit involving key stakeholders; calls on the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to take swift action to address antisocial behaviour and violence towards bus drivers, including exploring the potential for legislative measures to protect transport workers against assault, threats and abuse; notes the increase in the rate of incidents following the extension of the bus travel scheme; supports fully the provision of free bus travel for young people and children aged under 22 and notes the multiple benefits that it brings, but acknowledges that this comes with responsibilities, and calls on the Scottish Government to remove access to concessionary bus passes from individuals who repeatedly carry out antisocial behaviour.

16:14

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I associate myself with Claire Baker's comments about the tragic death of Keith Rollinson. That was devastating, and our thoughts go out to his loved ones, friends and colleagues.

Bus services, when run well and in the public interest, have the power to unite our communities. They provide a social service for the vulnerable, a way for young people to get on in their lives and a great way to cut congestion and get the economy moving. However, valuing bus services means valuing the workers who run them. The crisis in bus driver recruitment has worsened the cycle of decline. In some cases, bus companies have blamed cancelled services and the withdrawal of whole routes on driver shortages.

We have to break that cycle of decline, and that starts by respecting and investing in the workforce.

Competitive pay and improved terms and conditions are important, but it is clear that the working environment and the continued rise in antisocial behaviour also need to be tackled head on. Like Claire Baker, I commend the work of Unite the union and the survey of its bus driver members, which has helped us to understand the problems of abuse that they face day in, day out, particularly from the often unheard voices of women. The figures in the survey are shocking, with 84 per cent having experienced abuse over the past year and 85 per cent feeling that abuse is just part of the job.

Everybody has a right to feel safe at work. It is unacceptable that such abuse is taking place. Unite's 15-point route map to safer buses, which was launched in February, provides a great starting point to address the problem. I hope that the Scottish Government can continue to use its convening power to make progress on all the recommendations, including consideration of whether the law at present is fit to protect all transport workers.

We should not lose sight of the fact that hundreds of millions of pounds are paid to mostly private bus operators every single year to deliver concessionary travel schemes. Payments to those companies must come with a responsibility on the companies to deliver a safe environment for drivers and passengers. Again, Unite's route map spells out the changes that bus operators need to make, from having CCTV cameras on board to having well-maintained protective barriers and lockable cabs.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Will Mark Ruskell take an intervention?

**Mark Ruskell:** If there is time in hand, I certainly will.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is no time in hand. It is up to the member whether he wishes to absorb the intervention.

**Mark Ruskell:** I will take a very brief intervention.

**Daniel Johnson:** Mark Ruskell is right that employers absolutely have a responsibility to drivers, but do passengers not also have a responsibility to uphold the decent norms of behaviour and not abuse bus drivers?

**Mark Ruskell:** Absolutely. That is enshrined in law and in the conditions of carriage, and I will come on to that.

I am shocked that many of the buses that we have in Scotland are in a poor state. There are buses in my region with leaking windows and broken heating, so I would not be surprised if enhanced safety and security measures and the investment that is needed in those are way down

the priority list. The Unite survey found that 79 per cent of drivers have not reported abuse to the police and that 48 per cent have not reported it to their employer. That points to a culture in which workers believe that their concerns are unlikely to be acted on, which is unacceptable.

There needs to be better joint working on the ground between the police, bus operators, councils and other agencies to target those who routinely cause trouble at bus stations and on buses. It is clear that antisocial behaviour was on the rise before the introduction of free bus travel for the under-22s, but it is the case that the welcome increase in bus use has brought with it a very small minority who abuse workers and other passengers, including young people.

On social media, we see bus drivers being abused by people of all ages. There is racist and misogynistic abuse, with workers being spat at or punched. The people who do that are a tiny minority, and none of them should be allowed on buses. It is important that we have the ability to detect repeat offenders through CCTV and that we work to exclude them from bus services.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has already hosted two summits on the issue and that the independent working group on antisocial behaviour will make more recommendations later this year. Let me be clear that nothing should be off the table, including concessionary card suspensions, but we need an approach that tackles the problem at the root. Bus operators must be able to uphold their conditions of carriage, which apply to all passengers, regardless of their age and whether they pay a fare or have a bus pass. Antisocial behaviour is unacceptable, full stop, and nobody should accept abuse as just part of the job. It is time that it ended.

I move amendment S6M-15612.1, to leave out from “; notes the increase” to end and insert:

“, alongside support for restrictions on all individuals who cause serious and repeated antisocial behaviour from accessing bus services, and further calls on bus operators to fully invest in measures to support the safety of transport workers and passengers, including on-board CCTV.”

16:20

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** I thank Claire Baker for highlighting this important issue.

Bus drivers are at the front line of delivery of vital public transport services. Our communities depend on them and, for the most part, greatly value them. I have the greatest sympathy for bus drivers, who can be at the sharp end of antisocial behaviour from a small minority. Antisocial behaviour is unacceptable in all contexts, and the



concerning results of Unite's survey of bus drivers highlight the negative effects on bus travel.

The Scottish Government takes the issue very seriously. We will support the motion, which broadly reflects the Government's position, and I intend to relay the progress on each item.

No single approach or stakeholder can or will fix the problem. Police Scotland and local authorities lead on antisocial behaviour interventions, and local partnerships are often best placed to understand and resolve issues in their communities. The Government's role is to provide partners with the powers and tools to do that, and that work is being progressed as a priority.

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety, who is in the chamber, has tasked an independent working group on antisocial behaviour to report by the end of the year. The group has gathered a wide range of evidence, including from bus operators and bus passenger representatives, and its report will improve our understanding of antisocial behaviour and provide insight into how a strategic approach to prevention remains relevant and core to today's society.

Although bus operators can already restrict access to their services—including for fare-paying passengers—in line with their conditions of carriage, we continue to work closely with them and others to develop further options for addressing antisocial behaviour, through learning from our investment in travel safe teams and use of body-worn cameras on the rail network.

Much of the focus is on young people, but I must stress that a very small minority misuse the young persons free bus travel scheme. We are developing a behaviour code, with the intention that it will cover all passengers who have a concessionary bus pass. The vast majority of Scotland's young people will have no hesitation in accepting the responsibility that accompanies their entitlement.

**Claire Baker:** I understand that under Andy Burnham's scheme in Manchester, people have to sign a code of conduct before they get access to a pass. Is the Government considering that option?

**Fiona Hyslop:** Yes, we are looking at that for all passengers who have a concessionary bus pass.

Perpetrators of antisocial behaviour can be of any age, and the basis of our support for the motion is that we are examining the legal means by which concessionary passes can be suspended for persistent antisocial behaviour by people of any age, as we announced last December.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the cabinet secretary give way?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I need to make progress. There is limited time in the debate.

Fairness and consistency must underpin that work. I recently met Unite to discuss its 15-point safety plan, and I note that calls for a public transport safety summit have been made by the United Kingdom general secretary, who might not be aware that, in Scotland, we already have regular stakeholder meetings with Police Scotland, bus operators, Unite and Transport Scotland in order to work collaboratively on solutions. I am open to considering whether recommendations for action from the group could be best addressed through a wider summit.

I am considering fixed-penalty notices, and I have reviewed application of the Protection of Workers (Retail and Age-restricted Goods and Services) (Scotland) Act 2021 to rail workers. I understand that, although it is for the courts to determine, the definition of "retail work" might not apply to those who sell train tickets if a court deemed those transport workers to be engaged in the sale or supply of services rather than of goods. There might also be applications in relation to buses.

I emphasise the critical role for bus operators, as employers, in doing all that they can to ensure the safety of their drivers and passengers. I welcome the Confederation of Passenger Transport's on-going commitment to progressing measures through a partnership approach with the Government and others. I strongly encourage all operators to prioritise the areas of Unite's plan that have the potential to improve conditions for their staff. It is in everyone's interests to let passengers know that they are welcome, safe and encouraged to travel by bus.

16:24

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** During the past fortnight, we have spent a significant amount of time discussing the topic that Claire Baker has brought to the chamber this afternoon—tackling abuse of bus drivers. We support the calls in the Scottish Labour motion. Unite the union has found that an alarming 84 per cent of bus drivers have experienced abuse in the past 12 months and that drivers are frequently beaten, spat upon and threatened by teenagers.

Members might recall that, at First Minister's question time on 14 November, I asked the First Minister to outline what action the Scottish Government is taking to protect drivers and to clamp down on under-22s who abuse their free bus pass by committing antisocial behaviour. Mr Swinney's response was helpful in that he confirmed that he would explore the point that I had put to him and determine whether any action

could be taken. Only yesterday, the cabinet secretary wrote to me advising of the commitment to addressing that pressing issue, and findings and recommendations are expected by the end of the year. The need for that to be a priority is clear.

Next week, as we have already heard, I, Claire Baker and Mark Ruskell will host a round-table meeting in Parliament about the safety of bus drivers. I am glad to hear that the minister, Mr Fairlie, will also be in attendance. We will discuss the growing level of abuse towards bus drivers and how it can be tackled. A variety of stakeholders will attend, including Unite the union, FirstBus, Young Scot, Police Scotland and the Confederation of Passenger Transport. We have also heard that, on 14 December 2023, my colleague Graeme Simpson held a members' business debate to discuss reports of antisocial behaviours on buses.

I want to go into some detail about the card curfews and confiscations that the Scottish Conservatives have been calling for.

**Claire Baker:** Graeme Simpson's members' business debate was a year ago, so does Sue Webber share my disappointment that not much has changed in the past year? I appreciate that there are complexities, but I would have liked to have seen more progress in the past year.

**Sue Webber:** We all would, and it is helpful that it appears to be the case that, in the debate this afternoon, we are all in the same place. That acceptance will go a long way, but we cannot let anyone rest on their laurels. I hope that we will manage to keep feet to the fire on this one.

The majority of young people use their concessionary cards responsibly. We know how valuable young people find those cards in getting to school, college, work and their leisure activities. It is a real pity that the minority of young people are spoiling it for everyone. The curfews that we are calling for would impact only the young people who have abused their privilege and would limit the hours in which they can use their travel pass. It is still imperative that those youths are able to access their education, after all. However, in extreme cases, there should be scope to remove the privilege permanently. My colleague will go into some of the breadth and depth of what that might look like.

The Green amendment that Mr Ruskell lodged is not one that we can support. It would remove all reference to the under-22 concessionary bus pass. We know from recent Scottish transport statistics that 95 per cent of buses have CCTV, so it should not be an impossible task to catch the perpetrators. However, there is direct evidence that the number of assaults on bus drivers has

surged since under-22s were given the free bus pass and travel back in January 2022.

