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DRAFT

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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 11 November 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. Our leader today is the Rev Dr Robin Hill, Church of Scotland minister of Gladsmuir, linked with Longniddry.

The Rev Dr Robin Hill (Church of Scotland):

It is the afternoon of 11 November. This morning's two-minute silence lies in the past, to remain dormant for another year. We still have our poppies. After all, it would be callous to bin them so soon after the event but, come tonight, bin them we will—and why ever not? The calendar keeps turning and life moves on, as it always does, with the tartan of St Andrew's day in the near future and then on to the red ribbon of world AIDS day at the start of the never-less-than-hectic month of December. We have done remembrance, so why not just let it go?

Well, here is why not. Across our world of stark division, voices are being raised in favour of private domestic self-interest over and against public international law. They are, in effect, suggesting that hubris, aggression and outright cruelty are necessary and acceptable elements of diplomacy in the 21st century. Those voices have got it wrong.

That is why, this evening, each one of us should take our poppy and fix it on to our computer screen, our bathroom mirror or any place at all where it cannot be ignored over the year to come. There, let our poppies serve each one of us, together, as year-long and year-round reminders of the violence and suffering that continue across this world of injustice and sorrow. It falls to the people of Scotland, as a peace-loving nation, to live justly and to live with courage as we strive for that which is right against that which is merely expedient.

Reminders are vital things, and we cannot afford to ignore our poppies when 12 November rolls around. Although "remembrance" is most definitely a noun, it is our duty to treat that word like the verb that we all need it to be. We do remembrance, and we must keep on doing remembrance for the sake of our humanity and our planet.

But what if we choose to forget? What then? Today, I find myself remembering my visit to the city of Berlin in March this year. I went on a casual

stroll with my wife through the Brandenburg gate and on to the chic elegance of Unter den Linden. There, we chanced upon a poster bearing these simple but striking words:

"Auschwitz: not long ago; not far away".

If, tonight, you remember anything, remember that.

Business Motion

14:03

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-19646, on the suspension of standing orders. I ask Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees, for the purposes of consideration of the supplementary legislative consent memorandum on the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, Rule 9B.3.5 of Standing Orders is suspended.—[*Graeme Dey*]

Motion agreed to.

Point of Order

14:03

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can you confirm that the matter relating to my topical question—the Scottish National Party's transgender prisoner guidance and the subsequent legal action—can be spoken about freely by ministers, because section 5 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 allows

“matters of general public interest”

to be discussed without fear of that being treated as contempt of court?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you, Ms White. That is a matter for Scottish ministers.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Presiding Officer, I was not expecting to have to come in on this point of order, but I think that Tess White and I would certainly appreciate having from the chair the ruling that the understanding of the Presiding Officer of this Parliament is that section 5 of the 1981 act means that ministers are freely able to give full and substantive answers on the issue. We all saw the clip last week in which the First Minister told journalists that he could not comment on the case because it is a live case. That is not a defence; indeed, ministers are able and encouraged to comment on this live case.

The Presiding Officer: The extent of my role, Mr Ross, is covered by rule 7.5 of standing orders. I direct the member's attention to that with regard to admissibility. That is the extent of my role in relation to the matter.

Business Motion

14:05

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-19647, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on changes to business.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for Tuesday 11 November 2025—

after

followed by Stage 1 Debate: UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Motion on Legislative Consent: Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill – UK Legislation

delete

4.15 pm Decision Time

and insert

4.30 pm Decision Time—[Graeme Dey]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

Transgender Prisoners (Legal Action)

1. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government what its justification is for pursuing legal action in relation to its policy on transgender prisoners, in light of the judgment in the case, *For Women Scotland Ltd v the Scottish ministers*. (S6T-02747)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Presiding Officer, with the greatest of respect to you and all members in the chamber, as the question relates directly to live court proceedings, it is not appropriate for me or any member of the Scottish Government to comment.

Tess White: In April, the United Kingdom's highest court ruled that the legal definition of a woman is based on biological sex. Yet, as the months have passed, the Scottish Government has ignored that judgment and failed to direct its public bodies to adhere to it. Instead, it has dithered and delayed, and now sees fit to defend its policy that allows biologically male prisoners to be housed in women's prisons. Does the cabinet secretary support single-sex spaces—yes or no?

Angela Constance: As well as referring to my earlier remarks, I advise the member—and I am sure that she has heard this before—that every key area of Government that is, or might be, affected by the Supreme Court judgment is carrying out assessments across legislation, guidance and policies. One example thus far would be the action that the Government has taken on guidance around gender representation on public boards.

Under my responsibilities as justice secretary, the safety and wellbeing of all prisoners and staff are at the core of everything that I and the Scottish Prison Service do.

Tess White: Scotland's prison system is a shambles and it needs leadership from the cabinet secretary. While the Scottish National Party is preparing to let more criminals out early, because its soft-touch approach to justice means that our prison estate is buckling under the weight of a surging population, its prison guidelines leave vulnerable women and girls at serious risk. If those guidelines remain, I am extremely concerned about the spine-chilling risk of a repeat of the Isla Bryson case in which, under the Scottish National Party's watch, a dangerous male criminal was put in a women's prison.

My understanding is that the cabinet secretary can answer my question. Does she still agree with what she said on 28 November 2017, which was:

"Women should feel safe in every space they wish to inhabit—this is a matter of fundamental human rights."

Does she stand by what she said—yes or no?

Angela Constance: Of course I remain firmly of the view that every woman has the right not only to feel safe, but to be safe.

I advise members that, as of last night, the lock-up figure for our prison population was 8,441 prisoners, which hardly speaks to the soft-touch justice that the member mentioned.

With regard to the early emergency release scheme, as members well know, there are very stringent safeguards to ensure that those who have committed domestic violence or sexual offences are excluded from it.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I want to allow the member who lodged the question to complete her series of questions. However, in the cabinet secretary's first response, Angela Constance said that she could not comment on the on-going case. Section 5 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981 clearly allows the cabinet secretary to give full answers in the chamber today. Therefore, has the cabinet secretary misled Parliament? What action can we, as members, take to ensure that section 5 of the 1981 act is applied in the chamber? Given that ministers are freely able to answer those serious questions, I believe that the minister has misled Parliament by saying that she cannot do so.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Thank you, Mr Ross. It is a matter for the Scottish Government, as a party to the case, to consider the level of detail that it wishes to go into.

We turn to supplementaries. Pauline McNeill is joining us remotely.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): What safeguarding concerns do Scottish ministers have for transgender prisoners that would justify not implementing the Supreme Court judgment and going to court to defend the Scottish Prison Service's unlawful policy, which contravenes the requirement for single-sex spaces in Scottish prisons? *[Interruption.]* Can Scottish ministers, including the cabinet secretary, say today why the SPS would continue to deny female prisoners the right to serve their sentence with other women?

