



OFFICIAL REPORT
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Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 17 June 2025

Session 6



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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 17 June 2025

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, and our time for reflection leader today is Neil Crabtree, conflict negotiator.

Neil Crabtree: Thank you for your time. The title of this talk is, "A contemporary rite of passage for young people".

Like you, I am deeply concerned about the behaviour of young people who are carrying and using knives. Many commentators describe how young males in particular no longer have the opportunity to experience a heroic rite of passage into adult and community life. Rites of passage are a practical, spiritual and psychological phenomenon, and, up until recently in this country, that was largely provided by traditional industry. However, the environmental problems that are upon us, and which many predict are due to worsen, may provide an opportunity to create a contemporary model and draw youngsters, both males and females equally, into strengthening community life.

I will project 30 years into a future when, I think, high winds, fires and flooding will be common. Local voluntary environmental services have been organised that encourage young people to join as apprentices. These services are run by adults who themselves have been trained to become trainers by the emergency services involved—for example, the police, search and rescue, the fire brigade, the Red Cross and the Army. These adults are selected for their ability to empathise with young people. In other words, the rite element, which was largely random and unrecognised in traditional employment, is well thought through and wound around the activities—a mix of kindness, skill, knowledge and discipline.

At the age of 16, apprentices receive the following training, often in purpose-built outward-bound centres: first aid, particularly around shock, burns and resuscitation; flood management, which involves sand-bagging in teams and boat handling; high winds, which involves operating chain saws and clearing up damage; firefighting, which involves putting out bushfires; searching for missing people, including rope and tunnelling skills; and setting up emergency centres and working with people under stress.

On completing the training course, the apprentices are welcomed into the organisation/community with a formal ceremony and a meal to which they can invite friends and family. They are awarded a certificate that entitles them to reductions with popular businesses and informed that they will always be members of the service and on stand-by. Some will be called in for voluntary refresher courses and those who wish to develop skills in a particular area will be encouraged, and funded, to do so. Many become trainers in later life.

Now, back from the future. Thanks to the Quakers and Rhoda Grant.

Business Motion

14:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-18001, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to business. Any member who wishes to speak to the motion should press their request-to-speak button now.

Motion moved,

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

(a) Tuesday 17 June 2025—

delete

6.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

7.00 pm Decision Time

(b) Thursday 19 June 2025—

delete

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

and insert

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions

after

followed by Scottish Government Debate:
Progressing NACWG Recommendations
on Equality

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Alexander Dennis
Limited

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.15 pm Decision Time—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

14:04

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to see included in our business programme a ministerial statement on the situation affecting the Alexander Dennis company in my Central Scotland constituency.

Through you, Presiding Officer, I make a plea to the minister also to include an early ministerial statement in response to this morning's release of two documents that contain guidance on behaviour in schools and guidance on conducting

risk assessments on violent, aggressive and dangerous behaviour there.

In the chamber and elsewhere in the Parliament, there has been much discussion of the issues of school violence, classroom disruption and pupil-on-staff aggression; they feature regularly in our debates and questions. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills had promised to deliver those documents, and they have now been published, which I welcome. However, it is vital that, before the summer recess, we parliamentarians have an adequate opportunity to properly scrutinise their contents by asking questions of the cabinet secretary and other ministers.

I ask the Minister for Parliamentary Business to consider this additional request on my part—and on the part of many other members, I am sure—so that we can have an adequate opportunity to respond in a timely way to those important publications.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn): I suggest that Mr Kerr, and I urge all his party colleagues, perhaps to think through the internal dialogue of their group, because we have already received such a request from their business manager, which is being considered in the usual way.

Stephen Kerr: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your clarification. In responding to the motion, I did not mention that—of course, I am aware of the dialogue. However, I am also aware that, at the Parliamentary Bureau meeting earlier today, the minister was not able to give a firm commitment that members would have the opportunity to scrutinise those publications. That is why I did not reference it, although of course I am aware that there is an internal dialogue. I ask the minister to bear in mind those discussions, my comments and a letter that I wrote directly to him this morning as he decides how we will use the remaining parliamentary time before the recess.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kerr. Both of those points are on the record, although the latter was not a point of order.

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:07

National Health Service (Ambulance Turnaround Times)

1. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action is being taken to reduce ambulance turnaround times at hospitals, in light of figures showing that so far in 2025 more than half of conveyances recorded a turnaround time of longer than 45 minutes. (S6T-02591)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): Improving access to urgent care services is a key priority for the Scottish Government. On 31 March 2025, we published the NHS Scotland operational improvement plan, which sets out how we plan to improve access to treatment, including in urgent care settings. As part of our wider £21.7 billion investment in health and social care services, the plan includes an additional £200 million to reduce waiting times and improve patient flow through hospitals, which will lead to a reduction in ambulance turnaround times and in delayed discharges. We are supporting boards to strengthen facilities such as flow navigation centres, so that they are able to refer patients to more services and avoid their unnecessary conveyance to hospital in ambulances.

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary will agree that, although our paramedics do a wonderful job, they simply cannot cope with the scale of the challenge. This is the fifth recovery plan that has been published in the past four years, and none of them has worked so far. For example, in Aberdeen, an ambulance waited for more than 15 hours outside a hospital. In Ayrshire and Arran, one waited for 15 hours. In Glasgow, an ambulance waited for nearly 10 hours outside the Queen Elizabeth hospital. All of that is happening because our accident and emergency departments are bursting at the seams. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that is simply not acceptable? Will he set a maximum time by which ambulance patients must be admitted to hospital rather than queuing outside?

Neil Gray: I agree with Jackie Baillie on a number of those points. The incredible work that our Scottish Ambulance Service staff do is well recognised by me, and my gratitude goes to them. They go to remarkable, incredible lengths in serving the people whom we also seek to serve.

On Ms Baillie's point about accident and emergency bursting at the seams, I say that what we are seeing is the pressure in the whole system

contributing to pressures in particular parts of it, of which the Scottish Ambulance Service is one. That is why the operational improvement plan is focused not just on one area but on social care, general practice and primary care, on addressing delayed discharge and on providing additional capacity through frailty services adjacent to accident and emergency, as well as on providing additional capacity to reduce delayed discharge, where progress is happening.

I agree with the member that any undue delay to people being able to access services is unacceptable. That is why we are making a concerted effort to reduce the pressures that we are seeing across the system.

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary should tell that to the almost 2,000 people who are stuck in a hospital due to delayed discharge.

Not only are ambulances unable to attend calls, doctors cannot get jobs, despite record-high waiting lists for treatment, and the Royal College of Psychiatrists is reporting a £240 million shortfall in the face of a mental health emergency. The Scottish National Party has been in power for 18 years now. It has presided over this crisis. If it had an idea of how to fix it, surely we would have seen it by now.

Neil Gray: On the ambulance turnaround times that we are seeing, the investments that we are making in relation to all the aspects that Jackie Baillie speaks to are having an impact, including a substantial reduction in delayed discharge from the 2,000 figure that she quotes—delayed discharge was at its peak around Christmas time, but it is below that position now.

Of course, we must support our general practitioners and we must support our wider system. That is the very point that I was making when I said that we need to support our ambulance service to respond. The performance of our ambulance service is robust in terms of the response times of ambulance service colleagues. The median purple incident response time is at 6 minutes 45 seconds, and we are seeing an improvement in that picture.

I will do everything that I can to make sure that the whole system responds to lessen the pressure on our ambulance service, for exactly the reasons that Jackie Baillie sets out.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I receive regular reports of ambulances queued for a long time outside Victoria hospital in Kirkcaldy. The Government wasted endless amounts of time and energy on the centralisation of the care service, but it neglected the reform that the sector requires. That is the central problem. We do not have the flow through the hospital into social care. Where is

the brand-new plan to sort out social care in Scotland?

Neil Gray: I have already referenced a significant amount of intervention. The operational improvement plan, which was published earlier this year, will address some of the concerns that Mr Rennie is highlighting. It will increase the capacity of hospital at home and social care services, and it will ensure that we have call-before-you-convey services for our ambulance service. It will make sure that we have a whole-system response that looks after the individual patient, as opposed to the other way around.

There is already significant investment going on, and, in relation to oversight, we now have a national social care advisory board, which is ensuring that we respond to the needs of the social care system, because it is integral to the performance of our health service.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): There are enormous disparities in turnaround times between health boards, yet we know that delayed discharge is endemic across all the health boards.

On the cabinet secretary's assessment, why are the turnaround times in some health boards significantly lower than in others? Are there lessons or practices that are not being shared across the health boards that would improve the situation? Someone, somewhere is getting it right but, in other places, it is not happening.

Neil Gray: The member is absolutely right that the variance in delayed discharge performance among our health and social care partnerships is far too wide. The First Minister has said that on countless occasions, as have I. That is why the new Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing and I have a regular meeting with the health and social care partnerships, so that we can ensure that best practice is learned across the system.

We are working with our health boards to improve the clinical pathways to ensure that patients who can be moved through the system quickly are discharged quickly. We do not see the picture that the member paints of delayed discharge being endemic across all parts of the system, because there is good performance in some parts of it. I want to learn from those best-performing areas to ensure that we can take that best practice to the areas that are most challenged. We are providing financial and practical support in order to do just that.

Criminal Records (Transgender Prisoners)

2. Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how many transgender prisoners have had their criminal records erased, following a self-identification

process and changing of their birth name. (S6T-02590)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Let me be clear that a change of name does not, under any circumstances, alter a person's criminal record. All criminal records are maintained in accordance with established retention and sharing protocols and remain fully accessible to the justice system—including for disclosure in court proceedings where appropriate.

Police Scotland has acknowledged an error in one case, which was reported in the media, and it acknowledges that that should not have occurred. I have sought and received assurances from Police Scotland that that was an isolated incident that did not reflect broader issues in its recording practices. I have also asked Police Scotland to ensure that steps will be taken to review systems and procedures in the light of the reported case.

Meghan Gallacher: This should not have happened in the first place. We are talking about convicted criminals—some of them violent or sexual offenders—whose records could, at any point, be obscured through self-identification and a legal name change. The cabinet secretary needs to provide clarity—I am pleased that she did so in her response—because we cannot have further instances happening in the future. We need to ensure that victims, women's groups and the wider public have faith in the justice system when the Government looks at such issues, because we need to know whether there have been instances of authorities having missed a person's criminal record because they changed their gender. Is the cabinet secretary absolutely sure that that instance was an isolated one? Is she sure that we will not return to the chamber to hear of any more such instances in the future?

Angela Constance: As Police Scotland has clearly stated, that situation should not have happened. It is crucial to be very clear that a person's gender identity, legal gender status or, indeed, name does not in any way prevent the disclosure of relevant criminal information. According to the information that I have received from Police Scotland, there was an error in one case and a failure to disclose, which was not a reflection on data recording systems. The information was there on the criminal history record. I hope that I have conveyed in the strongest possible terms the assurances that I have received from Police Scotland on what is a very important matter.

Meghan Gallacher: My next question relates to the point about data. Campaigners have called for a review of Police Scotland and Crown Office policy following the story that emerged in the press at the weekend. Given that a name change

allowed an individual to separate himself from his criminal past, there needs to be a further investigation into the processes that Police Scotland and the Crown Office followed. We should not have had to wait until the initial incident took place and was reported in the press.

Record keeping is vital, especially in circumstances in which an individual changes—or can change—their name. Will the cabinet secretary commit to ending any practices by which a criminal can obscure their criminal record via a change of name or gender, to stop convicts hiding in plain sight before the authorities? Most importantly, can the cabinet secretary assure me and other members that safeguards will ensure that records are not misplaced in the system—which, as it stands, may be open to abuse, as we have seen through the story that was reported in the press?

Angela Constance: To be crystal clear, there can be no separation of any individual—irrespective of their gender, sexual identity or how often they might change their name—from their criminal past. That is because, irrespective of the reason for any name change, knowing someone's identity is absolutely critical. As has been narrated, there was a failure to disclose. Disclosure responsibilities are crucially important.

The matter was rectified. I have been assured that it is not a reflection on data recording systems. As is widely understood and as has been discussed in the chamber, Police Scotland is undertaking a wider, holistic review of recording issues in relation to trans people.

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): I do not believe that this was a mere administrative error. I believe—and I think that I have evidence to support this—that there is systemic data corruption, which has been driven by years of unlawful self-ID policy.

I also believe that the public deserve to know how many criminals have been allowed to reinvent themselves through inaccurate data capture and rewritten or obscured criminal records, which, of course, disconnect identifying data from offending histories. Data integrity is the very foundation of safeguarding. Without it, victims are failed, and the public are put at risk.

I heard what the cabinet secretary said this afternoon about ordering a review, but I ask her to go further. I ask her to order a full and complete audit of all that data corruption, to fix it and, finally, to bring it out into the public realm.

Angela Constance: It is important for the public, who might be listening, to know that criminal records cannot be and are not rewritten or erased on the basis of gender identity. A legal change of name or the possession of a gender

recognition certificate does not alter the substance of a criminal record, and nor does it prevent the justice system from accessing or disclosing relevant conviction history.

The management and updating of criminal records is, of course, an operational matter for Police Scotland, which is bound by existing law and is subject to regular audit and oversight. Where concerns have arisen, I have requested clarity from relevant justice partners to ensure that public confidence is upheld.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): I note that the cabinet secretary used the words “gender” and “sexual identity”. Before asking my question, I will say that any legal action that was brought against the Scottish Prison Service in respect of its policies would be brought against the Scottish ministers. Have the Scottish Prison Service's policies been brought into line with the Supreme Court judgment in *For Women Scotland Ltd v the Scottish ministers*?

Angela Constance: As a minister, I would never comment on live proceedings, but, again, I cannot stress more how clear I have been and how clear the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and other ministers have been that there is a Supreme Court judgment. We are all, at pace, working through the implications for implementation. Of course, we await the Equality and Human Rights Commission's code of practice, which it is consulting on. A great amount of work is going on across the length and breadth of Government to ensure that, once we receive further information from the EHRC, we are ready for implementation. We are in a state of readiness to act once further information comes our way.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): This is clearly a shambles. We know that dangerous male offenders have gamed the Scottish National Party system to serve their sentences in women's prisons, and now they are getting their criminal records wiped. The chair of the EHRC said that the law that the Supreme Court ruling sets out is “unambiguous” and “effective immediately” and that

“Those with duties under the Equality Act should be following it”.

I wrote to Police Scotland and the Scottish Prison Service to demand that they comply with the Supreme Court ruling, but their response showed that they are still stalling. Given the latest outrage, will ministers now finally intervene, remove all biological men from women's prisons and ensure that all public bodies are following the law?

Angela Constance: It is utterly inaccurate, misleading and somewhat disingenuous—if not disgraceful—to suggest that Police Scotland wipes

criminal records. Under no circumstances does Police Scotland wipe criminal records, and under no circumstances can anyone, irrespective of their name or status—whether they are male, female or transgender—escape from a criminal past. They cannot do so.

With regard to the second part of Ms Dowey's question, right now, the Scottish Government is making the necessary preparations for implementation.

Child Poverty

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Shirley-Anne Somerville on the tackling child poverty delivery plan annual progress report 2024-25. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:25

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville):

The Scottish Government has today published its annual progress report on child poverty, setting out the detail of our continued implementation of the programme that was set out in the "Best Start, Bright Futures: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-2026" document and reporting against the interim child poverty targets that were agreed unanimously by this Parliament.

In the past year, the Scottish Government has faced some of the most challenging fiscal circumstances in the history of devolution, but we know that the pressures on families who are in poverty have been greater still. The report highlights that, despite those challenges and the continued detrimental impact of United Kingdom Government decision making, we are making real progress in Scotland, which is changing the lives of families. We are committed to building on those firm foundations and remain unequivocal in our commitment to meeting the 2030 targets and to tackling the scourge of child poverty in our society.

Looking first at the interim target, statistics that were published in March and are presented in today's report show that, despite significant challenges, levels of both relative and absolute poverty reduced in 2023-24. Although the long-term trend broadly remains stable, the proportion of children who lived in relative poverty in 2023-24 was the lowest since 2014-15, while the proportion of children who lived in absolute poverty was the lowest in 30 years. The rates of both relative and absolute poverty stood nine percentage points below the UK average in 2023-24. To put that in context, were rates in Scotland to be the same as they are in the UK, that would be equivalent to 90,000 additional children in poverty.

Although the Joseph Rowntree Foundation predicts that child poverty will rise in other parts of the UK by 2029, it highlighted that policies such as the Scottish Government's Scottish child payment and our commitment to mitigate the two-child limit

"are behind Scotland bucking the trend".

Although our policies are having to work harder than ever to make a difference, modelling that was published by the Government in March reinforced

the significant impact that those policies are having. It is estimated that the lowest-income families will be an average of £2,600 better off this year as a result of our policies, with that figure increasing to an estimated £3,700 by the end of the decade.

As is set out in the report, there is no single reason that the interim targets have not been met. A wide range of factors, including the headwinds of more than a decade of UK Government austerity, Brexit and the Covid pandemic, have all made meeting the interim targets particularly challenging. However, data demonstrates the significant impact of UK Government policies, which have worked against us—not least the two-child limit, which has caused poverty rates to rise in larger families, while they have fallen for families with one or two children.

It is deeply disappointing that the interim targets have not been met. However, we have made progress, and we will continue to build on those foundations to reach the 2030 targets.

On delivery in the past year, 2024-25 saw some of the most challenging fiscal circumstances in the history of devolution, as the outgoing chancellor delivered unfunded tax cuts at the expense of public services and support for struggling families. Combined with the failure to inflation proof capital budgets, that meant that we had to make difficult decisions to prioritise spend and protect the most vulnerable in our society.

Even so, we continued to invest more than £1.4 billion in support that benefited children in low-income families. That investment enabled us to continue delivering critical support, including awarding more than £455 million to families through the Scottish child payment, providing support for more than 6,000 parents through devolved employability services and mitigating the UK Government's benefit cap to support almost 10,000 children.

We have also taken steps to further strengthen the support that is available. That includes the expansion of our ambitious fairer future partnerships into five more local authority areas, the expansion of our successful council tax debt pilot project into six new local authority areas and the delivery of a second round of our child poverty practice accelerator fund, which supports a range of innovative local action.

We responded to the emerging needs of families by delivering £2.9 million of funding to cancel historical school meal debt and a £41 million package of measures to support households struggling with energy costs over the winter. As is set out in the report, 68 of the 113 actions reported on this year were either

completed or delivering at scale, which is an increase from 60 as of March 2024.

The action that we have taken stands in stark contrast to that of the current and previous UK Governments. Although I welcome the establishment of the UK Government's child poverty task force, and early actions, including the fair repayment rate in universal credit and the Employment Rights Bill, the reality is that the action that has been taken so far has lacked the necessary urgency and fails to meet the scale of the challenge.

It is deeply disappointing that the two-child benefit cap remains UK Government policy. That policy is estimated to have pulled more than 35,000 children into poverty since July last year, and estimates suggest that it will pull a further 20,000 children into poverty by the autumn unless it is scrapped. That inaction is made worse still by the UK Government's plans to make deep cuts to social security for disabled people. The Department for Work and Pension's own impact assessments highlight that, by 2029-30, an estimated 3.9 million families will lose out as a result of reforms and that they risk driving an additional 250,000 people across the UK into poverty, including 50,000 children. I urge the UK Government to reverse those damaging cuts and to work with us in eradicating child poverty. The actions of the Scottish Government show that another way is possible, and it is one that gives us hope for the future.

In the final year of the "Best Start, Bright Futures" programme and of this session of Parliament, we will continue to drive forward progress towards the 2030 targets and take steps to improve the lives of and outcomes for families. That includes further investment in childcare; delivering more free breakfast club places; providing additional support in school holidays for children with disability; and expanding our extra time partnership with the Scottish Football Association so that 5,000 children and their families can benefit. In addition, we are allocating £768 million for our affordable housing supply programme, enabling the delivery of more than 8,000 homes, with £40 million being targeted at local authorities facing the most sustained temporary accommodation pressures. It also includes further expanding provision of free school meals, so that around 25,000 children and young people can further benefit.

Because the UK Government is failing to act, we are urgently driving forward action that will, in effect, scrap the impact of the universal credit two-child benefit cap in Scotland. I am pleased to announce today that, subject to the passing of the necessary legislation, Social Security Scotland will accept applications for the two-child limit payment

from 2 March 2026, with payments beginning as soon as possible after that date. The Scottish Fiscal Commission estimates that mitigation payments will be made in respect of 43,000 children at a total cost of £155 million in 2025-26, rising to 50,000 children and £194 million by 2029-30.

It is estimated that that mitigation will reduce the number of children living in poverty by 20,000 next year. In addition, it will significantly reduce the depth of poverty experienced by thousands more as a result of payments that could be worth more than £3,500 per child. As the First Minister has said, if the UK Government does the right thing and scraps the cap, we are committed to investing mitigation spend into further ambitious measures to tackle child poverty, enabling us to accelerate progress in the years ahead.

Alongside our continued focus on delivery, we have already begun to engage with partners and Parliament to inform the development of the next tackling child poverty delivery plan. That includes launching our call for evidence in February and working with partners, including Young Scot, the Poverty Alliance and Changing Realities, to meaningfully engage children and young people, and parents themselves, to help to inform the next plan.

The plan will also be informed by new research that we have published today, including the outputs from a review of international approaches to tackling child poverty and research that is focused on gender and child poverty, and by both the final report from our independent expert group on the minimum income guarantee and the advice of the Poverty and Inequality Commission.

Covering 2026-31, the plan will be the final plan ahead of the 2030 targets, and it will be progressed by the Scottish Government that will be formed following the next Holyrood elections. That offers the opportunity to build consensus across the Parliament and Scotland on the actions that need to be taken in the years ahead. I thank the committees for their input to date, and I look forward to engaging with members across the chamber as we continue this important work.

Together with our partners, including local government, we will continue to do everything within the scope of our powers and our budget to continue to drive progress towards the 2030 targets that were unanimously agreed by the Scottish Parliament. I urge the UK Government to match the ambition and investment of the Scottish Government and to work with us to help to end child poverty. I encourage all members, regardless of political beliefs, to work with the Government to develop a plan that will build on the progress that has been made and deliver enduring reductions in child poverty for generations to come.

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

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for prior sight of her statement. I put on the record, again, that the Scottish Conservatives, like all other parties in the chamber, absolutely see child poverty as an important issue.

I will concentrate my questions on the Scottish Fiscal Commission's most recent report. First, the SFC says that the Scottish Government's mitigation of the two-child cap would be one of two major factors contributing to the widening gap between social security spend in Scotland and available funding. Where will cuts be made to pay for that mitigation?

Secondly, how does the cabinet secretary respond to the claims from some independent economic analysts that the mitigation will create perverse incentives against working, at a time when Scotland is already facing significantly higher percentages of economic inactivity than elsewhere? Does she think that that might be the reason why a lot of members of the public support the two-child cap?

Finally, the Scottish Fiscal Commission has calculated that the mitigation will cost £156 million in 2026-27 and that that will rise to £199 million—which is a slightly different figure from the one that the cabinet secretary just gave—over the period to 2029-30. Can the cabinet secretary explain why a 27.5 per cent increase is expected in that short period of time?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: On the last point, a number of children will be brought into the two-child cap because of the way that it brings in more families as the children age. That is why there is a difference in the numbers.

I take Liz Smith's point about dealing with economic inactivity. That is why the Deputy First Minister and other ministers have been resolute in our determination to assist people who are economically inactive to move into employment with the help of employability schemes or childcare schemes. However, it is important that we do that by supporting people out of economic inactivity, instead of punishing them for having children, which is exactly what the two-child cap does.

Liz Smith is also right to say that some of the challenges around the Scottish Fiscal Commission's forecasts of the cost of social security result from Scottish Government

decisions that have been taken to keep children out of poverty despite the two-child cap, and from the UK Government's determination to push children into poverty by reducing the spend on disabled people. We have made those choices to protect disabled people and children because we need to protect them from the effects of poverty. Those decisions will be set out in the work that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government has taken forward on the sustainability of our finances. We recognise that challenge

Finally, the easiest way to deal with those challenges is for the UK Government to follow the principles that it claims to have and scrap the two-child cap and its proposals to cut disabled benefits. That would take away the challenges that Liz Smith points to.

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance sight of her statement, both at the usual time and in her morning press exclusives.

There has been a lot of spin and, in the statement, there is a myriad of excuses, but the reality is that there is also failure. For all the rhetoric that we have had from the First Minister and the cabinet secretary, after the Scottish National Party's 18 years in office, relative child poverty, after housing costs, has fallen by only 1 per cent. When the cabinet secretary says that rates are "broadly ... stable", what she really means is that the dial has not shifted.

On the two-child limit, over the history of that policy, Scottish Labour has been consistently clear that we want it to be scrapped, but the haphazard and last-minute decision to include its mitigation in the budget makes a mockery of the claim that the cabinet secretary made over many years that she was powerless to do anything about it. I note the letter that has been issued before we meet her this afternoon, which outlines that applications will be open but does not say when payments will be made. It also talks about using Scottish child payment data—the cabinet secretary was not willing to admit to that in the past.

On the wider picture facing Scotland's young people and the root causes of child poverty, responsibility for failing to meet the targets lies with the Scottish Government. It is the SNP that failed to deliver on its commitments to expand free school meals; it is the SNP that stripped employability services to the bone; and it is the SNP that created a housing emergency, with 10,000 children in temporary accommodation. Is it not the truth that more of the same will not deliver the 2030 targets and that the SNP Government is out of ideas and out of time to meaningfully reduce child poverty?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: What Labour has delivered since it came into power is a review of universal credit and a delayed child poverty task force report. The reason why the Scottish Government stepped forward at the budget is that some people—I can appreciate where they came from on this—actually thought that a change of United Kingdom Government, from Conservative to Labour, would make a difference, but it did not. That is why the Scottish Government will deliver the effective scrapping of the two-child cap when Labour has failed to do so. We are determined to move forward on that, and to do so more quickly than we had originally thought that we could.