Here in the Lothian region, we are fortunate to have an award-winning bus service, but drivers and passengers are increasingly facing soaring numbers of incidents of antisocial behaviour. Since the introduction of the free bus travel scheme in January 2022, ASB has increased by almost 170 per cent on Lothian buses. From January 2022, when the scheme was introduced, to October 2024, 5,817 incidents were recorded on Lothian buses, which is an increase of 168 from the period between 2019 and 2021. To put that in context, in 2019 there were 473 incidents on Lothian buses. In 2023, that jumped to 2,581, which is an increase of 446 per cent.

As we know, it is not a Lothian-specific issue. There have been serious and tragic incidents, such as that involving Keith Rollinson, who lost his life in February 2024. The time to take action is now. We can no longer find reasons not to tackle the issue head on.

16:28

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I thank Claire Baker and the Labour Party for bringing this serious and important debate to the chamber this afternoon. Scottish Liberal Democrats will support the motion, which I hope will be passed.

I also associate myself and my party with what has been said about bus driver Keith Rollinson. Our thoughts go out to his family, friends and colleagues. Their loved one went out to do a day's work and did not return because of the horrific actions of another. I can only imagine their pain and grief.

Ensuring safety and security for workers is of paramount importance. No one should feel unsafe at work, whatever that environment may be. No one is entitled to make anyone else feel unsafe or to act however they wish to act and to cause fear and alarm. Free bus travel provision is not a free entitlement—it comes with responsibility. We should not be apprehensive about sanctions such as the removal of free bus travel from individuals who repeatedly and persistently behave antisocially towards drivers or other passengers, or who cause damage to buses, but any policy to remove entitlement to bus passes must be clearly defined. There should be just cause for removal, and there should be an appeal mechanism.

As Sue Webber and others have pointed out, the vast majority of concessionary bus pass holders use their entitlement responsibly. We should be wary of tarnishing any group of people with the antisocial behaviour brush, but the evidence of an increase in antisocial behaviour

following the introduction of free bus travel for under-22s points towards younger people—albeit a small minority of them.

I note with great concern the fact that Unite the union's recent mass survey of bus drivers in Scotland showed that 51 per cent of respondents did not feel safe at work. That was just one of the survey's many shocking findings.

All bus users can be affected by antisocial behaviour. In its briefing, the Confederation of Passenger Transport Scotland highlights the concern that vulnerable passengers might become isolated if they feel unsafe travelling on public transport.

I call on the Scottish Government to do more to tackle the underlying causes of antisocial behaviour. Early intervention strategies that could prevent antisocial behaviour have been eroded through the decline and underfunding of youth services.

Scotland's alcohol issues need to be addressed, too, as does underage drinking. We need to ensure that the legal tools and measures that are used to combat antisocial behaviour are fit for purpose and that they act as deterrents or punishments, or are able to provide rehabilitation.

Buses do and will continue to play a core role in our efforts to decarbonise our economy and tackle the climate emergency. The CPT estimates that a full double-decker bus can take up to 75 cars off the road. If everyone swapped one car journey a month for a bus journey, that could save 2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, but people will choose buses as an alternative to the car only when bus services are reliable, convenient, appealing and safe.

Our society sets laws, rules and boundaries. When it comes to antisocial behaviour, we should not shy away from the task of tackling repeat offenders. Taking away free bus provision is not the only measure that we can pursue. There are many causes of antisocial behaviour that the Scottish Government can do more to tackle today.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. I remind all members who wish to speak in the debate to check that they have pressed their request-to-speak buttons.

I advise members that there is no time in hand. Speeches from back benchers should be of up to four minutes.

16:33

**Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** Members who have spoken in the debate so far have rightly stressed that it is a minority that causes the problems, but I suggest that it is a

growing minority. The more that people who cause problems such as vandalism and threats, including physical threats, get away with it, with nothing happening to them, the more that it happens, not just on buses but in bus stations. I am told that it was pandemonium a few weeks ago in Dunfermline bus station. Therefore, action needs to be taken.

When I wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport on 16 August, I did so because some of the stories that bus drivers were telling me were horrendous. People were going off work sick because of stress, and it was having an impact on their families as well. The current situation is not good enough. We cannot simply say that we looked at the issue a year ago because, in my view, not enough progress has been made.

In a briefing that it sent to all members, the Confederation of Passenger Transport Scotland said that it agreed that the right to free travel under the young person's free travel scheme should be suspended or removed in cases in which individuals repeatedly carry out antisocial behaviour, and that there must be penalties in place for those who commit abuse. It went on to say that it made that request of Transport Scotland in the summer of 2023 and that it continues to raise the matter with the Scottish Government. The confederation then said that it understood that there were legal issues and that it hoped that ministers might shed some light on them today.

That request was made more than a year and a half ago. For problems to continue is just not good enough. That must be today's message—it is good that we are having the debate, but we must move beyond talking and start to take action.

In her speech, the cabinet secretary pointed out that a lot of the issues depend on the bus companies. However, the Government is putting millions upon millions of pounds into those companies. I wrote to the cabinet secretary about Unite's 15-point plan and asked her to call a summit and to use the plan as the basis for discussions. De-escalation training must be given to all staff—surely the Government can put pressure on the companies to do that. All buses must be fitted with robust safety screens—again, the Government can put pressure on companies around that. CCTV on buses must be working—an audit must be carried out in all locations, and a weekly check must be carried out thereafter. CCTV must be in good working order in all bus stations and must cover all parts of a bus station.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Will the member give way?

**Alex Rowley:** If the cabinet secretary is quick.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Very briefly, cabinet secretary.

**Fiona Hyslop:** The member is asking me to lobby bus operators, but does he realise that the UK Labour Government could now use its responsibilities in relation to vehicle regulations to do—in law—precisely what he is asking for?

**Alex Rowley:** I am not asking the cabinet secretary to lobby bus companies. I am saying that the Government is putting millions upon millions of pounds into those bus companies and should be making absolutely it clear to them that we expect to see the kind of actions that I have mentioned. It should be making it absolutely clear that it is not acceptable that workers are going to their work and being attacked, and that they are driven out of their jobs because of the threat of that. We have to make it clear to those who are carrying out such actions that their bus passes will be removed and that they will be banned from travelling on buses. That is the action that we demand, and the one that the Government must take.

16:37

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I, too, welcome the debate, which was unfortunately prompted by dreadful, tragic circumstances, and I send my condolences to Keith Rollinson's family and friends.

I note that the focus is on the impact of the concessionary bus pass for young people, which was introduced in January 2022. I recognise that any threat and aggression from, or anxiety caused by, passenger to driver and, indeed, other passengers are to be deplored. However, to give some context, more than 2.3 million people in Scotland have a concessionary pass—everyone under 22 or over 60 and disabled people and carers can now all benefit from free bus travel. Therefore, as other members have said, the overwhelming majority—young and old—use their pass responsibly. However, it is a privilege and, when abused, remedies are required.

Sometimes, crimes are being committed, so existing remedies can be used. They include diversionary and early intervention activities, if appropriate, alongside the use of police-issued formal warnings, fixed-penalty notices, antisocial behaviour orders and, indeed, prosecution. However, those activities happen post the event.

CCTV, which I know is on Borders buses and most Lothian regional transport buses, has its uses and might act as a limited deterrent, but there are those to whom it means nothing—in extreme cases, they might even see it as offering a challenge.

The briefing from the Confederation of Passenger Transport says:

“The under 22s Free Bus Travel Scheme is widely viewed as a success.”

It continues:

“There is however an acknowledgement that one unintended consequence has been a perceived rise in antisocial behaviour in and around buses in Scotland, observed by bus operators, but also by young people themselves, other passengers and representative groups. The Year 1 Evaluation of the Young Person's Free Bus Travel Scheme highlighted ‘the perceived need to introduce some mechanism to police the use of the scheme and implement consequences for inappropriate behaviour.’”

I agree.

Let me focus on the minority of those—with or without a concessionary bus pass, young or old—who abuse. Although bus operators have their own conditions of carriage, those conditions apply to all passengers and include legal obligations regarding passenger conduct and, indeed, the right to refuse access to someone who wants to board.

It has been suggested that hotlisting passes would send a strong message and could be used to stop people boarding another bus, but that would mean that the driver still had a policing role and that confrontation would be possible. Protection and respect for the driver and other passengers are paramount.

I understand that Transport Scotland has the authority to remove the free bus travel benefit. Presently, it is revoked if the card is used fraudulently but not when an individual assaults a bus driver—that is surely wrong.

Finally, I have reviewed my own case files and found only one complaint regarding youth behaviour, which was in Midlothian on Lothian buses in 2023. I contacted the police, and the Midlothian community action team carried out additional patrols in the affected areas. A combination of high-visibility and plain-clothes patrols were also deployed on buses to deter and disrupt antisocial behaviour and identify those who were responsible. Although no criminal behaviour was identified, a number of youths were taken home to be warned about their behaviour in front of their parents.

I have had nothing from Borders buses in respect of young people. It may be that the drivers are local and know their passengers, and the passengers know their drivers. That perhaps lends itself to a more responsible culture and respect. It may be different in rural areas because culprits can be easily identified—I do not know.

I note the progress on a code in relation to receiving a concessionary bus pass, which I would welcome—I have a bus pass myself—and I support progress on restricting the passes of those who abuse them, whoever they are. It is a

privilege to have one, and it should be used appropriately.

16:41

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

I begin by thanking Claire Baker for bringing the debate to the chamber and giving Parliament an opportunity to discuss this extremely serious matter. Abusive behaviour towards anyone—and certainly towards those who are just trying to earn a living—has no place in our society. However, the reality, as we have heard in the debate, is that such behaviour not only exists but is increasing.

We have heard a number of statistics in the debate. I will not go back over them all, but I will highlight one in particular—it is a shocking figure—that came out of the research conducted by Unite. That research shows that an astonishing 84 per cent of bus drivers say that there has been an increase in abusive behaviour incidents over the past year. We should just think about that for a moment—that means that we would have to search hard to find a bus driver who has not seen rising levels of abuse.

To put it another way, rising levels of abuse are becoming the norm. In fact, one bus driver is quoted in the research as saying that abuse is now

“just part of the job”,

and Unite found that more than half of drivers do not feel safe at work. That is simply not good enough. People have a right to go to work without fearing for their safety, and bus drivers’ safety is at risk. We have heard about the vile threats that have been made against drivers, and, worst of all, that a driver has died after being assaulted at work, as highlighted in the motion.