Angela Constance: If I have understood Ms McNeill correctly—I apologise if I have not, because there was some interruption in what I heard her say—I believe that she is asking me, ultimately, to lay out here the position that we will advance before the court. That is what I cannot do. The Scottish Government does not regard it as appropriate to engage in public comment in respect of live court proceedings.

I say with the greatest respect, Presiding Officer, that I know that people will have different views on the law. I appreciate that there has been public commentary on the matter in the course of the weekend, but I advise members that I do not take legal advice from people on social media.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): We have heard from the Government over many years that female prisoners are among the most vulnerable women in society. They are often victims of terrible crime and abuse and are very likely to have suffered domestic violence. Given that, why on earth does the Government see fit for them to be housed alongside male-bodied inmates, some of whom are convicted rapists?

Angela Constance: Without commenting on live proceedings, I remind members of the evidence that was given to the Criminal Justice Committee some time ago with respect to the SPS trans policy, which states that no transgender woman with a history of violence against women and girls and who presents a risk of harm should be placed in the female estate.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD): I agree that there should be clarity on the transgender policy. We know that when the Prison Service gets it wrong, it can lead to tragic outcomes. I refer members to the case of Sarah Jane Riley, a transgender prisoner who was endlessly moved around the prison estate and then kept in solitary confinement for weeks on end. Sarah Jane took her own life in custody, and the fatal accident inquiry report on that case stated that she was "unlawfully segregated", despite having done nothing to merit it.

What lessons might be learned from that tragedy in relation to the revised update of the policy on transgender prisoners? More importantly, does the cabinet secretary agree that all prisoners in custody are human beings who deserve dignity and that the state has a duty of care whether prisoners are transgender or otherwise?

Angela Constance: I assure Mr Greene that the recommendations of the fatal accident inquiry into the case of the prisoner who committed suicide are being taken very seriously. I have reviewed the results of that FAI, the Scottish Prison Service will respond formally and I will be happy to keep the member up to date.

The crucial point that he makes is that I am often at this podium being, rightly, held to account for the care and treatment of all prisoners—whether they are men, women, transgender men, transgender women, younger or older—who are in the care of the Scottish Prison Service. I, and the SPS acting on behalf of ministers, have a duty to

ensure that all prisoners are appropriately cared for, safe and protected.

Douglas Ross: When did the cabinet secretary last either receive or request a briefing on section 5 of the Contempt of Court Act 1981, and has that been shared with Cabinet colleagues, including the First Minister, who is also hiding behind that fake argument? Given that the question revolves around the Supreme Court ruling, can the cabinet secretary explain to Parliament, and to For Women Scotland, why, more than half a year on from For Women Scotland's success in the Supreme Court, where it defeated the Scottish Government, the Scottish Government is still withholding the costs awarded to For Women Scotland?

Angela Constance: I cannot comment on the issue of costs, because I do not have the information to hand. I am quite sure that Mr Ross is well aware that it is not the practice of the Scottish Government to publish its legal advice and that there is such a thing in this country as legal privilege. However, I assure him that full legal advice is always taken on a range of matters, because ministers must ultimately comply with the law.

Drug Deaths

2. Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reported comments by Professor Catriona Matheson, former chair of the drug deaths task force, that the national mission on drug deaths has failed to deliver robust, evidence-based clinical care for people affected by drug use, due to clinical and practitioner expertise being sidelined. (S6T-02748)

The Minister for Drug and Alcohol Policy and Sport (Maree Todd): The latest drug deaths statistics show a 13 per cent decrease and the lowest number registered since 2017. That is welcome, but we know that there is more to be done.

The national mission has always made clear that its aim is to reduce drug-related deaths and to improve the lives of people who are affected by drugs. That mission has been directly shaped by a wide range of evidence, clinical advice, surveillance and data. We also rely directly on advice from experts through the work of the drug deaths task force and the national drugs mission clinical advisory group.

I assure the member that we are also actively engaging with service commissioners, clinicians, delivery partners and those with lived and living experience to develop our new alcohol and drugs strategic plan.

Katy Clark: Given those comments, does the minister agree that the Scottish Government must focus on delivery to reduce drug deaths, rather than on chasing headlines, and that drug policy in this country must be based on the evidence?

Maree Todd: I agree that it is really important that we follow the evidence, and the Scottish Government is committed to taking an evidence-based approach to the issue, using a wide range of evidence.

Clinical advice plays a key role in the making of drug and alcohol policy, along with surveillance and up-to-date data. The clinical advisory group was established in April 2023 and now meets via correspondence, with its most recent meeting being held on 17 September 2025. The workforce expert delivery group demonstrated a clear and sustained commitment to ensuring that workforce development is informed by those with direct experience and expertise in the field throughout the national mission. Not only was that group instrumental in interpreting and prioritising the recommendations of the drug deaths task force, but it provided critical oversight and expert advice on the development and implementation of the Scottish Government's workforce action plan.

Katy Clark: The face of the drugs crisis has changed with the emergence of synthetic opioids, which are linked to more than 100 deaths across Scotland, many of which have been in the west of Scotland. Will the minister outline how the Scottish Government plans to improve services in the west of Scotland given the growing use of synthetic opioids? What role does clinical and practitioner expertise have in that?

Maree Todd: I have already outlined the clinical and practitioner role in developing evidence. I assure the member that, in last year's figures, one of the substantial areas of improvement was Greater Glasgow and Clyde, where we saw a reduction of, I think, 25 per cent. I may need to check that number and get back to the member to confirm it, but we saw a substantial reduction in the number of deaths there, and that was because of sustained effort. As I have said in the chamber many times, there is no single solution that will fix the problem. We need to take advantage of a multitude of opportunities that are ahead of us to try to rise to the challenge.

The member is absolutely correct to point to the difference in the drug use that we face nowadays. When the national mission was conceived, we were dealing mainly with heroin use and heroin overdose. The picture has changed substantially, and the threat from synthetics is significant and concerning. We have a number of courses of action to rise to that, not least the rapid action drug alerts and response—RADAR—system, which picks up and disseminates information on the new

threats that we are facing. We also have some drug-checking facilities, and one has recently been approved in the west of Scotland.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): What progress is the Scottish Government making on reducing drug harms? In particular, what work is being done to target the delivery of more residential rehabilitation beds?

Maree Todd: Increasing the provision of residential rehab and ensuring that it is available to everyone who wants it and for whom it is deemed to be clinically appropriate at the time when they ask for it in every part of the country is a key pillar of the national mission. We have improved access to residential rehab through the funding of eight new facilities, increasing referrals and improving local pathways. We are on track to reach our target of 1,000 publicly funded placements a year by 2025-26, with the most recent Public Health Scotland publication showing 985 confirmed records of individuals starting a publicly funded residential rehab placement.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Professor Matheson is right that the national mission

“was more about controlling the narrative than addressing drug deaths”,

which are still the highest in Europe. We were willing to give the Thistle a chance, but it has led to nothing but misery for Calton residents. At the same time, drug deaths increased by 3 per cent in the first six months after it opened. Why could the minister not extend the same chance to the Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill and work with us to improve it instead of voting it down at the first chance and continuing with the Government’s failed policies?