The payments will come after people apply, depending on when their universal credit is paid. That is because we have a devolved system that relies on parts of the system that are reserved and that relate to universal credit. The simple way for us to deal with the issue is to have all the powers here and not to rely in any way on a Labour Government's promises or the false hopes that it raised before an election and on which it continues to fail to deliver afterwards.

The Presiding Officer: I call Emma Harper.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I am having an iPad issue—thank you for bearing with me.

It has previously been reported that the rate of child poverty among rural Dumfries and Galloway communities has hit a record high and that Dumfries and Galloway had a child poverty rate of 26.9 per cent in 2022-23. Given the clear link between Labour's policy of the two-child cap and child poverty, will the cabinet secretary update us again on the Scottish Government's plans to end the impact of the two-child cap in Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I have confirmed, the payment will open for applications on 2 March. That is earlier than we had planned, which shows our determination to move as quickly as possible on the issue. Emma Harper is right to point to the challenge of poverty in rural areas and in other communities across Scotland. The level of poverty, particularly among larger families, is absolutely related to the impact of the two-child cap. That is why campaigners have been campaigning for change, why they are disappointed that the UK Government has refused to come forward with that policy and why we will deliver it on 2 March.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Access to affordable good-quality childcare is essential to supporting parents back into work. That was highlighted in a Social Justice and Social Security Committee report last year, and it is a recognised route out of poverty. The progress report highlights the recruitment of 40 new

childminders as a result of the programme for Scotland's childminding future, which is, of course, welcome. However, that equates to roughly one and a quarter new childminders per local authority.

Given that the Scottish Government's expansion of early years childcare from 21 August was predicated on working with the private sector and childminders, and that Scotland lost 255 childminders in 2022-23 alone, with the total almost halving since the SNP came into power, does the cabinet secretary think that the recruitment drive goes anywhere near far enough to address the shortage, which is entirely of the Government's making? When will the barriers to parental employment be properly addressed?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: In my statement, I detailed some of the work that has been undertaken and will be undertaken next year to assist with the delivery of early learning and childcare and out-of-hours support for working families.

Our expansion of early learning and childcare has been exceptionally important. Scotland is the only part of the UK to already offer 1,140 hours a year of funded ELC to three and four-year-olds and eligible two-year-olds. Childminders are an important part of the flexibility that will be taken forward. The encouragement of more childminders into early learning and childcare and the work that is being undertaken to support that is exceptionally important, as is the work that is being taken forward in our 23 early adopter communities.

Regarding school-age childcare programme work, I have mentioned the extra time programme and the bright start breakfasts programme, which are examples of policies that not only help early learning and childcare but offer different approaches that might be suitable for families. Work has also been undertaken in school-age childcare in order to support the flexibility that people need when they are looking to get into the workplace or expand their hours.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement. What engagement has the cabinet secretary had with the Secretary of State for Scotland about the development of a UK-wide child poverty strategy?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland joined the most recent ministerial task force meeting on 14 May. The work that the UK Government has undertaken through the child poverty task force on a four-nation basis has been exceptionally disappointing. It has not allowed for the level of in-depth discussions that the Scottish Government wished to see and expected, given the discussions between the First Minister and Prime Minister

about a resetting of relationships when the new UK Government came in.

Clearly, we are very concerned about the delay to the child poverty task force report, because that seems to suggest that the action that comes from the report will also be delayed. We have asked for clarity from the task force co-chairs in order to get at least some idea of what might be in the report, so that we know its impact on children and what we can do with the UK Government to support even more children.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Data that has come out today shows that the number of young people in the most deprived communities who go on to a positive destination has fallen to the lowest point since 2019 and that the gap has widened. The impact of the SNP's failure to meet the interim child poverty targets is leaving Scotland's most disadvantaged pupils behind.

What is fundamentally wrong with the Government's approach is that it refuses to change direction or address the root causes of poverty. Education and skills are key to that, but there was precious little on those aspects in the Government's statement. The Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Bill has been roundly rejected by stakeholders, and colleges, which are key to lifting people out of poverty, barely get a mention—there was nothing in the statement to address budget concerns, course closures or college staff losing their jobs. What will it take for the Government to realise that education and colleges are key to lifting people out of poverty?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Education is critical to our approach, which is exactly why we are investing up to £1 billion in the Scottish attainment challenge in this parliamentary session, including in pupil equity funding, in order to empower our headteachers to take approaches that best suit their pupils' needs. That is an exceptionally important piece of the work that we are undertaking. The poverty-related attainment gap between young people from the most deprived areas and those from the least deprived areas who are meeting standards in literacy in primary school is at a record low, so we are seeing progress.

It is very important that we look to our colleges and universities to encourage young people on whatever path they choose. Once again, we have heard a long list of suggestions from Labour on how to spend money, but it has shown absolutely no responsibility by failing to bring forward plans on how any of those suggestions would be paid for. I am not surprised, but I continue to be disappointed by that.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I note that Professor Danny Dorling has published a piece that praises the Scottish Government's work on tackling child poverty, in which he says:

"Scotland has shown what can be done and needs to be done."

With Scotland setting an example on what can be achieved, he predicts that Westminster will be forced to act. I am keen to understand whether the UK Government has acknowledged the success of the Scottish child payment and whether there have been any discussions about creating a UK-wide benefit.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am continually disappointed by the UK Government's lack of progress on that issue. There has been a lot of back and forth between Labour members—I hope that they are conferring among themselves on how they can perhaps persuade their Labour colleagues down south, because I spot a bit of uncomfortableness on the part of the Scottish Labour Party today. We are bringing forward plans to mitigate policies from a UK Labour Government. I never thought that that would be needed.

Whether it relates to the UK Government's lack of action on the two-child cap or to our learning from the Scottish child payment, we stand ready to assist the UK Government should it wish to introduce policies that, as Professor Dorling has said, have made a major difference in tackling poverty in Scotland.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Earlier this month, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation provided a toolkit that describes the wide-ranging transformations that are needed if we are to meet the 2031 child poverty reduction targets. It makes clear the distinctions between poverty, deep poverty and very deep poverty. One in three children in poverty are in deep poverty and are more than £1,000 a month away from getting out of poverty. The Scottish child payment and employment support will not close that gap. If we do not deal with very deep poverty, we will not reach our targets. What holistic and targeted interventions are planned that will focus on families in deep and very deep poverty?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Maggie Chapman is quite right to point to the specific challenge of deep poverty. In the JRF's "UK Poverty 2024" report, it is clear that six successive UK Prime Ministers have overseen deepening poverty over the past 20 years. It describes that as "social failure at scale".

That is exactly why the Government looks not only at how many children we can keep out of poverty and how many children we can assist in many different ways, but at how we can help

children to get out of deep poverty. It is positive that the level of deep poverty among children fell by four percentage points in 2023-24. That means that 40,000 fewer children were in deep poverty because of the work that the Scottish Government has undertaken. However, I recognise that the Scottish and UK Governments have more to do on the issue.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I am afraid that the cabinet secretary's statement is wholly depressing. The Government seems to be more interested in attacking the Labour Party than in solving child poverty in this country. We should have a direct focus on that.

Although I support the Scottish child payment—providing direct cash payments is a good thing—we know that it is not sustainable in the long term for struggling families or for the public finances. We should be putting more investment into projects such as the Wise Group's relational mentoring programme. I know that the Government is supporting that project, but I wish that there was more excitement about lifting families out of poverty in a sustainable way for the long term, instead of all the politicking that is going on this afternoon.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I appreciate Willie Rennie's frustration. I am frustrated, too, but perhaps for a different reason. I can see what a difference it would make if we had two Governments, rather than just one, trying to lift people out of poverty, so I make no apologies for pointing out the reality that we are in.

However, Willie Rennie is quite right to point out that it is not simply a question of making direct payments to people, such as the Scottish child payment; we need to undertake other work. I will give some examples of the work that is contained in the report that I mentioned.

Our fairer futures partnerships are being expanded into more local authority areas, and we are doing work on our whole-family holistic approach. We are doing that because, as I see when I go on visits and as the evidence shows, we make the biggest difference when we assist young people and their families to address the various challenges that have an impact on them. I am talking about a systemic change rather than a change that simply involves giving money out to assist people to deal with the immediate poverty that they are in.

When it comes to our approach, I do not think that it is a case of either/or, although I am afraid that it is when it comes to how to spend money, because we can spend money either on the Scottish child payment or on other issues, but we cannot spend it twice.

I recognise the challenge that the member rightly puts to the Government in relation to the Scottish child payment and the wider support that we need to give to people. I hope that, when he reads through the publication in detail, he will see the work that we are doing through, for example, the fairer futures partnerships and our determination to progress those.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): Unlike some members, I see the positives of much of what the cabinet secretary has said today. I can see from the cabinet secretary's statement that the eradication of child poverty is clearly at the heart of the Scottish Government's plans and ambitions. How will measures and investments arising from the 2025-26 budget drive forward those plans?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: A number of areas in the 2025-26 budget will assist the Government with the eradication of child poverty. Those important measures include the provision of 8,000 affordable homes, the expansion of free school meals to a further 25,000 children and low-income families, and our continued delivery of unique support through the Scottish child payment.

On a recent visit to Renfrew, I saw the important work that has been undertaken by the extra time partnership to encourage young people to stay on at school and take part in extra time partnership activities. I spoke to the parents who were there that night about the difference that that had made by allowing them to take on extra shifts or get back into employment. That is a positive programme, and the budget for this year will allow us to expand it.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): We are hearing the same thing time and time again. It is always someone else's fault when it comes to the SNP failing to achieve its targets.

Over the years, the Scottish Government has promised to deliver a number of policies to eradicate child poverty, such as free laptops, free bikes, smaller classroom sizes, new swing parks and closing the attainment gap, to name just a few. However, not one of those policies has been delivered in full.

I want to go back to the important question that was raised by my colleague Liz Smith about the mitigation of the two-child cap. The issue comes down to finances. As Liz Smith rightly pointed out, the mitigation of that policy will contribute significantly to worsening the pressure on the social security budget. I will simply repeat the question, because I do not believe that the cabinet secretary answered it when Liz Smith asked it originally. How will that be funded?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: This is about setting out responsibilities. Today, I have set out the responsibilities that the Scottish Government feels

very deeply, and I have set out the responsibilities that I expect the UK Government to have on child poverty. Again, I make no apology for that, because it is a simple statement of fact: if we want children to be lifted out of poverty, it would help if both Governments were pointing in the same direction.

I am also concerned when we discuss the level of expenditure on social security, which the Scottish Conservatives' leader and others continuously say that they want to be cut. We have made decisions to scrap the two-child cap, in effect, and to invest in the Scottish child payment, because we want to lift children out of poverty.

The Scottish Conservatives need to be very clear to people. If they want to cut social security expenditure, do they plan to take it from disabled people, as the Labour Party does? Do they intend to take it from carers or from low-income families?

We will balance our budget in every year, as we always do. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government will set out the sustainability of our finances, but the Tories also need to come clean about whose benefits they would cut—would they cut the benefits of disabled people, of low-income people or of carers?

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank the cabinet secretary for outlining her vision and priority of lifting children out of poverty. How are UK Government policies actively contributing to the problem? What is the Government's assessment of the delays to the work of the UK Government's child poverty task force?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: My assessment of the delay in the production of the task force's report is that I fear that the UK Government knows that its current policies are making the situation worse rather than better. One thing that I hear is supposed to be happening tomorrow is the UK Government's announcement of its determination to cut benefits for disabled people, which, as I mentioned earlier, will push 50,000 children into poverty. That one policy, which is apparently being announced this week, will push 50,000 children into poverty. That policy is being announced in the same week that I have made a statement on how we are lifting children out of poverty.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement. There will be a brief pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a statement by Neil Gray on delivering reform and renewal for health and social care.

15:01

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to update Parliament on the Scottish Government's progress in advancing the health and social care reform programme, following the vision that I announced to Parliament last year and what was set out in the First Minister's speech in January.

Today marks an important milestone in that journey. I am pleased to announce the publication of "Scotland's Population Health Framework" and the "Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework", which are two vital components in delivering our shared vision for a healthier, fairer and more resilient Scotland. Together, the frameworks represent a significant step forward in shaping a future where people live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives.

As the First Minister outlined earlier this year, we are taking bold and ambitious action to reform our health and care systems, delivering the transformation that the people of Scotland need and expect. Alongside the "NHS Scotland Operational Improvement Plan", published in March, which is about improving service delivery now, the frameworks will drive forward public service reform in health and care, with a focus on prevention and on joined-up, efficient services. They provide clear direction on how we will plan and deliver services for the whole population over the next decade, while tackling the deep-rooted inequalities that continue to impact health and wellbeing across Scotland. As the First Minister set out just yesterday, they are part of an essential shift to a front-foot focus on prevention. They are public service reform in action in our health and care system.

The population health framework, which was co-developed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, reflects our shared, long-term commitment to improving health and wellbeing across Scotland through a preventative, system-wide approach that addresses the broader drivers of health. Improving health and reducing inequality remains central to the Government's ambition, yet we must face a hard truth: people in Scotland still experience vastly different health outcomes depending on where they live and the circumstances that they face. Too many people in our most deprived communities live shorter lives

and spend more of those years in poor health. That cannot continue.

The core purpose of the population health framework is to improve life expectancy for everyone in Scotland and to reduce the unjust and avoidable gap between our most and least deprived communities. By shifting the focus from treating illness to preventing it, addressing the root causes of poor health and targeting our efforts where they are needed most, we can ensure lasting improvements for this generation and the next.

Most of what affects our health happens outside health and care settings; it happens in homes, in nurseries and schools, in workplaces, and in parks and green spaces—it happens in each and every one of our communities. That is why the framework contains 30 initial actions across these drivers of health: good early years, jobs, income and powerful communities.

The framework focuses on two early priorities: hardwiring prevention into our systems—how we plan, deliver, budget and account—and improving healthy weight. We know the toll on the health of our people from being overweight or living with obesity, and we know that that is preventable. The evidence tells us that tackling the environment is key. That is why one of the first actions of the population health framework will be to legislate to make the balance of foods that are available on promotion healthier and to restrict the location of less healthy foods in our supermarkets. That is what clinical leaders who treat our people have called for, and we will align with similar legislation in England and Wales, which is what our business leaders have called for.

This is the whole-system approach in action, delivering the decisive shift to prevention that the First Minister has called for. The approach follows the evidence; tackles the environment without blaming the individual; works with business and not against it; and involves all of us, across all our sectors and interests, working together.

As we move through the next decade, the framework will evolve and adapt to future challenges, meeting emerging needs and driving progress where it is needed most. Today, alongside the framework, we have published four sector summaries on the roles that the whole system plays in creating health. Developed by our business sector leaders, our community and voluntary sector leaders, our local government colleagues and national health service leaders, the summaries demonstrate the role that all sectors play in health and the opportunity that they all have to do more to improve health.

The business sector influences health through good employment with fair incomes, through the

goods and services that it produces and by supporting thriving local economies. The NHS plays a central role in improving health, not only through the delivery of healthcare but as an anchor institution that works in partnership with local communities to improve the building blocks of health. Local government offers a critical leadership role and collaborates through local partnerships to deliver public services that strengthen health. The community and voluntary sector is uniquely situated to build trust, reach key population groups and support prevention through person-centred approaches, the delivery of critical services and the creation of community assets. That is the whole-system approach that public service reform requires, and we are grateful to our system leaders across all sectors for their work in developing the summaries.

In tandem with the population health framework, the health and social care service renewal framework sets out a clear path to ensuring a sustainable, high-performing health and social care system that can meet the future demands and evolving needs of our population. It will ensure long-term financial sustainability, reduce health and care inequalities, further harness the benefits of digital technology and improve health outcomes for people in Scotland.

Five principles that will shape the future of care in Scotland are at the service renewal framework's core. The first is prevention. The population health framework looks to prevent illness occurring in the first place; the service renewal framework builds on that, with a focus on early detection and supporting those living with long-term conditions.

The second principle is people. We will design care around individuals and not systems. People will be empowered to be more in charge of their care and more involved in the decisions about their support and treatment.

The third principle is community. By rebalancing our resources, it will be easier for people to access services and a broader range of treatments closer to home.

The fourth principle is population. We will plan services based on the needs of our populations and not according to administrative or geographical boundaries.

The fifth principle is digital. We will embrace technology to improve people's access to modern, joined-up and efficient services. People will have the choice to access information and services digitally in an inclusive manner. That means that more treatment will be delivered safely closer to home, whether someone lives in a town, in a rural village or on an island. For example, our digital front door service will mean that you can manage your condition, co-ordinate your appointments and

see your diagnostic results all from your own phone.

For our workforce, our effort to capitalise on digital innovation means having the right digital access and information that they need to do the best job possible. That will streamline support, reduce their administrative workload and free them up to spend more time with patients and people.

Digital systems and smarter ways of working are not just enhancements but essential enablers of reform. The ability to meet our health and social care reform objectives hinges on how effectively digital tools are deployed and making digital transformation a strategic imperative for sustainable, high-performing health and social care services. The transformation will be underpinned by strengthened governance, providing clear accountability, robust oversight and empowered leadership.

Through those principles and the major changes that we have set out in them, people will experience faster and fairer access to services; the workforce will have new opportunities to deliver care more effectively and efficiently; and we will create a system fit for the future.

As the First Minister highlighted yesterday during his visit to the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, the renewal of Scotland's essential public services must be rooted in a long-term vision that prioritises prevention and early intervention. Both the population health framework and the service renewal framework place prevention at their core.

To support this transformation, we are bringing together existing national resources, which are currently spread across several national boards, into a single, co-ordinated body to be called NHS delivery. As part of that change, we will merge NHS National Services Scotland and NHS Education for Scotland. That will ensure that we are better equipped to deliver key priorities, including making progress on our digital ambitions. It will enable us to provide clear, streamlined support to local systems to deliver on once for Scotland services, both for NHS Scotland and, potentially, for the wider public sector.

We are not proposing structural changes for the Scottish Ambulance Service and NHS 24, but we expect them to work much more closely together, supported by enhanced joint planning and co-ordination, building on existing collaboration. That will support transformational improvements in urgent care, so that people can access timely, appropriate support wherever and whenever they need it.

I want to acknowledge the vital partnership with COSLA to develop both the frameworks. I call on partners across the Government, local authorities, the NHS, the third sector, business and

communities to continue to work with us to deliver this ambition. We developed the frameworks together and I want to implement them together.

I spoke earlier about all of us, with all our interests, working together to improve health. That applies to members in this chamber, too. I know that all members want our people to enjoy good health and for our services to be modern, joined up and efficient. Together, through shared purpose and co-ordinated action, we can build a system that not only treats illness but helps people to live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. It would be helpful if members who wish to ask questions were to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for early sight of his statement. Having read the statement, my overriding feeling is: what a breakthrough. Who would have thought that investing in preventative health and digital solutions would benefit the NHS and the health of our nation? Rarely have so many statements of the blindingly obvious been contained in a single Scottish Government publication.

In my first debate, on 7 June 2016, I championed preventative spend and investment in digital solutions. The then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, Shona Robison, said:

“I am committed to taking forward our health and social care agenda in the context of public sector improvement and against the four pillars of public sector reform in our response to the Christie report”,

those being

“prevention; integration at a local level; workforce development; and a focus on performance, with outcomes-based targets.”—[*Official Report*, 7 June 2016; c 9.]

Scotland’s poor health record and low healthy life expectancy are no secret. In fact, the solutions have been in front of us for decades.

How will the cabinet secretary quantify preventative spend and measure success? Considering that the documents have apparently taken years to come together, when does he expect the changes in them to be achieved?

Finally, the much-trumpeted digital front door, commonly known as the NHS app and first announced in 2021, is expected to be providing limited services to dermatology patients in Lanarkshire by the end of the year. When does the cabinet secretary expect it to be able to do for patients in Scotland what it can already do for all the patients in the rest of the United Kingdom?

Neil Gray: I thank Brian Whittle for what I think was his support for what we have set out in the documents. I recognise that there has to be a continued emphasis on prevention. With regard to what Ms Robison set out when she was in my role, significant steps have been made to move to a more preventative model, including the work that has been done on urgent care pathways and the hospital at home service, for example.

However, the statement is an acknowledgement that we need to do more. We need to go further and we need to go faster. On delivery, both of the documents set out the progress that we wish to make over the coming years, and I expect to see some elements of them delivered quickly. Some changes will be happening now, such as those that I announced in relation to foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar, and our proposed structural changes to some of our national boards.

On Brian Whittle’s question about the digital front door, he is correct. The initial pilot is happening in Lanarkshire at the end of this year and we expect to roll it out to the rest of Scotland in 2026.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): This is simply tinkering around the edges. The Scottish National Party Government’s plan would simply merge two special boards rather than implement effective reform. It amounts to gesture politics that will not create an NHS in which systems work together and money follows the patient. Whatever the new board might be called, the hallmark of this Government will be its lack of delivery. If Neil Gray wants me to come up with ideas, he should tell John Swinney to call the election now and I will do the job for him.

I am not holding my breath over the promise of using an NHS app that has been used by NHS England since 2018 and that, although it was developed by a Glasgow headquartered company, has been ignored by the SNP. The SNP made a manifesto commitment to have an all-Scotland app, but we are to have a pilot in NHS Lanarkshire alone. That commitment has been broken but, cynically, it is now being reannounced.

The cabinet secretary rightly talks about prevention, but for the past 18 years the SNP Government has funded crisis rather than prevention. Audit Scotland has identified cuts of £560 million in social care—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Baillie, please put your question to the cabinet secretary. You are over your time.

Jackie Baillie: Of course. In this year alone, services are being cut to the bone—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, Ms Baillie—we need questions.

Jackie Baillie: Today's statement amounts to little more than gaslighting the people of Scotland—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Baillie, please put your question. You are well over your time.

Jackie Baillie: —with announcements of measures that will never deliver—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Will you please put your question?

Jackie Baillie: I am trying to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are over your time, Ms Baillie.

Jackie Baillie: —coming from a Government that is running out of ideas and fast running out of time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I do not know that there was a question there.

Jackie Baillie: There was.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, please respond.

Neil Gray: I am not convinced that there was a question there, Presiding Officer.

I am genuinely seeking to engage with members from across the Parliament on the contents of what we have put to them. The service renewal framework and the population health framework are about making generational shifts in the way in which we deliver our health and social care services by moving to a more preventative model, shifting the balance of care so that more services are delivered in our communities and ensuring that we intervene earlier and do not see an escalation in an individual's poor health.

The digital front door will go further than the NHS app that is available elsewhere goes. It will be an integrated health and social care digital front door to ensure that there will be the element of co-ordination that Jackie Baillie asked for but is not being delivered elsewhere in the UK. I will be more than happy to work with her and other members to ensure that the vision for health and social care services that is set out in the documents is delivered.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members who seek to ask questions to check that they have pressed their request-to-speak buttons.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have heard from constituents who are British Sign Language users who have been assessed for a care support package but cannot access it due to a lack of BSL-trained support workers. I know that they are keen to hear the outcome of the inquiry that the Equalities, Human

Rights and Civil Justice Committee is currently holding. Can the cabinet secretary provide any reassurance to BSL users that health services are aware of gaps in provision and are focusing on closing those gaps?

Neil Gray: A shared aim of the population health framework and the service renewal framework is to reduce health inequalities by ensuring that services are designed and delivered in ways that are inclusive, equitable and responsive to the needs of all communities.

The Government's BSL national plan, which was published in 2023, represents our on-going commitment to making Scotland the best place in the world for BSL users to live in. Equal access, opportunity, representation and inclusion are key components of our plan, which apply across areas such as education, health, justice and culture. Through the national plan's implementation advisory group, we will work with key partners who represent deaf and deafblind communities to ensure that we are held accountable for the actions in the plan and to draw on their experience to strengthen delivery, including in the areas that Emma Roddick has asked about.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Annie Wells is joining us remotely.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): The Government says that it wants to prioritise community-based preventative care but, right now, Glasgow's Huntington's disease specialist service is facing closure. It consists of front-line professionals who prevent hospital admissions and support families in crisis. Will the cabinet secretary act to protect those essential services before more vulnerable families are left behind?

Neil Gray: I recognise the issue that Annie Wells has posed and the seriousness with which the community in Glasgow that receives support with Huntington's disease. We are working on the two documents in collaboration with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, in recognition of the fact that, in many ways, local authorities are our delivery agents in such settings, along with our health and social care partnerships.

We have invested in an increased level of support for our local authority partners, which should also mean an increased level of support for our health and social care partnerships, but I recognise that, at the moment, people still need to make difficult decisions.

The two documents set out the frameworks for how we can shift the balance of care and how we can shift where resource goes to support those more interventionist actions and early intervention priorities, such as the one that Annie Wells sets out. If she wants to write to me with the details, I

will be more than happy to see what can be done in the short term.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): The landscape of general practice in Scotland has changed significantly in recent years, with rising numbers of people living longer and with more than one condition. What reform opportunities are being considered to enable general practitioners to offer a greater specialist response, meeting the needs of population groups across areas such as cardiac and frailty?

Neil Gray: Audrey Nicoll is absolutely right that general practice will play an ever more important role in the delivery of our services. For us to shift the balance of care and for our constituents to receive services within the community that they call home, we will be required to support general practice to play that role in a sustainable way.

A further £10.5 million has been invested this year to expand targeted interventions by GP practices on cardiovascular disease and frailty prevention. As part of that investment, we have already agreed an enhanced service with the British Medical Association that will increase the number of proactive interventions to prevent cardiovascular disease from having a significant impact on patients' long-term health outlook.