It is not just physical abuse that we have to be concerned about, though. I remember making a similar point when Parliament was debating the bill on the protection of retail workers. Abusive behaviour can have a serious impact on mental wellbeing, not to mention the distress that it can cause to the victims’ families.

Abusive behaviour also has an impact on our communities, many of which depend on vital lifeline services. Communities cannot afford to see them disrupted by the actions of a few who think that violent and abusive behaviour is acceptable. Just last month, Xplore Dundee had to withdraw a service from a particular area of the city following incidents of antisocial behaviour that had been ongoing for weeks. That is not a new occurrence in the city. I note that the company called for action back in April following months of incidents.

There is no one group of people behind or single cause of abusive behaviour, and it pre-

dates the introduction of free travel for under-22s. However, bus drivers have reported an increase in incidents since the scheme was rolled out. The scheme is obviously beneficial to young people, and I want to see them getting use out of it, but society is not about being given something for nothing. Responsibility is always attached, and people must help society in return for what society gives them.

The Government must show leadership. Yes, it should work with bus companies to improve safety measures, but it must also show that it means business by stripping free travel from those who abuse and threaten others.

16:45

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):**

I join colleagues in expressing my sincere condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Keith Rollinson.

A lot has been said in the debate already, and it has been good to hear lots of points of agreement. I will try not to be repetitive, but it is good that we realise the seriousness of the challenge. Too many of our bus drivers and other front-line workers are experiencing abuse and violence, which is not acceptable. It affects those in the workforce and people who want to get on the bus to get to work, access education, go to see their friends or spend money on our high streets. It is a serious issue, and it is good to see that there is a lot of agreement in the chamber.

I thank Unite the union for its role in lobbying MSPs and getting people to take the issue seriously. I remind members that I am a member of Unite the union. I also declare an interest as the parent of a child who has a young person’s bus pass and uses it regularly. I want her and all young people to feel safe when they are travelling on public transport up and down the country.

However, listening to our constituents and to people who have raised concerns, we hear that not everyone feels safe. That cuts across different ages and backgrounds. We need people to feel confident about using public transport, and we need people to feel that we are on their side.

I again draw attention to Unite the union’s 15-point plan. There are some really good points in it. Sue Webber talked about CCTV, and Mark Ruskell mentioned the plan. It offers solutions, and there is stuff in it that bus operators could get on and do. My colleague Alex Rowley made some important points that I hope the Scottish Government will reflect on, such as on conditionality and the fact that many operators receive public funds.

It is not just about bus travel; it is also about the wider public transport network. I am thinking about Hamilton, where the rail and bus stations are co-located. I am concerned about ScotRail's proposal to reduce the hours of operation of our ticket offices. My colleague Richard Leonard raised that issue, but it also concerns me and other colleagues. We have to look at such things holistically. We are in a climate and nature emergency, and we need to get our economy working for our communities. Every pound that we invest in public transport makes a difference, and we all care about that.

I am grateful to Mark Ruskell, who talked about gender-based violence. Colleagues are aware that we are now in the 16 days of activism to end violence against women and girls. Misogyny, sexism and sexual assault happen on our buses, at bus stations and across our public transport system.

I looked to see what young people are saying. Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament say that they want safer public spaces and transport. Part of the solution is early intervention through better education, and not just in schools, but through youth work, too. Colleagues have not pointed the finger only at young people, because we would not want to do that. We have to look for holistic solutions. My colleague Martin Whitfield proposed a member's bill on youth work. We need to ensure that we do not demonise young people and that we do not defund public services. We need to invest in our young people, and that includes investing in youth work.

16:49

**Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** The tragic death of Keith Rollinson following an assault at his workplace is a stark reminder of the dangers that our essential workers can face. Like my colleagues, I express my deepest sympathies for his family, his friends and his colleagues, who now bear the weight of such a senseless loss. I also pass on the condolences of my colleague Richard Lochhead, who, as the constituency MSP, has had many multi-agency meetings about this horrific incident.

Nobody should ever have to fear for their safety at work, and yet, for bus drivers, abuse and even violence can too often be a reality. That is utterly unacceptable. I hope that, as parliamentarians, we all see it as our duty to ensure that no one in Scotland faces such risks, particularly when they are simply doing their job and serving the public.

Our bus drivers connect communities. They link up our rural areas, our towns and our cities. They ensure that our children get to school safely, that workers can reach their jobs, and that people can

stay connected. They keep our communities moving, often with acts of kindness that go unnoticed but that mean so much to people.

There is a road near my home that absolutely fills me with dread. Whenever my sons have to cross it, I have my heart in my mouth. Cars speed along at 60 mph—often above the limit—and there are no crossings. However, there is one bus driver in our area who knows my concerns and, when it is safe, she will drop my sons off at a point where they do not need to cross the road. That simple act of care is not part of her job description, but it reflects the responsibility and kindness that she feels towards her passengers.

Stories such as that one are not uncommon. Bus drivers often go above and beyond, whether it is in holding back while someone runs to catch the bus, helping an elderly or disabled passenger, or simply offering a smile or a kind word. It is even more heartbreaking, then, to hear that they are often the target of abuse and violence. The recent survey by Unite the union highlights that they are facing verbal abuse, physical threats and, in some cases, actual assaults, which is utterly appalling.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling antisocial behaviour, and I support Unite's call for a transport safety summit. Bringing together unions, bus operators, local authorities and other stakeholders can help us to develop comprehensive solutions. However, we must also address the root causes of antisocial behaviour. Training for staff on handling difficult situations is important, but those situations should not be happening in the first place, so education and early intervention are key.

Most passengers, including young people, behave responsibly, and the introduction of free bus travel for under-22s has been transformative. However, with privilege comes responsibility, and although most young people use their bus passes appropriately, there is a small minority across all age ranges who engage in antisocial behaviour, which cannot be ignored. Young people also want to feel safe on our buses.

I support exploring some sanctions, such as the potential removal of bus passes from individuals who repeatedly behave inappropriately. However, that should happen regardless of age. Anyone engaging in repeated antisocial behaviour should face consequences.

In conclusion, I want to thank every bus driver in Scotland—you deserve to come home safely at the end of the working day. You are not just moving people from A to B; you are connecting lives and supporting communities, and I hope that we can all work with you to help build a society in which respect is the norm, not the exception.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Adam. We now move to closing speeches.

16:53

**Mark Ruskell:** This has been a positive debate. I might not agree with everything that Sue Webber and Claire Baker said, but it has been positive and I look forward to continuing the discussion with them and to finding solutions at the round table in Parliament next week.

It is important to understand and to reflect on the root causes of antisocial behaviour in a minority of young people. Karen Adam just spoke very well about that. Post Covid, there are individuals who face enormous social isolation, who have grown up in absolute poverty or who have grown up in an abusive household and ultimately have a lack of any kind of positive destination when they leave school. I think that we all understand that. Therefore, I would ask members to reflect on how positive free bus travel for under-22s has been for those individuals in giving them the opportunity to continue their lives and to be part of society.

I agree with Beatrice Wishart and Monica Lennon, who both underlined the importance of youth services and of engaging with disaffected young people. That is hugely important. We should not be demonising young people; we should be seeking to understand them and to work with them to ensure that they drop their antisocial behaviour. It is also important to recognise what antisocial behaviour is. Maurice Golden described it as vile or illegal behaviour, and as abuse.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Mark Ruskell:** I do not have time.

I often receive in my email inbox complaints from constituents about young people who perhaps lack understanding of how to use buses and who, at times, might exhibit a lack of courtesy in how they use services. We can tackle those issues through appropriate education, such as those programmes that are identified in CPT's briefing. When young people transition to high school, they receive their Young Scot cards, which is a good opportunity to educate them about how to use a bus. Some young people may not have been on a bus, and they may not be in families who have used bus services throughout their lives.

A good point was made about the adoption of a behaviour code in Manchester. It is good that the Scottish Government is looking at that. I think that a code could be introduced here and could be part of young people's education when they go into secondary 1 and receive their Young Scot card for the first time.

I will say again that I do not think anything should be off the table when considering how to tackle illegal antisocial behaviour, including the suspension of bus cards. However, it is good to hear that the Government is looking at fixed-penalty notices. CPT underlined the fact that there are technical and legal issues associated with suspending cards, and, at the back of my mind, I have doubts about whether, on its own, that approach would be enough to tackle antisocial behaviour. Even if someone's card is taken off them, they will still be able to get on a bus; they will just pay a fare or swap cards with their mates, they will force their way on, or they will hang around in bus stations where, again, they would be free to commit antisocial behaviour unless we have CCTV and the enforcement that is required at bus stations. We need a multi-agency approach.

In the most recent members' business debate on the topic, the cabinet secretary spoke about work that was being done in Kilmarnock to identify those who were causing antisocial behaviour and to address the problems on the ground. I say to Alex Rowley that that is the solution for Dunfermline. Simply removing free bus passes may have a marginal effect, whereas getting in on the ground to do the hard work of tackling antisocial behaviour is what is needed. There needs to be functional CCTV and the footage needs to be followed up by the police and agencies. I am proposing a much broader approach.

I hope that members will reflect on that and support the Green amendment. Like Karen Adam, I thank everyone who works in public transport every day to serve us.

16:58

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

I remember where I was when I heard that someone had died at Elgin bus station. If anyone knows the station, they will know that buses drive in but have to reverse to get out. I assumed that there had been a tragic accident. It was a Friday evening, and that would have been terrible. Then, we heard that it was a bus driver who had lost his life, and we heard the details—that it was not a tragic accident but a brutal and sinister assault that killed Keith Rollinson.

Keith was a loving husband to Sue and a devoted dad to Sophie and Abigail. That night, their world was turned upside down. I cannot begin to imagine what they must have gone through that night and every day since. All that Keith—who had served his country in the Royal Air Force and was subsequently serving his community in Moray as a bus driver—had done was to go to work. He was just about to finish his

shift. Concerned for the other passengers on the bus, he said to the young person, “You are not getting on.” Simply because he did that, Keith is no longer with us.

That is why we have to look at punishments and, indeed, withdrawal of the free bus pass as a sanction. The point that I was going to make to the cabinet secretary—I have heard it from others—is that this is not about persistent behaviour, although in some cases it will be. The fact is that, sometimes, a person’s behaviour is so brutal and unacceptable that, in itself, it should cause them to lose the privilege of having a free bus pass.