Maree Todd: It is clear that the Government and the Parliament had some significant concerns about the bill’s overly medicalised approach. It did not reflect the evidence-based, person-centred, trauma-informed model that we are committed to. We believe that enshrining rights must be done in a way that is deliverable, inclusive and aligned with existing frameworks in order to avoid unintended harm.

In her comments over the weekend, Professor Matheson raised some serious concerns about the right to recovery bill, too. She explicitly stated that it was “sensibly voted down” by the Scottish Parliament.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): This is an area that the Liberal Democrats want the Government to succeed in. People are dying. I remember the widespread acclaim that accompanied the appointment of Dr Matheson to lead the task force. It is very dispiriting, then, to

hear the concerns that she has raised about the Government’s approach.

We want evidence-based solutions. I visited the Thistle centre in the early morning one day in the October recess. Since that facility opened in January, it has prevented or reversed 60 overdose events through its pharmaceutical interventions. That is 60 people who are alive today who very likely would not be if they had been on the street, so I utterly reject Annie Wells’s assertion that the Thistle is not working. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: With that weight of evidence, why can we not extend that pilot to other parts of the country that are equally struggling with the scourge of drug deaths? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

Maree Todd: Members will understand the challenges that are associated with the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which were such a barrier to the introduction of the Thistle in the early stages. We have overcome those challenges for the Thistle with the support of the Lord Advocate and her prosecution policy, but that is not scalable or movable to other areas. That work process has to be gone through for every area that is considering such a centre.

Representing an area in Edinburgh, Alex Cole-Hamilton will be aware that work is on-going in the local community, with Government support. There is a groundswell of keenness to consider a safer drug consumption facility in Edinburgh, and local representatives have identified a couple of potential sites. However, there is no quick fix, because we have not had a change to the 1971 act, so there is no straightforward process to achieve what the member is asking for.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical question time.

Wildfire Summit

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Jim Fairlie on a wildfire summit. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:26

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): I am here today to update the Parliament on the outcomes of the recent ministerial wildfire summit, which was held on 14 October in Grantown-on-Spey. The summit was a culmination of a series of engagements, including the Scottish multi-agency resilience training and exercise unit debrief, the ministerial debrief with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, and cross-public sector meetings on wildfires. Those events reflect the seriousness with which the Government treats the growing threat of wildfires across Scotland.

This year, Scotland has experienced its most severe wildfire season in recent memory. So far this year, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has recorded a total of 241 wildfire incidents. There was a sharp spike in activity in April, with 109 recorded in that month alone. The fires between 28 June and 2 July were described as the largest in living memory, with flames reaching 20m in length and jumping up to 750m.

Those incidents underscore the scale of the challenge that we face. Wildfires are no longer a seasonal hazard; they are a climate-driven crisis that is placing immense pressure on our rural communities, our emergency services and the natural environment. They devastate landscapes, threaten people's homes and businesses, threaten biodiversity, damage critical infrastructure and release vast amounts of carbon.

Scotland's rural terrain, which is rich in biodiversity and extensive peatlands and woodlands, makes us uniquely vulnerable. When those landscapes burn, that undoes years of climate progress in a matter of hours. However, when restored and managed properly, they can act as powerful carbon sinks and natural firebreaks.

Land managers and gamekeepers are on the front line of wildfire prevention and response. We owe them a debt of gratitude for the valuable role that they have always played in controlling wildfires. Their intimate knowledge of the land and terrain remains crucial. That is why we must strike a balance that recognises their expertise, supports sustainable practices and enables them to work in partnership with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Controlled burning, when done responsibly, plays a vital role in creating firebreaks and reducing fuel loads. To that end, we have delayed until September 2026 the implementation of the muirburn licensing scheme. That decision reflects our commitment to ensuring that gamekeepers and land managers can continue to manage land appropriately in light of increased wildfire risk. The licensing scheme will help us to build a stronger evidence base, improve safety and reduce the risk of damaging effects. We are also reviewing land management plans and considering stronger requirements for wildfire mitigation, including guidance for both public and private landowners.

The wildfire summit and associated meetings identified several key themes and actions. However, it is clear that prevention must come first. There is strong support for a wildfire warning system, similar to flood and storm alerts. That would improve public understanding and preparedness. A national campaign will be explored, using behavioural science and lessons from Covid-19 communications to tailor messaging for different audiences.

We will look to develop Scotland-specific fire risk models, moving away from reliance on Canadian data. That includes integrating wildfire layers into the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's community risk index model. We are also evaluating the unintended consequences of alternative land management practices that may increase fire risk to determine how those policies can better align to Scotland's increasing wildfire risk.

We must strengthen our preparedness. A gap in multi-agency training was identified. We will work with the Scottish multi-agency resilience training and exercising unit to develop a national table-top exercise and to improve preparedness in a truly collaborative way across all agencies. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has invested £1.6 million in wildfire response assets, including personal protective equipment, all-terrain vehicles, fogging units and drones. Further investment is currently being considered. We are exploring a mountain rescue-style voluntary response model, with trained wildfire wardens to support local efforts.

We must enhance co-ordination. A shared concept of operations will be developed to clarify roles and responsibilities across agencies, supported by the Scottish Government resilience room, local resilience partnerships and regional resilience partnerships. We are reviewing helicopter access protocols, including through exploration of the potential for a central budget, contractual arrangements and a trump card approach to ensure that public sector needs are prioritised.

Improvements are needed in communication, interoperability and improved command and control arrangements across large-scale incidents. We will strengthen co-ordination and ensure that all responders understand their roles, including through priority communications with affected residents and those who may be at risk in a wildfire event.

We must empower communities and volunteers. The community asset register remains a vital tool to help us achieve that, so we will look into what is required to expand its use and to overcome barriers to adding new assets and volunteers. Landowners and land managers conducting muirburn must notify the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service before and after burns to ensure full situational awareness.

We must address issues around insurance and liability. We are working to overcome barriers related to insurance coverage for wildfire response. That includes clarifying liability and ensuring that responders are not penalised for taking action. We recognise the financial impact that wildfires are having on rural businesses, so we are providing grant funding of up to £10,000 through the Cairngorms National Park Authority to replace damaged equipment.

We are committed to ensuring that emergency services and land managers are properly resourced. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service strategy includes continued investment in training and upskilling, and we will support that through policy and funding alignment. The Scottish Government has increased the service's annual budget to £412.2 million for 2026, which is an increase of more than £19 million since 2017.

The summit concluded with a clear mandate for action, and the following steps are now under way. We will finalise the Scottish multi-agency resilience training and exercising unit debrief, and we will publish its recommendations in full. We will develop a collaborative outline proposal to consolidate actions and to guide future strategy. We will review legislation, including national byelaws and fire-related product restrictions. We will continue to engage with land managers, insurers, emergency services and all key partners involved to refine our approach. We will also hold a round table with MSPs on 18 November so that they can share their views with us.