By spring next year, we will offer a frailty enhanced service to general practices, enabling each GP practice to identify a frailty lead, which will help to drive improvements in frailty care through training, data optimisation and cross-sector collaboration.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the publication of the long-overdue population health framework and the Government's response to the high in fat, sugar or salt consultation, which has just been published in the past few minutes, although we were promised it at the start of this year. Those things are critical to improving health and reducing inequalities.

However, I fear that the Government's actions fall short of its ambition. When does the Government intend to publish its impact assessment on food and drink that is high in fat, sugar or salt? If the Government is truly committed to delivering improvements to health and reducing inequalities, it will need to ensure that regulations are brought forward, otherwise it will just be the usual piecemeal approach to public health intervention.

Neil Gray: I have a number of things to say. First, I appreciate Carol Mochan's welcome of the documents. We have a lot of shared endeavour in relation to what they can achieve and in recognising their importance in supporting and enhancing health and social care services.

We will be setting out our regulations on foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar later this year, and I would expect the publications that Carol Mochan has asked for to be a part of that. Carol Mochan stressed the need for ambition. The regulations will match what is happening in England and Wales already, so that there is consistency across these islands. However, I recognise that there is more for us to do in supporting people to have healthy, active lifestyles and in tackling obesity. That is what the population health framework is all about, and we are trying to enable people to deliver on it.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): My question is in a similar vein, with regard to high-fat, high-sugar and high-salt foods. The cabinet secretary will be aware of the work of Henry Dimpleby, Dr Tim Spector and Dr Chris Van Tulleken on ultra-high-processed foods and ultra-processed foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt, and their connection to poorer health, as well as of my interest in the subject. Will the cabinet secretary say a bit more about the actions that will be taken regarding the promotion of healthier foods and the restriction of less healthy foods in our supermarkets?

Neil Gray: I recognise Emma Harper's long-standing interest in this area and the work that she has done, as well as the work of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, which she sits on, to advance things in that area.

The regulations later this year will provide the full details, but at the centre of those regulations, we will set out where products can be located, how they can be promoted and to whom. As I said to Carol Mochan, we will also be aligning ourselves with the regulations that are in place in England and Wales, to ensure that there is consistency across these isles for those who are selling such products.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The documents land in the context of significant cuts to existing prevention services around the country. Through constituents in Glasgow alone, we learn of cuts to the Glasgow psychological trauma service, the Huntington's disease specialist services, adult mental health services, Flourish house, the falls prevention programme, counselling at the Sandyford sexual health service, and breastfeeding support from the National Childbirth Trust. Does the cabinet secretary acknowledge that we are already losing successful prevention services as a result of how integration joint board decisions are being made? That will have a human and financial cost in the future. Does he acknowledge that the way that the IJB makes those decisions is democratically unaccountable and needs to change?

Neil Gray: I recognise, as I did in my answer to Annie Wells, the fact that we have delivery agents with whom we need to work to make sure that decisions that are taken locally reflect the national policy direction that is set out in the documents. I also recognise that we need to continue to support local areas, as we are doing—our local authority partners received a record funding settlement, as did our health boards, this year; those are the funders of our health and social care partnerships.

I recognise that decisions are to be taken locally, but, in some of the areas that Patrick Harvie set out, they are not in keeping with what I have set out in relation to the population health or service renewal frameworks, or directed towards preventative areas of spending. That is why I will continue to work with local decision makers, as we have done in the development of the product through COSLA, to ensure that the importance of prevention is recognised.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Strategies and recovery plans such as these come and go, but the health and social care sector is still on its knees. Nowhere is that crisis more acute than in our remote, rural and island communities. However, the renewal document suggests that those communities will have to wait until year 9 before they can expect care that meets quality standards. All the while, mums will have to drive 100 miles down the A9, care homes in the Highlands will continue to close and care visits will be cut short because of travel time. Does the cabinet secretary really expect those communities to be happy to wait until 2034 for the care that we all expect now?

Neil Gray: That is not what we have set out. We expect the framework to inform decision making from now on. The decision-making process that the service renewal framework and the population health framework set out is about taking those considerations into account. We will continue to work with our boards—including those that represent rural and island communities—to ensure that service parity is available.

I was born and brought up in an island community; I know what it is like to travel to receive services; I therefore recognise that, for some, travel will inevitably be needed. I want to ensure that that is done equitably, fairly and supportively, so that there will be a better situation for island communities such as the one that I am from, and for the communities that colleagues across parties represent—and a better system for the people of Scotland.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): For a number of years, social care recruitment has been a challenge in the east of East Lothian—in particular, for the rural villages near Dunbar, Haddington and North Berwick. To build on care at

home, what strategies will be in place to address the issue of the social care worker shortage in rural areas and villages such as Innerwick, Gifford and Gullane, in my constituency?

Neil Gray: Clearly, we are aware of the challenges of recruiting staff in rural and island communities. Changing demographics and increased needs serve only to add to those challenges. The population health framework and the service renewal framework set out the key areas of reform and the principles that we will work to that will reduce pressures, increase opportunity, improve integration and transform how services are experienced by the workforce and those whom it supports.

What will not help us to attract and retain our workforce are the United Kingdom Government's damaging policies on our social care staff. In that regard, I encourage it to think again.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Forced to deliver a £30 million budget cut, NHS Dumfries and Galloway is seeing a systematic dismantling of local health services. Cottage hospitals are being closed, maternity services are being shut, there is no hospice provision, and care home beds are in critically short supply, yet this Government claims that it wants to deliver on five principles of reform.

How does the closure of maternity services and cottage hospitals align with the second principle of people—designing care around individuals and empowering them to make their care decisions? How does it support the third principle of community—bringing services closer to home—when expectant mothers are forced to travel miles for basic care? How does it reflect the fourth principle of population—planning services based on local needs—when the needs of rural families in Galloway are being entirely ignored?

Is it not the case that this Government's rhetoric on reform is completely at odds with lived experience—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Carson, that is quite long—I think that the cabinet secretary has the gist of the three questions.

Neil Gray: I well recognise the issues that Mr Carson raises. I engaged on them with his constituents when I was at the Dumfries and Galloway board annual review last year and when I met trade union colleagues in his area. I have also had meetings with him to discuss those matters.

The thread that runs through all that he has set out is patient safety. We rely on clinicians to advise us on ensuring that services remain safe. I recognise that a balance always needs to be

struck between needing to travel and ensuring safe and timely access to services.

As I said, I am from an island community, so I recognise the need to travel for services and what that means, and the burden that it can have on individuals and their families. We want to make sure that such decisions are always taken in a proportionate manner that reflects the needs of those communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Three more members have requested to ask a question. I will take all three, but I need one brief question from each member and a brief answer.

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

As the cabinet secretary outlined in his statement, we know that taking preventative action at any point of a person's health or care needs can make a significant difference. Will he advise how Scottish Government investment is helping to expand targeted interventions across Scotland, particularly for cardiovascular disease and frailty prevention, and how the population health framework will complement those initiatives?

Neil Gray: We have launched the cardiovascular disease risk factors programme to improve CVD outcomes, with an aim of reducing avoidable CVD deaths by 20 per cent in 20 years. We have established a new GP enhanced service from 2025-2026 to support 100,000 patients who are at risk of developing CVD. We will also bring forward funding for a frailty enhanced service. We are investing £4.5 million over three years to tackle type 2 diabetes.

The population health framework is a cross-Government, whole-society approach to creating health. We are using the totality of public expenditure and hard-wiring prevention into our systems—through planning, delivery, budgets and accountability—to reduce the demand that such issues can cause in our system.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The cabinet secretary has spoken about preventative spend. Does he agree that GPs can play a crucial role? I recently met Dr Robert Lockhart from Elgin, whom I think the cabinet secretary met on Friday. He discussed what they can do locally and nationally with more funding.

What percentage of the health budget is currently spent on general practice? What percentage does the cabinet secretary believe it should be to allow our GPs to deliver more?

Neil Gray: I did, indeed, meet Dr Lockhart on Friday, and I was very pleased to do so. We had an informative discussion, including with the

community council, which Mr Lochhead also took part in. The areas that relate to the latter part of Douglas Ross's question are currently matters of discussion and negotiation with the British Medical Association. We are discussing how we can continue to support general practice and its sustainability, and how it can deliver more in our communities, as both Dr Lockhart and I want to see.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In his statement, the cabinet secretary talked about local government supporting health inequalities. Accessing information is critical, and having effective digital tools is vital. Partnership working and frameworks must be the goal, but how can they be achieved without major reforms taking place?

Neil Gray: If Mr Stewart is asking me about reform within local government, that is not for today. However, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities provided collaborative support for the two documents that have been published, so we are seeing a willingness on its part to engage and recognise the role that its members play as delivery agents for our national policy ambitions.

This is a shared endeavour of ambition; we want to see a step change and generational shift in the way that we deliver services and in the balance of care. I am confident that COSLA will continue to support us in that endeavour.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement.

Business Motion

15:34

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-17968, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, which sets out a timetable for stage 3 consideration of the Scottish Languages Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, during stage 3 of the Scottish Languages Bill, debate on groups of amendments shall, subject to Rule 9.8.4A, be brought to a conclusion by the time limits indicated, those time limits being calculated from when the stage begins and excluding any periods when other business is under consideration or when a meeting of the Parliament is suspended or otherwise not in progress:

Groups 1 to 3: 55 minutes

Groups 4 to 7: 1 hour 50 minutes

Groups 8 to 10: 2 hours 25 minutes.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Scottish Languages Bill: Stage 3

15:35

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is stage 3 proceedings on the Scottish Languages Bill. In dealing with the amendments, members should have the bill as amended at stage 2—that is, Scottish Parliament bill 39A—the marshalled list and the groupings of amendments. The division bell will sound and proceedings will be suspended for around five minutes for the first division of stage 3. The period of voting for the first division will be 30 seconds. Thereafter, I will allow a voting period of one minute for the first division after a debate. Members who wish to speak in the debate on any group of amendments should press their request-to-speak buttons or enter RTS in the chat as soon as possible after I call the group. Members should now refer to the marshalled list of amendments.

Section 4—Areas of linguistic significance

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 1 is on areas of linguistic significance. Amendment 13, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, is grouped with amendments 14 to 18, 1, 2, 19 to 23 and 65.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I will speak to amendments 13 to 16, 1 and 2, all in my name. Amendments 13 to 16 relate to the process by which areas will be designated as areas of linguistic significance. As it stands, the bill will already enable a local authority to designate part of its area as an ALS when certain criteria are met. However, as the legislation is currently drafted, that designation is discretionary. My amendments would strengthen the framework by introducing a clear duty that an area that

“contains a significant number of people with Gaelic language skills ... must be designated as an area of linguistic significance”.

That change is essential. If Gaelic is to be protected where it is most at risk and supported where it is most widely spoken, the bill should provide more than optional powers; it must create obligations.

Amendment 13 would introduce a new subsection into section 1A of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 to require that any area with a significant Gaelic-speaking population be designated as an ALS. Amendment 14 would delete the existing provision that will allow but not require such designations to be made. Amendments 15 and 16 would make consequential changes to ensure that the duty is fully reflected across section 1A.

Taken together, the amendments would shift the emphasis in the bill. We know from evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee and from decades of advocacy by Gaelic communities that policy must begin with place. Those amendments would make sure that it does.

Amendments 1 and 2, in my name, would be an important part of the local authority process for designating areas of linguistic significance. Those amendments would ensure that, at certain stages in the process, the local authority must consult community representatives from an area that is likely to be designated. That will be an essential part of the process: the local authority will designate—and that is important—but decisions to designate and the activity that flows from that designation will be for the local community, and it is right that its voice is clearly heard.

Amendment 22 in my name would provide for an important new democratic right: the ability for communities to request that their area be considered for designation as an area of linguistic significance. The bill already establishes a framework in which local authorities can designate an ALS, and other amendments that I have lodged would create duties to do so where Gaelic-speaking populations are significant. However, the amendment would go a step further and give communities the ability to trigger that process. That is important, because, too often, policy is done to communities, not with them—nowhere is that more true than in rural, island, and Gaelic-speaking parts of our country.

The amendment would do three things. First, it would allow any community to make a formal request to its local authority to consider designation. Secondly, if a local authority decides not to proceed with that designation, it would have to set out its reasons and make those reasons public. Thirdly, the amendment would create a right of appeal. Communities would be able to challenge a decision not to designate via a process that would be set out by ministers in regulations. The amendment would ensure that linguistic planning is not only responsive to community need, but accountable to it, and it would empower communities to speak for themselves.

Together, the amendments would create a vital step in realising the community-led approach that the bill aspires to.

I move amendment 13.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Emma Roddick to speak to amendment 17 and other amendments in the group.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Tapadh leibh, Oifigeir Riaghlaidh. The bill

makes provision for local authorities to designate areas of linguistic significance. Those will be areas in which there are important numbers of Gaelic speakers or levels of Gaelic activity and that are clearly important for the future promotion and support of Gaelic language. However, in order for that approach to meet its potential, people must be able to trust that those areas will, indeed, be designated where appropriate.

Therefore, amendments 17 and 18 seek to strengthen the provision by requiring a local authority to consider whether any part of its area contains such a significant number of people with Gaelic skills and to consider submitting a proposed designation to the Scottish ministers if that test is met.

Amendment 17 would set a period of one year within which the local authority must give that consideration. As the committee's stage 1 report acknowledges, there is a need for urgent action to ensure that our language and our language communities are protected.

Amendment 19 seeks to add to the provisions on the guidance that can be given to help local authorities with decisions, so that it may relate, in particular, to how they determine which areas could be designated as an area of linguistic significance. Amendments 20 and 21 seek to provide a ministerial power to require a local authority to reconsider in cases in which it has decided not to submit a designation proposal to the Scottish ministers.

Designating areas of linguistic significance will be a new development, with the potential to focus strong support on areas with Gaelic activity and significant numbers of Gaelic speakers. That important process will involve local authority decision making, community input, Bòrd na Gàidhlig advocacy and the involvement of the Scottish ministers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Ross Greer to speak to amendment 65 and other amendments in the group.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Feasgar math. Amendment 65 would require local authorities to develop local Gaelic plans for the designated areas of linguistic significance, in consultation with the community, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and other stakeholders. That is somewhat equivalent to the provision that requires the bòrd to lead on the preparation of a community Gaelic language plan.

The amendment arises from concerns that the bòrd is not democratically accountable to local authorities and that the link between the local plan that it would produce for the ALS and the council-wide Gaelic language plan is not clear or strong enough.

Currently, the local plan must have regard to the council-wide Gaelic language plan, but not the other way round. The alternative way to achieve that would be for ministers to set out clearly in the statutory guidance that the council's Gaelic language plan must include specific provisions for each area of linguistic significance within its geographical remit—that is, the community plans, as set out in the provision that I mentioned, should effectively form part of the council's overall Gaelic language plan, even though those community plans would not originate from the council.

My concern relates to the lack of a sufficient connection between the council-wide Gaelic language plan and the community plans for each area of linguistic significance, which, as I said, would not be produced by the council but would be produced by the bòrd—in consultation, one would hope, with the council and, of course, with the local community. If the cabinet secretary could confirm that that will be addressed in the statutory guidance—that the community plan should form part of the council's overall Gaelic language plan, even though the council itself is not leading on that community plan—that would probably be sufficient for me not to move amendment 65.

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): Although this group will take slightly longer to deal with, and my remarks will therefore be longer than for the other groups, it is appropriate that we start the stage 3 process with the areas of linguistic significance, because that remains one of the most significant elements of the bill. It is therefore good to start with that.

I welcome the level of interest and the lively debates that we have had in the run-up to stage 3. I am particularly grateful for the amendments that have been lodged by colleagues in other parties, because they prompt a bit of debate, which is no bad thing.

I have some reservations about Pam Duncan-Glancy's amendments 13 to 16, because of the combination of a compulsory duty and the absence of sufficient detail on to which areas that duty would apply. That means that I am unable to support those amendments. They would lead to a measure of confusion for communities and local authorities, and the proposed duty might be implemented in impractical and unhelpful ways. We have grappled with this area extensively.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will the Deputy First Minister set out which part of amendment 13 is unclear? My understanding is that it is quite clear. It creates a specific definition about the numbers of people who speak Gaelic in a particular area. Which parts of it are not clear?

15:45

Kate Forbes: I thank the member for that question, because it is a helpful cue from which to proceed.

The requirement in the amendment does not specify the size or the type of area that would be subject to mandatory designation. We grappled with this issue extensively in the run-up to the Government lodging amendments, because I was keen to explore all possibilities with regard to it. It would not be clear from the member's amendments which area or areas must be designated. For example, if the requirement fell on a local authority, only one area of linguistic significance would be designated in Scotland. If it applied to electoral wards, only Skye would be added to that one authority. If it applied to census output areas, which are smaller in nature, a number of very small areas would also be designated, which would probably be artificially small. In any case, it would be impractical. For example, some districts in small towns would be designated, but not others in the same town. Some small output areas in islands would be designated, but not the entire island. Some of the areas to be designated would be too small for the practical implementation of policy or programmes.

Even if we step away from the census-area issues, there are unhelpful implications for other provisions. The amendment would reduce the involvement and ownership of authorities, communities and Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

I recognise that one of the reasons why there is support for Pam Duncan-Glancy's approach is that, to some people's minds, it cuts out the bureaucracy of a process. However, some of the feedback that I got when engaging with local authorities and others was that the process is quite important for bringing people with them—Pam Duncan-Glancy alluded to that in her comments, too.

The compulsory yet undefined nature of the duty could result in fewer areas being designated. The member's approach would cause a measure of confusion about the size of the area, and it would remove the involvement of those who would be closest to the process and for whom that would make a difference.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I am not sure that I entirely agree about the confusion, given that, on the most important part of the change, the bill already says that an "area may be designated". The same area that the bill refers to is the area that I am suggesting in my amendment that we "must" designate. The difference is that my amendment says that if an area contains enough Gaelic language speakers, we have to designate it. I am not redrawing the size of the area—the

amendment relates to areas of the same size as those that the Government's version of the wording applies to in the bill.

Kate Forbes: Yes, but the fact that the amendment says "must" and would therefore create a mandatory obligation to designate an area would lead to huge questions about whether the statutory duty had been met in particular areas. Having set out a process through the use of the word "may", we have set out clear expectations for where an area of linguistic significance may be designated.

It is an iterative process. There is consultation and responsiveness. The member will know that there are a number of obligations, so that it could be an area in which significant activity relating to the Gaelic language takes place, an area in which teaching and learning by means of the Gaelic language is provided, an area that is historically connected with the use of Gaelic or an area where that 20 per cent figure is met. If we turned that "may" into a "must", it would be very difficult to determine whether that statutory duty had been met. The criteria for "must" are much higher than for "may", which would involve an iterative consultation process.

The member will know—I say this for the benefit of other members in the chamber—that I have grappled extensively with this issue, because I was quite drawn to the proposal that she has set out in her amendments. It was by considering what would happen in implementing her proposal that we came to the conclusion that, legally, if it is stated as a statutory duty that an area "must be designated", but there are grey areas around exactly what needs to be designated, that would create a significant legal challenge.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Kate Forbes: I appreciate that the member disagrees with that and that she wants to intervene again. I am very happy to take that intervention.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: What process does the Deputy First Minister think there is for people who believe that their area should be designated? If the legislation says only that an area "may" be designated, what process does the community have to challenge that?

Kate Forbes: As the member will know, we will consider a number of amendments today that will strengthen the provisions, and I will come on to those. Having heard loud and clear that, legally, a mandatory implementation of areas of linguistic significance would not work, my responsibility was to try to strengthen the provisions as far as possible, just short of mandatory. That is the commitment that I gave to a number of groups and

bodies that fed back on the impossibility of implementing the "must" phrasing. I will go through the other amendments, because some of them touch on that.

Emma Roddick's amendments 17 to 21, along with the bill provisions as strengthened at stage 2, provide a welcome and essential focus on areas with important levels of Gaelic activity and important numbers of Gaelic speakers. There is a very clear message from Gaelic communities that that is an important requirement at this time. The provisions and amendments on areas of linguistic significance also provide important support for Gaelic initiatives that are in place, the work of community bodies and officers, and the development of Gaelic community plans. We are happy to support amendments 17 to 21.

We are very supportive of Pam Duncan-Glancy's amendments 1 and 2. The bill is a wide-ranging one that touches on many areas of Gaelic and Scots activity, and community activity is hugely important. I welcome those amendments, which strengthen the focus and remind us that the impact of the provisions will be felt in communities. The amendments will also sit well with the provision whereby Bòrd na Gàidhlig can ask a local authority to consider designation if the bòrd considers that there is evidence of demand from those living in a local authority area.

I will move on to amendments 22 and 23. With amendment 22, there is an overlap with the provision that is already in the bill that requires Bòrd na Gàidhlig to make a request to an authority to consider making a designation if the bòrd considers that there is evidence of demand.

On amendment 22, there are some questions to raise. In the first place, the definition of community is very broad. There could also be questions about exactly what the area is for the requested designation, as we have touched on. The community request could be based on areas that are not recognised census areas, so relevant information on Gaelic skills would not be available, or the area requested could be too small for the practical implementation of programmes. At the same time, it would not be appropriate for a community group to request designation of the entire authority area if people in that group live only in one part of the local authority. For example, people living in Skye cannot request that the entire Highland Council area be designated as an area of linguistic significance. It is difficult to understand how that would work with the standards and the requirements that are to be made by regulation.

Also, amendment 22 does not contain a mechanism to prevent repeated requests, so a local authority could face multiple requests from small groups, which it would have to consider and publicise a decision on each time. The existing

provision that provides for requests to be channelled through Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a more streamlined, evidence-driven and appropriate approach.

On amendment 23, at present, significant numbers of Gaelic development officers are in post and operating in communities. Bòrd na Gàidhlig was, for the start of the current financial year, provided with £0.5 million to support the Gaelic development officer scheme, and with a separate funding package of in the region of £500,000 to ensure that key Gaelic bodies had increased investment. That includes funding for bodies such as Comunn na Gàidhlig, which has in the region of 17 iomairtean officers across Gaelic-speaking communities.

At stage 2, the bill was amended to give Bòrd na Gàidhlig a duty to support communities with the preparation of community plans in particular areas. That will ensure that Bòrd na Gàidhlig works with the Gaelic development officers who are already in place.

Therefore, amendment 23 has a measure of overlap with provisions that are already in place. It would also introduce a burden on the authority to make an appointment at the point of designation. On the appointment of development officers, it would be unusual for central Government to regulate local authority staffing decisions. I would prefer to outline our priorities in the Gaelic strategy and standards and look to authorities and the bòrd to implement and interpret those. The regulations will make provision for what needs to happen in an area of linguistic significance, and it will be for local authorities to employ appropriate staff to fulfil those functions.

I am sorry, Presiding Officer, but I did warn you at the beginning that my comments on this group would be a bit longer.

On amendment 65, I thank Ross Greer for focusing on the important issue of community plans, which has come up time and again. I state for the record that the areas of linguistic significance will operate effectively only if we have community plans. The question is whether the amendment is the way to do it.

Amendment 65 overlaps with provisions that are already in the bill. At stage 2, the bill was amended to give Bòrd na Gàidhlig a duty to provide

“advice, assistance and support to any person in the preparation of a plan for the development or promotion of the Gaelic language, Gaelic education and Gaelic culture in relation to a community in a particular area.”

The amendments on guidance will also be important for that provision.

Guidance will be provided on how to determine which areas are appropriate for designation as an area of linguistic significance, which factors should be taken into account when making such determinations and the process for making them. In addition, standards will set out expectations of how public authority functions are to be exercised in those areas. If an area has been designated as an area of linguistic significance, the relevant authority’s Gaelic language plan must set out the measures that are to be taken in that area, and ministers may make further provision about the required content of Gaelic language plans in respect of areas of linguistic significance.

Those measures will have an important community impact. The current area of linguistic significance provisions are a package of mutually supportive measures that combine local authority decisions, Bòrd na Gàidhlig involvement, community activity and ministers’ interventions. As has been mentioned, planning and community involvement are points that will be followed up in guidance, and we will take our lead from the proposed stage 3 amendments on guidance on areas of linguistic significance.

Under the current provisions, the focus is on Bòrd na Gàidhlig supporting the wish that emerges from the community. Although the idea behind amendment 65 has much to commend it, it is preferable to have an initiative that originates in the community and is supported by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Ross Greer: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for offering points of reassurance around the guidance. Will she address my specific concern that there is a requirement for the community plans to have regard to the local authority-wide Gaelic language plan but no equivalent requirement the other way round? In situations in which a council might be producing a new Gaelic language plan, it is not required to have due regard to existing community plans in those areas of linguistic significance. Could that be addressed in the statutory guidance to ensure that the work is all joined up and consistent on an on-going basis?

Kate Forbes: That is a very fair point. One criticism that has been made is that there is a lot of duplication and overlap. If we believe in grass-roots community work, we know that it should start with the community. We will take that into account, and I am happy to express my desire to consult extensively with relevant bodies and other members on the substance of the guidance.

I recognise the importance of local authority support at every level, but, as I have said, amendment 65 creates a measure of overlap.

I want to come back to Pam Duncan-Glancy's question about what we are doing if we are not supporting her amendments 13 to 16. I mentioned that we have concerns about the mandatory implementation of areas of linguistic significance without details on which areas the duty applies to. At the moment, census data, which goes to output areas, is the main source of data when it comes to knowing whether obligations to people with Gaelic skills are being met.

Two backstops strengthen the approach that we have taken to how an area can determine its plan: a local authority can designate if an area falls under certain descriptions, which we have covered, and, if the local authority does not proceed, Bòrd na Gàidhlig can request that the local authority consider making a designation. If Bòrd na Gàidhlig makes such a request, it can do so on the evidence of demand for designation from those who reside in the authority's area. Essentially, a referral from the community who are unhappy that a designation has not proceeded goes to Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which can request that the local authority make the designation. If the authority does not submit a proposed designation, the local authority must publicise the decision and the reasons for making it. The authority has to publish up front the reasons why it is not proceeding.