Christine Grahame and others have spoken about people having their free bus pass removed and have noted that it can be removed because of fraud. I cannot get my head around the fact that, according to a response to a freedom of information request that I have seen, since the scheme started in 2022, four cardholders have been suspended from the young persons free bus travel scheme, and in each case the reason was fraud. The message is that someone can get their bus pass taken away if they give it to someone else to use, but brutally assaulting someone does not result in their bus pass being revoked. That cannot be right.

I do not understand why we are having this discussion now, two years into the scheme. Why did we not discuss ultimate sanctions when the scheme was introduced? A pass can clearly be removed if people engage in fraud—that has happened to four people. Why are we only now looking at other reasons to possibly remove passes?

**Monica Lennon:** [*Made a request to intervene.*]

**Douglas Ross:** I would like to take Monica Lennon’s intervention, but I have two final points to make.

I know that we cannot go into the details of the person who pled guilty to Keith Rollinson’s death, but we know his age, and we know that, because there is no way to remove a pass, he will still be entitled to a young person’s free bus pass when he has served his sentence. What message is that sending? The message is that causing the death of a bus driver is not even enough to have a young person’s pass removed.

I will use my last words in this speech to quote what the Rollinson family—Sue, Abigail and Sophie—said in the immediate aftermath of Keith’s death. They said:

“On Friday, 2 February the kindest, dedicated and loving husband and father was taken from us. Our world has been shattered—I cannot see us ever getting over our loss of our rock.”

No family could get over the loss of their rock, and no family should have to face that situation. If anything comes out of this terrible tragedy, it must be that we in this place do everything possible to protect our bus drivers and ensure that Keith’s death is something that prevents other bus drivers from ever having to go through the same trauma and prevents their families from being left without a rock.

17:02

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** The debate is absolutely necessary

and it is understandable that it has been brought to the chamber, particularly given Mr Ross’s testimony just now, but it is the kind of debate that is frustrating, because the reality is that we all more or less agree on the issues and agree that it is necessary to take the time to have the debate because of the actions of a few mindless individuals.

It is as sad as it is predictable that, no matter what we do in local or national Government or in society as a whole, there will always be a small minority of mindless individuals who behave in an unacceptable and inconsiderate way, who cause fear, alarm and distress or—worse—who hurt those around them.

What is also predictable is the clamour for someone or something to blame. That is understandable. However, there is a need for calm heads and considered thinking to find proportionate but effective solutions when such issues occur. No one should have to deal with such antisocial behaviour—certainly, no one should have to deal with what Mr Ross just talked about—in any setting.

**Monica Lennon:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Jim Fairlie:** I am sorry—I will not take an intervention today, as I do not have enough time.

People should not have to deal with such behaviour at their place of work. In the context of the debate, I say that passengers should be able to go about their daily lives without fear of intimidation and disruption. Equally, we cannot allow ourselves to fall into the trap of demonising whole sections of society because of a tiny minority. That principle should stand in all situations, whether it is at a football match, in shopping precincts or on public transport. We must ensure that people feel safe, but the under-22s bus scheme is not to blame, and the vast majority of young people who take advantage of that benefit are not to blame.

I urge caution in allowing our reaction to demonise the scheme and young people, which, in



the main, are huge positives for Scotland and demonstrate the kind of country that we want to be. We witness innumerable examples of fantastic young people who are growing and thriving in our society by engaging and playing their part in what Scotland has to offer, aided and abetted by a policy choice that the Parliament unanimously agreed to deliver. I am not minimising any of the issues that we have heard about today, but I hope that we can collectively remember that positive aspect, in order to counter the sadness of why the debate was necessary. I hope that we can find collective solutions and stay focused on the tangible and visible positives.

I will take a moment to reflect on some of the contributions that members from across the chamber made. Like a number of members across the chamber, Claire Baker said that she recognises the scheme's benefits. However, she also made a point that concerned me slightly. I think that 50 per cent of respondents to the Unite survey said that they did not get an adequate response from their employer, which is something that we should maybe have a conversation about. She also said that nothing was being done. Something is being done; things are happening.

Monica Lennon talked about women and girls, as did Mark Ruskell. I had the great delight of being at Waverley station yesterday to award ScotRail, Network Rail and the British Transport Police White Ribbon Scotland awards for the work that they are doing to help to protect women and girls.

The cabinet secretary, Fiona Hyslop, gave a comprehensive review of the actions that the Government is taking. I hope that members take confidence from the fact that we share the concerns of everyone in the chamber and that we are working to get to the root of the issues.

Sue Webber and a number of other members have noted the value of the national entitlement card. We must remember what it is actually delivering for our young people. Christine Grahame made the interesting point that there are regional variations—the problem does not exist across the entire country. There are young people in those areas who feel demonised because the subject is being raised. It is absolutely right that the matter is raised, but we must remember that—

**Claire Baker:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Jim Fairlie:** I am sorry—I have 30 seconds left, so I cannot take an intervention.

Maurice Golden made the point that the issue has existed for a long time and that rights come with responsibilities. Monica Lennon also raised the point that we should not demonise young folk, because there are far too many brilliant young

people who are using their cards day and daily and doing so appropriately.

I am happy to take part in the round-table meeting next week, when we can have these discussions in depth. However, in a four or five-minute contribution to a debate, we simply cannot get into the detail.

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I call Sarah Boyack to wind up the debate.

17:07

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I want to join colleagues in sending my sincere condolences to the family of Keith Rollinson, his friends and his colleagues.

The survey that was carried out by Unite reinforces the fact that antisocial behaviour on buses needs to be addressed urgently. Its members reported an 84 per cent increase in reports of verbal or physical abuse over the past year, and that is not acceptable. I hope that bus drivers and Unite members will take strength from our debate, because they have heard support from across the chamber. That does not happen very often in this place, but it is because of the nature of the issue and the appetite for solutions to be identified and implemented. There is also very strong support for the under-22 bus scheme.

The tone of Jim Fairlie's concluding remarks did not really help us, because people do support the scheme. Some 150 million journeys have been made with under-22 bus passes. That is fantastic, and we can all be proud of that. The problem is the very small number of young people who are abusive, not behaving properly and taking antisocial actions, not just against bus drivers but people in bus stations and passengers, too.

**Sue Webber:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** I will mention Sue Webber in a positive manner in a second.

The focus of our debate has been how we tackle the problem of threatening behaviour on buses, which is unacceptable. It also creates problems for bus users. *[Interruption.]* Like many who have spoken in the chamber today—

**The Presiding Officer:** Could we please do Ms Boyack the courtesy of listening to her?

**Sarah Boyack:** As many members have said today, across the country, we hear from constituents who are witnessing this antisocial behaviour at first hand, so we need to act now. The criticism of the Scottish Government—

**Sue Webber:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Sarah Boyack:** I am just about to reference Sue Webber. The criticism of the Scottish Government is about the speed and the range of actions. We are not saying that nothing has happened, but not enough has happened.

I thought that the tone of the cabinet secretary's opening remarks was constructive, but, to go back to the reality, as Sue Webber commented, in the Lothians, we have seen buses cancelled, bus drivers threatened and passengers intimidated. There have been thousands of incidents. That is not acceptable.

We are having this debate for a second time, because we debated the issue last year, and it has been the subject of parliamentary questions over the past year. There is cross-party support for faster action.

I praise colleagues across the chamber who have made valuable contributions. Claire Baker, Mark Ruskell, Alex Rowley and Monica Lennon all pointed out the impact on bus drivers. It is horrific. We need to recruit bus drivers, not see them being intimidated. The lack of reporting that Mark Ruskell and others mentioned is key. We need to make sure that every incident is reported, so that bus drivers know that there will be a consequence—that the matter will be investigated and something will happen and will not be ignored.

Unite the union's 15 action points are absolutely critical. Again, there is cross-party support for the physical changes that are needed in our buses, including CCTV and safe doors, and the infrastructure that is needed in our bus stations, as well as the social changes that need to be made. The solutions that we have called for in our motion would be an important step towards protecting bus drivers and helping young people to realise the consequences of their actions.

The cross-party support has been critical. The point that I make to the cabinet secretary and the minister is that we need action. We need the leadership of the Scottish Government to implement this stuff, because Unite has sent us a clear message. Resources need to be invested to support bus drivers and we need to see action by the bus companies. We need to see policing where there are incidents. There has not been a lot of reference to that, but there is an idea that it is not worth reporting incidents, because nobody will investigate. We need to up the scale so that people understand that action will be taken.

Maurice Golden, Christine Grahame and Alex Rowley spoke about what is happening locally to them, but this is an issue across Scotland, and we need to act now.

I also commend the briefing by the CPT, because it mentions tackling bad behaviour on buses and the positive messaging that we need to

see in our schools and communities, so that young people understand the incredibly negative impact of such behaviour. What might start off as a joke becomes serious and brutal antisocial behaviour. That can impact on young people's families, too, because they cannot get on a bus to get out to work.

We need to end the debate on a broader point. Why are young people turning to such behaviour in the first place? A lot of the time, they do not have anything else to do. There is a lack of youth clubs, poor provision of sport and culture facilities for young people and a lack of community spaces. As Ben Macpherson said in the debate last year:

"there are wider and deeper questions that we need to ask ourselves about support for our young people, ensuring that there is adequate youth work provision, helping our young people to engage in better behaviour".—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2023; c 31.]

In concluding, I will mention that, this week, my colleague Martin Whitfield launched his bill, which would place a legal obligation on local authorities to ensure provision of and access to youth work, which is key. Young people have to feel invested in and cared for and to feel some pride in their communities. We must take important steps today, but to truly tackle antisocial behaviour, we need a longer-term, bigger-picture approach and a transformation in our communities.

If we debate this matter at the same time next year, we want to have seen a reduction in antisocial behaviour on our buses and an investment in our bus services and bus stations. Young people across the country should feel that they can use those buses, but there must be consequences for those who do not abide by the rules.

**The Presiding Officer:** You must conclude, Ms Boyack.

**Sarah Boyack:** That is critical. Let us work together. Let us not be here in the same place next year. Let us make progress together.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you. That concludes the debate on tackling abuse of bus drivers.