Let me take a moment to thank the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, gamekeepers, land managers, volunteers, local authorities, the wider land management sector and local communities. Their efforts in tackling this year's wildfires have been nothing short of heroic.

The Government is committed to working with our rural communities to tackle the very real

wildfire threat that is facing us. Through the right planning, the right investment and the right leadership, we will build a more resilient Scotland. We will continue to listen, to learn and to act. I look forward to updating Parliament on our progress in the months ahead.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

The wildfires that we experienced in Moray and Highland in June this year were simply devastating. It is thanks to the heroic efforts of the Fire and Rescue Service, estate workers, gamekeepers, farm workers, forestry workers, volunteers and communities that they were brought under control. As I have said privately to both ministers, I believe that we were also lucky, as we got a downpour one night that put out most of the fires. At times, despite the heroic efforts, the fire was getting away from the professionals and those seeking to bring it under control.

It is a welcome update from the summit, but I say gently to the minister—I exclude myself from this, because I know that I would not be invited to a summit with this minister—that there were certain estates and people within the sector who were bitterly disappointed that they were not included in the summit. I hope that the minister will consider that point.

There is clearly an issue with capacity in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service—it needed the help and support of many other organisations to get the fires under control. What consideration have the minister and the Government given to a dedicated wildfires unit in the SFRS?

In his statement, the minister spoke about reviewing protocols for helicopters. Can we get more information on that? It is not widely known that the helicopters that assisted in that wildfire were drawn upon only because of the insurance that was held by the estates; they could draw down on that insurance to use those helicopters.

The minister mentioned reviewing insurance. We are hearing that insurers are unwilling or unable to provide cover for employees or equipment if employees are fighting fires on land owned by a third party. We need more than just a review; we need the minister to tell us what will happen to resolve the issue.

At the same time that our firefighters were dealing with the wildfires on Dava and coming into Moray, we had more deliberate fires, particularly in Lossiemouth, draining away resources. What is the Government doing to tackle deliberate fires? Since 2017, 50 deliberate fires have been recorded at Sunbank quarry in Lossiemouth. We need far greater punishment for those who are deliberately setting fires, because it is drawing away resources and is a huge concern.

Jim Fairlie: There are a number of questions in there. I take on board the point about the restriction on the number of people who came to the round table. That was done deliberately, so that we could have a proper open discussion about what processes we would take forward, and I think that we did that.

Douglas Ross also said that he would never be invited to a round table that I was hosting. *[Interruption.]* He is invited to the round table that I am holding this week—he has already been invited to that. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Members—no sedentary interruptions, please.

Jim Fairlie: On the fire service's capacity, we have to bear in mind that the scale of wildfires is such that it absolutely requires the knowledge and the resilience of the local community, as well as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. There is a service review of the SFRS at the moment to look specifically at changing needs in relation to what the service delivers.

I absolutely take on board the point about helicopter provision. That is why it is in the review. We are looking at whether there could be a trump card that would allow us to say that, on a particular occasion, we need that helicopter more than somebody else.

As far as insurance is concerned, clearly, that sits with private companies. We continue to have that dialogue and I will be happy to update members and the people who are looking for that insurance in due course.

As far as deliberate fire setting is concerned, that very much involves a police response, and I would expect Police Scotland to deal with that appropriately.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): This summer, Scotland experienced the greatest number of wildfires in living memory, with more than 200 incidents. Lives, livelihoods and ecosystems are under mounting threat. The carbon released will have a devastating impact on climate change.

The Government's investment in equipment is welcome, but it does not go far enough. Many retained fire stations do not have decontamination equipment, meaning that those who fight fires are returning home with contaminated clothing, which not only puts themselves at risk but creates risk for their families. Also, there is no mention at all in the statement of the Fire Brigades Union. Most retained fire stations are not fully staffed, so developing a further voluntary service seems impossible.

We now know, as Douglas Ross has said, that gamekeepers and others are not insured if they help to fight wildfires on neighbouring properties. In the interim, will the Government provide insurance cover for people and equipment, whatever their source, to help with controlling wildfires? That is needed now, otherwise we will be in a really difficult situation. Will the minister also ensure that all fire stations have decontamination equipment to be used for all those who are working to control wildfires?

Jim Fairlie: Again, the question raises a number of points. As far as capacity is concerned, there will always be a requirement to have local people on standby. That is why we are looking to set up an organisation that is similar to Scottish Mountain Rescue to deal with wildfires, so that appropriate training is given in the same way as it is for mountain rescue teams.

I am not entirely convinced that people cannot get insurance. We are still looking into the details of that, and if they cannot, we will take steps to work out how we can get a resolution to the matter.

With regard to the service delivery review, which I spoke about in my previous answer to Douglas Ross, that is all part of the on-going work by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. The SFRS is very alive to the fact that the demands on it are changing, and it is therefore changing the way that it works.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Between 10 and 13 April, a decade's worth of conservation work by the National Trust for Scotland was wiped out after a wildfire in Arran's Glen Rosa destroyed 27,000 trees. The glen is home to three rare species of Arran whitebeam trees, with only 407 specimens in existence pre-fire. The fire was devastating to Arran's ecology; volunteers replanted thousands of trees, but recovery will take years.

Given the increasing frequency and severity of wildfires as a result of climate change, what measures will the Scottish Government take to support ecological restoration and protect diversity in fragile impacted areas?

Jim Fairlie: We do an awful lot of that work already. As my colleague Kenneth Gibson talked about, in 2018, the National Trust for Scotland began restoring native woodlands to improve the biodiversity in Glen Rosa in Arran. That work included erecting deer fencing and planting trees with a volunteer workforce.

The wildfire in Glen Rosa began on 10 April and lasted until 13 April; it is estimated that it killed thousands of trees, and it has had a significant impact. NatureScot has started to replant and revitalise the area, using volunteers.

In reducing the incidence and impact of wildfires in forests and woodlands through good management, planning is important to protect the delivery of those forest ecosystems and goods services. That is why we are looking at ensuring that we have proper wildfire resilience and why we have pulled all that work together, and I very much hope that those actions will allow us to be resilient in the future.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As one of the few members in the Parliament who has written muirburn plans and actually undertaken muirburn in fighting wildfires, I am shocked by the Government's long-term plan to shorten the muirburn season. Wetter springs and higher winds mean that that is absolute madness.

Surely, in the light of the fires that we have heard about, we should be undertaking more muirburn over a longer period, without affecting nature, to ensure that we do not have fires that damage people's houses and threaten people's lives.

Jim Fairlie: I think that Edward Mountain is trying to make the point that muirburn is a silver bullet, but it is not. It is not a panacea, by any stretch of the imagination. We saw that in Dava: it did not matter whether the land was rewilded or forested or whether it was peatland or moorland—the fire went through every single type of managed landscape and beyond.