A third backstop is that, if a local authority does not submit a proposed designation, the Scottish ministers may require it to reconsider the decision. A local authority must submit a proposed designation or confirm its original decision and notify ministers of the reasons for it.

16:00

As part of the debate on whether the duty should be obligatory, rather than the bill including the word "may", I consulted Western Isles Council, Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council in particular to get their views on the matter. There was a range of views, but they were all keen on proceeding at pace with designation, although they all expressed to me that they have very different geographical and demographic spreads. For example, in Argyll and Bute, it would not be obvious to designate an entire ward, because there are multiple islands in one ward, so it would make more sense for the designated area to cover an island rather than a ward. In relation to Highland Council, as I have referenced, Skye would be an obvious contender, and each part of the Western Isles could, arguably, be designated. There was certainly an appetite in that regard from all local authorities.

If Pam Duncan-Glancy's primary concern is about the pace at which the provisions will be implemented—which is my primary concern—I

heard reassurance from local authorities that they want to move at pace, but they stress the importance of there being an iterative process, with engagement with the community, to ensure that the size of the area matches what the community wants. As we are all aware, if we proceed with a designation that does not work for the community because the area is the wrong size—either too big or too small—that might create more challenges.

I hugely respect the work that Pam Duncan-Glancy has done, and I share her sentiment, but I am struck by the operational challenges in implementing what she has set out.

Presiding Officer, you will be delighted to know that that concludes my comments.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Pam Duncan-Glancy to wind up and to press or seek to withdraw amendment 13.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I have listened carefully to the Deputy First Minister's comments. She highlighted three specific backstops in the bill, but I would argue that those backstops suggest that there is already a sense of a provision. My amendments would make it much clearer that communities will be at the heart of the decision-making process, as the bill would say that they "must" be consulted, not that they "may" be consulted. In addition, if a community's request was denied, the reasons why the request had been denied would need to be published.

I heard what the Deputy First Minister said about Bòrd na Gàidhlig development officers, but my amendment 23 seeks to ensure that somebody from the grass roots will be in designated areas to help to build and sustain the community. As we know, much has been said about whether the bill will achieve the difference that is needed in Gaelic-speaking communities across Scotland. To ensure that the Gaelic language survives, communities must be provided with support on the ground, so I still think that amendment 23 is really important.

I press amendment 13.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The question is, that amendment 13 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a suspension to allow members to log in to the digital voting system.

16:03

Meeting suspended.

16:10

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment 13. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My system would not connect in time. If it had, I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Leonard. I will make sure that that is recorded.

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My apologies. My system was not updating. I would have voted no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Slater. I will ensure that that is recorded.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am having some issues with my app. I am not sure whether my vote registered.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can assure you that your vote was recorded, Mr Choudhury.

Foysoyl Choudhury: Thank you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a point of order from Alex Cole-Hamilton. *[Interruption.]*

I move on to a point of order from Ariane Burgess.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect. I would have voted no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Burgess. I will make sure that that is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysoyl (Lothian) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) *[Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]*
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) *[Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]*
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 13, Against 91, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 13 disagreed to.

Amendment 14 not moved.

Amendment 15 moved—[Pam Duncan-Glancy].

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 15 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Richard Leonard: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Apologies. Again, my system would not connect. If it had, I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Leonard. I will make sure that that is recorded.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms McNeill. I will make sure that that is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)

Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 12, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 15 disagreed to.

16:15

Amendment 16 not moved.

Amendments 17 and 18 moved—[Emma Roddick]—and agreed to.

Amendments 1 and 2 moved—[Pam Duncan-Glancy]—and agreed to.

Amendments 19 to 21 moved—[Emma Roddick]—and agreed to.

Amendment 22 moved—[Pam Duncan-Glancy].

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 22 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)
 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)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 38, Against 68, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 22 disagreed to.

Amendment 23 moved—[Pam Duncan-Glancy].

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 23 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Pauline McNeill: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My vote was a yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms McNeill. I will make sure that that is recorded.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)

Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 12, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 23 disagreed to.

Amendment 65 not moved.

Section 5—Gaelic language strategy

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 2 is on Gaelic language targets. Amendment 24, in the name of the Deputy First Minister, is grouped with amendments 25 to 30.

Kate Forbes: The bill requires that we prepare a national Gaelic language strategy that must set out ministers' objectives in relation to promoting and supporting the use of Gaelic. That is an important ambition and one that needs to be measured against clear and demanding targets for Gaelic, which is a point that was made repeatedly in the stage 2 debate.

Amendments 24 to 26 seek to do that by requiring the national Gaelic language strategy to place targets on ministers in relation to promoting and supporting the use of Gaelic. Amendment 29 sets out that those may include targets for the number of people with Gaelic language skills, targets for education and training in Gaelic and targets for Gaelic activity in an area designated as an area of linguistic significance. Those categories are intended to be illustrative. They are broad headings under which more detailed, specific targets can be shaped, and they do not prevent other targets from being set if it seems useful to do so.

Michael Marra's amendment 30 takes a very similar approach to my amendment 29. I have hugely appreciated Mr Marra's engagement and commitment on these issues throughout the bill process and I think that we share a lot of common ground. His amendment 30 and my amendment 29 simply offer two slightly different alternatives in relation to what the targets may relate to. In the spirit of wishing to demonstrate that collaborative approach, I am minded not to move my amendment and, instead, to support his amendment.

Amendments 27 and 28 require the strategy to set out arrangements for the collection of data in order to allow progress towards meeting the

objectives and targets in the strategy to be measured. Without a doubt, we need a national language strategy for Gaelic with clear objectives, and an essential element of that is having appropriate targets and a means of measuring progress towards meeting those objectives. The amendments relating to targets will ensure that action is taken and that progress is measured. If there is one thing that unites us all, it is the understanding that the legislation will be only as useful as the progress that it delivers once it passes.

I move amendment 24.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Michael Marra to speak to amendment 30 and the other amendments in the group.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Members on these benches have been concerned from the outset about the scope of the bill. We do not believe that it is commensurate with the scale of the challenge that the Gaelic language faces. Experts have warned that, without very significant intervention, Gaelic could cease to exist as a living language in as little as a decade. Where possible, my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy and I have sought to strengthen the bill. That is what my amendment in this group seeks to do.

I am glad that the Scottish Government now agrees with Scottish Labour that targets definitely need to be written into the bill, and I echo the Deputy First Minister's words about our engagement and the pragmatic and open discussions that we have had to that end. I therefore welcome amendments 24 to 28, in the name of Kate Forbes. However, in order for targets to be effective, they must be meaningful, and I welcome the Deputy First Minister's decision to not move amendment 29, in her name. Amendment 29 is a broader amendment. It uses the words

"numbers of persons with Gaelic language skills",

which could include people who have spent a few hours on Duolingo. That would do nothing to arrest the decline of Gaelic as a living language in traditional Gaelic-speaking areas. If anything, I believe that it risks masking a precipitous and potentially terminal decline of Scotland's ancient language.

Concerns were raised at stage 2 about the Scottish Government's capacity to collect the relevant data for reporting on Gaelic, including targets. When I met the Deputy First Minister in February, her officials supplied a list of data that was already available to the Scottish Government and that would not require legislative change. We believe that there is also common ground in relation to not wishing to impose a great burden on public bodies in that regard, while trying to meet

our shared ends and ensure that we have a robust set of rules. The categories that my amendment 30 proposes are covered by that pre-existing data.

Having suitable questions in the Scottish social attitudes survey and the Scottish household survey would help to capture the number of people, including the number of children, in our households who use the Gaelic language. School figures, the survey of school subject availability and the data on achievement of curriculum for excellence—ACEL—would all help to establish how much education and training are taking place in, or through the medium of, the Gaelic language.

The Scottish Government could conduct an analysis of economic and social data linked with Gaelic from bodies such as MG Alba and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, which would contribute to an understanding of the number of businesses and other bodies that use Gaelic as their main language.

The Scottish Government could also do more to compile data on the economic and social impact of Gaelic. MG Alba and others already collect and publish data that would paint a picture of activity relating to Gaelic culture.

As we know, the Government's targets across a wide range of policy areas have done nothing to guarantee progress. However, I believe that having targets in this context will strengthen the bill somewhat and keep the focus on the survival of our ancient language. We cannot wait a decade for another census to happen. There is every chance that that would be too late.

I ask all members to support amendment 30.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite the Deputy First Minister to wind up.

Kate Forbes: Amendment 30 captures precisely what the Scottish Government wishes to see happen in the years to come. I will be happy to support amendment 30, in the name of Michael Marra.

Amendment 24 agreed to.

Amendments 25 to 28 moved—[Kate Forbes]—and agreed to.

Amendment 29 not moved.

Amendment 30 moved—[Michael Marra]—and agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 3 is on minor and technical amendments. Amendment 31, in the name of the Deputy First Minister, is grouped with amendments 39 to 42, 50 to 57, 59 and 61.

Kate Forbes: Amendment 31 seeks to make a minor correction. It will adjust terminology to

ensure consistency throughout the bill. It will also reorder sections that were inserted by amendment at stage 2 so that they follow a more logical order.

I will be happy to support amendment 59, in the name of Ross Greer, which would make the position on which public authorities must have regard to our language strategies consistent between Gaelic and Scots.

I move amendment 31.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Ross Greer to speak to amendment 59 and the other amendments in the group.

Ross Greer: At stage 2, I lodged an amendment to clarify that the public bodies that must have regard to the Government's Gaelic language strategy should include the post-16 education bodies, Scottish Rail Holdings and Scottish Water. As the cabinet secretary said, I have lodged amendment 59 simply for the sake of consistency, to ensure that those public bodies also have regard to the Scots language strategy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Deputy First Minister, do you have anything to add by way of winding up?

Kate Forbes: I have nothing to add, thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer.

Amendment 31 agreed to.

Section 6—Gaelic language standards

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 4 is on Gaelic language standards. Amendment 32, in the name of Michael Marra, is grouped with amendments 33 and 34.

Michael Marra: My concern—and my party's principal concern—with the bill's provisions is that they are not commensurate with the existential threats that the Gaelic language faces. In its stage 1 report, the Education, Children and Young People Committee stated that the Gaelic language is in "a perilous state". To put it simply, we do not have time to waste. It is 20 years since the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 was passed. I fear that, in another 20 years, there might not be a living Gaelic language left to save.

My amendments in this group aim to introduce specific deadlines so that the Government and other relevant bodies do not lose sight of the urgency of these matters once the legislation has been passed. The Scottish Government often takes a very generous approach to its own deadlines, with nebulous targets such as "autumn" giving little certainty to the Parliament or to the wider public. Deadlines are also allowed to slip, as members of the Finance and Public Administration Committee, of which I am a member, can attest to,

given the particularly high number of important financial documents that are overdue.

I believe that the Government should be transparent about what it is trying to achieve and when it expects to achieve its outcomes. Constant shifting of goalposts erodes public trust and wastes time that the Gaelic language can ill afford. My amendments in this group therefore set a deadline of one year after the act comes into force, by which time the Scottish ministers must lay draft Gaelic language standards before the Parliament.

Following discussions with the Deputy First Minister subsequent to stage 2, I am pleased to have arrived at a compromise with the Scottish Government on these amendments while still maintaining the sense of urgency that is essential to ensure that survival of the Gaelic language.

I move amendment 32 and I ask members to support all the amendments in the group.

16:30

Kate Forbes: I thank Mr Marra for lodging these amendments and for explaining their importance. I agree that the standards are going to be important for many areas of Gaelic activity—in fact, I often think that many of the questions that have been raised over the course of the bill will be answered in the standards. We need to ensure that they reflect the needs of the speaker community and, as these amendments require, we need to ensure that they are available without delay. We agree that prompt action needs to be taken to address the needs of Gaelic-speaking communities and I am happy to support the amendments.

I am aware that, with amendments 32 and 33, we are back to a bit of a debate between “must” and “may”, which Pam Duncan-Glancy introduced earlier. It may be helpful to explain why we are supportive of amendments 32 and 33. We are changing “must” make regulations back to “may” make regulations, because there is now an obligation to lay the draft regulations within a deadline. That makes the use of “must” unnecessary. It is clear that there is a duty, because the regulations need to be laid by that deadline. It is also expected that further regulations will need to be made in the future using that provision. I just wanted to explain that because I know that some members—not Mr Marra—had some questions about why we were happy to support his amendment, and that is the reason.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Michael Marra to wind up and to press or seek to withdraw amendment 32.

Michael Marra: I have nothing further to add. I press amendment 32.

Amendment 32 agreed to.

Amendments 33 and 34 moved—[Michael Marra]—and agreed to.

Section 8—Reporting on Gaelic language strategy, standards and duties

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 5 is on reporting on Gaelic language strategy and plans. Amendment 35, in the name of Ross Greer, is grouped with amendments 36 to 38.

Ross Greer: The bill will deliver new interventions and build on initiatives that are already in place. As there will be a national Gaelic language strategy that includes objectives and targets, it is important that we have in place a clear and effective reporting regime for that. Gaelic is on the edge of extinction as a living language, so we need to have regular reporting against clear objectives and metrics in order to know whether we are turning the situation around.

Amendment 35 will amend the requirement for Bòrd na Gàidhlig reporting—the requirement that will be inserted into the 2005 act by section 8 of the bill—so that Bòrd na Gàidhlig must report on a two-yearly basis on progress towards meeting the objectives and targets that are set out in the national Gaelic language strategy. I think that that strikes the right balance between not putting too onerous a reporting requirement on the body that takes away its capacity to deliver and making sure that we have regular reporting on a situation that is genuinely at crisis point.

I have two further amendments in this group, amendments 36 and 38, which propose that the Scottish ministers lay before Parliament any report about a public authority’s failure to implement its Gaelic language plan—that is, a failure of a public body in its statutory duties, as created by the bill. The purpose of those amendments is to ensure transparency and accountability.

I move amendment 35.

Kate Forbes: I agree with Mr Greer that reporting is necessary, and I also agree with him that two years feels about right. Reporting is an important part of the policy process, because it shows us where progress has been made and where new interventions need to be considered. In this case, it will provide a clear message to the Scottish Government, the Parliament and relevant public authorities.

I also believe that Mr Greer’s amendments demonstrate the important links between various provisions of the bill. Implementation is important, but the bill contains a strong package of mutually supportive measures for the future support and

promotion of Gaelic. On that basis, we are happy to support amendments 35, 36 and 38.

Under section 6 of the 2005 act as amended at stage 2, Bòrd na Gàidhlig can report to ministers on a public authority's lack of compliance with its Gaelic language plan. If ministers accept the bòrd's conclusion, they must direct the authority to implement the measures in the plan.

Amendment 37 adjusts ministers' direction-making powers so that they need only make such a direction

"if they consider it necessary or expedient to do so".

That is to provide necessary flexibility, as the power of direction would be a power of last resort, even if the bòrd's conclusion was accepted.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Ross Greer to wind up and to press or withdraw amendment 35.

Ross Greer: I have nothing to add. I press amendment 35.

Amendment 35 agreed to.

Section 9—Gaelic language plans

Amendment 36 moved—[Ross Greer]—and agreed to.

Amendment 37 moved—[Kate Forbes]—and agreed to.

Amendment 38 moved—[Ross Greer]—and agreed to.

Section 9A—Interpretation: meaning of public authority

Amendments 39 and 40 moved—[Kate Forbes]—and agreed to.

Section 9B—Scottish Ministers' powers relating to research etc

Amendment 41 moved—[Kate Forbes]—and agreed to.

Section 9C—Financial assistance for the promotion etc of the Gaelic language

Amendment 42 moved—[Kate Forbes]—and agreed to.

Section 11—Duty of Scottish Ministers to promote Gaelic education

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 6 is on education material in Gaelic and Scots. Amendment 43, in the name of Ross Greer, is grouped with amendments 44, 3 and 62 to 64.

Ross Greer: I think that this is my longest set of speaking notes, but they should still come to only a couple of minutes.

Gaelic-medium education is a crucial part of the survival of the language. Over recent years, the value of GME and bilingualism has been increasingly recognised by parents. However, the provision of teaching resources has not kept pace with demand. All teachers in Scotland are struggling with workload pressures, but GME teachers have the additional pressure of often having to translate the resources that they need to deliver education in their classrooms. That work should be done at the centre rather than by classroom teachers across the country, who often reinvent the wheel on top of all their other duties.

The aim of my amendments in this group is to reduce and, ultimately, eliminate any deficit in the resources that are available, compared with English-language teaching resources. Resources for Scots also need attention, so that the language of home and community can become the language of the classroom.

Amendment 43 seeks to place a duty on ministers to

"promote, facilitate and support the provision of adequate education resources"

in Gaelic for use in school education by teachers and pupils. The duty in question is a general duty, which will ensure that the consideration of resources is embedded across the education system.

Amendment 44 seeks to place a specific duty on the Scottish ministers to consider whether to produce information, guidance or documents for use in schools in Gaelic when they produce them in English. In practice, that will be done by Education Scotland, which is the relevant executive agency.

Amendment 44 will also require ministers, if they are requested to do so by an education authority, to consider producing in Gaelic something that they have already produced in English. Councils are best placed to know which materials will be most beneficial in the classrooms in their area, and they will be able to target such requests accordingly.

Members will note that, like the amendment that I lodged at stage 2, amendment 44 contains a requirement to "consider" translation rather than an absolute requirement to translate in all cases. That is in recognition of the fact that some resources may be of no relevance to GME; for instance, they might relate to supplementary resources for specific subjects or qualifications that are not yet available through GME. If the primary subject is not available in GME, there

would be no need to translate the supplementary resources.

I hope that statutory guidance on GME could set out in further detail circumstances in which translation might or might not be relevant, so that authorities might be confident in knowing when translations would be produced. Amendment 44 is designed to strike the right balance in creating the mechanism but not being too onerous or prescriptive. Guidance can add to that.

Amendment 44 also seeks to place a duty on ministers to keep under review the adequacy of Gaelic resources for school education. It will require them to prepare and publish reports that set out the steps that are necessary to address the issues that might be identified by the review, which will ensure that there is a process of continuous improvement.

Amendments 62 to 64 seek to achieve all those aims for Scots. The quality and availability of resources and support for teachers and pupils are core elements of learning and teaching.

Taken together, my amendments in this group will bring improvements and make a real difference to young people and teachers in Gaelic-medium education, in particular, but also to those who are learning in Scots.

I move amendment 43.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: An important area for the progress and development of Gaelic-medium education is continuity and more young people progressing from primary to broad general education and on to the senior phase. It is vital that young people are empowered to continue their Gaelic learning throughout their school career and beyond school, and to use their Gaelic skills in training and employment.

My amendment 3 will contribute to that ambition by ensuring that an appropriate number and range of qualifications are available through the medium of Gaelic. Proposed new section 16B, which amendment 3 seeks to insert into the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, will place a duty on the Scottish Qualifications Authority to ensure that its qualifications

“include an appropriate number and range of qualifications”

that are available in Gaelic. In deciding what is an appropriate number and range of qualifications, the SQA must seek advice from the Scottish ministers, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and others with an interest or expertise.

Through proposed new section 16C of the 2016 act, amendment 3 will also place a duty on the SQA to ensure that appropriate material is available in the Gaelic language. That applies

“When the Scottish Qualifications Authority produces information, guidance or documents in the English language for use in connection with qualifications it has devised”,

and it requires that equivalent Gaelic versions must be produced when the relevant qualification is available in Gaelic. The Glasgow Gaelic school, for example, has said that such a duty would be hugely beneficial to the school and its learners.

Translation of such material must be produced “on request from the Scottish Ministers”,

thereby ensuring that there is a mechanism for all relevant material to be translated. That will mean that young people who are learning through the medium of Gaelic are not disadvantaged, compared with their English-medium counterparts.

Members will have noticed that amendment 3 will place duties on the SQA, which the Education (Scotland) Bill proposes to replace with a new qualifications body. I am sure that, in due course, we will debate that matter at great length. I understand that the procedure will be that, although my amendment 3 reflects the current position, if the education bill is passed, references to the SQA will be replaced as part of the implementation of that bill. I say that to reassure members that, should the education bill be passed, my amendment would stand the test of time.

The bill strengthens support for Gaelic-medium education in various ways, and I welcome the amendments that Ross Greer has lodged in that area.

I commend the many authorities that have made good progress with Gaelic-medium education, and I believe that my amendment 3 will strengthen the continuity of Gaelic-medium education and the pathway for young people to secure Gaelic qualifications and continue their use of Gaelic throughout their educational journey.

Kate Forbes: I thank Ross Greer for lodging and explaining his amendments. He talked about the pressures on classroom teachers. In my youth, the issue was the pressures on parents, all of whom put Gaelic translation labels on top of the English materials that we took home. That was how I was educated at primary school.

At all stages—early years, primary and secondary—we need to ensure that young people and teachers have access to attractive, high-quality Gaelic and Scots resources. It was not so long ago that there was a lack of good-quality resources that were specifically produced for Gaelic-medium classes. There have been improvements, but there is still some way to go. I think that the amendments in this group support that progress.

I am also happy to agree to a review duty to ensure that we continue to move forward in supporting teachers and young people. I will certainly look at how the statutory guidance can assist with illustrating the scope of the duty to translate.

I massively appreciate and commend the work that bodies such as Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig, Scots Hoose and Yaldi Books have done over the years. We are happy to support amendments 43, 44, 62, 63 and 64.

Pam Duncan-Glancy's amendment 3 is important. We need to see Gaelic-medium education strengthened at secondary level, especially in the senior phase. That has been a strong point of feedback throughout my consultation conversations. Amendment 3 will strengthen the pathway from school to training and study and on to the world of work; it is welcome and will make an important contribution.

For example, the SQA currently makes national 5, higher and advanced higher papers, through the medium of Gaelic, in a specific range of subjects, such as cruinn-eòlas, geography, eachdraidh, history, nuadh-eòlas, modern studies, and mathematics. The proposed provision will ensure that, for those subjects—or any subjects that are offered in the future through the medium of Gaelic—core documents, such as course specifications and supporting documentation that is prepared for pupils or teachers, will also be provided in Gaelic.

I confirm that Pam Duncan-Glancy's understanding is correct. The Scottish Government will ensure that the duty, if approved, is appropriately carried forward and placed on the SQA's successor body, as part of the implementation of the Education (Scotland) Bill. I am happy to support amendment 3.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Ross Greer to wind up and to press or withdraw amendment 43.

Ross Greer: I have nothing further to add, other than to welcome the consensus on the issue.

Amendment 43 agreed to.

After section 13

Amendment 44 moved—[Ross Greer]—and agreed to.

After section 18

Amendment 3 moved—[Pam Duncan-Glancy]—and agreed to.

After section 22

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 7 is on Gaelic-medium education requests. Amendment 11, in the name of Miles Briggs, is grouped with amendment 12.

16:45

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I am pleased to have worked with the Deputy First Minister to lodge these amendments, which would change the process by which requests can be considered for access to Gaelic-medium education. I also welcomed the opportunity to work on them with the wider Gaelic community, which has experience of the process, and I am grateful for the advice that it has given me.

Amendment 11 would make key changes to the process that was established by the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. I will go on to explain some of the detail, but, broadly speaking, the amendment would simplify the process for parents and local authorities. It would extend the request process to parties that were not previously included and it would mean that a request could be made not just for Gaelic-medium primary education but for Gaelic-medium early learning.

Although the Gaelic community welcomed the introduction of the process that is in the 2016 act, some concerns have emerged over the years about how that process works in practice. There are two key issues. First, the parental request must be

“accompanied by ... evidence that there is a demand for GMPE from parents of other children who are ... in the same year group”.

That can be hard for parents not only to source but to administer.

Secondly, the assessment is in two stages. The initial assessment proceeds to a full assessment only if there is evidence of demand from at least five children. Parents have found those two stages of the process to be frustrating, and the threshold of five children might not be appropriate for many geographical areas.

My amendment proposes a single-stage assessment process. It would remove the requirement for parents to provide evidence of demand for GME from other children and their parents, and it would therefore be for the local authority to consider the wider demand in their local area.

The process would start with a request to the education authority. I was pleased to support the Scottish Government's amendment at stage 2 to introduce a process for requests for all-Gaelic schools. Amendment 11 would extend the right to make requests to Comann nam Pàrant and Bòrd na Gàidhlig to bring the process into line with all-

Gaelic school request processes. A request would be made to assess the need for Gaelic-medium primary education or Gaelic-medium early learning, and the authority would have to designate a relevant assessment area and “consider” its provision of Gaelic-medium education and the level of demand in that area. The authority would then have to make

“an assessment of the need”

for Gaelic-medium education.

As is the case under the current full assessment process, there would be various considerations for the authority to take into account in the making of a decision—for example, the availability of premises and staffing. The authority would also have to “publicise arrangements” for parents, children and others

“with expertise or an interest”

to make representations, and it would have to take those representations into account when making a decision.

The authority would also have to decide to secure the provision of GMPE and GME early learning in the designated areas unless, having regard to those considerations,

“it would be unreasonable to do so.”

Again, that wording is maintained from the existing full assessment procedure.

Because my amendment 11 now incorporates the changes to the process that are in section 23 of the bill, amendment 12 would completely remove that section, as it would no longer be required.

I am confident that amendment 11 addresses the practical issues that have been raised by parents and the Gaelic community and that its provisions would be an improvement on the current process, which many parents have been frustrated with. I hope and expect that the amendment would be able to contribute to the growth of Gaelic-medium education as a recognised and successful sector in our Scottish education system.

I move amendment 11.

Kate Forbes: I thank Miles Briggs for those amendments. With Miles Briggs’s amendments, there will be two robust pathways in place: the process for requesting the provision of Gaelic-medium education, which his amendments would do much to clarify and improve, and the process for requests for local authorities to consider the establishment of an all-Gaelic school in an area, which I introduced at stage 2. The two processes are consistent while still recognising the different factors that are involved for education authorities.