## Business Motions

17:14

### The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-15625, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

#### *Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 3 December 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 4 December 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business; Justice and Home Affairs

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Scottish Budget 2025-26

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

4.20 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 5 December 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Support for the Veterans and Armed Forces Community in Scotland

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Empowering Young People's Voices in

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 10 December 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Stage 3 Proceedings: Judicial Factors (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 11 December 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic; Finance and Local Government

*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 12 December 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

*followed by* Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Debate: Remote and Rural Healthcare Inquiry

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 2 December 2024, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

*Motion agreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-15626, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 timetable for a bill.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 28 March 2025.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:15

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Neil Gray is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-15613.4, in the name of Neil Gray, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15613, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on addressing the crisis in social care now, 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.

17:16

*Meeting suspended.*

17:18

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Neil Gray is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane will fall.

We come to the vote on amendment S6M-15613.4, in the name of Neil Gray, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15613, in the name of Jackie Baillie. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

I can see that you are requesting to make a point of order, Ms Baillie, but I can confirm that you have voted and that your vote has been recorded.

### For

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)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 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)  
 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)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

### Against

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)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 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)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-15613.4, in the name of Neil Gray, is: For 60, Against 63, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-15613.2, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15613, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on addressing the crisis in social care now, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was not able to connect. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Macpherson. We will ensure 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)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 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)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (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)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 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)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-15613.2, in the name of Sandesh Gulhane, is: For 55, Against 70, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-15613, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on addressing the crisis in social care now, 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)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 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)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]  
 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)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 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)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

## Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-15613, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on addressing the crisis in social care now, is: For 33, Against 90, Abstentions 1.

*Motion disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-15612.1, in the name of Mark Ruskell, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15612, in the name of Claire Baker, on tackling abuse of bus drivers, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

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

## For

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

## 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)  
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)  
Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
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)  
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)  
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)  
Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)



Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-15612.1, in the name of Mark Ruskell, is: For 7, Against 118, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-15612, in the name of Claire Baker, on tackling abuse of bus drivers, 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)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Edmond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 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)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)

Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

#### Against

FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)

#### Abstentions

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-15612, in the name of Claire Baker, on tackling abuse of bus drivers, is: For 117, Against 1, Abstentions 7.

#### *Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament is deeply grieved by the death of Keith Rollinson following an assault at his place of work; agrees that workplace abuse is not acceptable and notes the serious concerns raised about levels of abuse in the recent mass survey of bus drivers in Scotland, carried out by Unite the Union; supports the union's campaign to improve driver safety, including its call for a public transport safety summit involving key stakeholders; calls on the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland to take swift action to address antisocial behaviour and violence towards bus drivers, including exploring the potential for legislative measures to protect transport workers against assault, threats and abuse; notes the increase in the rate of incidents following the extension of the bus travel scheme; supports fully the provision of free bus travel for young people and children aged under 22 and notes the multiple benefits that it brings, but acknowledges that this comes with responsibilities, and calls on the Scottish Government to remove access to concessionary bus passes from individuals who repeatedly carry out antisocial behaviour.

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

## Miners Strike (40th Anniversary)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-12169, in the name of Richard Leonard, on marking the 40th anniversary of the miners strike. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

#### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that 12 March 2024 marks the 40th anniversary of the official start of the 1984-85 miners' strike; considers that this strike was, without parallel, the most significant industrial dispute since the 1926 general strike; believes that miners took action in defence of jobs, communities and a very way of life; considers that the full force of the state was deployed against the miners and their trade union, the National Union of Mineworkers, but that they stood steadfast for a full year; believes that the strike could not have endured without public support, including from women's groups, the lesbian and gay community, trade unions and workers across the world; deplores what it sees as the injustices towards miners and their communities during and since the strike; notes the belief that there is continuing need for investment in mining communities, and further notes the call for a public inquiry into the policing of the strike.

17:31

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I thank all those MSPs who signed the motion, but more than that, I thank all those miners who lived—who struggled—through the strike 40 years ago. *[Applause.]*

Too many of them are no longer with us, but some we welcome to the public gallery in Parliament tonight.

"It is an abiding and indisputable truth that a people which does not understand the past will never comprehend the present, nor mould the future".

Those words of Tom Johnston echo down the ages, and they remind us why this debate in this Parliament is so important: because this is our history, the people's history, working-class history. If we do not understand it or comprehend it; if we do not remember it, who else will?

The miners strike was 40 years ago. All the pits have long closed down, but for anyone who lived through that tumultuous year, it is still very real, and it is still very raw. This was not a strike about pay and conditions. This was not a strike about material gain. It was a strike about jobs—about the closure of pits, about mass unemployment and about the survival of mining communities. It was a strike about the defence of a very way of life.

We should make no mistake about it—much of the strike's leadership was provided by the heroic women of our mining communities, who

transformed the battle to defend the coal industry from an industrial struggle into what was truly a community struggle. It was a strike that was founded on the simple socialist principle of solidarity, and so it was about a higher ideal: of an old miner, fighting for the job of a young miner whom he had never met, in a coalfield that he had never seen. It was about that old trade union principle: that you do not cross a picket line.

Yes, we saw violence—the violence of the state brought down upon mining community after mining community. We saw the imprisonment of innocent men, and the victimisation and the sacking of innocent men. We witnessed at first hand the violence of a Tory Government closing down industry after industry, throwing four and a half million of its own citizens out of work. That was the violence that we saw.

We saw the violence, as well, of the union busting of Thatcher, of MacGregor, of Wheeler; of the threat to the National Union of Mineworkers of sequestration and receivership. We saw the media bias, the political vitriol, the spying, the dirty tricks and the smears from MI5. That was the violence that we saw.

Where there was attack upon attack, not just on civil liberties but on human rights, it was not the Labour left, it was not the Communist Party, it was not the Scargills or the McGaheys and it was not the striking miners—it was the security services who were the real subversives.

And then there was the violence of Orgreave, where there was a riot—not a mass riot of pickets, but a mass riot of police. It was a turning point, and the Orgreave truth and justice campaign's simple demands—to restore justice, to restore accountability and standards in public life and to restore police operational independence, and for the establishment of an inquiry—must be met in full.

The strike that we mark today in Parliament was not just about resistance to a closure programme of pits, but resistance to a closure programme of entire communities; to a closure programme of towns and villages; and to a closure programme of hope, and its replacement with fear.

The central demand of the strike was not just a plan for coal, but a plan for energy, for the economy and for society—a plan of hope for the future. That is why it resonates today with those workers offshore, and with the workers onshore at Grangemouth and in the communities around it.

It has been the privilege of my life to meet the families of miners, and in particular to meet those miners who were arrested, convicted and sacked during the strike. Some I had not met for 40 years—and every one of them people of principle and of honesty, whose only crime was to be guilty

of standing up for their class. Many of them were young miners who had their future stolen from them—never criminals, yet criminalised. Many of them are now entitled to a pardon, but deserving of compensation, too—although, as the late Alex Bennett used to say,

“It's not compensation we're after, it's what we're due.”

Next year, we will mark in this Parliament the centenary of the birth of Mick McGahey, who warned us that the movement has to learn that

“If we stop running, they will not chase us. Stand firm and fight.”

It is now up to us to carry on the fight—the fight for truth, and for justice, because time can be no barrier to justice. Many of those same issues—of poverty, of unemployment, of inequality—are still around us in our coalfield communities, so we will never walk away from those issues, and we will never walk away from those communities.

Today, we remember the strike. We will shed a tear for those whom we have loved, including our comrades who are no longer with us. We celebrate the enduring legacy of the strike, because they never broke our spirit and they never defeated our class.

We send a message to the miners, and to their sons and daughters, their wives, partners and grandchildren—a message of unflinching solidarity. We remember them—we celebrate their struggle, and the battle for justice, which was then, and remains now, part of a wider campaign for equality, for human compassion and dignity, and for the triumph of the human spirit and the triumph of hope in place of fear. It is this great cause which the miners fought for, and which, I firmly believe, in the end, will prevail.

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

17:39

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I congratulate Richard Leonard on bringing the debate to the chamber. It is almost Christmas, and I am sure that Parliament will be once again graced with the presence of the Newtongrange brass band, when they play at our carol service. It always brings a lump to my throat when I remember that that is what the mining communities were about. It was about that tradition, and the community, and being part of something that was greater than the individual people who worked in the mines.

I was very lucky to be at the opening of the new Newtongrange National Mining Museum, after it had been refurbished, at the same time as the great tapestry of Scotland was on display downstairs in this very building. The steelworks,

the mining and the traditional farming—the whole history of Scotland—were rightly represented in the tapestry.

I mention the steelworks because I am from Motherwell and Wishaw. I was at secondary school at that time. My best friend then is still my best friend to this day, and her dad and brother were both miners. My family were no longer involved in the steelworks, but I had schoolmates who had fathers who were steelworkers and miners, and fathers who were policemen. I remember being appalled at the scenes on the television of the upset outside Ravenscraig, in what was my home town.

As Richard Leonard said, that was absolutely orchestrated by Thatcher and her Government in an effort to destroy the trade union movement. That was my community, and I was so hurt to see what was happening to it, as he described. I remember when the steelworks closed, and the mining, so I know that the idea of a just transition is so important, because, to me, the bigger crime was walking away from those industries and putting nothing in place in our areas to replace that work and those opportunities for young people.

As Richard Leonard has always said, this injustice has gone on. We now have the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Act 2022, which is important, but I remember writing in 2021 to Kwasi Kwarteng, the then Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, about the injustice of the miners pension scheme at that time, as the money had been removed from them.

I was glad that, in October this year, the incoming Labour Government righted that historic injustice and reversed the decision, so that 112,000 former coalminers finally have that £1.5 billion for the pension scheme transferred to them, boosting their pensions by 32 per cent. However, many people did not benefit from that, because it was too late. I mentioned my best friend—her dad, Joe, passed away this year. He was fairly lucky; he had worked in the mines for his whole life until they closed, and he then went into the steel industry, so he managed to secure further work in industrial Lanarkshire.

However, he suffered the consequences of those years, with vibration white finger and difficulty breathing sometimes. Those conditions are very prevalent in my area as a result of those industries. Those jobs were not easy, but they were vital to our country and to our economy, and we owe such a huge debt of respect and recognition to the people who worked in those industries for so long.

Once again, I thank Richard Leonard for bringing the debate to the chamber tonight. We do not just have Newtongrange—we also have the

wonderful Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life. I know that he is a very fond representative of that area, which I used to represent. These museums are so important, because we cannot forget not just the mechanics, but the whole heart of the industry, and the injustices that were done to the miners at that time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I alert members that there is, as they might imagine, an awful lot of interest in participating in the debate. I intend to get everybody in, so I will probably have to extend the debate in order to do so. I would be grateful, therefore, if members could stick to their allocated speaking time to allow other events that are taking place in Parliament this evening to go ahead—not too late, if at all possible.