There is absolutely no doubt that muirburn plays its role, and that is exactly why I paused the scheme to bring in licensing. We are reviewing those processes right now and we will continue to ensure that we give the land managers and the keepers the tools that they need in order to help us to combat wildfire in the future.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): In April this year, there was a significant wildfire at Palacerigg country park in my constituency—a reminder that wildfire is not just a phenomenon of the summer months. How is the Scottish Government engaging with local authorities such as North Lanarkshire Council to consider preventative measures that are perhaps akin to the new byelaws that have been put in place in the Cairngorms?

Jim Fairlie: Jamie Hepburn raises a good point. The new byelaws that have been put in place in the Cairngorms national park will prohibit outdoor fires and barbecues within the park between April and September, although camping stoves and barbecues will continue to be allowed. The public consultation by the Cairngorms National Park Authority on the draft wording of the byelaws was carried out in 2024, and 79 per cent of

respondents indicated their support for the introduction of fire management byelaws.

We will absolutely be talking to local authorities and other agencies to ensure that we have that national resilience in place. People need to understand that we are now living in a very different world—wildfire is a threat, and we all need to be aware of it. We need to get the message out there, and we need people to understand that wildfire is now a real threat in Scotland. I hope that, by raising these issues in Parliament, we will get that message out to the people of Scotland.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I welcome the round table and the focus on preventing wildfires as the climate emergency is increasing the vulnerability of our land. It is good to hear that funding will be increasing, given the real-terms cut of £56 million in recent years.

Will the minister acknowledge that we need to look at both urban and rural challenges, as our fire services are under huge pressure dealing with wildfires, storms and flooding? Will he agree to look at investment across the country so that we do not lose services, as we would with the current proposal to close Marionville fire station, which is minutes away from Arthur's Seat?

Jim Fairlie: I take Ms Boyack's point on board. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is looking at the changes in its demands, which include wildfire and flooding.

As I have stated, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has put £1.6 million into making sure that it has the equipment, such as fogging units and four-by-four vehicles, that it needs in order to combat wildfires as and when they strike.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Recent wildfires have spread far and fast. Will the minister set out what action the Government can take to support small and large landowners to manage their land to mitigate wildfire risk?

Jim Fairlie: There are a number of things that the Scottish Government can do, but the vast majority of what needs to be done to mitigate that risk is down to the management plans of the landowners. What concerns me is that some land managers are not including any consideration of fire risks in their thinking on their land management plans, so we must look at that.

The Scottish Government will work across the country to make sure that we have fire resilience in every area and that we have warning systems in place that will allow people to know that there is a potential risk at that given time.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Motivated by the climate-driven increase in wildfires earlier this year, I obtained data

through a freedom of information request that showed that out-of-control intentional burning, such as muirburn, was the fourth most common cause of wildfires in Scotland over the past five years.

However, the vast majority of wildfires recorded by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have no known cause. Given the growing threat that wildfires pose to communities and nature, will the minister commit to increasing funding and resources for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, in order to improve investigation and data collection, and better inform our prevention strategies?

Jim Fairlie: The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is well enough equipped to carry out the work, and it has given us a list of the numbers of fires that it has been called out to deal with this year.

Ariane Burgess made a point about muirburn. One reason why we must bring in a licensing scheme is to ensure that, when people carry out muirburn, they know the right conditions in which to do it, the right way to do it and the days when they should not do it.

This is probably the right time to point out that, literally within hours of me pausing the licensing scheme earlier this year, a purposefully set fire on the Dinnet estate became out of control. The individual who set that fire did not have any training and did not have a licence to do it, because we did not have a licensing scheme.

That indicates to me that we are on the right road. We need to ensure that the licensing scheme is workable and operable, that it gets to the right people and that people know how to do muirburn properly in order to help us to prevent wildfires.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): We can be in no doubt that the climate is changing and that preparation will be our best tool to prevent and limit dangerous wildfires in the future. Shetland, with its oceanic climate, faced an extreme wildfire warning this July. That is a scenario that has been increasing in recent years.

How will the Scottish Government ensure and be confident that the measures that the minister has outlined in his statement today are able to be replicated in island and rural areas, whose communities often have smaller populations?

Jim Fairlie: Beatrice Wishart raises a good point, because that is now a national objective for all of us. She makes a point about the unusual circumstances in Shetland, but we face unusual circumstances across the country. We are not used to seeing the level of wildfires that we saw in April this year.

That confirms that the work that Siobhian Brown and I have been doing to put together a package of measures is allowing us to build into the system a resilience that will ensure that every part of the country has the protection that it needs.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind): The suggestion of a mountain rescue-type service is welcome, but, as someone who served in a mountain rescue team for about a decade, albeit in a different century, I assure the minister that it would take several decades for a voluntary model to develop. That is just fact.

We need an urgent solution to tackle wildfires more effectively to be in place by next spring. I put this to the minister in writing at the weekend. I have had detailed discussions with various parties, including a land manager and a keeper—who, between them, have about a century of experience—who have a specific proposal. Would the minister be willing to meet them and me, as I think that their proposal could be a serious part of the answer and could save lives to boot?

Jim Fairlie: I received Fergus Ewing's letter. I take on board the point that building a mountain rescue team might not be an overnight solution, but it is certainly something that we need to start doing now.

With regard to the request for a meeting, I have forwarded to my officials the sensible and detailed list of proposals that Fergus Ewing put forward. I have asked them to look at the proposals, and we will respond in due course.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The minister is aware that I have made multiple inquiries about the potential to ban the use of disposable barbecues at a Government level. The Cairngorms National Park Authority has taken a lead and introduced a local byelaw, but if we are serious about reducing risk and preventing wildfires, banning disposable barbecues is a clear action that can be taken nationwide, or at least in our most vulnerable areas where there is woodland, peat or a greater likelihood for fire to damage agricultural and other rural businesses. Is the minister able to give any further update or reassurance on whether the Scottish Government will consider such a ban?

Jim Fairlie: The Cairngorms National Park Authority has brought in such a byelaw, and local authorities are in a position to do the same. What Ms Roddick has suggested is one of the considerations that we are looking at as we go through the process of gathering information. If Ms Roddick is at the round-table meeting that we will have later on this week, we can perhaps put more flesh on the bones as to what that might look like or whether there are any barriers to us being able to do so.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): As well as the incidents that Kenny Gibson and Beatrice Wishart mentioned, in 2022, a wildfire on Gruinard island burned from one end of the island to the other in what was described as an “apocalyptic” scene. Who attended the wildfire summit specifically to represent island communities? What additional support is the Government providing or considering to protect our island communities?

Jim Fairlie: I have the list of people who attended the wildfire summit here in front of me. There were about eight or nine people from the Scottish Government and its agencies. There were another 10 people who were either fire experts or from the emergency services. There was a group of land managers, there were environmental non-governmental organisations and there were insurance companies, as well as gamekeepers.

Was there a specific island resident in attendance? I would guess that there might have been somebody there who lived on an island, but we did not look at this as a specific island issue. That is because, as I have already said, we are talking about a national effort; it is not just about islands. The islands will be included in the same level—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members, let the minister respond.