Together, they allow for the sustainable development and growth of Gaelic-medium education in an area.

Having said at the outset that I thought that our first group of amendments on areas of linguistic significance was one of the most critical parts of the bill, I would also say that this proposed new section to the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 is one of the most radical parts of the bill, because it responds to a concern that parents have consistently expressed about how to ensure that they have access to Gaelic-medium education.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite Miles Briggs to wind up and press or withdraw amendment 11.

Miles Briggs: I have nothing further to add. I press amendment 11.

Amendment 11 agreed to.

Section 22A—All-Gaelic schools: viability of establishment

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to group 8, which is on all-Gaelic schools requests. Amendment 45, in the name of Ross Greer, is grouped with amendments 46 to 49.

Ross Greer: At stage 2, we added a process to allow parents and carers to request that councils assess whether GME could be provided locally. As we have just heard, Miles Briggs did much of the work on that. At that point, I flagged that the language that we agreed to in that amendment gave that option only to parents of school-age children when the biggest value would be from allowing parents of pre-school children to make such a request. It would be far better for a child to start in GME from primary 1 or, even better, from nursery, than to have them start in an English-medium school only to move a few years later, once a GME school was open.

The amendments seek to extend the ability to make that request to the parents and carers of pre-school children. They also seek to extend the consultation requirement to include children and parents of

“children resident or attending school”

in the authority area. Again, that includes pre-school children and their families. Given that I raised the issue at stage 2, I should mention that the definition of “parent” that is used in the provisions is the one used in the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, which includes guardians and others with parental responsibilities, and carers.

The aim of the amendments is to have an open process in which those with an interest can make a request, have their request assessed and make representation. All-Gaelic schools are good for

Gaelic and good for Scottish education overall, and the amendments would give more parents and children the opportunity to have access to that process.

I move amendment 45.

Kate Forbes: The amendments in this group are important off the back of my stage 2 amendments to introduce the process for requesting all-Gaelic schools assessments. I am happy to support Ross Greer's amendments 45 to 49.

The importance for minority languages of having a separate space from the dominant language is well recognised in language planning terms. For school settings, that can assist with fluency, confidence and a whole-school ethos around Gaelic.

In order to support delivery of that, I welcome Ross Greer's amendments to ensure that there is wide access for parents and children to the process. I strongly agree with many of his remarks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Ross Greer to wind up and to press or withdraw amendment 45.

Ross Greer: I have nothing further to add. I press amendment 45.

Amendment 45 agreed to.

Amendment 46 to 49 moved—[Ross Greer]—and agreed to.

Section 23—Extension of assessments to early learning and childcare

Amendment 12 moved—[Miles Briggs]—and agreed to.

Section 25A—Review of status of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 9 is on Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Amendment 4, in the name of Willie Rennie, is grouped with amendments 5 to 10.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is one of our national institutions, and it should be valued, protected and supported. Clearly, SMO is important for the Gaelic language at home, but it also has an international reputation. In addition, it makes a significant contribution to education, culture and economic regeneration in an area of low population.

Discussions about the status of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig have been taking place for some time—some would say that they have gone on for too long. I believe that the review that was committed to at stage 2 is necessary and will provide all

parties involved with the information that is needed to make the necessary decisions. Central to the review will be both the future status and the funding of SMO, and I look forward to the review being commissioned and to its recommendations.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig has always been a place of commitment and ambition, and we need to take steps to protect and sustain its important contribution and independent status. My amendments strengthen the position that was agreed at stage 2 by placing a duty on ministers to take appropriate action

“to support the development of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig as the national centre for Gaelic language, education and culture in Scotland”,

as is stated in amendment 4.

My amendments clarify that conducting the review is part of exercising that duty. They specify what the review must consider, including SMO's funding and the question of whether SMO should be designated as a higher education institution in its own right. They set out that ministers will comply with the new duty in amendment 4 by

“taking the actions to support the development of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig which are set out in the report”,

in order to bring legal clarity.

Ross Greer and I had slightly competing amendments at stage 2. I wanted to move straight to giving SMO the status of a small, specialist higher education institution; he was in favour of the more considered approach of reviewing the evidence and reaching a conclusion. Our amendments were consistent in many ways, and I have tried to work on the proposals through discussions with the cabinet secretary, her officials and Ross Greer. There were some concerns about what the “small specialist institution” status would mean for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and whether it would enhance SMO's funding arrangements. However, with amendment 4 and the review, I am trying to move SMO towards greater freedom, enhanced support and the partnership that will be required among the various institutions. There is no doubt that we need to bring benefits to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to secure its future.

My new amendments bring the two amendments from stage 2 together, and, from what I can gather, everybody is quite content. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is content with the review process being strengthened, and I believe that the Deputy First Minister is content. Even the Minister for Higher and Further Education, Graeme Dey, is content, which is quite a rare thing to happen. Members should grasp the opportunity and support my amendments this afternoon.

I move amendment 4.

Kate Forbes: I thank Willie Rennie for lodging these amendments. He has explained their benefits and the reasons behind them well.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig makes a contribution on many levels. I am conscious that its principal, Gillian Munro, is in the public gallery, although I do not mean to totally mortify her. Her presence reflects the value that Sabhal Mòr Ostaig places on this debate and on the cross-party support of MSPs. I am delighted that there has been cross-party support for it and recognition of its importance.

Sabhal Mòr Ostaig has a significant history in terms of its economic contribution to the development and repopulation of the Sleat peninsula. It is vital for Gaelic adult learning, Gaelic teacher education and professional learning. Those are all things that we want to encourage and promote.

I welcome the duty on ministers in amendment 4, as well as the identification of the matters that the review must consider. I want to be clear that there is an expectation that the review will move at speed and will have some pace behind it, and that other public bodies will be able to provide support as necessary to get to the point of clarity on the next actions.

I am happy to support Willie Rennie's amendments. I am grateful for the work that Ross Greer did at stage 2, as well—

Pam Duncan-Glancy: [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Kate Forbes: I will happily take an amendment—sorry, an intervention.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I thank the Deputy First Minister for indicating that, but I think that both the legislation team and members across the chamber would be slightly concerned if I were about lodge or draft any further amendments. [*Laughter.*]

I wanted to make the point that Willie Rennie's amendments are important for the college. However, we know that there is an impetus to get more housing around the college to support the people who work and learn there, because access to the college and to the surrounding area is one reason why the college has not always had the impact that it should have had on Gaelic speakers. Can the Deputy First Minister say for the record whether the Government will consider that issue as part of Willie Rennie's amendments and the review that they propose?

17:00

Kate Forbes: As I said, I have long been very supportive of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's vision for developing the Sleat peninsula and supporting its

repopulation. Repopulation depends on housing, and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig has taken a lead on the provision of housing.

Although this is not necessarily specifically referenced in the amendments, I encourage members to consider how the provisions on areas of linguistic significance could also be used to support the provision of housing in communities. We should consider the combination of a strong, resilient and Gaelic-oriented Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the provisions on areas of linguistic significance to support the community, and the putting in train of the recommendations of the short-life working group on economic and social opportunities for Gaelic. Taking those three areas together, we have a healthy package of support for communities, including the provision of new housing.

Willie Rennie: I, too, am delighted that Gillian Munro is in the public gallery today. She is a very modest but determined woman. She is rightly determined to make sure that this happens.

The Deputy First Minister has set out a positive vision that involves bringing together different parts of the strategy, with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig being an important part of that process. I am pleased to hear her say those things. I hope that the people who are conducting the review hear not just my words but those of Ross Greer at stage 2 and of Pam Duncan-Glancy this afternoon, and understand that the review must be conducted at pace. I hope that the conclusion is positive, in the way that I would like to see. It is important that we enhance the role of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to make it an important part of the vision that the Deputy First Minister has set out.

Amendment 4 agreed to.

Amendments 5 to 9 moved—[Willie Rennie]—and agreed to.

Section 25B—Status of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig

Amendment 10 moved—[Willie Rennie]—and agreed to.

Section 25C—Power to enforce duties of public authorities

Amendments 50 to 57 moved—[Kate Forbes]—and agreed to.

Section 27—Scots language strategy

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 10 is on equal respect for the Scots language. Amendment 58, in the name of Ross Greer, is grouped with amendment 60.

Ross Greer: I lodged amendments at stage 2 to make it clear that, when ministers are preparing

the national Gaelic language strategy and guidance, they must have regard to the principle of equal respect for Gaelic—that is, equal respect to English. Amendments 58 and 60 mirror those changes for Scots. I believe that the principle should apply to Scots as well, but I am aware of members' concerns that the measure might go further than they are comfortable with, or that it could have unintended consequences.

The significance of the bill for Scots comes primarily from the fact that it will be recognised in law for the first time. It is important—certainly to me—that Parliament is unanimous in that recognition. Therefore, to preserve unanimity, I will not press or move the amendments, although I ask the cabinet secretary to give a commitment that the Scots language strategy will be ambitious and will seek to undo the centuries of denigration that have led to millions of children and adults across this country being embarrassed about how they speak because society has convinced them that it is not proper.

I hope that, one day, we can embed the principle of equal respect in law but, for the sake of unanimity at this point, a commitment on the guidance from the cabinet secretary, if forthcoming, would be enough.

I move amendment 58.

Kate Forbes: I totally understand the sentiment behind Ross Greer's amendments. We have all heard damaging and derogatory comments about the Gaelic and Scots languages. I always find it quite ironic, because I probably know Gaelic speakers and Scots speakers who vote for every party in this Parliament. That reflects the value and importance of all citizens in Scotland, irrespective of what language they speak.

Amendments 58 and 60 require Scottish ministers to have regard to the principle of equal respect in preparing the strategy and guidance, but I can tell Ross Greer that I unequivocally commit to an ambitious strategy that is built from the ground up—in other words, one that is based on consulting with partner groups and MSPs across the chamber to deliver the end goal that he has outlined.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I call Ross Greer to wind up and to press or withdraw amendment 58.

Ross Greer: I appreciate the cabinet secretary's remarks and hope that we will be able to embed the principle of equal respect in law at some point soon. However, for the sake of unanimity on the bill as a whole, which I consider to be important, I seek to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment 58, by agreement, withdrawn.

Section 29—Effect of Scots language strategy

Amendment 59 moved—[Ross Greer].

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 59 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Nicola Sturgeon (Glasgow Southside) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Sturgeon. Your vote will be recorded.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Whittle. Your vote will be recorded.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Gilruth. Your vote will be recorded.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am in a similar position, because my app is still not connecting. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Grahame. Your vote will be recorded.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app could not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Torrance. Your vote will be recorded.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes. I had tech issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Hamilton. Your vote will be recorded.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Adamson. Your vote will be recorded.

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Fairlie. Your vote will be recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (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)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 83, Against 15, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 59 agreed to.

Section 30—Power for Scottish Ministers to give guidance

Amendment 60 not moved.

Section 30B—Financial assistance for the promotion etc of the Scots language

Amendment 61 moved—[Kate Forbes]—and agreed to.

Section 31—Scots language education in schools

Amendment 62 moved—[Ross Greer]—and agreed to.

After section 33

Amendment 63 moved—[Ross Greer].

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 63 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Clare Adamson: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect to the system, but I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Adamson. Your vote will be recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)

Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 91, Against 13, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 63 agreed to.

Amendment 64 moved—[Ross Greer].

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment 64 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app is telling me that I have not voted, but I did, and I voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kidd. Your vote will be recorded.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order. I could not connect to the system, but I would have voted no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Smyth. Your vote will be recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)

Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 91, Against 12, Abstentions 0.

Amendment 64 agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That ends stage 3 consideration of amendments.

As members will be aware, under standing orders, the Presiding Officer is required to decide whether, in her view, any provision of the bill relates to a protected subject matter—that is, whether it modifies the electoral system and franchise for Scottish parliamentary elections. In her view, no provision of the Scottish Languages Bill relates to a protected subject matter.

Therefore, the bill does not require a supermajority to be passed at stage 3.

I suspend the meeting for a comfort break.

17:15

Meeting suspended.

17:21

On resuming—

Scottish Languages Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-17966, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Scottish Languages Bill at stage 3.

17:21

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): 'S ann tro ghealladh Bile nan Cànan Albannach ùr a thoirt air adhart a thòisich am pròiseas pàrlamaid seo. Chaidh a chuir an cèill gu follaiseach gur e ar n-amas a bhith a' leantainn nan ceumannan leis an dèigheadh àm ri teachd nas tèarainte a chruthachadh do Ghàidhlig agus Albais. Tha sinn air deagh adhartas a choisinn a dh'ionnsaigh a' gheallaidh sin.

Tha sinn fìor mhothachail nach e seo eacarsaich a shuathas a-mhàin ri riaghladh nan cànan—tha sinn airson ceumannan a ghabhail a bheir buaidh air cleachdadh nan cànan ann an dachaighean, a bhios gan neartachadh sa choimhearsnachd agus san àite-obrach.

Chaidh am bile seo a dheasbad aig iomadach ìre eadar-dhealaichte. Nam measg, na h-ìrean deasbad coimhearsnachd; co-chomhairle fhoirmeil; leasachadh poileasaidh; agus an sgrùdadh is atharrachadh a rinn a' Phàrlamaid seo. Tha am bile air a bhith air a neartachadh aig gach ìre air sgàth nan deasbadaan seo.

'S e geallaidhean soilleir agus àrd-amasach a bha air cùlaibh a' bhile seo. Le bhith ag obair às leth Gàidhlig agus Albais tha sinn an-còmhnaidh a' togail air agus a' cur ris na gnìomhan a chaidh a chur an sàs le daoine romhainn. Feumar a bhith ag aithneachadh a' bhile seo agus ceumannan eile mar phàirt riatanach den oidhirp a bhith a' càradh a' chroin a dh'fhulaing na cànan ann an linntean nas tràithe. 'S e seo a' chiad uair a chaidh Albais a chomharrachadh ann an reachdas.

Sa mhìos mu dheireadh tha mi air tadhal air a' cheathramh sgoil Ghàidhlig a tha san amharc do Ghlaschu agus an sgoil Ghàidhlig a tha a' sior fhàs ann an Inbhir Nis. Tha mi air a bhith an sàs ann an còmhraidhean mun thaic a bheir Gàidhlig don eaconamaidh ann an sgìrean cugallach. Chìthear comharran adhartais agus, leis a' bhile seo, nì sinn cinnteach gun lean an t-adhartas sin.

Tha sinn air èisteachd. Tha sinn air gabhail ri beachdan bhon choimhearsnachd. Tha deasbadaan mun bhile seo air nochdadh thairis air na coinneamhan agam le luchd-ùidhe coimhearsnachd agus le measgachadh de

bhuidhnean Gàidhlig agus Albais. Tha sinn air buannachd fhaighinn bho bhith a' còmhradh ri Buill-Phàrlamaid agus air fàilte a chuir ri molaidhean nam Ball-Pàrlamaid. Rim bheachd-sa, tha bile pàrlamaid againn a tha a' riochdachadh luchd-ùidhe an t-seòmair seo uile gu lèir.

Tha sinn mothachail de thoraidhean a' chunntais-shluaigh mu dheireadh. 'S iad seo adhbhar airson dòchais, misneachd agus dùbhlain. Mar às àbhaist, le Gàidhlig agus Albais, tha an t-uamhas obrach romhainn agus tha am bile seo a' toirt dhuinn an comas agus na dòighean anns an tèid adhartas a bharrachd a choisinn.

Tha cumhaichean ùra sa bhile seo aig a bheil buaidh air àitichean a tha riatanach ri leasachadh na Gàidhlig agus na h-Albais. A thaobh ionnsachadh, chaidh ceumannan a leantainn gus cothrom nas fheàrr a thoirt do dhaoine air foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus gus goireasan foghlaim a leasachadh do dh'Albais san t-seòmair-sgoile.

A thaobh coimhearsnachd, thèid cumhaichean a chur an sàs gus comharrachadh is taic a thoirt do sgìrean aig a bheil ceanglaichean cudromach don Ghàidhlig agus gus taic a thoirt dhaibhsan a tha a' fuireach is ag obair sna sgìrean seo. Anns an ro-innleachd agus na bun-inbhean a tha am bile a' cur air adhart bidh sinn a' mìneachadh nam prìomhachasan againn agus na targaidean air am bi sinn ag amas.

Tha am bile seo a' toirt a-steach cumhachdan gus sgìrean cànan sònraichte a chomharrachadh. 'S e miann a' bhile gur e am pròiseas comharrachaidh rud a bheir cumhachd do choimhearsnachdan Gàidhlig agus gum bi sgìrean cànan sònraichte a' cur taic ri ceumannan practaigeach. Mar eisimpleir, a bhith a' toirt seachad seirbheisean tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig agus solar nas fheàrr airson foghlam Gàidhlig ris am b' urrainn ùghdarrasan ionadail dèiligeadh mar phrìomhachas.

An lùib a' bhile seo tha measgachadh de chumhaichean airson foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig, cumhaichean gus neartachadh mar a thèid aithris air poileasaidhean cànan, agus feadhainn a chuireas dleastanas air ministearan ro-innleachdan agus bun-inbhean a stèidheachadh. 'S iad seo cumhaichean ùra agus bidh iad ga dhèanamh nas comasaich tuilleadh adhartais a choisinn.

Thig atharrachadh às a' bhile seo. Tha sinn air freagairt na dùbhlain aig ìre 1. Chaidh barrachd airgead a thasgadh. Tha sinn air sealltainn nach e seo dìreach bile samhlaichail. Chuir sinn aithne ri prìomh dhraghan a thaobh foghlam Gàidhlig. Tha sinn air prìomhachas a thoirt do ghnìomhan

coimhearsnachd agus air aontachadh gu bheil feum air targaidean àrd-amasach.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

This parliamentary process started with a commitment to bring forward a new Scottish Languages Bill. The clearly stated aim was to take further steps to create a secure future for Gaelic and Scots. We have made good progress with that commitment. We are aware that the bill is not just an administrative exercise; we want the steps that we take to have an impact on language use in homes, and to strengthen its use in the community and the workplace.

The bill has gone through the stages of community discussions, formal consultation, policy development, and scrutiny and amendment by the Parliament. The bill has been strengthened at every stage by means of those discussions.

The commitments behind the bill were clear and ambitious. With Gaelic and Scots, we are always building on and adding to what others have done before. We must view the bill and other steps as an essential part of reversing the neglect of earlier times. This the first time that Scots has been included in legislation.

In the past month, I have visited the planned fourth Gaelic school in Glasgow and the expanding Gaelic school in Inverness, and I have had discussions about where Gaelic can contribute to the economy in fragile areas. Those are signs of progress and, with the bill, we will ensure that progress continues.

We have listened, and we have taken in community views. Discussions on the bill have featured across my meetings with community interests and with a range of Gaelic and Scots bodies. We have benefited from discussions with MSPs and we have welcomed proposals from MSPs. I believe that we have a bill that represents all interests in the chamber.

We are aware of the most recent census results, which give us hope, optimism and challenge. As ever with Gaelic and Scots, there is much to do, and the bill gives us the means and the levers to make further progress.

There are new provisions in the bill that will affect crucial areas of Gaelic and Scots development. In learning, steps will be taken to improve access to Gaelic-medium education and to improve resources for use in classrooms for Scots in education. In communities, provisions will be put in place to recognise and support areas with important connections to Gaelic and to support people who live and work in those areas. In the proposed strategy and standards, we will set out our priorities and the targets that we will aim for.

The bill introduces powers to designate areas of linguistic significance, or ALS. It is envisioned that Gaelic communities will be empowered through the designation process and that ALS will support practical steps such as delivery of services through the medium of Gaelic and improved provision of Gaelic education, which local authorities could prioritise. The bill includes a range of GME provisions, strengthens reporting and requires ministers to establish strategies and standards. Those are new provisions that will enable more progress.

The bill will make a difference. We have answered the challenges that were raised in stage 1: new investment has been provided; we have demonstrated that the bill is not symbolic; we have addressed key Gaelic education concerns; we have prioritised community activity; and we have agreed that ambitious targets are needed.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

The Deputy First Minister has spoken about the investment that comes with the bill. What are her reflections on previous investment in the Gaelic language? I am thinking about police cars and uniforms being labelled with both the language of Scotland and Gaelic. Could that investment have been put, years ago, into the Gaelic services that we see today, rather than being spent on something symbolic on police cars and uniforms? Would that have been a better way to spend that money?

Kate Forbes: Tha an t-iongnadh orm gu bheil am ball a' faighneachd mu chàraichean is rudan mar sin, gu h-àraidh às dèidh buidsead far a bheil barrachd airgead gu lèir airson na Gàidhlig, barrachd na £30 millean, £5 millean a bharrachd na bha anns a' bhuidsead airson na Gàidhlig roimhe.

Agus bidh fhios aigesan nach eil na rudan sin samhlachail—gu bheil e cudromach gu bheil sinn a' faicinn a' chànan againn fhèin. Tha sinn a' pàigheadh chisean mar a h-uile duine eile, agus mar sin tha e cudromach gu bheil cothroman aig daoine aig a bheil Gàidhlig a bhith a' fuireach agus a' cleachdadh na Gàidhlig fad na h-ùine.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I am surprised that the member is asking about cars and such like, especially after a budget in which there is more money overall for Gaelic—more than £30 million, which is £5 million more than there was for Gaelic in the previous budget. Further, he will know that these things are not symbolic—that it is important that we see our own language. We pay taxes like everyone else, so it is important that people who speak Gaelic have opportunities to live in and use Gaelic all the time.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): A bheil an Leas-Phrìomh Ministear ag aontachadh

nach eil e dìreach a' dèanamh ciall gu bheil daoine no dhà bho àm gu àm ag ràdh nach iad an aghaidh na Gàidhlig ach dìreach gu bheil iad an aghaidh a' Ghàidhlig fhaicinn?

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

Does the Deputy First Minister agree that it simply does not make sense that, from time to time, some people say that they are not against Gaelic, only that they are against seeing Gaelic?

Kate Forbes: Tha tòrr dhaoine an aghaidh chànanan mar a' Ghàidhlig agus Albais ach aig a' cheann thall tha daoine a tha a' bhòtadh airson nam pàrtaidhean air leth aig a bheil Gàidhlig agus aig a bheil Albais agus tha e cudromach gu bheil sinn a' riochdachadh daoine bho gach pàrtaidh aig a bheil an cànan. Mur a bheil daoine ann an Alba a' toirt taic dhan chànan againn fhèin, chan eil dùthaich sam bith eile a' dol a bhith taiceil leis a' chànan againn fhèin. Tha mi a' smaointinn nach eil mòran ùine agam air fhàgail so tha e cudromach gu bheil sinn dìreach a' dol a chumail oirnn.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

There are many people who are against Gaelic and Scots, but there are also many people who vote for our parties who speak Gaelic and Scots, and it is important that we represent all those people. If people in Scotland do not support our own language, no other country will support it.

I do not think that I have much time left, so it is important to keep going.

The member continued in Gaelic:

Bidh am bile seo, leis na h-atharrachaidhean agus na sgrìobhainnean cudromach a leanas, a' toirt dhuinn am frèam-obrach a dh'fheumas sinn gus adhartas a bharrachd a choisinn do Ghàidhlig agus Albais. Bidh cumhaichean a' bhile ag obair còmhla ri chèile agus feumaidh ar fòcas a-nis a bhith air buileachadh a' bhile agus a bhith a' dèanamh an fheum as motha às na cumhaichean ùra seo.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

The bill, as amended, and the important documents that follow will give us the framework that we need to make more progress on Gaelic and Scots. The provisions of the bill will work together, and the focus now must be on implementation and on making the most of the new provisions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Deputy First Minister. Can I just check whether you moved the motion in Gaelic?

Kate Forbes: I did not, but I will move it now.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Languages Bill be passed.

17:30

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I start by thanking the many individuals and organisations who have engaged with me on the bill and the Deputy First Minister and her officials for their positive engagement.

I joined the Education, Children and Young People Committee last October, so I very much came late to the party in relation to the bill. However, I hope that the amendments that were agreed to, to simplify Gaelic-medium education requests, and some of the other measures in the bill will provide a strong framework that will ultimately help to develop future pathways to learn to speak Gaelic, especially for the young speakers of tomorrow.

After 25 years of the Scottish Parliament, I do not think that we can look back and see the progress that many of us would like to have seen to not only protect but develop the language. There have been some positive developments, but we need to be honest that the language continues to be vulnerable and that it must be nurtured if it is to survive and thrive.

Twenty years after the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, we must take stock of the policy frameworks, including in relation to Gaelic language plans, Gaelic-medium education and initiatives to raise the profile of Gaelic in various sectors, given that they have not achieved the outcomes that we all, including members in previous parliamentary sessions, hoped that they would. I very much associate myself with Michael Marra's remarks about targets and our ability to judge where progress is needed and where resources need to be focused.

We can look at the example that Wales has set. In saying that, I acknowledge that Wales has been proactive in protecting the Welsh language since the 1930s. Significant progress has been made in Wales to protect and develop the language. That includes the target that the Welsh Parliament has set to have 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050, and other targets relating to the use of the language.

The Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill also establishes a statutory body—the national Welsh language learning institute—and, in that regard, I very much welcome the amendments to this bill in the name of Willie Rennie that were agreed to in relation to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. I visited many years ago with Liz Smith, and I was hugely impressed by the work that the institution was undertaking. There is also probably no better view outside a lecture theatre—perhaps only here in the capital. I hope that the opportunity in the bill for the

institution to move forward as a national centre for Gaelic language education and culture can be secured as soon as possible. I hope that we will see as soon as possible the positive progress on that that the Deputy First Minister has outlined and said that she wants to be made.