17:44

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate Richard Leonard on securing the debate. I do not agree with everything that he says, but I always admire the passion that he brings to the chamber and enjoy listening to his contributions.

I do not have that many childhood memories, but one of my first is the Falklands war in 1982, when I would rush home from school and watch the reports every night. The next thing that I remember after that is the miners strike in 1984. Once again, I was hooked on watching the news updates every night. Like the Falklands, that almost seemed like war to me as a 12 or 13-year-old.

One of the things that I remember most about the strike—like most people, probably like most people—is the battle of Orgreave. I remember the scenes on television with thousands of miners and probably thousands of police with their riot shields and batons banging. There were police horses charging the crowd. I remember blood running down people's heads—I am not sure whether Arthur Scargill had blood rushing down his head at Orgreave as well—and police helmets lying everywhere. It was a scene of total chaos. Such scenes stick in your mind for ever more.

I also remember hearing about the taxi driver in Wales who had a concrete block thrown on to his taxi from the bridge. I bring that up not to demonise miners but to highlight the division that the dispute caused. I was shocked years later when a friend who grew up in Nottinghamshire told me that there were still neighbours in the streets who did not talk to each other because of the division that the dispute had caused.

As I got older, I realised that the miners were striking to save not just their jobs but their communities. That is the main reason why I want

to speak tonight. I want to speak for the communities that I represent. We often hear in the Parliament that we must not do to the oil and gas industry what happened to the mining communities, but that is exactly what the Scottish National Party and Labour Governments are doing. The SNP's presumption against oil and gas is demonising the industry and Labour's approach to new licences is killing off the industry.

Unite the union has a campaign called no ban without a plan. Tomorrow, it is marching from Johnston Terrace down to Holyrood and speaking up for Grangemouth. It has also held demonstrations in Aberdeen. I will be there and will talk to the demonstrators because Unite is spot on: there is no plan. We are waiting for the energy strategy and just transition plan, but we have been waiting for ages. We have often been told that they need Cabinet approval, but that has gone on far too long.

We can all look back and agree that we needed to stop burning coal. We probably all agree that we need to stop burning oil and gas. However, as Richard Leonard said, we need to learn the lessons of the past and have a managed transition that protects our communities. That is why it is vital that the Government learns the lessons of the past and has a proper transition plan in place for oil and gas workers in the North Sea.

17:48

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I, too, congratulate Richard Leonard on securing the debate. As we both know, this is not the first debate we have taken part in—and it will possibly not be the last—not just on the strike of 1984 but on the miners' pension fund, the Miners' Strike Pardon (Scotland) Act 2022, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and, in fact, Mick McGahey.

I am older than other speakers and saw the charges on the miners by the mounted police, the women manning barricades at the picket lines and collecting for their communities, and communities—and, indeed, some families—being torn apart. I listened to Arthur Scargill and Mick McGahey.

During that long strike, the voice of Mick McGahey was more measured than that of Arthur Scargill, although, right to the end, Mick McGahey insisted that the 1984 strike was unavoidable and that the union's tactics had been correct in the circumstances. I understand that there was a failed attempt to solve the dispute involving secret talks between Lord Whitelaw, the Tory deputy leader, and Mick McGahey, but Thatcher was out to avenge the demise of her predecessor, Edward Heath, who had taken on the miners with the

resulting three-day week, failed and lost an election. When she came into government, she was hellbent on emasculating the unions, starting with the miners, and she succeeded.

It was the first time that I had witnessed British police attacking British people who were simply defending their jobs and their communities. I watched the scenes on the news bulletins with my late mother, who was a formidable advocate for the miners because, for her, it was personal. Her father was a Welsh coal miner. I never met him. He died in his early 40s from a head injury that he sustained when a pit prop fell on him. In those days, surgery was not so sophisticated, and a steel plate had been inserted. He left his large family of children, including my late mother—a Derbyshire woman—orphaned, as his wife had died in childbirth. My mother never let us forget the hardships of mining, and the fact that he left those 10 orphan children. His death had an enduring effect on the way she led her life, as a committed socialist, and on how she saw coal mining, and she passed that on to me.

My mother raged against the Tory Government for its ruthless treatment of the miners, their families and their communities, and I, too, was shocked when police on horseback were sent charging into men who were simply demonstrating for their livelihoods. Often, those officers were shipped in from outside the community, because the local police could not be used or would not be used.

Little did I know that, one day, I would represent mining communities in Midlothian, in particular, Newtongrange, Gorebridge and Penicuik. The footprint of the mines in my constituency is there for all to see. It includes the mining museum in Newtongrange; the memorial high above Gorebridge to the miners who lost their lives in the pits; and the Shottstown miners welfare club in Penicuik. That is just a snapshot.

Convictions were to follow the strike, with 1,300 or more people being charged and more than 400 convicted but, at last, two years ago, this Parliament passed the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Act 2022. I absolutely agree with that symbolic and collective blanket pardon. Because the act does not get rid of the conviction, I appreciate that we still have the effect of the prerogative of mercy. However, the act is good enough, and, in any event, in practical terms, that issue might not be relevant, as convictions might now have lapsed through time, and records might be lost.

What is sad is that the UK Government has not followed the Scottish Parliament in introducing a collective pardon, although I commend it for, at long last, tackling the issue of the miners' pension

fund. That is an issue that I and Richard Leonard, as well as others, have campaigned on.

In particular—here I share Mr Leonard's concern—there must be an inquiry into whether there was political interference in policing and the actions of the judiciary during that period.

17:52

**Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** I congratulate my colleague Richard Leonard on bringing this debate to the chamber.

I begin my speech by paying tribute to Neil Findlay, who was an MSP for Lothian before me and who campaigned for years to fight the injustices that were inflicted on striking miners.

It is hard to overstate the role of mining in Scottish life and communities such as Newtongrange, Addiewell and Danderhall. The miners gala, attended by thousands, used to finish near this building, in Holyrood Park, and many local people came out to support the miners during the strike. Edinburgh District Council donated £5,000 a month to the striking miners and Edinburgh students passed motions in support of the miners. Those are just a few examples that demonstrate solidarity and community spirit, and we should be proud of that part of our history.

Many of our former mining communities still feel the effects of having their industry ripped out from under them with no replacement or support. Research from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust found that former mining communities are some of the most deprived areas in the country, with higher unemployment, fewer children finishing school and more people out of work and on benefits.

Those communities, where people did their jobs for 150 years, built this country and fuelled our industrial revolution, but they were left behind, and, when those people stood up for themselves, they were demonised, brutalised and mistreated. Among them was one who would go on to become the MP for Midlothian, David Hamilton. At the time, he was an active member of the National Union of Mineworkers, and he was held for two months during the strike before being released and acquitted, with a finding that no crime had been committed.

Many miners who were convicted of non-violent crimes lost their jobs and had their lives ruined. David Hamilton, like Neil Findlay, campaigned for a review of prosecutions made during the strikes in Scotland. Two years ago, following the independent review that took place, I was proud to vote for the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Act 2022, which ended that historic injustice, and I am also proud to see the Labour Government in Westminster recently also taking action to rectify

an injustice, ensuring that miners will now receive the £1.5 billion that was kept from their pensions, which is a reversal of the Conservative Government's position and is a recognition of their contribution to our country.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Foyso Choudhury:** I do not have time.

To conclude, I join members in remembering workers, communities and women who took action. I remember Mick McGahey, trade unionist and miner, whose ashes are scattered in the foundations of this building. He said that the miners did only one wrong thing in their lives:

"They fought for the right to work".

We should never stop fighting for working people.

17:56

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** As the MSP for the Cowdenbeath constituency, it is a privilege for me to speak in this debate. I congratulate Richard Leonard on securing the debate, and on his extremely powerful contribution.

I welcome the minister, Tom Arthur, to his place. It is quite fitting that he is here to respond to the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government. He, further to an invitation from me, represented the Scottish Government on the march with the miners that took place in Benarty in June this year. The event was held to mark the 40th anniversary of the miners strike, and the turnout and solidarity that were shown were hugely impressive. I also welcome our visitors to the gallery and say that they are all very much welcome in their Parliament.

At the outset of my remarks, I wish to say how much I admire the former mining communities in my constituency. They are resilient and generous and they stick up for each other. Indeed, the intense community spirit that was forged by the dangerous and dirty work that was carried out underground created an implacable bond among the communities above ground. What was done to those communities, to miners and to their families during the 1984-85 miners strike was utterly abhorrent, and it is beyond doubt that the scars are still deeply felt.

The strike involved a unique set of circumstances that saw entire communities defending their way of life and their jobs against a United Kingdom Tory Government that seemed determined to bring them to their knees by deploying the forces of the state to that end. Arbitrary dismissal by the National Coal Board for relatively minor acts of public disorder was the

order of the day, and some were even dismissed notwithstanding that they had not been convicted but rather had been admonished or found not guilty or subject to a not proven verdict, or, indeed, had not even been brought to court at all.

Dismissal brought with it financial hardship, loss of income, loss of pension rights and difficulties in obtaining future employment. However, above all, convictions for activities anent the strike meant that miners and their families lost their good name and their respectability—perhaps the hardest loss to bear. It was important, therefore, to see, in June 2022, the enactment by this Parliament of the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Act 2022. In fact, I had been a member of the Scottish Government's ministerial justice team when the decision to proceed with the independent review by John Scott into the impact of policing on affected communities during the strike was announced in June 2018. I was, therefore, extremely proud to vote for legislation that recognised those wrongs by way of a collective and automatic pardon for those eligible, thereby bringing a degree of reconciliation and justice to the many involved.

What we need to see now, as has been called for by a number of members this evening, is a public inquiry into the policing of the miners strike. It remains to be seen whether the new UK Labour Government will heed those calls. It also remains to be seen whether the UK Parliament will follow the lead of the Scottish Parliament in legislating for a miners pardons bill. It is to be hoped that the UK Government will proceed with legislation in that regard.

Finally, it must surely be time for the UK Government to compensate those who have been unjustly penalised by the state over the intervening years for the financial hardship that they suffered as a result of the unique set of circumstances of the miners strike. That compensation could, of course, be funded from the billions of pounds that the UK Treasury, under successive Tory and Labour Governments, has siphoned off from the surplus in the miners' pension fund for the past 30 years.