Jim Fairlie: The islands will be included in the same level of consideration as every other part of Scotland.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): This April, a massive wildfire struck Galloway in the heart of the forest park. Thankfully, no one was injured and no lives were lost. The work of the local community in Glentworth was highly helpful to responders such as the Fire and Rescue Service and Galloway Mountain Rescue Team. Will the minister outline how the Scottish Government is encouraging partnership working across communities and responders, not just for wildfires but for other issues in our rural communities?

Jim Fairlie: That issue is one of the things that I have tried to get across from the start. There has to be a partnership and co-ordinated approach right across Scotland, whether that is with gamekeepers, land managers, local authorities or the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. It takes all of us to get behind the project of ensuring that we build resilience in our fire and rescue services and in our local communities. That is something that we will continue to do through the SMARTEU work. It is also why we are having the round-table meeting with MSPs, who will bring their own perspectives. We will continue to build resilience so that we have actions in place that are ready for us at the start of next spring.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): The wildfire in Galloway forest park scorched approximately 6,500 hectares, or approximately 25 square miles. The fact that it accounted for nearly a quarter of all the land burned across the country made it one of the largest wildfires in the United Kingdom that year, yet there was no mention of representation from Dumfries and Galloway, Galloway forest park or south of Scotland stakeholders in any report from the summit.

The minister stated that £1.6 million has already been invested in wildfire response, including PPE and all-terrain vehicles, and that other investment is being considered. Will the minister clarify whether any wildfire response investment has been made in Galloway and whether any future investment will be delivered in my constituency? Given the strange emphasis on the Cairngorms national park in the grant funding scheme, will similar financial support be extended to rural businesses in Galloway that are affected by wildfires?

Jim Fairlie: I think that Finlay Carson has pointed out, as have other members, that the wildfire danger that we face is not just in Galloway or in the islands—it stretches from one end of Scotland to the other. Therefore, we are taking a national approach.

We did not invite every area of Scotland to the wildfire summit, because—

Finlay Carson: Dumfries and Galloway were not even represented.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Carson, please let the minister respond to the question.

Jim Fairlie: We did not invite people from all over the country to attend; we invited people who had the expertise and the understanding of how we will manage wildfires and build wildfire resilience across the country. That does not mean to say that the issues in Galloway are not as important as the issues in Dava. It means that every part of Scotland must be resilient. We must ensure that we have provisions in place, which is why we are doing the work that we are, and we will deliver that next year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement.

Fergus Ewing: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The minister repeatedly said that the stakeholder meeting with MSPs will take place later this week. In my diary, I have it down as taking place on Tuesday of next week. I wonder whether that can be corrected for the record, if I am right.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps the minister could contact all members to clarify the position.

There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-19613, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button.

I invite the minister to speak to and move the motion.

14:57

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): As we meet on 11 November, armistice day, wearing our poppies, to discuss the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill and the opportunity that it brings for our nation, we do so on a day of profound reflection. Today, we all paused to honour the courage and sacrifice of those who gave their lives in service to our country. It is with that spirit of respect and unity that we look to the future, and sport brings nations and us all together.

I turn to the specifics of the stage 1 debate on the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill. First, I thank the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee for its constructive scrutiny. I also thank all who contributed evidence, including the Union of European Football Associations, the Scottish Football Association, Police Scotland and the Scottish Human Rights Commission.

The Scottish Government welcomes the committee's support for the bill's general principles and has considered its recommendations carefully. We are committed to working with Parliament and stakeholders to ensure that the legislation is proportionate, effective and fit for purpose.

The bill is a vital step in enabling Scotland to play its part in hosting Euro 2028. In the more immediate future, our attention perhaps will be more focused on the next few days, when Scotland's men's team will play crucial qualifiers against Greece and Denmark for next year's FIFA world cup. I know that I speak for us all when I say that we wish Steve Clarke and the team all the best. *[Applause.]*

However, in 2028, the Euros are coming to Scotland. Euro 2028 will be the largest-ever major sporting event jointly staged by the United Kingdom and Ireland. It will be a month-long celebration of football, and Scotland will host matches at Hampden park in Glasgow, welcoming fans from across Europe and, no doubt, beyond.

The tournament is about football, but it is also about so much more. Euro 2028 aligns with our national priorities as a Government: supporting economic growth, promoting inclusion and showcasing Scotland internationally.

Our successful joint bid for Euro 2028 reflects Scotland's significant experience and global reputation for hosting major events.

Our hosting of Euro 2020 was shaped by the pandemic, but Euro 2028 offers a fresh opportunity to provide a warm Scottish welcome and deliver really vibrant celebrations—all the way to the final match, I hope.

During Euro 2024, we saw the enthusiasm and positive reputation of Scottish supporters abroad, and we want to build on that in 2028. The tournament will boost tourism and hospitality in Scotland and promote our culture at the same time. Glasgow will host at least one official UEFA fan zone, extending the experience beyond Hampden park.

A Euro 2028 UK and Ireland social impact fund of £45 million is jointly supported by government and football partners. That is intended to deliver benefits right across these islands and Ireland.

To host Euro 2028, Scotland must meet UEFA's requirements for protecting commercial rights; conditions apply to all host nations. Although some protections already exist, additional legislation is required, with the bill focusing on three key areas. First, it will prohibit the unauthorised sale of tickets for more than face value or for profit. Secondly, it will restrict unauthorised street trading and advertising in designated event zones. Thirdly, it will provide enforcement powers to implement the protections effectively. The measures are time limited, proportionate and targeted. The bill will be automatically repealed on 31 December 2028.

I welcome the committee's stage 1 report and will now turn to its key themes. The committee asked for clarification on whether

"it will be legal under the Bill to resell a ticket online at face value."

I confirm that the bill defines ticket touting as the unauthorised sale of a championship ticket either for more than its face value or with a view to making a profit. That means that reselling a ticket at face value will not in itself be an offence, provided that the seller does not intend to make profit from the transaction. However, UEFA's ticketing terms and conditions might prohibit tickets being resold except via an authorised resale platform. Although such activity would not be a criminal offence under the bill, it could result in the ticket being voided by UEFA under those conditions once they are published. The committee also asked how ticketing offences will

be addressed across borders. We are working on that with the UK Government and other host nations to support an aligned approach.

The committee raised concerns about the potential impact of the bill on street traders. We recognise the importance of Euro 2028 to local businesses, including street traders, in addition to the usual level of trade that they would expect. The bill will require Glasgow City Council to offer alternative trading arrangements to affected street traders, and we welcome the council's intention to waive temporary licence fees for those affected traders. The bill will also require the council to publish guidance for businesses. We will continue to engage with businesses and communities as the detail of event zones is developed in the coming months.

The committee sought reassurance that the enforcement powers in the bill are proportionate and compatible with human rights. The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that enforcement powers are exercised in a manner that is compatible with human rights. Enforcement officers will be subject to the legal obligations that are placed on public authorities under the Human Rights Act 1998. The bill's enforcement powers mirror those under existing legislation such as the Consumer Rights Act 2015. The powers include safeguards—for example, enforcement officers may enter premises only with permission or a warrant. Without permission or a warrant, using reasonable force to enter will be a decision for a police constable and not an enforcement officer. Entry to people's homes will be subject to additional safeguards.