I am pleased to have managed to work cross party to take forward amendments on Gaelic-medium education and on simplifying the process for parents and carers to request GME. It is important that local authorities can then accommodate and progress those requests. I fully acknowledge the financial pressures that councils face, but if we are going to save the Gaelic language and improve the uptake of speakers, it is important that that is taken forward.

I very much welcome the positive work that I have been able to undertake with the Government and with campaigners. I thank Wilson McLeod and Dr Gillian Munro, who are here today, for their help and support with those amendments and for their work over many years to support and promote Gaelic-medium education. Future pathways to speak and learn Gaelic are now part of the bill, and I hope that those pathways will succeed where, previously, we have not seen the number of people speaking and learning Gaelic pick up.

I hope that the development of the areas of linguistic significance has the potential to not only stabilise the language but help to create a positive localised environment to give people the confidence to use their language and to further develop structures around speakers. On a visit to Cnoc Soilleir, on South Uist, with the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, I saw at first hand how the community hub not only helps to promote and celebrate the community's Gaelic cultural heritage but provides a multigenerational learning space to save and take forward the language. That provides a great vision for how the public and private sectors can come together to do some of the policy work.

It is clear that, in the coming years, we will continue to face financial pressures. However, I hope that we will have cross-party understanding that resources should rightly focus on making the greatest possible progress on stabilising and growing the language in the areas where it is most widely spoken. A figure of 20 per cent has been put on that in the bill. The areas of linguistic significance that the bill creates will be important in enabling us to see where the language is being developed.

Scottish Conservatives have a long and proud record of supporting the Gaelic language, from the late 1990s, when John Major's Government made positive reforms, until the present. I place on the record the contributions of a number of my colleagues, both past and present—Liz Smith,

Donald Cameron, Ted Brocklebank and Sir Jamie McGrigor—who, over a long time, have made distinguished contributions to supporting the Gaelic language in the Parliament.

On its own, the bill will not turn around the decline in the Gaelic language. However, I hope that its overall policy aims—of increasing the use of Gaelic and furthering opportunities to learn it—will ensure that a vibrant part of Scotland’s cultural landscape will exist for generations to come, and that we will all look back at this point as giving us an opportunity to take the language forward.

Scottish Conservatives will support the motion at decision time.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Michael Marra to open the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour.

17:36

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): It is now 20 years since the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 was passed. The vital question for us all now is where the Gaelic language will be in 20 years’ time.

In 2020, research by academics at the University of the Highlands and Islands, entitled “The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community”, revealed stark findings. It said that the social use of Gaelic within communities was

“at the point of collapse.”

The decline in the number of Gaelic speakers was steepest among young people, the majority of whom were not using Gaelic either socially or in the home. The researchers warned that, without changes to policy and intervention at community level, the then-present Gaelic vernacular community would not survive beyond the next decade. That was five years ago, so time is clearly running out.

I have genuinely appreciated the Deputy First Minister’s collegiate approach since she took over dealing with the bill. Various members with far greater and longer-standing knowledge of this policy area than I have have told me that there is a desire to maintain the consensus on Gaelic matters that has underpinned previous laws, and I think that that is represented in parts of the bill’s approach. We should certainly not risk joining the prevalent culture wars by politicising the Gaelic culture and language.

However, the Parliament’s cross-party group on Gaelic, of which I am a member, is genuinely concerned that cosy consensus is simply not working and that we are continuing to go in the wrong direction. We were therefore disappointed that, in the face of this existential crisis for

Scotland’s ancient language, the Scottish National Party Government chose to introduce a narrowly drawn, education-focused bill. I have expressed that view to the Deputy First Minister.

Of course, education is important for the survival of Gaelic, but it is not the principal means by which the language will be saved or where changes are required. The underlying reasons for the decline in the number of Gaelic speakers, particularly among younger generations, are not in the excellent teaching that is found in Stornoway or in the Gaelic-medium education schools in Glasgow or Edinburgh. The principal issues that endanger Gaelic are economic and social ones. Young people grow up in traditional Gaelic-speaking areas, but they find that there are not enough homes, well-paid jobs, reliable ferries or roads there to enable them to build lives for themselves and their communities. Instead, they leave for opportunities in urban areas, in Scotland or further afield, which are far from the Gaelic heartlands, and, increasingly, they are unlikely to return. Those are the issues that the Parliament and, I hope, the Government should tackle, but they are all outwith the scope of the bill.

Scottish Labour’s 2023 policy paper “Gaelic: An Economic Plan for a Living Language” argued that economic issues including housing, jobs and other critical infrastructure must be addressed in order to arrest the decline of Gaelic. The short-life working group on economic and social opportunities for Gaelic, which the Deputy First Minister herself commissioned in March 2022, made similar arguments in its report. Although its members perhaps did not go as far as Scottish Labour did in our paper; their comments were similar in tone. The Government does not appear to have listened to those arguments, though. I ask the Deputy First Minister to reflect on them in her closing remarks. I fear that the SNP Government has turned its face against the real prospect that, in 20 years’ time, there could be no Gaelic language left to save, because it has been put in the pile of issues that are too hard to deal with.

I welcome the amendments that the Government has worked with members across the chamber to lodge and the modest and incremental changes that they bring to the bill.

I was struck this week that the focus of the Government’s press activity on the bill has been Gaelic-medium education. We are strong supporters of Gaelic-medium education, and minor tweaks have been supported by all parties to ensure that that is provided. However, it is, inevitably, peripheral to whether Gaelic survives as a living language. That is part of the evidence that comes out, and perhaps part of what the Deputy First Minister referred to as the challenge that emerges from the census figures—although

there is a larger number of people speaking a basic level of Gaelic, the number of people who continue to use it beyond childhood is decreasing rather than increasing. We have to be concerned about the ability to use Gaelic as a living language rather than as peripheral to people's lives, or as an add-on to Scottish culture; it must be integral to the way that people live their lives.

Scottish Labour will support the bill at decision time, but we will do so while sounding the alarm that, in the words of the Deputy First Minister, merely building on what has come before will be insufficient to meet the sure trust of our ancestors, with a near certainty that if we do not change course and Gaelic is lost in this generation, part of Scotland will be gone forever.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Ross Greer to open on behalf of the Scottish Greens.

17:41

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I think that we all went into the bill process agreeing about not only the crisis for Gaelic as a living language but its importance to Scotland's culture, but there was not that same consensus on the status, importance or even definition of Scots. We have grown support for legislative provisions on Scots through the process, but, as we have just seen from some of the last votes on amendments, it is clear that there is more work to do to build consensus across the Parliament in support of the language. I am glad, though, that my amendments to include provisions on more education resources and on extending the Scots language strategy to more public bodies were at least agreed to by majority.

I do not want to lose sight of the importance of what I think is the most significant element of the bill for the Scots language, which is simply its recognition in law for the first time. Symbolic recognition is important, after centuries of denigration. Scots is a living language and thrives in all sorts of ways that Gaelic does not, despite sustained efforts to force it out.

We have waited 20 years for a new bill on Gaelic. It is fair to say that, when the bill was first published, it was underwhelming and would not have had the transformational impact that we are all looking for. The amendments that have been lodged and agreed to over stages 2 and 3 have made significant improvements to it. I commend the excellent bill team, who worked with members of all parties on amendments. They are brilliant advocates for both languages in the Scottish Government, and the cabinet secretary should be very proud of their work.

We all understand the context for Gaelic. As has been mentioned, the number of learners is

growing, largely as a result of the Duolingo effect and the establishment of more GME schools in our cities. However, in traditional communities, where Gaelic is a living language, it is in steep decline. Misneachd Alba, the Gaelic activist organisation, has said:

"We desperately need qualitative targets, both overall and in GME output. We are seeing an improvement in the overall numbers of people who self-identify as having some Gaelic ability, thanks to Duolingo, GME and other learning initiatives. However, we are still seeing a precipitous decline in people who can and do use the language in their daily lives."

We have started to address that with the reporting requirements and some of the specifics that will come later through guidance and strategy, but the contrast between the growth in the number of people with Gaelic language skills in our cities and the decline in traditional communities is stark. There is huge demand for GME schools in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and some extracurricular activities in Gaelic are being established, so there is some progress, but it is clearly not yet a community language there—you cannot use Gaelic when you go shopping in Glasgow or Edinburgh.

Compare that with the evidence that one of our witnesses gave us. She had been in Stornoway a couple of days before coming to Parliament for the stage 1 process. She said that one of the best examples that she could give of Gaelic as a living language was seeing a group of teenage boys misbehaving in Gaelic in Stornoway. That was the example that she used of what a living language really looks like.

New, tangible provisions in the bill to advance that are essential, but I do not think that we should dismiss the value of the signal in and of itself that Parliament sends by passing the bill. Symbolism matters. The legitimacy of Gaelic and Scots in this country is still being challenged, and the Government and Parliament are making a clear statement in law that we believe that these languages—our languages—have value.

The bill goes some way towards addressing those challenges; however, on its own, it is clearly not enough. No one would suggest that it is, but this afternoon is a hugely important moment, as I said, because for the first time in 20 years for Gaelic and the first time ever for Scots, those languages are being recognised in law by the Parliament. We have a stronger bill in front of us as a result of the work of the Parliament and tireless advocates such as Wilson McLeod, Gillian Munro and Matthew Fitt from Scots Hoose. We can all be proud of the bill that we are going to vote for this afternoon.

17:45

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): On occasions such as this, I feel inadequate in that I do not speak the Gaelic language. However, in the past, Liberal Democrat members have been fluent—well, John Farquhar Munro was a keen advocate of the language. On one occasion when he was delivering his contribution to a debate, the interpretation went silent, so George Lyon, another former colleague of mine, made a point of order to ask whether something was technically incorrect. However, it was not; it was just that the interpreter could not understand a word that John Farquhar Munro was saying. Such is, perhaps, the diversity of the language.

I am grateful to the Deputy First Minister for piloting the bill, because—to answer the points that Michael Marra made—it has given a new focus and energy to the revitalisation of the Gaelic language. We were pretty underwhelmed by the bill when we started. It is pretty minimalist. Ross Greer is right to say that it has improved, but the reality is that if we are relying on just the bill to revitalise the language, we will fail. I was grateful that the Deputy First Minister recognised that. If she had started the process, this would not be her bill; she would be doing something much more substantial, together with the wider plan that she has instigated in other areas.

We know that we are in a crisis. There is a real determination from many, but that might not be enough. We saw from the witnesses who gave evidence to the committee that there were pretty strong views and tensions. On some occasions, it was just as well that the witnesses sat with somebody in between them, because they felt so strongly about the language and its importance.

Like Ross Greer, I am incredibly grateful for the support of the bill team. Not only are its members outstanding; they care deeply about the language. That gives me confidence that we will be able to move forward and make progress.

The language used to be suppressed by the state. Now, it is supported by the state and elevated by the state. However, just when the state is behind the language, people are neglecting it in their communities and moving away from it. That should alarm us. Although we are getting the language expanded and spread across Scotland in schools, when it comes to the pub, the cafe or the home, people do not use the language daily in the way that we would like it to be used. It should not be peripheral but central to their lives. We need a critical mass to make that happen, and extra support in communities will be required to give it critical mass and enhanced credibility so that it does not retreat further.

A bizarre knock-on effect of spreading Gaelic-medium education into our cities is that there is now a shortage of Gaelic-medium education teachers in many schools in traditional Gaelic-speaking areas. It is bizarre—extraordinary, in some ways—that the very communities that we are trying to help are being damaged by that expansion across the country. We therefore need to make sure that we give the right support in our traditional communities.

I am pleased that the Sabhal Mòr Ostaig amendment was passed, and I hope that the college will be given enhanced and elevated status so that it becomes a national centre. I am pleased that we are moving towards a simplified process for designating Gaelic-medium education schools.

I am particularly interested in the potential of the Gàidhealtachd—the areas of linguistic significance. On the surface, the concept is pretty vacuous and might not mean an awful lot, unless local authorities and communities really get behind it. My hope is that it will be a central gathering point for the energy for change, so that the retreat is reversed and progress is enhanced.

Finally, I am also pleased about the enhancement, for the first time, for Scots. It is an important part of our community and society and we should be supporting it.

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

17:50

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Tha mi air leth toilichte am pìos reachdais seo fhaicinn air ar beulaibh an-diugh, còrr beag is fichead bliadhna on a chaidh gabhail ris a' chiad achd na Gàidhlig—Achd na Gàidhlig (Alba) 2005—achd a thug inbhe don Ghàidhlig ann an dòighean gu math cudromach.

Tha am bile ùr seo a' neartachadh agus ag atharrachadh an reachdais a th' againn mar-thà, gus dèanamh cinnteach gu bheil sinn a' dìon agus a' brosnachadh na Gàidhlig agus Albais anns an dòigh a b' fheàrr agus as èifeachdaiche agus as urrainn dhuinn airson nan ginealaichean rin tighinn.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I am delighted to see this piece of legislation before us today, just over 20 years since the first Gaelic language act—the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005—gave Gaelic status in very important ways.

This new bill strengthens and amends the legislation that we already have, to ensure that we protect and promote Gaelic and Scots in the best

and most effective way possible for generations to come.

The member continued in Scots:

The maist o whit A hae tae say the day is anent Gaelic, as ane wad expeck fae the memmer for the Wastren Isles. But a wheen o memmers kens at A grew up in anither pairt o Scotland awthegither, whaur Scots is tae the fore yet. Scots is at the hert o monie lawland communities, an for aw the sneers o some fowk at kens nae better, it is at the hert o Scotland's leiterature forby.

Sae A am gled tae see at the ack afoore us minds baith o Scotland's native leids. A hope we can be by wi aw the antrim nories aboot Scots at wes threapit frae sindrie airts an pairts o this chaumer the last time we spak here o the subjeck, an recognise the day at aw leids haes dialecks—Gaelic an Scots baith—at bilingual road signs isna the enn o ceivilisation, an at Scots an Gaelic isna like the nose an chin o Willie Wastle's wife—bi which A ettle tae say, they dinna threaten ither, or oniebodie else.

The member continued in Gaelic:

Tha mi airson oidhirpean luchd-ùidhe a mholadh—an dà chuid airson na h-obrach cruaidh a rinneadh le diofar dhaoine agus bhuidhnean thairis air an ùine a dh'fhalbh, agus airson am bile seo fhèin a leasachadh on a chaidh fhoillseachadh.

Chaidh an t-uabhas obrach a dhèanamh airson am bile a dhèanamh na bu làidire. Tha mi gu math taingeil don Leas-phrìomh Mhinisteir airson a bhith ag obair còmhla riumsa, agus còmhla ri càch, airson na beachdan againne a thoirt a-steach dhan bhile far an robh sin comasach a dhèanamh.

Tha fhios gu bheil beachdan diofraichte ann a thaobh na dòigh air adhart gus a' Ghàidhlig a dhion mar fhìor chànan coimhearsnachd. Bha iomadach daoine an-diugh a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn sin. Mar a bha daoine a' bruidhinn mu dheidhinn cuideachd, tha sinn aig àm cugallach. Ged a bha figearan de luchd-ionnsachaidh na Gàidhlig air èirigh gu soilleir anns an dàta bhon chunntas-sluaigh mu dheireadh, gu mì-fhortanach tha a' Ghàidhlig fhathast a' crìonadh air a' Ghàidhealtachd, agus gu h-àraid anns Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

'S e mo dhùil gum bi modhan-obrach ùra—mar na sgìrean cànan sònraichte—air an cur an cèill anns an reachdas seo a chuireas maille air a' chrìonadh sin gus an cànan a ghlèidheadh anns na coimhearsnachdan againn, a' toirt stèidh làidir do dh'obair-leasachaidh a bhitheas nas fhaisge air na daoine.

Chunnaic sin soirbheachas ann am foghlam tro mheadhan na Gàidhlig thairis air an leth-cheud bliadhna a dh'fhalbh. Tha iartas mòr air an dòigh-

foghlaim seo, agus a dh'aindeoin nan cnapan-starra a th' ann an cois trèanadh agus fastadh luchd-teagaisg, chì sinn gu bheil àireamhan nan sgoilearan a thèid tro fhoghlam Gàidhlig a' sìor-èirigh. Am measg nan iomadh iomairt air feadh na dùthcha, bu thoil leam moladh a thoirt gu h-àraid air oidhirpean Comhairle nan Eilean Siar gus àrd-sgoil Ghàidhlig a stèidheachadh.

Tha mi' n dòchas gum bi am bile seo a' neartachadh oidhirpean den t-seòrsa seo air feadh na h-Alba agus gum bi a' Phàrlamaid againn fhèin ag aithneachadh ann an dòigh ùr an-diugh gu bheil Alba nas fheàrr dheth airson na dileib iomadh-chànanach a th' againn mar dhùthaich.

Following is the simultaneous interpretation:

I commend stakeholders for their efforts—the hard work that has been done by various people and groups over the years—and for their work on the development of this bill since it was published.

A great deal of work has been done to make the bill stronger. I am very grateful to the Deputy First Minister for working with me and others to incorporate our views into the bill where possible.

It is recognised that there are differing views on how to proceed in order to protect Gaelic as a genuine community language at such a sensitive stage. Although the figures for Gaelic learners have clearly risen according to the most recent census data, unfortunately, Gaelic is still in decline in the Highlands, particularly in the Western Isles.

It is my hope that the new approaches, such as the areas of linguistic significance, which are set out in this legislation, will slow that decline, in order to preserve the language in our communities and provide a strong basis for development work that is closer to the people.

We have seen the success of Gaelic-medium education over the past 50 years. There is great demand for this form of education and, despite the challenges in training and recruiting teachers, the number of pupils who are receiving Gaelic-medium education is continuing to rise. Among the many initiatives across the country, I particularly commend Comhairle nan Eilean Siar in its efforts to establish a Gaelic secondary school.

I hope that the bill will strengthen such efforts across Scotland and that our Parliament will recognise, in a new way today, that, as a country, Scotland is better off for our multilingual heritage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

17:54

Ross Greer: It is a privilege to follow Dr Alasdair Allan, who has done so much to contribute to Gaelic and Scots.

As has already been said, this bill alone will not save Gaelic or restore Scots to the status that it deserves—there are so many other factors at play. I will start by touching on an issue that a few other members have mentioned, which is the housing crisis that is driving the crisis in Gaelic as a living language. That crisis is largely being driven by the increase in holiday homes and short-term lets.

One councillor in Skye reckons that 60 per cent of properties there are empty over the winter because they are second homes or short-term lets. House prices on Skye are £60,000 higher than the national average. That is driving young people and young Gaelic speakers out of their communities. Those are exactly the kind of people who we need to stay in these communities to continue Gaelic as a living language, but they are being driven out because, as adults, it is simply impossible for them to find somewhere to live in their own community.

The licensing of short-term lets has definitely helped, but it does not go nearly far enough. Far more targeted housing policy is needed specifically to support the recovery and survival of Gaelic as a living language. I suggest targeted increases in the additional dwelling supplement for areas of linguistic significance as one of the most obvious ways in which we can lever tax policies to support Gaelic speakers to stay, live and raise families in the communities that they have grown up in. The third stage of the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which will take place after the summer recess, is an opportunity for all parties to make proposals, given that, across the stages of this bill, speakers from all parties have raised housing as one of the key issues for us to consider.

To stick with Skye, I am proud of the provisions in the bill for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and my work with Gillian Munro, Willie Rennie, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the bill team. We have set a clear process and direction of travel. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is a world-class institution and a change in its status and enhanced abilities will be crucial to the delivery of the wider agenda that we all share for Gaelic recovery, not least to address the shortage of GME teachers.

The teaching resource provisions that we have just agreed to will also make GME teaching a more attractive prospect and will, I hope, reduce and eliminate the significant additional workload that puts Gaelic speakers off becoming Gaelic-medium teachers. I was surprised by Labour's opposition to those provisions being extended to Scots. I would be happy to discuss that with Labour, but I am glad that those provisions have been passed, because we need to end the shame that has been felt by millions of Scots for speaking our own language in our own country. Most, if not all, of us have been reprimanded at some point in

our lives and told to speak properly simply for using one of this country's native languages.

Success will look different in different places. In our cities, it is about moving beyond GME school provision and into community spaces, whereas, in the likes of Skye or Lewis, it is about protecting Gaelic as a community and a living language. That latter point is the most critical.

I want to recognise the different perceptions and appetites in different communities, and we should recognise the hostility to these efforts. There is not always an inherent hostility to Gaelic; in some cases, and in our cities, we need to recognise the class dynamics around GME education. I welcome the location of the new GME school in the Calton in Glasgow. We should recognise that parents of kids whose needs are not being met in English-medium schools can understandably be frustrated to see additional resources for GME schools, whose pupils are overwhelmingly drawn from more privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the solution is to resource all schools and to meet the needs of all kids, not to play different needs off against one other.

It grates a bit when some argue that the range of social ills that we face means that we should not be prioritising the recovery of our native languages. After centuries of decline and deliberate marginalisation and oppression, when should that start? I hope that all parties remember the comments that they have made today when it comes to budget time and the allocation of resources.

This is a good day for Gaelic, Scots and Scotland. The bill is just one part of the puzzle, but the Parliament is sending a message today that these are our languages. If Scotland's Parliament will not support and protect them, no one else will. It may be that I am being optimistic, but I hope that today will be seen as a turning point and, in particular, that it will be the start of Gaelic's recovery as a living, celebrated language.

17:59

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I apologise to the Presiding Officer, the Deputy First Minister and others in the chamber for my late arrival to the debate this afternoon.

I am pleased to close today's debate on behalf of Scottish Labour and to confirm our support for the Scottish Languages Bill at stage 3. I thank the legislation team, who I suspect have scored me off their Christmas card list this week after the significant number of amendments that I lodged. They work tirelessly, and I appreciate all the work that they do.

I also thank the Deputy First Minister and her team for engaging with us on the bill. Finally, I thank my team and members across the Labour benches for their support in getting us to where we are today.

A Labour-led Government introduced the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. Like others, we are committed to the language's survival and revival, and to supporting the cultural, educational and community life that surrounds it, which others, including the Deputy First Minister and Dr Allan, have spoken passionately about today. The aim of supporting and enhancing that community life has driven our approach to the bill. Without a living community and a working economy, the Gaelic community and our ancient culture will cease to exist.

As my colleague Michael Marra set out, we regret that the scope of the bill did not extend directly to such matters as housing, jobs and connectivity. Academics and the report of the short-life working group on economic and social opportunities for Gaelic, led by Kate Forbes, agree that those matters are crucial, so I hope that the bill will be a catalyst to ensuring that they get the attention that they need.

Nonetheless, we worked hard to have a meaningful role in strengthening the bill, because we know that, without significant action, Gaelic will cease to be a living language. Our amendments helped communities to have a key voice in action on Gaelic, and those people will now be involved in decisions about their community and their language.

I am disappointed that the Government did not support the provision of a dedicated development officer, because that could have ensured that there would be a local resource working with communities. However, I hope that, in supporting the board to discharge the duties that the Deputy First Minister mentioned, the Government can ensure that the areas and communities that are designated in the act get the help that they need to grow their community and ensure that their language flourishes.

Thanks to my colleague Michael Marra, with the support of the Government and others, there will now be targets in law, which are essential to ensuring that we meet the level of action that is needed for the language to survive. For the first time, the Scottish Qualifications Authority will be under a duty to ensure that a meaningful number of qualifications are available through the medium of Gaelic and that resources are provided to support that.

Ross Greer, Miles Briggs and Willie Rennie have also spoken passionately and acted to give meaning to the bill for education, including

parental rights, provision for schools and support for Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. Although we still believe that the bill could and should have gone further, many of those changes mean that the bill now begins to meet the challenge that many campaigners and academics have pointed to: that Gaelic cannot be revived solely in the classroom. It must live in communities, and, with the right structures and support, it can.

I thank colleagues from across the chamber who worked together to improve the bill. Those changes reflect what we heard in the committee and from others, which was that, for the Gaelic language to thrive, it must be visible, viable and valued not only in schools but in homes, workplaces and public life.

The bill was not perfect, and the work does not end here, but, with the amendments that the Parliament has now made, we believe that it has a much stronger foundation. The challenge is now around implementation and the provision by the Government of the long-term resource and leadership that are needed. I am sure that, together, we will rise to that challenge, because Gaelic communities have waited too long for action, and it is time that we matched our words with delivery. I hope that today's bill will make that happen.

18:02

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): It is a privilege for me to be able to close this afternoon's debate on the Scottish Language Bill on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

As I said in the stage 1 debate, as Scottish Conservatives, whose ethos is based on tradition, we believe that our customs and heritage play an important part in who we are. We are proud of our shared culture and agree that we need to uphold and encourage our traditional languages. If I can play on language for just a second, what can be more basic to a Scottish Conservative than the conservation of Scots?

Language, in all its forms, is the key to communication, but so little communication is effective. The innate understanding of the spoken and written word is not only the way to break down barriers, it is essential in fostering bonds and ensuring that traditions are there for generations to come. The Deputy First Minister will be pleased to hear that I am not going to repeat the history lesson on the origins of Scots.

Scottish Conservatives support making Gaelic more accessible. It is important that we highlight that that is not a party-centric effort. There is an awful lot of support across the chamber for making sure that Gaelic is more accessible. That is what the bill sets out to achieve. However, again we find

ourselves worried about the ability of the bill to achieve its aims. We cannot legislate and forget.

It will be no surprise to members to hear that I am interested in the education, care and wellbeing of the children of Scotland. In education debates, we are often reminded of the need for our councils to have the autonomy to progress Government legislation and guidance. That suggests that, should the bill be agreed today—I am sure that it will be—the enactment of its provisions will be entirely down to local authorities. It is therefore worrying to read the briefing that COSLA issued for today's debate. Also, as Willie Rennie stated earlier, where are the Gaelic teachers?

It is all well and good to move forward on legislation, but it is the outcomes that matter. As a former councillor I know at first hand the issues in taking forward educational changes—the 1,140 hours expansion of childcare provides a classic example.