Let us hope that the new UK Labour Government now delivers the justice that miners and their families deserve and for which they have been waiting for so long. I am sure that we will all be watching.

18:00

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** It is a great privilege to speak in this debate. I start by saying how much I genuinely respect Richard Leonard. In the 40 years that I have known him, I have never had any doubt that he holds his

convictions genuinely and sincerely. However, as he well knows, we fundamentally disagree.

We were both students at the University of Stirling during the miners strike, and I have a vivid memory of a miners strike support meeting being held in the foyer of the MacRobert centre at which I had the temerity to ask representatives of the NUM why it was not prepared to allow the miners the opportunity of a secret ballot on strike action. On that occasion, the left did not like the question and, I presume, it probably still does not like that question.

I want to make my position clear: at the end of the day, regardless of what has been said by all the speakers in the debate so far, Arthur Scargill's primary motivation in the miners strike was political. It was a politically motivated strike, led by Arthur Scargill, with one objective in mind, and that was to remove a democratically elected Conservative Government that was led by Margaret Thatcher. The NUM thought that it could bring down the Thatcher Government, and it was fully justified in some of the assumptions that it made, because it had done the same thing to Ted Heath's Conservative Government in 1974—but Margaret Thatcher was no Ted Heath.

Yes, the miners strike pulled communities, families and, indeed, our country apart, but the trade union bosses were not doing anything new when they were flexing their industrial muscle and crippling the country, because they had been doing it for the previous two decades.

**Christine Grahame:** I disagree with much of the point that the member makes—as he would expect. Does the member have any qualms about the manner of policing during that period? Would he perhaps address that?

**Stephen Kerr:** I have a tonne of qualms—if that is how qualms are measured—about how everything was conducted during that period, and the violence on the picket lines and on the secondary picket lines. I will come back to that point in a moment, if I may.

The NUM's calculations were justified because of the weakness of previous Governments. Because of that, we had seen wage growth spiral out of control, productivity decrease, costs increase and an economic crisis caused by inflation and an uncompetitive economy. We were regarded as the international economic basket case of basket cases—the sick man of Europe. Let us not forget that Harold Wilson's Labour Government closed 253 pits when, during Margaret Thatcher's Government, 115 pits were closed.

The NUM's refusal to ballot its members to go on strike seems to have been lost in the narratives that we have heard tonight. At no point during the

strike were workers ever allowed to have their say through a secret ballot. To address Christine Grahame's point, it was a time of fear and intimidation and bloody violence on the secondary picket line. We have already heard about Orgreave, and no doubt that will come up again.

There is no doubt that, at the time, it was a real struggle for the families in those mining communities, which was largely thanks, if I may use that word ironically, to Arthur Scargill's egotistical attempt to bring down a democratically elected Government, under the guise of saving an industry that, in common with all traditional industries, was already dying, due to technological change. However, more important than that, a growing sense of aspiration within mining communities and mining families meant that it was no longer the desire of those families that their children should be sent down the pit.

I represented Fallin when I was the member of Parliament for Stirling. Polmaise colliery was famous for being first out and last back during the strike. However, when I think of the people of Fallin or the former coalfields around Falkirk, I think not of victims with nothing left to live for but of educated, clever and aspirational people who wanted more for their children than going underground to mine coal.

I, too, think that we should memorialise the miners strike, but my reasons are very different from those of Richard Leonard. For centuries, working-class people have been kept in their place and told that low-paid, menial and dangerous jobs somehow gave them status and that there was pride in being part of a community and doing something that no one else wanted to do.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to conclude.

**Stephen Kerr:** Now we know better—that that was nothing more than an attempt by vested interests to keep people in their place.

Technology, investment and aspiration should improve the lives of everyone. No one should feel shackled to a dying industry for the sake of the ego of a union leader.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I need you to conclude.

**Stephen Kerr:** That is what we should also remember.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call the next speaker, I will say that—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Torrance, I will not have conversations of that nature going on across the chamber.

I am conscious that several members still want to participate in the debate. In order to accommodate them—and some who have

pressed their buttons very late, who will be given a speaking allocation, albeit not of four minutes—I am minded to take a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Richard Leonard to move such a motion.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[*Richard Leonard*]

*Motion agreed to.*

18:07

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** I thank Richard Leonard for securing this debate on a cause that he is passionate about: seeking to bring a wider understanding of what happened to the miners and their communities, and of the impact that that continues to have.

I fundamentally disagree with Stephen Kerr. A worker is entitled to withhold their labour until such time as they receive the terms and conditions that they believe are fair. That includes fighting for their job. Anything other than that is slavery, and is certainly not a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. I am proud that the United Kingdom Labour Government will bring forward the new deal for working people and that it has introduced the Employment Rights Bill. An important part of that legislation is that it should give unions better access to workplaces, enabling them to recruit and organise workers more effectively in industries that are resistant to unionisation.

The debate teaches us a lesson on why that is important. The Thatcher Government wanted to make an example of miners, regardless of the cost to those workers, their families, their communities and, indeed, the whole country. Worse, Mrs Thatcher used the police to break that strike. Governments make laws, but the police and the justice services must uphold the law without the interference of politicians—including Prime Ministers. Richard Leonard's call for a public inquiry into the policing of the strike is therefore as important today as it was 40 years ago. A democracy must have separation of powers; therefore, the use of police to break a strike for political purposes calls our very democracy into question. The only way in which we will ensure that that never happens again is to shine a light on what happened at the time. The police service must uphold the rule of law, work for its communities and never be used as a political pawn.

The other issue is the lasting impact on mining communities, which were set against each other and saw families torn apart and miners starved back to work. The strike was only able to continue for as long as it did because of support from wider



communities, the trade union movement and others who sustained striking miners and their families.

Although most of Scotland's coal mines were in the central belt, the strike also had a significant long-term impact on rural Scotland. Mine closures targeted and influenced the trade unions, altering labour dynamics in both industrial and rural contexts. The rural economy declined as ancillary industries such as transport, equipment and related services suffered, so the younger generation left in search of jobs in urban centres, exacerbating population decline and community fragmentation.

It is clear that the closure of the mines devastated many communities, which are still suffering. That provides lessons for us all today. We must move away from hydrocarbon fuels that harm our environment and planet and must do so for the good of the whole population and the whole world. However, that will impact on people working in those industries and on their livelihoods and families. Lessons must be learned and we must ensure that a just transition leaves no person or community behind. That is challenging, but we can achieve it if we learn the lessons of the past.

18:11

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** I begin, as Richard Leonard did, by thanking and remembering the miners who lived through the injustices in the run up to, during and after the miners strike 40 years ago and I thank him for bringing this important debate to Parliament.

I was a small child in Zimbabwe in the mid-1980s but I remember hearing, even there, on the other side of the world, snippets about a big thing happening in a world totally unknown to me. As the motion shows, the strike was an unforgettable experience, not only for those who took part in person, for miners and mining communities, and not only for unions and their families and allies. It had deep and lasting effects on the way that people across Scotland, Wales and England see themselves, their history, their Governments and their rights and freedoms.

There may be three reasons why the strike is so important. First, it matters because of the miners themselves and their dignity, courage, skill and comradeship. Those qualities were shared by the families and communities who bore the hardships of coal mining, shared the fear and grief of mining disasters and knew the realities that underpinned British industrial success. If that success began with the injustices of colonialism and the horrors of slavery, it continued on the bent backs of labouring miners. Those in the women against pit

closures movement carried on the traditions of solidarity, support and care that their mothers, aunts and grandmothers had always known.

Secondly, the strike is important because of the extraordinary vindictiveness of the Government and organs of the state. Miners experienced the Ridley plan and smear campaigns, the carnage of Orgreave and a police presence on village greens, the notorious Stepps incident and security cordons across tiny country roads. Miners were victimised, especially in Scotland, and the state was willing to see miners' children go hungry as a punishment for their parents' resistance.

Thirdly, the strike matters because, in response to that brutality, solidarity sprang up like fields of flowers. Connections were made between women working in the Dundee Timex factory and their sisters in Cowdenbeath, and between international trade unions, peace activists, Asian youth movements and Chilean exiles. Groups such as black people support the miners, lesbians and gays support the miners, and the Dundee trades council marched at the Edinburgh miners gala.

The Government thought that its anti-union legislation could suppress support, but it might as well have kettled the wind. That support was reciprocal: the miners had already supported the Grunwick workers in 1977 and would go on to make sure that LGBT rights reached the Labour manifesto. Here in Scotland, the miners had long called for devolution. They helped to found the Parliament in which we proudly, if belatedly, passed the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Act 2022.

We have our own memories, or those that were passed down to us by comrades and families, but we have lessons learned as well. Whatever struggles we are engaged in now, whether they be for climate, migration, economic or social justice, we know that what we do must be rooted in experience, respect and community. We must not underestimate how long and meticulously the forces of reaction will plan and wait, and how many of our common resources they are prepared to commit to defeat us.

However, we also know what is not theirs to command and what they will never have. Solidarity is something that we do together—it is not simply a voice calling across a chasm. Together, locally and globally, we can create communities of shared experience, shared resistance and shared love. The miners taught us that, and I am grateful to them.

18:15

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I will start with how proud I am to say that I grew up in, live in and now represent a coalfield community. I

therefore thank Richard Leonard for securing this important and heartfelt debate, which recognises the impact that the 1984-85 strike had not only on miners but on their families, wider communities and Scotland itself.

The strike has been defined as the greatest industrial dispute in post-war Britain and its significance cannot be overstated. To this day, the echoes of that brutal Thatcher Government are felt in so many towns and villages across our country.

I strongly disagree with Stephen Kerr. The pit closures were used as an insult to the miners, who contributed so much to Scotland's culture and economy. Communities such as the one that I live in faced job losses and deprivation, and miners and their families were vilified and criminalised for their fight to save their livelihoods and their communities. The injustices that were felt by miners and their communities remain rife across modern Scotland.

Although it is unlikely that full amends can ever truly be made, I do recognise the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Act 2022 as a step in the right direction. However, much more must be done and we must all fully support an inquiry into policing at that time. We must continue to find the truth, which miners and other striking workers deserve.

My region, South Scotland, is home to so many mining villages and communities, such as Cumnock, Dalmellington and my home town of Mauchline. Like others across Scotland, those communities have faced and continue to have unimaginable struggles as a result of the pit closures.