The committee rightly highlighted the importance of protecting freedom of expression and the right to protest, so the bill supports legitimate protest. It includes exemptions for peaceful protest, and Police Scotland will uphold rights to protest and freedom of expression. We are discussing, monitoring and reporting on human rights impacts with Glasgow City Council and other partners. Those discussions are ongoing.

The committee reiterated the recommendation of its predecessor committee that the Scottish Government should consider developing an events framework bill. Although we see the potential benefits of that route, bespoke legislation for Euro 2028 is the suitable approach: it is consistent with the approach for previous major events and deliverable within the required timescales. We remain open to exploring the case for a general major events bill in future, but that would require careful consideration and engagement with stakeholders that would not have been possible within the overall timelines for Euro 2028.

In conclusion, Euro 2028 is a significant opportunity for Scotland economically and culturally, and for our reputation. The bill is essential to meeting our obligations as a host nation and delivering a successful tournament that benefits communities right across the country. We have taken a very collaborative approach, working with UEFA, Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Life, Police Scotland and many others, and we will continue those constructive engagements as the bill progresses. I invite Parliament to support the general principles of the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Clare Adamson to speak on behalf of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee.

15:05

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I associate myself with the minister's comments regarding armistice day, and I back up his support for the Scottish team. It demonstrates the power of football that it can result in a round of applause across the chamber, as we do not often see united applause in this place.

As the convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, I was glad to see the publication of the committee's stage 1 report on the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill. I thank my committee members and colleagues for their work in scrutinising the bill, as well as members of the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee and the Finance and Public Administration Committee for their contribution to the scrutiny of the bill. On behalf of my committee, I thank all those who provided evidence to the committee for their time and contributions. Of course, I pay tribute to the committee clerks, without whom the work could not have been completed.

The Scottish Government states that the bill is intended to establish commercial rights protections that are in line with the requirements of UEFA ahead of hosting the Euro 2028 matches in Hampden park. The bill includes provision to ban certain commercial activities, such as the unauthorised resale of tickets above face value or with a view to making a profit, and unauthorised street trading and advertising within the championship event zone. The bill also provides enforcement powers, creates a criminal offence of obstructing enforcement officers in their duties, and requires that Glasgow City Council publish guidance and offer alternative trading arrangements to affected street traders.

Our scrutiny considered the bill's intentions and provisions, and our stage 1 report outlined several questions and recommendations regarding the bill. I thank the minister and his officials for their response to the committee's report, which addresses those points. I also thank UEFA and UK & Ireland 2028 Ltd for providing their joint response to the report.

I turn to the findings of our report regarding the bill's provisions. On the ticket touting offence that is included in the bill, we sought clarity from the Scottish Government on whether reselling tickets at face value will be legal. I welcome the Scottish Government's confirmation that, providing that the seller does not intend to profit from the transaction, that will not be an offence.

Our report raised concerns regarding the potential impact on street traders of the bill's street-trading restrictions, as all hosting authorities will be required to undertake a range of measures during the championships, including taking all reasonable measures to prohibit, restrict and prevent unauthorised street trading. We asked the Government what further engagement it will undertake with street traders ahead of the tournament.

The bill also requires Glasgow City Council to offer alternative arrangements to affected street traders and to provide guidance on the restrictions. Our report asks the council to clarify how guidance will be communicated and how impacts on street traders will be minimised. We also asked UEFA to clarify what assessments it had undertaken of the potential impact of the restrictions on street traders. In response, UEFA stated that it is keen for local businesses to feel the benefits of hosting the championship.

We also sought clarity on the bill's enforcement provisions, particularly the power for a police constable to enter and search a place—though not a house—without permission or a warrant if they believe that there is a real and substantial risk that delay in seeking a warrant would defeat the purpose of taking action. We took considerable time over the issue, and our report asked the Scottish Government to clarify

"what criteria must be met to qualify such a risk as 'real and substantial'".

I thank the Scottish Government for setting out the basis for the criteria in its response to our report.

We also considered the bill's potential human rights impacts relating to the restrictions on ambush marketing. We stated that

"a clear distinction must be drawn between activity with a commercial purpose, where restrictions may be justified, and activity with a social or political purpose"—

such as protests—

“where restrictions are not justified”.

We recommended that

“the Scottish Government should work with Glasgow City Council to monitor and report on any human rights impacts arising from the Bill’s provisions”.

Following our stage 1 scrutiny, the committee supports the general principles of the bill. I look forward to hearing the perspectives and contributions of colleagues in today’s debate. I reiterate my thanks to those who were involved in the stage 1 process, particularly my committee colleagues who might be slightly more excited about the Euros than I am. Nonetheless, this will be a great opportunity for Scotland, so we should all look forward to the Euros, and I again wish Scotland the very best.

15:12

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Of course, we all welcome the opportunity for Scotland to host an international sporting event with the prestige of the Euros. Euro 2028 will provide a platform to promote Scotland and to showcase the warmth and hospitality of Scotland’s people.

Every one of us wants to see Scotland’s men’s team playing in the finals, but, as we consider the bill, let us not be naive about what UEFA is. It is a powerful supranational corporation that is unaccountable to any public body—it is accountable only to its member associations. The bill is, in essence, the domestic legal instrument through which Scotland will deliver the guarantees that UEFA demands. We should proceed with our eyes wide open, aware that we are implementing the conditions of a commercial contract, not designing policy from first principles.

The bill’s first substantive sections—sections 2 to 4—criminalise the unauthorised sale or resale of championship tickets above face value or for profit, as the minister mentioned. The offence will result in a summary conviction only and will be punishable by a fine up to level 5 on the standard scale, which is currently £5,000.

The provision applies to tickets, including those that are sold or advertised electronically, for all matches that are played in Scotland. However, crucially, the provision does not extend beyond the territory of Scotland, which means that anyone operating an online resale platform outside Scotland or simply listing tickets on an external-based website falls outside the bill’s reach. The Government’s legal directorate confirmed that the extraterritorial competence that is required to go further is lacking. We agree that touting is a scourge that prices fans out of major events, but fragmented national regulation invites exploitation. A UK-wide framework would close loopholes and

simplify enforcement by Police Scotland and the Crown Office. The principle of the bill is right, but its scope is inadequate.

There is also an issue of equity and common sense in how the offence is framed. UEFA and its authorised partners are exempt from the touting ban, but community groups, schools and charities are not. Under the bill, a parent council raffling Euro 2028 tickets to raise funds or a local hospice auctioning a pair of tickets at an event would technically be committing a criminal offence. That cannot be right. Charitable causes, especially those that are rooted in our local communities, should not be collateral damage in UEFA’s efforts to police its commercial rights. The exemption must be broadened to allow legitimate charitable fundraising.