COSLA is quite right to highlight its concerns. It states:

“Our submission to the earlier consultation referenced a report which noted that far too few Gaelic Medium Education Teachers were being trained. The pipeline of Gaelic teachers is often out with local authority control, and without concerted action from the Scottish Government and partners to increase the number of Gaelic teachers, any expansion would not be deliverable.”

That issue must be addressed.

We know from other Government projects, including the 1,140 hours expansion of childcare provision, that funding falters at the first hurdle. COSLA also highlights that issue, raising concerns in relation to the estimated costs for local government. It notes that sufficient information to allow an assessment of the accuracy of estimated costs was not provided, but that those estimates “seemed low” and that cost estimates of some implications for local authorities appeared to be missing.

It goes on to highlight that

“The supplementary financial memorandum focuses only on costs associated with Stage 2 amendments”

and that

“Concern remains that the costs of implementing the Bill have not been sufficiently captured.”

The Government must do more to ensure that the funding is provided to do that.

COSLA's final point is that, at stage 2, there was a fully agreed amendment by the committee for Gaelic education. The Scottish Government introduced amendments to create a process for local authorities to consider requests to establish all-Gaelic schools. Local government is concerned about the time, resource and the expense of carrying out those new duties. There are a number

of all-Gaelic schools in the absence of the legislation.

Local government's view is that section 22A takes away the ability of an education authority to determine the best location for Gaelic language provision and requires them to spend officer time and effort on a process that might determine that provision is unviable.

The Scottish Conservatives recognise the good intentions behind the bill and see it as a springboard to speed up processes, but whether the legislation will stabilise or deliver a sustainable future for the Gaelic and Scots languages is far from clear. Only time will tell whether it goes the way of other initiatives for every child, such as free school meals, bikes and laptops, or whether we will see the development of our traditional speech. I wait with bated breath.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I call the Deputy First Minister to wind up the debate.

18:07

Kate Forbes: Presiding Officer,

“S ged a dh' fheuch iad ri cur às dhuinn,
Chi mo theaghlach cnoc nan linn.
'S ged tha ar cànan leòint' le stri,
San tìr seo bidh i beò.”

The member continued in English:

“Although they tried to destroy us,
My children will see the landscape of generations.
Although our language has been wounded in its struggle,
In this land she will live on.”

As I close the debate, I want to stress at the outset that my primary concern throughout this process has been to progress the bill on a cross-party basis. There have been keen advocates for the bill in every party that is represented here today. The Conservatives can be proud that theirs was the party that first introduced the very concept of Gaelic-medium education. Labour—with, I think, some support from the Lib Dems—can be proud that it introduced the bill that became the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. My party has led on work in this area, too, and I have been grateful for the support of the Scottish Greens.

I said in answer to a previous intervention that there are voters across Scotland who use Gaelic as their everyday language—who live, breathe and work in the language. I know from speaking to them that it matters intensely to them that they have representatives who not only reflect their values and concerns in the political sphere but realise how precious their language is.

I am therefore grateful to members who have risen to the challenge of ensuring that the bill truly is a national endeavour, with representation,

participation and contributions from every party. I am particularly grateful to Miles Briggs, who assumed responsibility for the bill after it was introduced.

The bill is a milestone and a marker of the progress that we are making. I, too, give my enormous thanks to the bill team and to the Government team, who are sitting up the back of the chamber and are, I hope, looking forward to an early night tonight after working extremely hard for about 18 months.

In debates about our languages, it is very difficult not to look back and forward. Language study and historical analysis show that, when the frontier of a Gaelic-speaking community—or, indeed, a Scots-speaking community—has receded, there is no evidence yet that it has recovered. My forebears hail from the Applecross peninsula. Some Gaelic can be heard there today, but it certainly does not have the same vibrancy as it did when I was a child. When speakers pass on, pass away and take with them the rich cultural heritage of a language, we lose something as a nation, unless it is passed on to the next generation.

I will also look to the future. As I think Ross Greer said, Gaelic and Scots are our languages. They are Scotland's languages—they are nobody else's languages. If we cannot protect and nurture them, nobody else will, so it is up to us.

The consultation responses and the evidence received on the bill have been enormously helpful. I smiled when Michael Marra—or perhaps it was Willie Rennie—talked about the fact that, occasionally, he was glad that the committee witnesses were separated. However, that speaks to the strength of feeling about language and the value of diversity and debate—and sometimes dispute—about the best way forward. It is because we care about the languages that we debate them, and it is in the debate that we have that democratic representation. As I said to Pam Duncan-Glancy in relation to her amendments in the first group, I applaud the debate that we have on language, and I am thankful for members' participation in it.

Willie Rennie and Michael Marra both talked about the fact that legislation has limits. I would be the first to recognise that we cannot legislate language into existence. If language is truly a living, breathing medium of communication, it has to be about more than what Governments and Parliaments pass in the form of legislation.

I have been somewhat preoccupied by the bill, but, on Friday, I met members of the short-life working group on social and economic opportunities for Gaelic and stressed to them that our focus will be on implementing the

recommendations that they made in their brilliant report. The areas that they raised are the very areas on which Parliament has been inviting me to go further. There are questions about population retention and infrastructure, housing, transport, digital connectivity, education, jobs and key sectors. Those are all the things that bring our communities to life, irrespective of where they are.

Those things are critically important for strengthening Gaelic because, ultimately, language is about the people. We talk about Gaelic and Scots as if they are tangible assets that are independent of people, but, ultimately, it is about the speakers, how they prosper and are successful, and how their wellbeing is taken into account. I would very much like to continue the cross-party consensus that we have achieved through the bill and to work with members to implement the recommendations that the short-life working group identified as critically important.

I will touch briefly on the points that Roz McCall made about local government, because she is absolutely right. Particularly in the discussions about areas of linguistic significance, we considered whether central Government should direct and mandate or whether there should be an iterative process with our local authorities. Our local authorities are key in taking responsibility and reflecting local diverse needs.

I have spoken to the three primary local authorities for Gaelic—Argyll and Bute Council, Highland Council and Western Isles Council—on which there is a variety of political representation. I want to work with them at pace to understand not just what will be expected of them but how we support them to take forward that work.

Presiding Officer, I have forgotten how much time you gave me, but I want to take a few more seconds to say that one of the biggest changes in the bill relates to education. Although we are focusing on community, we know that, for young people, learning the language and being able to study in their native tongue in school is critical.

The bill strengthens Gaelic-medium education considerably. The provision of Gaelic-medium education by an education authority can fulfil the foundational duty in our education law to provide adequate and efficient education. Authorities may consider that providing only Gaelic-medium education is appropriate in certain areas. Indeed, that is almost happening right now, but that will be the case in an area of linguistic significance where there is a high proportion of Gaelic speakers. An authority would be required to satisfy itself that, in doing so, it would be complying with its wider legal duties.

I started my speech with a quote from Rory and Calum MacDonald of Runrig, which ends on the

point that she will live on in this land. That is the choice that we will make by passing the bill, and it is the choice that I hope that all future generations will make, because we should not squander the value, the heritage, the culture and the wealth in our language.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

18:17

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-18002, on a committee meeting time. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between approximately 5.45 pm and close of business on Wednesday 18 June 2025.—
[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Motion without Notice

18:17

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

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 11.2.4, Decision Time be brought forward to 6.17 pm.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

18:17

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-17966, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Scottish Languages Bill at stage 3, be agreed to. As this is a motion to pass a bill, the question must be decided by division.

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

18:18

Meeting suspended.

18:19

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on motion S6M-17966, in the name of Kate Forbes. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app has not connected. I would have voted yes.

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

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I do not think that I was connected, but I want to check. I would have voted yes.

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

I call Tess White for a point of order.

Given the connection difficulties that we are having, Ms White, we will proceed for now.

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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)

Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (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 motion S6M-17966, in the name of Kate Forbes, on the Scottish Languages Bill at stage 3, is: For 112, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Scottish Languages Bill be passed.

[Applause.]

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-18002, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on committee meeting times, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between approximately 5.45 pm and close of business on Wednesday 18 June 2025.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Gaza

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business this evening is a members' business debate on motion S6M-17933, in the name of Bill Kidd, on the on-going crisis in Gaza. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call Bill Kidd to open the debate.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament echoes the "grave concerns" of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the reportedly catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza; notes the calls, including from constituents in Glasgow Anniesland, for an immediate ceasefire and the safe release of all hostages, alongside the immediate and unconditional lifting of all restrictions on the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid in Gaza, and further notes the belief that international recognition of a sovereign independent state of Palestine, as part of a two-state solution, is the fundamental pillar upon which a lasting peace in the Middle East depends.

18:24

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): More than 55,000 people have been killed and more than 127,000 people have been injured. More than 70 per cent of Gaza has been bombed into oblivion. Since 18 March this year, more than 80 per cent of Gaza has been under displacement orders or military control orders. Each day brings more untold horror. Each new report, each image and each child's cry pierces the conscience of the world—or at least it should.

My heart goes out, as must all our hearts, to those who are directly affected—to those in Gaza who are enduring unimaginable suffering, to the families of hostages and victims, and to those in Scotland who feel that pain deeply and personally. It is a pain that we all share, whether we choose to openly acknowledge it or not.

Parliament debated this very issue in the early days of the war. At that time, some members expressed understanding for Israel's initial actions, citing security reasons or the right to self-defence. However, I do not believe—I do not hope—that people in this Parliament continue to stand by those words in today's circumstances. How can we defend the indefensible? How can we defend systematic destruction and blatant genocide? How can we defend mass starvation and the deliberate targeting of civilians who are seeking aid?

Only last night, I listened to a British doctor who is working in Gaza. He described the injuries of civilians—men, women and children—who had been shot while attempting to reach aid distribution points. He said that those injuries

could have been inflicted only on people who were lying face down in the sand, cowering in fear, unarmed and seeking food. Those were people desperate to live, and what they found instead was a firing line—a shooting gallery. That is not just indiscriminate or inhumane; it is a direct affront to every humanitarian principle that we claim to uphold in the international order.

Yet where is the outrage? Where are the sanctions? Where, indeed, is any action? We have seen the International Criminal Court issue arrest warrants, both for Hamas leaders and for the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu. What is the response from the United Kingdom Government and the UK Prime Minister? At best, there are warm words; at worst, there is complicity. They are happier to be pictured with a beaming smile alongside a despotic US President who is hellbent on facilitating continuing genocide than to take action to save the people of Gaza or to acknowledge the historical injustices that the UK finds itself guilty of in the current situation.

Internationally, we see the same inaction and the same complicity. The latest UN Security Council resolution appeared to offer a glimmer of hope as members came together to call for the actions that are set out in today's motion, only for it to be vetoed by one party—the United States.

However, rather than give the UK and others cover, we urgently need to seek other international mechanisms and instruments in the face of continual Security Council impasses. The United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food, Michael Fakhri, has asked the UN General Assembly to authorise peacekeepers to accompany humanitarian convoys. That is indeed possible and achievable. A statute dictates that, where the Security Council is paralysed by a veto, the General Assembly can—and, indeed, must—step in. A majority vote among its 193 members could authorise peacekeepers. Let us be clear that such a vote would pass. Therefore, I ask the cabinet secretary to support such a move and to urge the UK Government to bring forward such a resolution.

More glimmers of hope seemed to be on the horizon when we were told that the UK and France were on the brink of recognising a Palestinian state. A Franco-Saudi summit was planned. Ordinary Israelis have been calling for peace—I have Israeli friends who are calling for peace. Israeli Opposition leaders have called for a ceasefire and for elections to take place so that a new decision can be made.

How did Netanyahu's regime respond? It launched a unilateral strike against Iran, risking regional war and the lives of its own citizens—all to distract from corruption charges and domestic political failure. That is why I call on not only

Governments but the people of Israel—good, decent people who want peace—to speak out, because their lives, too, are being gambled away in the name of fear, hate and political preservation.

We must all do our part to speak out and to take concrete actions. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has been outspoken in its condemnation of the genocide that is taking place in Gaza and that it has been outspoken on the need to adhere to international law. I welcome its support for a Palestinian state. I welcome its announced review of Scottish Enterprise’s human rights checks when awarding funding. However, I note the concerns of Amnesty International and Oxfam that the review lacks the necessary transparency and their calls for an independent review, which would promote transparency and trust in the process. I would welcome the Government’s thoughts on that in its response to this evening’s debate.

Although I appreciate that our powers here are limited, our voice is not. We must ensure that we use what powers we have and that the voice that we raise is heard loud and clear, for it is not only through action but through moral leadership and partnership—although we must have action along with those—that we can hope to bring an end to the suffering.

There can be peace in the middle east, but only if the world, including this Parliament, chooses to stand up and demand it—and demand it we do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kidd. We move to the open debate.

18:32

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I thank Bill Kidd for bringing this debate to the chamber.

Presiding Officer, I will not stand here and give you some polished parliamentary line. I rarely do—I tend to speak from the heart and tell you how I feel. This is not about grandstanding on this issue; it is about doing what is right.

What is happening in Gaza just now is a humanitarian disaster and we cannot just turn away from it. Since last October, as Bill Kidd has already said, more than 55,000 Palestinians have been killed—and I say “killed”, because the vast majority are civilians. Tens of thousands of them are women and children. Just think about that for a second: mums, babies and toddlers gone and whole families wiped out, and still, every single day, people die.

In 2025 alone, on average, 10 children have been killed every single day. Just this past week, 40 more people were shot dead at distribution sites for aid—again, many of them were women and children. That is not accidental, and it is not

collateral. It is collective punishment and it has to stop. This genocide has to stop.

Back home in Paisley, we have seen the strength of our community as it comes together, and I have been proud to speak at just about every single Paisley for Palestine demonstration. People from all walks of life have come together—families, faith groups, young people—to stand for humanity, for justice and for peace. Let me say this loud and clear: these are not fringe voices. These are not the usual suspects—the individuals who turn up at the various campaigns that we all turn up at. These are the values of the people I represent in Paisley, and these are the values of the people we represent in our communities—and they are saying that we should all be saying, “Enough is enough.”

We need a full and immediate ceasefire, we need all hostages to be released safely and we need humanitarian aid—food, water, fuel and medicine—to be allowed in without delay, without conditions and without political gains. Let us not kid ourselves that this will just fix itself. There is no future and no peace without justice, and that justice means recognising the right of the Palestinian people to live in safety, with dignity and with self-determination. It means recognising a sovereign Palestinian state not as some token gesture but as a foundation for lasting peace.

I am standing here today because I have seen pain. I have heard from my constituents and I know what they expect from this Parliament. They want us to care and to act. They want us to speak up, not just in sympathy for but in solidarity with those who are suffering in Gaza.

We cannot regain the lives that have been lost, but we can stand up now and make sure that we do everything in our power to stop any more being taken.

Let us be on the right side of history, let us be human and let us be bold. We must provide support and stop the suffering of those in Gaza. This cannot be allowed to continue.

18:35

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I do not doubt the passion and the sincerity with which Bill Kidd has spoken today. I read his motion very carefully. Some motions that we have debated in the chamber about Palestine have gone further than Bill Kidd’s; however, I felt that there was a lack of balance in it, and I will use my time to look at the situation without diminishing in any way the atrocities that we have seen in Gaza and the impact that they are having on a daily basis.

We must also acknowledge what happened on 7 October—the terrorist attack that saw women raped, mutilated and murdered and countless people across Israel killed, with many still held hostage. Their families across the world are waiting for news, but they are not hearing a single thing. Outside our Parliament, on almost a weekly basis—and, I know, in Glasgow on a weekly basis—we see people, including families, worried about their loved ones in Israel whom they have not heard from since 7 October. We cannot allow that to be forgotten.

Although the motion echoes the UN concerns about addressing the broader context, it fails to mention the terrorist attack by Hamas. It seems to call for an oversimplification of the issues that we have in front of us. Some of the atrocities on 7 October were filmed on dashcams and mobile phones by the terrorists themselves. There might be disagreements in the chamber, but I implore MSPs to watch a 47-minute film of footage that was pieced together, to properly understand the sheer evil that was witnessed by many on 7 October.

Humanitarian aid has been mentioned quite a lot during the debate, and it is part of the motion that we are debating. However, we know that there are issues with Hamas continuing to misappropriate humanitarian aid supplies, using aid as a vital tool to preserve its own influence and control over Gazans. The new model of aid distribution that has been introduced with the support of the US, which involves the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation providing aid directly to Gazan families, is to ensure that that aid reaches the civilians who need it and is not repurposed for violence.

The international community has been clear that Hamas should play no future role—

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Douglas Ross: I will in one moment, Mr Greer.

The international community has been clear that Hamas should play no future role in the civilian administration of Gaza. Unless its control of the aid supply chain is broken, Hamas will continue to exert influence over Gazan streets and perpetuate the cycle of violence and suffering that we all continue to witness.

Ross Greer: I absolutely agree that aid should not be used for violence. Will the member acknowledge the overwhelming evidence that, as Bill Kidd mentioned, Israeli soldiers are systematically executing starving Palestinians who are queuing for aid? Will he join us in condemning that?

Douglas Ross: I would never in any way—no one would—endorse executions of women and children who are waiting to get aid. No one is going to defend that—I am not going to defend it. I think that Ross Greer also acknowledges that Hamas, a recognised terror group, is using humanitarian aid for its own means, by preventing it from getting to those who need it and by using it to redouble its efforts to rearm.

I know that we are short of time, but I need to say that an immediate ceasefire such as is called for—one that does not ensure the release of all the remaining hostages—cannot be supported. Historically, ceasefires have been exploited by Hamas to rearm and regroup, as has been seen in the violations of past agreements during the 2014 and 2021 conflicts. We must take that on board.

I reiterate that what we are seeing in Gaza is appalling. We all want to see it stop. What we saw in Israel on 7 October was appalling, too, and the fact that people are still being kept hostage and away from their families as a bargaining chip is something that no one can support. We must have a balanced resolution that condemns terrorism, supports Israel's right to self-defence and promotes direct negotiations with a two-state solution.

I will finish with a quote:

“The path to peace lies not in one-sided declarations but in fostering dialogue, accountability and mutual security. Let us work towards a resolution that brings hope to both Palestinians and Israelis.”

18:40

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Bill Kidd for giving Parliament an opportunity to discuss the horrific and enduring suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza, most of whom are victims of an 18-year blockade.

Life in Gaza has become hopeless. People—trapped and living mostly in tents, with some sleeping on the bare roads—are now dying the most horrible deaths while the world is watching live, in real time, and is literally doing nothing to stop what is happening.

We have had 20 months of that. Israel's war on the Palestinian people has become a well-planned operation to clear the land and to ethnically cleanse Gaza and the West Bank of their people. It is like nothing that we have witnessed in our lifetime. At least 56,000 people are dead, with the actual total probably much higher, and yet the hostages are still in danger because of that strategy. This is not self-defence. I, and most members in the chamber, have condemned the atrocities of 7 October, but, 20 months on, nothing—nothing—can justify what has happened to the Palestinians in Gaza.

Rafah, with its population of 275,000, has gone; Jabalia had 56,000 residents—now all gone; and Beit Lahiya had a population of 108,000. They are now in ruins. Israel stands out as being amongst the most extreme war cases in modern history right now. Nonetheless, there have been many brave people—too many to mention—who have been witnesses to this genocide, risking their own lives to save other people.

Dr Victoria Rose served for more than months in Gaza. She talks of a three-month blockade of food—for three months, Israel deliberately blocked food from going into the Gaza strip. She talks of the children whose muscles are wasting, with a loss of fat and a lack of essential nutrients. They are not healing, and they have infections as a result of their poor immune systems. There has been no medical aid since 2 March. Hospitals have run out of 47 per cent of all drugs, and the antibiotics that they have are not the ones that they need.

Why are no journalists allowed into Gaza to report any of that? Of the ones who have been reporting, 200 are already dead, and we are losing count. Who has not cried at these scenes? Gaza is completely on fire—it is flattened, and its children are under the rubble, with no adequate equipment to rescue them. It is unforgivable, but crying does nothing to stop it.

My dear friends Ahmed Al-Nasar and Dr Khamis Elessi message me most days from Gaza. They say that the fire and the bombs are relentless every hour of every day. They cannot sleep, and they all know that, one time, it is going to be them. Nasser hospital has been forced to transport wounded people on public transport. If we want to imagine the unimaginable, we are seeing it in Gaza right now. The speed and the scale of the bombs make them the most powerful weaponry in the world, and they are being used against the poorest women and children.

This is about not just the actions of one Government, but the actions of all the European Governments and what they are not doing to stop the genocide. The Labour Government has suspended 30 arms export licences; that is an important move, but we need to go further. Indeed, I do not believe that we should be supplying any weapons or parts for F-35 planes.

We should stand up and be counted—we should be trying to stop the slaughter. The future of the region depends on it. If we believe in peace in the region, we have to stop what is happening in Gaza. We have to realise that the morality of the west depends on it. We cannot say that we are a nation of people who believe in morality if we are not prepared to do something to stop what is happening in Gaza.

As Bill Kidd was saying, there is death by starvation. On 16 June, nearly 200 people were killed at a Gaza aid centre when an Israeli tank opened fire—it was witnessed and documented. The International Committee of the Red Cross said on Monday that its field hospital in Gaza had received 200 patients, marking the highest number that the hospital had received. Before the aid distribution centres were set up, people were at least being fed. However, since they have been set up, people are not being fed, and children who go to get a bag of flour to feed their families are risking their lives.

The deliberate starvation of a population is a war crime, but to kill them while they are risking their lives to get food aid goes beyond even that. Words are not enough—only actions count here. There are clear breaches of international law on several counts. Israel, as the occupier, has an obligation to the people that it is responsible for, but it has not taken those responsibilities seriously.

The world can clearly see that this is a bid to destroy an entire people, and anyone who does not see that is not watching closely enough. We need to ask ourselves this: what platform are we using to stop it? Ordinary Israelis and significant Israeli figures know that the future of Israel actually depends on stopping Netanyahu from doing this. They believe in their country, and they believe that it is time to join forces with everybody else in the world who wants to stop it.

We, as politicians, must stand up and be counted, because we will be asked by our children and our grandchildren, when they see the horrors that have happened in the past 20 months, “What did you do to stop the genocide? What did you do to promote peace in the region of the middle east?” I, for one, have always said that I want peace for Israelis and security for Israel, but I want a sovereign, independent Palestinian state, too. I demand justice for the Palestinians.

18:47

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I thank Bill Kidd for securing this debate.

Collective punishment is a war crime under international humanitarian law, and it is specifically prohibited by the Geneva conventions. Yet, collective punishment is exactly what the blockade of Gaza, imposed by the apartheid, genocidal Israeli state, is inflicting on Palestinians. Using the starvation of civilians as a weapon of war goes against international law and the customs of war. The humanitarian crisis that we see in Gaza is a direct consequence of that collective punishment.

Alongside that are Israel’s actions to destroy all the infrastructure of society and culture, flattening

schools, homes, hospitals and universities. Those acts of aggression are clearly designed to cause as much human suffering as possible and to make it as difficult as possible to resist the blockade and to rebuild, restore and live.

If we, in this Parliament, find the actions of Putin in Ukraine to be so unpalatable—and we rightly do—then we should find the actions of Netanyahu and his regime to be just as abhorrent. The International Criminal Court has had an arrest warrant out for Netanyahu since November 2024. We should take a similarly robust stance as we do with Putin. We should also be doing whatever we can to ensure that Netanyahu and the others who are responsible for these atrocities are held to account, that the blockade is lifted and that unhindered humanitarian access across Gaza is supported and encouraged.

However, this is not just about the ICC and legal routes to justice, or getting into Gaza the food, water, medical supplies, fuel, clothes and so much more that we all take for granted every day. We must also consider the role that we, in Scotland and the UK, are and could be playing in this on-going genocide.

We hear of the heroic attempts to get aid into or people out of Gaza and the West Bank, and we commend those who are committed to humanitarian and peace work. What we do not hear much about or see any accountability for are the actions of our state institutions that serve to pour fuel on the fire of this war. The UK's military forces are currently training Israeli Defence Force personnel. More than 55,000 Palestinians have already been murdered, the majority of whom were women, children and the elderly, and yet we are training the very army that is carrying out such atrocities.

As if that was not bad enough, UK taxpayers' money—our money—is being used to subsidise weapons companies that manufacture arms and components that are being used to destroy infrastructure and life in Gaza and, it seems, also in Iran, with Israel escalating instability across the region at the weekend.

We can no longer say that our Governments are not complicit in a situation that is

“worse than hell on earth”

according to the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross. We have to call it what it is—genocide and ethnic cleansing—and act accordingly. We should be doing everything that we can to stop the UK's complicity.

We want to see recognition of the state of Palestine, as is seen in a growing number of countries around the world. The Greens also believe that we must see support for and action

towards boycott, divestment and sanctions. We should not be normalising genocidal states. We should not be celebrating their inclusion in sporting or cultural activities. We should instead be using every ounce of our economic, social and political power to isolate the genocidal Israeli state and secure a very different future for Palestine and the wider middle east.

The crisis in Gaza is not inevitable. War is not inevitable. Both are a consequence of political failure, and our Governments are complicit in that failure. The Palestinian people deserve better.

18:51

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I, too, pay tribute to Bill Kidd for his commitment to this issue and thank him for providing the opportunity for a debate. However inadequate words might feel in light of the horrific events that we are debating this evening, the debate is an important one.

Since the barbaric attacks and terror that were inflicted on innocent Israeli citizens by Hamas on 7 October 2023, the situation in Gaza has lurched from one indescribable horror to another. Israel's blockade of aid into Gaza, which began more than 100 days ago and which is yet to be properly lifted, is, however, causing truly unconscionable levels of suffering. Men, women and children are being slowly starved while Israel's military offensive continues.