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Carol Mochan:** I will, if it is brief.

**David Torrance:** I thank Carol Mochan for taking an intervention. As someone who was born and bred in Kirkcaldy, which had at one end the Frances, which was commonly known as the Dubbie, and at the other, the Seafeld, I know that the communities there were rich in culture, heritage and wealth. However, Mrs Thatcher's legacy is 40 years of deprivation in those areas. Would the member agree with that?

**Carol Mochan:** Absolutely. I agree 100 per cent. The fault is square on that Thatcher Government. Poverty, deprivation and depopulation are still felt hard. It is incumbent on us to continue to remember the difficult choices that were made by those who felt that striking was their only option. Fortunately, unions and organisations such as the Coalfields Regeneration Trust continue to keep the issue front and centre.

Even when some Governments prefer to forget their responsibilities to their communities, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and others bring it to the fore. The report "State of the Coalfields 2024" lays bare the truth, stating that Ayrshire coalfield communities stand out as "particularly deprived" areas.

The coalfield communities did not create those problems. Rather, they fell victim to the social and economic problems that we see across the United Kingdom because of such a right-wing Government. Unemployment, lack of investment and accepted decline by the state are the scars that my communities will suffer for generations to come. There was no contingency planning, no support and no sympathy. Those are the realities that miners faced.

We cannot praise the fight's endurance without reflecting on the impact and support of women—predominantly the wives, sisters and daughters of the miners. They continued to support the miners, alongside community groups and trade unions, and they allowed the fight to continue for as long as it did. For that, I cherish the stories that have been recounted from women on the picket lines and in the communities.

I believe in those communities not only because of our history of mining and our part in empowering the country but because that history built a resilient people and bold communities, with warmth, talent and tenacity. It is they who deserve the wealth generated from the labour of their parents, grandparents and wider communities.

I close by demanding of the Governments of today: keep that fight for justice alive.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can accommodate a brief final contribution from Fulton MacGregor before we move to the minister.

18:20

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** Thanks for accepting my late request to speak, Presiding Officer.

I thank Richard Leonard for what was—as always on this issue—a very powerful speech.

I represent Coatbridge and Chryston, which has a rich coal-mining heritage as well as hosting other heavy industry. I come from Coatbridge myself. I was only four or five around the time of the miners strike, but I do have some memories of it, and my family had a rich history in the heavy industries, so I wanted to speak in the debate.

Clare Adamson mentioned Summerlee museum in Coatbridge. Every year, it hosts the international workers memorial day for Lanarkshire, which is always a poignant event. There is the Cardowan

colliery in Stepps, and there is the Auchengeich site in Moodiesburn, where this year we commemorated the 65th anniversary of Scotland's worst coal-mining disaster of the 20th century. Forty-seven men lost their lives, 41 women were widowed and 76 children lost their father. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Willie Doolan, who is in the public gallery, and to all those at the Auchengeich memorial committee, for the work that they do to ensure that we remember those men, and others who tragically died.

I do not think that the Tory contributions today have been helpful at all—I have to agree with Carol Mochan on that, and that is me being very nice about it. Stephen Kerr said that he wanted the Parliament to be clear on his stance, so let me be clear on mine. The Tory Government of the 1980s and what it did to the miners and our communities were an absolute disgrace. I would say to Stephen Kerr, as Carol Mochan did, that our communities are still paying the price. Stephen Kerr represents Central Scotland, which of course includes many of the Lanarkshire constituencies. Those communities are still paying the price for what the Thatcher Government did.

I welcome the calls for a UK pardon, following the line of the Scottish Parliament, and I absolutely back the call for a public inquiry into the policing of the miners strike. It was completely political, and it should never have happened. That is not to blame the police officers. As another member said, they had to do what they were told. It was a political intervention.

I see you looking at me, Presiding Officer, so I will finish there. Thank you again for letting me speak. Thanks, too, to Richard Leonard for bringing the debate to the chamber.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr MacGregor, and sorry for cutting you slightly short.

18:23

**The Minister for Employment and Investment (Tom Arthur):** It is an honour to have the opportunity to respond to the debate on behalf of the Government. I begin by commending and sincerely thanking Richard Leonard for bringing this important debate to the chamber. His connection to the miners strike is evident in his decades of advocacy for those affected. I also thank members from across the chamber for their thoughtful contributions. As other members have done, I welcome those miners, families and friends who are joining us here in the public gallery and those who are watching from home.

The motion rightly acknowledges one of the most significant industrial disputes in our history, which profoundly shaped our communities and society. The miners strike was not just about pay

but about livelihoods, dignity and future generations. It was a struggle of collective action and solidarity, when families stood firm against economic hardship and division. Forty years on, we reflect on the sacrifices made, the resilience shown and the lasting legacy that continues to shape our communities and our policies.

The scars of the struggle remain visible in mining communities, as we have heard, where unemployment exceeds the national average, life expectancy lags behind wealthier regions and challenges in attracting investment persist. However, slowly but surely, progress is being made. Initiatives supported by the Scottish Government have helped to regenerate former mining sites, transforming them into spaces that support recreation, community use and biodiversity. Polkemmet country park in West Lothian, once a colliery, is now a nature park, and Westfield community garden in Fife has become a sustainable hub for community engagement.

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust has been key in that renewal, by fostering economic and social resilience in the former coalfield areas. The Kelloholm skills centre in Dumfries and Galloway offers training for new industries, and the coalfields community investment programme, which operates across several coalfield areas in Scotland, supports small businesses that are adapting to a change in the economy. I also note the critical role that European Union funding has played in many of those projects.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** On the point about the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, will the Scottish Government reconsider the award of direct grants from the trust, which has become an important part of mining communities? I know that that has been stopped for various reasons, but at this time of change, and in reflecting on the anniversary of the miners strike, is it the right thing to do to look again at that option and make it available to the trust?

**Tom Arthur:** I very much recognise Martin Whitfield's points. I am committed to engaging with all organisations that the Scottish Government engages with on projects relating to community-led regeneration to support the resilience and sustainability of our communities. Martin Whitfield will appreciate that the budget is coming to Parliament imminently, but I will be happy to engage and to meet him and other members who have an interest, along with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, following the budget, to explore what options are available.

This anniversary is a significant milestone, and it means a great deal to the communities that lived through the strike. As Annabelle Ewing touched on, I had the privilege and honour of attending a march, rally and exhibition in Fife earlier this year

on behalf of the Scottish Government to mark the occasion. It was clear to me that the bonds of community remain as strong today as they were 40 years ago.

The miners were the backbone of the coal industry and they fuelled our whole economy, working in dangerous and gruelling conditions. Their strength and solidarity, and the unwavering support of their families, are a testament to the resilience of Scotland's communities. As has been touched on, although it was inevitable that coal would eventually be replaced by cleaner energy sources, there are crucial lessons that we must take from how transition was managed or, in this case, egregiously mismanaged. Government policies left our industry uncompetitive and they neglected to provide workers and communities with pathways to a new future, thereby intensifying the miners' hardship unnecessarily in an environment of strained industrial relations.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Tom Arthur:** I will take one more intervention, as I am conscious of time.

**Douglas Lumsden:** If lessons are to be learned, will the minister say when we can see the just transition plan that many oil and gas workers are waiting for? We keep getting told that it is imminent, but we cannot wait forever.

**Tom Arthur:** I will come to those points imminently. The failure of what happened in the 1980s teaches us critical lessons as we approach another industrial shift—as has been said, the transition away from oil and gas and the move towards net zero.

The Scottish Government is determined to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. That is why we were the first country to establish a Just Transition Commission, which advises on how to make that change in a fair and just way. The principles of a just transition are embedded in our climate change legislation. Through our just transition fund, £75 million has been allocated for projects in the north-east and Moray to create highly skilled jobs and support innovation.

We have also ensured strong trade union representation on the Just Transition Commission, and, in recent years, we have provided funding to support the Scottish Trades Union Congress in its just transition efforts. That enables the trade union movement to increase its engagement with workers, thereby enhancing workers' ability to influence transitions in their sectors. By empowering workers, we will ensure that their voices shape the development of Scotland's just transition plans and that fairness and inclusivity are prioritised in that process.

Unlike what happened in the 1980s, we are determined to bring workers, communities and their representatives to the heart of decision making and to ensure, by engaging closely with trade unions, that the costs and benefits of the transition are fairly distributed and that no one is left behind.

Regeneration programmes, community wealth-building initiatives and investments such as the vacant and derelict land fund are already helping to revitalise former coalfield areas. Infrastructure projects such as the reopening of Leven station, the Alloa to Kincardine line and the Borders railway are reconnecting communities and creating economic opportunities. Those are concrete steps towards renewal, which we must continue to build on. *[Interruption.]*

Do I have time to take another intervention, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I do not think so.

**Tom Arthur:** I am afraid that I cannot.

The legacy of the miners strike highlights the importance of workplace rights and the role of trade unions. Fair work supports a more committed, better skilled and more adaptable workforce that can spot challenges and opportunities, solve problems and offer insights and ideas for improvement, thereby creating real value for organisations. The Government's fair work agenda, which we have long championed—we established the Fair Work Convention in 2015 and announced our flagship fair work first policy in 2018—supports that.

Trade unions play a vital role in achieving better terms and conditions for employees, and we will continue to champion collective bargaining and trade union recognition and to strongly oppose anti-trade union Governments and legislation, such as the Trade Union Act 2016 and the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023.

It is the Scottish Government's position that employment law should be devolved to Scotland. That is the only way to protect workers' rights from future anti-trade union Governments. However, I welcome the current UK Government's Employment Rights Bill, which has the potential to put important elements of the fair work agenda on to a statutory footing and offers opportunities for collaboration.

The miners strike was a time of profound injustice. As has been mentioned, the use of state power, through policing, the courts and the media, left deep wounds in communities, and allegations of misconduct and wrongful arrests have yet to be fully addressed.

As has been touched on, the Scottish Government has taken steps towards supporting reconciliation. However, more must be done. A full UK-wide public inquiry into the policing of the strike would provide transparency, accountability and the closure that many still seek.

We remember the courage and sacrifices that were made during that time as we work to create a fairer society. This evening's debate reminds us of the cost of mismanaged transitions and inspires us to ensure fairness in the future. I thank Richard Leonard for bringing it to Parliament, I thank members for their speeches, and I thank the miners, their families and their communities for their enduring contribution.

*Meeting closed at 18:34.*



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

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