In that context, debates and votes in this or, indeed, the UK Parliament will not trigger the action that is required to end the humanitarian atrocities that we are seeing unfold. Yet, we need to be clear in our condemnation, clear in our determination to use what levers we have to exert pressure, and clear about the fact that there is no military route to resolving this long-standing and bloody conflict and to achieving a lasting peace for Palestinians as well as for Israelis, only a diplomatic one.

Those are insufficient but nonetheless important signals that we can and must continue to send to the Netanyahu regime. That regime seems increasingly out of control, impervious to the pleas of allies, unfettered by international law and hell bent on escalation, driven by the most extreme elements in that Government.

Of course, we must continue to condemn the 7 October attacks, but we must also continue to condemn the violence and inhumanity unleashed on innocent Gazans at the cost of more than 55,000 lives and the devastation of hundreds of thousands more. The UN has made it clear that the entire population of Gaza is at critical risk of famine while the blockade continues. Meanwhile,

Palestinians are being killed as they attempt to collect food. The UN is right to say that

“Hunger must never be met with bullets.”

Targeting aid distribution centres and humanitarian workers not only deprives Gazans of access to the basic means of survival; it is undeniably inhumane.

As media and political attention, inevitably perhaps, turns to the blows Israel and Iran rain down on each other, what is happening in Gaza cannot be allowed to fade from public view or consciousness in the face of famine and what many argue is genocide. In response, Liberal Democrats believe that the export of arms to Israel must be halted, the state of Palestine must be recognised and sanctions should be applied more rigorously. Amnesty International points to the role that the Scottish Government can play. Scottish Enterprise funding, for example, must be subject to robust human rights checks, with no links to the on-going conflict in Gaza.

It is often too easy to be numbed to the human aspect amid the headlines of this war, but, as it rages on, the children of Gaza are dying in their thousands, homes are being destroyed and families are being torn apart. As a nation, we must remain resolute in our commitment to support and facilitate efforts to bring an end to this grotesque suffering. Anything less would be to accept our own complicity.

18:55

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I thank Bill Kidd for bringing this important issue to the chamber.

Presiding Officer,

“Every day, we lose more ways to survive ... We’re not asking for proper housing or clothes or even meat. All we want is a loaf of bread to stop the children’s crying. Is that too much to ask?”

Those are the words of a mother in Gaza, reflecting on the birth of her son during a period of profound violence and instability. In his short life, he has known only conflict. Like countless others in Gaza, he is now enduring the devastating consequences of war, malnutrition, uncertainty and a daily struggle for survival.

Conditions in Gaza have been intolerable for months. Following the Israeli forces’ official blockade of the Gaza Strip and months more of drip-feeding aid to a population in desperate need, according to the World Food Programme, 470,000 people in Gaza—22 per cent of the population—face catastrophic hunger and 100 per cent of the territory is at risk of famine.

That is taking place while the threat of bombs looms over. We are now seeing the deeply concerning use of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which has been criticised by its former leader, who resigned rather than support its strategy, the United Nations agency and the humanitarian aid community for “weaponising aid” and going against the core principles of humanitarian support, including placing conditions on aid. The consequences of that have been deadly, with desperate Gazans shot and killed while attempting to access life-saving aid.

The UN says that 9,000 trucks-worth of aid are waiting to enter Gaza. Every one of those must be let in to avoid further humanitarian disaster. That is not just the right thing to do; it is Israel’s responsibility under international law and as part of the resolution that the International Court of Justice has issued. A ceasefire agreement is now, more than ever, a moral duty as a start to ending this horrific human suffering. The UK Government, as well as Governments worldwide, can increase the pressure to make that happen.

We have seen military strikes by Israel in Syria, in Lebanon and now in Iran. Debates like today’s are important in allowing us to put on the record and say, “Not in my name.” We can stand today and say that the UK and Scotland should be partners for peace in conflict, but we cannot be partners for peace while selling weapons where there is risk of war crimes. We cannot be partners for peace if we allow states to break international law without consequences. We cannot be partners for peace if we do not recognise the existence of a Palestinian state.

18:59

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Bill Kidd on securing the debate. I lodged a similar motion calling for the recognition of the Palestinian state, so I am very pleased that Bill Kidd’s motion has been selected and that we are debating the issue today. I very much hope that this Parliament is given the opportunity to vote to call for recognition of the Palestinian state, although that is obviously not possible in this members’ business debate.

As a Labour MP, I voted in favour of recognising the Palestinian state in 2014, when the House of Commons voted for recognition in a non-binding vote. I suspect that the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture may well have been with me in those lobbies. The UK Government should publicly call for the full recognition of Palestine, although I appreciate the point made by Liam McArthur that such actions will not be sufficient in themselves.

Like many members across the chamber, on an almost daily basis I receive emails from constituents expressing horror at the Israeli Government's treatment of civilians in Palestine. Since 7 October 2023, Israel has carried out indiscriminate attacks on Gaza, with displacement of Palestinians from their homes through land grabs and demolition, and with the horror of the scenes of carnage, mutilation and death that we see so often on our television screens.

Pauline McNeill and Bill Kidd said that at least 56,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli military offensives, and some estimates are considerably higher. More than 14,000 people are said to be missing or presumed dead. It has now been over 15 weeks since Israel imposed a complete blockade on vital aid and supplies, which amounts to collective punishment and the use of starvation as a method of war against the population of Gaza. The World Health Organization has warned of the permanent impact of hunger on a generation of people in Gaza.

Israel's co-ordinated attacks on and near hospitals have pushed Gaza's healthcare system to the brink of total collapse, and we are far beyond the early days, when there was denial that hospitals were being targeted. Israel's aggression on Gaza, in direct violation of international law and the International Court of Justice, has left many Palestinians in Gaza who have families across the world stranded without any safe or viable path to reunite with their loved ones, perpetuating the cycle of trauma faced by those individuals. Pathways to family reunification with relatives in the UK, for example, involve restrictive criteria, prolonged waits and hefty fees. That is the kind of issue that Britain could do more on. As of 24 March 2024, two Palestinians had died while waiting for the Home Office to decide on their applications.

I would therefore like to use this debate to highlight the calls of the Gaza families reunited campaign for the immediate implementation of a Gaza family scheme to enable Palestinians to reunite with their loved ones in the UK. Provisions under the scheme would involve deferring biometric enrolment until family members arrive in the UK and would require the Foreign Office to provide consular assistance to people accessing help. Importantly, that would not negate the Palestinians' right to return but would uphold it by seeking to protect the lives of those in need now.

I am pleased to support the motion and the call for an immediate ceasefire, the release of all unjustly detained people, the unconditional lifting of all restrictions on the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid into Gaza, and the recognition of the Palestinian state. I also support the call that both the UK and Scottish Governments must

divest from funding any organisation that enables the sale of weapons to Israel and that all arms exports to Israel must cease. That is very much in the interests of the people of both Israel and Palestine.

17:04

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I respect Bill Kidd's sincerity in lodging the motion, as I respect all those who have spoken so far, and I begin by deploring the suffering of innocent people—Palestinians and Israelis alike. The images from Gaza are harrowing. The loss of innocent life, the displacement of families and the deep trauma inflicted on civilians are tragedies that weigh heavily on us all. No one could be indifferent to such human suffering.

However, let me be absolutely clear: I support the right of the state of Israel to defend itself against terrorism. Douglas Ross was right to highlight the atrocities on 7 October. I hope that I am not alone in resolutely opposing Hamas—a violent proscribed terrorist organisation whose actions have inflicted unimaginable suffering on both Israelis and Palestinians. The Parliament cannot ignore the reality that Hamas is not a partner for peace but a death cult, funded by Iran, that is committed to the total destruction of Israel and is utterly indifferent to the suffering of the very people it claims to represent.

I share concerns about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. That is why I have asked questions about the nearly £1.5 million of Scottish Government aid that has been committed to Gaza over the past 18 months. As the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee discovered, that aid was intended to be delivered in the form of cash and vouchers to those in need on the ground, but I have raised grave concerns that that well-meaning and well-intentioned support risks being hijacked by Hamas in order to sustain its control and prolong the suffering of civilians.

Pauline McNeill: Stephen Kerr said that Israel has a right to defend itself. How does he feel about the deliberate starvation of the Palestinian population in Gaza? In my speech, I said that there is evidence from eye witnesses that Israel has shot at people who have been queuing up for aid, and it is common knowledge, as reported in the *Haaretz* newspaper, that Israel has paid armed gangs to cause chaos at so-called humanitarian food distribution centres. Surely he is not justifying that.

Stephen Kerr: I do not justify any action that causes civilians to suffer, but Pauline McNeill was very wise to couch her description of those events in relation to reports. This war is being fought not only through violence but through propaganda,

and there is an abundance of evidence of that propaganda and of how potent it is. We all long for peace, but peace demands clarity and honesty.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Does Stephen Kerr call for international journalists to be allowed into Palestine, as some of us do, so that we can get accurate reporting of what is happening?

Stephen Kerr: As Carol Mochan will appreciate, the situation on the ground in Gaza is very complex. We would all like to see some honest reporting of what is transpiring.

As I was saying, calls for a ceasefire must be accompanied by calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all the hostages who are still held by Hamas. A two-state solution must be grounded in mutual recognition. I hope that members appreciate and accept that Hamas fundamentally rejects recognition of the state of Israel. I do not believe that there can be equivalence between a democratic state acting in self-defence and a terrorist organisation using civilians as shields. That is not nuance; it is moral clarity.

Let us also be clear about recognition of a Palestinian state. Statehood cannot be seen as a solution in the face of on-going violence; it must be the outcome of a genuine peace process that begins with the rejection of terror and the embracing of co-existence. Until such time as Hamas is disarmed and dismantled, and until the Palestinian leadership is willing to live in peace alongside Israel, it appears that lasting peace in the middle east will, I am sorry to say, remain tragically out of reach.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call the next speaker, I advise members that, given the number of colleagues who still wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Bill Kidd to move the motion.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

19:10

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): In Shuhada Street, in al-Khalil, the occupation has segregated Palestinians from illegal settlements for two decades. What was once a central thoroughfare, a hive of commercial activity and the Barras of the city is now described as a ghost town. Military checkpoints deny Palestinian residents free movement in their home city. Children queue in metal cages to reach their

destinations—school, the grocery store or simply home. Those are ordinary, peaceful activities. That is why, every year since 2010, youth against settlements has campaigned to open Shuhada Street, end the closures in the city and end the military occupation of Palestine.

Shuhada Street is but one example of the indignity that Palestinians face every day. For more than 100 years, a war has been waged on the Palestinian people not because of religion, politics or self-defence, but because of land. In the pursuit of a land without a people for a people without a land, there was just one problem: the land had and has a people—the Palestinians. What we are witnessing in Gaza—the catastrophic humanitarian situation, the deliberate withholding of food by Israel, the half a million people in acute malnutrition, and one of the world’s worst hunger crises unfolding in real time—is, in short, genocide against Palestinians. It is not accidental. It is not “collateral damage”. It is by design.

We know that because that is what the Israeli Government told us. Yoav Gallant, then Minister of Defence, said on 9 October 2023:

“I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly.”

The International Criminal Court has issued a warrant for his arrest. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister, said on 17 November 2023:

“It is necessary to make cultural changes in Gaza, such as in Japan and Germany following World War 2.”

The International Criminal Court has issued a warrant for his arrest. Their words are incitement to genocide. Their actions are ethnic cleansing. Let us be clear: Gallant and Netanyahu are not lone operators. The Likud party, which they represent, is a right-wing nationalist party founded by members of terrorist organisations that expressly opposes the establishment of a Palestinian state. And the actions of those men and of the Israeli Government, as grave as they are, are not at all surprising. What is surprising is the blind eye that has been turned by so much of the international community. That must not be allowed to continue.

The UK Government must immediately suspend all UK arms exports to Israel, and the Scottish Government must ensure that no public money is awarded to companies that are manufacturing and supplying arms or their components to Israel. Whether our Governments act will come down to the people, as it always does. Through the votes that we cast, through the voices that we raise and through the choices that we make, together we can turn the tide.

19:14

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I thank Bill Kidd not just for lodging the motion but for his lifelong commitment to peace and justice. The Scottish Parliament will sorely miss his voice as of next May.

I want to ask Israel's defenders how they can sleep at night. I also want to ask that question of the people who, two years ago, condemned those of us who pointed out that Israel had bombed a hospital in Gaza. Where are those voices now, when every single hospital in Gaza has been almost completely destroyed and hundreds—if not thousands—of doctors, nurses and other hospital staff have been murdered by Israeli forces? Where are those who denied that Israel would ever target Palestinian children now that we have the testimonials of surgeon after surgeon saying that all they do all day is operate on children? Those children are five, six or seven years old and have single gunshot wounds to the head—in other words, wounds caused by execution shots by Israeli soldiers. Where are those who denied that Israel would ever massacre paramedics now that a mass grave has been found of 15 Palestinian paramedics, who were buried with their ambulances in an attempt to cover up that crime? Of course, when Israel was caught, it described that massacre as a professional error—and by the way, it murdered the 12-year-old boy who witnessed it.

I can think of no other word than “twisted” to condemn the Israelis who point to the Iranian air strikes on civilian infrastructure in Israel and say, “We could never possibly do that—that is the difference between democratic Israel and tyrannical Iran.” How can those Israelis say that after two years of systematic slaughter of civilians in Gaza and the West Bank? How can they say that after 80 years of occupation and the systematic murder of Palestinian civilians with impunity and without consequence? Some of—*not all*—Israel's air strikes in Iran were, indeed, highly targeted at military officials. However, all that does is prove the point that the mass slaughter of Palestinians is a choice—it is not collateral damage; Israel is choosing to deliberately kill tens of thousands of Palestinians.

I cannot wait for the Iranian people to overthrow their regime and live in freedom, but let us compare Iran with Israel. Iran has no nuclear weapons and, according to American estimates, is at least three years away from developing one. Iran allows international observers into their nuclear facilities to verify that that is the case, and it agreed to a treaty preventing it from developing nuclear weapons. In comparison, Israel has nuclear weapons, which it developed in partnership with apartheid South Africa. Israel

denies that it has those weapons, but it will not allow international observers in to verify that.

Day after day, we see more starving people desperately lining up and being herded into cages for something to eat, and then being shot—executed—at aid points.

Britain is complicit in this. Throughout the slaughter, Britain has never stopped arms sales to Israel. Britain has never stopped the Royal Air Force flights over Gaza and the passing of the intelligence gathered to the Israeli military. Britain has never stopped trading with Israel's illegal settlements in the West Bank. Britain has only sanctioned two ministers in the Israeli Government—not the Prime Minister, the defence minister, the President, the foreign secretary or a single military official. We now have the news that the British military is training the murderers that are the Israeli occupation force.

I am always deeply reluctant to use the word “holocaust”. I never want to diminish the unique evil of the Holocaust, but what can we call this other than a holocaust of the Palestinian people? Every year, with unanimity, we remember the victims of genocide. We say, “Never forget,” and “Never again.” However, so many of those who say that with us are now passive or even active supporters of this genocide. If you have ever asked yourself what you would have done then to prevent history's worst atrocities, it is whatever you are doing now.

What the UK can do is end all arms sales to Israel; end intelligence sharing with the Israeli military; expel—or, better yet, arrest, rather than train—the Israeli occupation force personnel who are here; and recognise the state of Palestine.

The Scottish Government can stop giving public money to Israel's arms dealers and can ban the companies that have been identified by the United Nations as complicit in the occupation from receiving a penny in grants or contracts in Scotland. It can call for a boycott of trade with Israel in the same way that it called for a boycott of trade with Russia. The International Criminal Court (Scotland) Act 2001 can be used to prosecute Israeli soldiers who return here—members should be in no doubt that some of those who are committing these crimes in Palestine are from the UK.

Peace is not just an end to violence—it is the presence of justice. I pray that the perpetrators of this genocide face justice. Right now, what I pray for more than anything else is that my Palestinian friends will simply be allowed to live.

19:20

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Bill Kidd for bringing the debate to the chamber and for all his work on establishing peace over the years that he has been in the Parliament and beyond. I know that he will continue to do that.

We need more serious discussion of our country's role in these conflicts and how we can alter our actions to limit the likelihood of war. The chamber should take time to consider more issues of such importance, and I am glad that we are doing so tonight.

I join other members in calling again for the immediate release of all hostages, the return of remains to families and the unconditional lifting of all restrictions on humanitarian aid going into Gaza. Those are the first steps towards a lasting resolution. People cannot negotiate peace with the threat of violence hanging over them. Let me be absolutely clear: our country should not be selling weapons and associated technology to anyone who is using it indiscriminately to strike civilian targets.

The death toll in this conflict has been utterly intolerable. It is clear to anyone who is approaching it from a moral position that what is occurring in Gaza is an attempt to commit genocide. That is clear for all to see. Some of the attempts to make it seem like a normal war between two adversaries have been perplexing. This is not a war of equals.

For well over a year, we have seen unimaginable slaughter and targeted starvation of the people living in Gaza. That is a fact. On top of that, any sense of human rights and decency has been thrown out of the window. Journalists, aid workers and, as we have heard, medical staff have been murdered simply for trying to help those in great need or to tell the truth.

The world's response has been impotent and truly depressing. I feel very naive for having assumed that we would never see such scenes again in my lifetime. It is dreadful to realise that it has simply been allowed to happen. I feel great shame that, in the UK, we are not doing all that we can to stop it.

All that I can do is continue to stand up and be counted with the millions who are saying that we must have peace. It is what my constituents want, it is what decent human beings across the world want and it is the right thing to do. I echo the motion's call for an immediate ceasefire, and not only in Palestine. There must be an end to the needless conflict between Iran and Israel, which was started so aggressively by the Israeli Government just last week. We must call for it to stop.

We have been down this road before when claiming the right to strike countries based on unconfirmed reports that they might develop a weapon of mass destruction. I had hoped that we had learned the lessons from Iraq and the dreadful repercussions that that conflict brought to people across the world.

There is no need for any more death and destruction. Let us use any influence that we have to secure peace and speak with one voice as a Parliament and as the nation of Scotland. Let us call for peace and for no more death and destruction.

19:23

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I, too, am grateful to Bill Kidd for lodging this vital motion and for giving the Scottish Parliament the opportunity to debate the on-going crisis in Gaza. I recognise that my colleagues, Katy Clark and Pauline McNeill, also lodged motions on the subject in recent weeks.

There are no words that do justice to this humanitarian catastrophe. We have to follow the evidence and the reality. I thank colleagues who have highlighted the fact that journalists cannot get into Gaza to report in the way that Stephen Kerr and other members clearly want to see. We know that many journalists have been killed, alongside many medics, doctors and others on the front line.

Like others, I thank constituents who have been in touch with me through my inbox or by speaking to me at events and surgeries. It was good to hear from George Adam about the lively efforts in Paisley to support the Palestinians. At the end of the day, all we can do is show love and empathy and that people care. I thank all my constituents who have written to me to urge an immediate ceasefire, the safe release of all hostages and the immediate and unconditional lifting of restrictions in Gaza on the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid.

I was thinking back to an event in 2022 that was hosted in the Parliament and organised by Jackie Baillie. Some guests from Medical Aid for Palestinians were hosting medics from Gaza; other guests included some of our doctors and other clinicians from Scotland who had been working with teams out there to build capacity. I was so impressed by what I heard at that event.

I also heard about MAP's work to support cross-party visits to Palestine and I was interested in perhaps going on one of those trips. A few years later, it is unthinkable that any of us will set foot in Gaza in the near future. I know that Pauline McNeill has spent time in Gaza and in the region, but what is going to be left?

We try very hard not to dehumanise people in debates on such conflicts, but the numbers are absolutely unbelievable. It is heartbreaking that, today, there are still 58 hostages who have been held for more than 600 days and remain in cruel captivity. At the same time, the lives of more than 55,000 Palestinians have ended, and more than 127,000 have been injured—and those numbers continue to rise. When will enough be enough?

If we believe in international law and international justice, we all have to do more. Debates such as this one can help to push the issue up the agendas of the Scottish Government and the UK Government. I agree with all my colleagues who have said that the UK has to do more. This cannot be allowed to happen in our name. Every day when I go home, my 18-year-old daughter speaks about Gaza. We have a generation of young people in this country who are in utter disbelief. We have to do more. That includes tracking what is going on in relation to Scottish Enterprise and making sure that no taxpayer pounds go towards funding the war.

What we are seeing in Gaza is genocide, but we are also witnessing an ecocide. Satellite imagery from Kent State University showed that nearly all Gaza's crops, tree cover and grasslands have been damaged. Three weeks ago, UN satellite imagery showed that less than 5 per cent of Gaza's crop land remains available for cultivation, further exacerbating the risk of famine.

I echo colleagues' remarks: we need justice for the Palestinians. Both the people of Israel and the people of Palestine deserve a better future. They are not getting that from their current leaders. The world needs to act—we need to act now.

19:28

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I thank Bill Kidd for securing this important debate, and I pay genuine tribute to all the members, across the parties, who have spoken so powerfully. Only last week, the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Tom Fletcher, said:

“Attacks on civilians in Gaza—including the killing and injury of hungry people seeking food and those delivering aid—are unacceptable.”

A former UK ambassador to Lebanon and senior adviser to two UK Prime Ministers, Tom Fletcher understands intimately the responsibility of the international community towards the world's most vulnerable citizens.

The Scottish Government condemns in the strongest terms the killings in Gaza of civilians who lost their lives while queuing for food and

trying to get aid for their families. Gazans are faced with an impossible choice between risking death by starvation and risking death by gunfire. It is totally unacceptable and it has to stop.

The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification assessment confirms that the entire population of Gaza faces high levels of acute food insecurity. Half a million people—one in five—face starvation, and children under five are at the highest risk.

The situation is entirely man made and was entirely preventable. Israel's approach to delivering aid via private contractors has failed tragically. Israel's plan to entrust the distribution of aid in Gaza to private contractors contravenes humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. The plan risks militarising aid and exacerbating inequalities. It is unconscionable that 2 million people are starving in the Gaza Strip while tonnes of food is being blocked at the border. Israel must now allow humanitarian agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to conduct their life-saving work unimpeded and at scale.

The Scottish Government has been consistent and forthright in calling for an immediate and sustained ceasefire. Like any other country, Israel has a right to protect itself and its citizens from terror, and the Scottish Government has repeatedly and unreservedly condemned the brutality of Hamas on 7 October 2023 and demanded the immediate and unconditional release of Israeli and other hostages. However, in exercising its right to defend itself, Israel must abide by international humanitarian law. Israel's military action has gone far beyond any legitimate response.

We have been consistent in calling for unimpeded access to Gaza for humanitarian aid, for Israel to comply with international court rulings and for accountability for those who are responsible for atrocities, wherever they occur. Scottish Government ministers have repeatedly called for an end to licensed arms exports to Israel. We do not believe that there is a case for sending more weapons to Israel. The UN Security Council has called for a ceasefire. Ministers have made it clear that, by continuing to arm Israel, the UK is in danger of being complicit in killing innocent civilians.

Monica Lennon: I welcome, and agree with, the points that the cabinet secretary has made, as other Scottish Labour members have done this evening, but will he provide an update on the Scottish Government's efforts to review Scottish Enterprise's human rights checks? We are approaching the summer recess, and many of us still feel very uncertain and quite anxious about the

situation in that regard. I would welcome an update on that.

Angus Robertson: I will be happy to update Monica Lennon, but I must tell her what really needs to happen. On 2 September 2024, the UK Government announced the suspension of 30 export licences for the export of arms to Israel for use in military operations in Gaza. That was welcome, but we have made it clear that the suspension should go much further and should cover all such licences. That would obviate the need for questions such as the one that Monica Lennon has just raised. However, I have given her an undertaking and I will reply to her in detail.

People in Gaza are being bombed and left to starve by Israel on a massive scale. Sadly, the rhetoric of some Israeli politicians is becoming increasingly extreme, and the trickle of aid that is being delivered by private contractors is inadequate and inhumane. The approach of bombing hospitals and targeting humanitarian workers is appalling and clearly incompatible with international humanitarian law, and it must cease immediately. The international community cannot allow the situation to continue. It must take decisive action now.

The Scottish Government has repeatedly called for the UK Government to officially recognise the state of Palestine, to break the political impasse that has condemned Israelis and Palestinians to successive cycles of violence. The First Minister called on the UK to review its position following the welcome decision last year by Ireland, Norway, Spain and Slovenia to recognise the state of Palestine. They have joined more than 140 other states in doing so. It is therefore regrettable, given the growing international consensus around recognition, that the UN conference on a two-state solution, which had been due to take place this week in New York under the co-chairmanship of France and Saudi Arabia, has been postponed.

Recognition would offer hope to Palestinians that a just and durable political solution is possible, and it would allow Israel and Gaza to move towards long-term peace and stability, which is in the interests of all. I made that position clear during a members' business debate on 26 June last year, and I repeat that position today. Katy Clark was right to recall that we both voted for the recognition of Palestine in the House of Commons in 2014. Only a two-state solution will bring lasting peace and enable Palestinians and Israelis to live side by side in peace and security.

I thank members for their measured and thoughtful contributions to the debate. We must amplify our voices in calling for immediate humanitarian support for the people of Gaza.

Today saw the UK national Srebrenica memorial day ceremony, which marked the 30th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. The ceremony took place in St Paul's cathedral, in London, earlier today. Fifty years after the world said, "Never again," to the horrors of the Holocaust, a genocide took place on European soil against Bosnian Muslims. Now, 30 years on from the murder of thousands of unarmed men, women and children in Srebrenica, we are again forced to ask ourselves what we will actively do. We must do all in our power to end the horror in Gaza—and, yes, that includes working to secure the release of all hostages. Doing nothing is not an option.

The Scottish Government will work with parliamentarians of all parties to support a ceasefire, to end the suffering of Gazans, to secure the release of the hostages and to secure a viable peace for both Palestine and the Israelis.

Meeting closed at 19:36.

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