Sections 5 to 15 will restrict unauthorised street trading and advertising within the designated event zones around Hampden park and the official fan zones. Those zones and the prohibited times will be defined later by statutory instruments under the negative procedure. As has already been said, Glasgow City Council must publish guidance and offer alternative trading arrangements for licensed street traders who are displaced during the tournament. However, there is no provision for compensation for those traders or for small, fixed-premises businesses that might suffer loss of trade. In fact, the committee received communication from UEFA just yesterday saying that there was no intention to offer any legitimate compensation.

Because we have to, we recognise UEFA’s legitimate commercial interest in preventing ambush marketing and protecting official sponsors. However, local cafes, kiosks and stallholders who have traded in Mount Florida for years will see their peak earning period removed. If any compensation is due, it must come from UEFA, not from Scottish taxpayers. The party of business cannot support the public purse underwriting a multibillion-euro organisation.

Richard Lochhead: I thank the member for giving way and welcome his general welcome for the bill. Can he explain further how he thinks the cafe in Mount Florida that he cited would lose out, and give an example, just so that I can understand his arguments?

Stephen Kerr: Very simply, the cafe would be asked to conduct its business in another location, which obviously would not be prime to its business interests, and it would be dislocated on the basis of UEFA’s commercial interests. We should recognise that. We should not lose sight of what the bill is, in effect.

The enforcement regime that is set out in sections 16 to 28 grants to designated

enforcement officers, who might include local authority staff or contractors, powers to enter and search premises, vehicles or stalls to seize or conceal goods and to use reasonable force. That is a serious departure from normal practice. Under the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, entry without warrant is permitted only for immediate risk to public safety. Under the bill, it would be exercised to protect branding rights.

I accept the Government's argument that UEFA requires a rapid enforcement mechanism, but the absence of judicial oversight fits uneasily with the long-established protections of property and due process in Scots law. Unless UEFA can demonstrate that a warrant requirement would breach its hosting criteria, those powers should be curtailed.

We will support the bill at stage 1 because, without it, Scotland cannot host Euro 2028, and we all want Scotland to host Euro 2028. However, we support the bill on the clear understanding that the Government must look more closely at tightening the enforcement provisions to restore warrant safeguards, press UEFA to contribute to a compensation scheme for displaced traders and work with the UK Government to deliver consistent ticket-touting regulation across these islands.

Euro 2028 will be a proud moment for Scotland but, as we welcome the world, let us uphold our principles: fairness, accountability, the rule of law and respect for enterprise.

15:19

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in the stage 1 debate on the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill. In opening, I join the convener of the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee in thanking the witnesses and clerks for their support in drafting the committee's stage 1 report.

Scottish Labour has consistently supported the UK and Ireland hosting the 2028 Euros. I know that many of us will be looking forward to welcoming this major event to Scotland. It is important to remember that, when Glasgow hosted the 2020 Euros in 2021, many missed out due to Covid restrictions. Thankfully, there will be no such restrictions this time. Many children today, such as my own son, were too young to properly remember the last championship on home soil. This will provide them with an exciting opportunity to witness a major international tournament coming to their shores.

It will also be an opportunity to host people, not just from Europe but from across the world, because of our shared love of football. It will be an opportunity for visitors to take time to explore our culture, heritage and rich history, and we can use

it as a fantastic platform to promote brand Scotland on the global stage.

The economic benefits to Scotland, the rest of the UK and Ireland are substantial. The UK Department for Media, Culture and Sport estimates that the tournament will contribute £2.4 billion in socioeconomic value to the host nations. I am pleased that, alongside that, the UK Labour Government has recognised the importance of sport by pledging £900 million in funding as part of the Government's plan for change. More than £500 million of that will be used to support world-class sporting events and, crucially, £400 million is being provided for grass-roots sporting facilities in order to help more people to get active and improve their wellbeing, and so that the sporting talent of tomorrow can be discovered. I welcome what the minister has said about Scottish Government funding, too.

Scottish Labour fully supports the Euros being held in the UK and Ireland in 2028. We want to see more major international cultural and sporting events being hosted in Scotland to boost our economy, raise our international profile and give people here the opportunity to witness world-class events. For those reasons, we encouraged the Scottish Government and the UK Government to work together to bring the Commonwealth games to Glasgow in 2026. They are also why we fully support the UK Labour Government working with the football associations and devolved Administrations to bring the women's FIFA world cup to the UK in 2035. These events contribute immense value to our society, wellbeing and economy. There are demonstrable benefits of bringing them to Scotland and of working with the rest of the UK to do so. It is also right for the Government to remain open, as the minister has said it is, to the introduction of a major events framework bill in future.

Scottish Labour supports the principles of the bill, as we recognise that it is necessary legislation for meeting our obligations to UEFA and securing the championships. However, the committee has pointed to several areas and issues of concern that should be addressed. Part of the reason for hosting these events is to ensure that Scottish fans can access them without the cost of going abroad. As members have already said, we must prevent ordinary fans being priced out, and we cannot allow people to make financial gain by reselling tickets at extortionate prices. That is why Scottish Labour will work with the Scottish Government and other parties to clamp down on ticket touting. We support the measures in the bill that aim to do that, and we are keen to ensure that any loopholes that would disadvantage or exploit fans are addressed.

The committee also took evidence on concerns about restrictions on street traders, which Stephen Kerr has just talked about. It is vital that the Scottish Government maintains close dialogue with Glasgow City Council to ensure that street traders are properly informed about any restrictions during the tournament and that any negative impact on them is minimised. We agree with the committee's recommendation that measures relating to commercial activity must be limited and proportionate. I believe that a proper impact assessment would be helpful, and even necessary, to us in understanding how that can be done.

I welcome what the minister said about the Government's engagement with Glasgow City Council and Glasgow Life. Further clarity on warrantless access by enforcement officers would be welcome. I welcome what the minister said about human rights and the right to protest, but further clarity on what distinction will be drawn between commercial activity and social or political activity would also be welcome. I also welcome what the minister said about working constructively with the UK Government to ensure that there is alignment of enforcement and delivery of the games.

Scottish Labour will support the bill at stage 1 and will work with the minister and other parties to address any outstanding issues that are raised in the committee's report. As long as those clarifications are addressed in the bill's later stages, Scottish Labour looks forward to supporting legislation that protects fans, supports local businesses and ensures that Scotland plays its part in hosting a successful and memorable UEFA European championships in 2028.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the open debate, and I confirm to members that we have a bit of time in hand and that those who take interventions will get time added to the end of their contributions.

I call George Adam for a generous six minutes.

15:25

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): As someone who has followed Scotland both home and away and who proudly backs St Mirren from the Paisley buddies' end, I have a lot to say about our national game in general. Some might be shocked by what I will speak on today. I could talk about the quality, or lack of quality, of Scottish football refereeing or of the video assistant referee as a separate subsection of the same debate, or about whether Scotland fans should be allowed a pint as they watch the game, but today is not about those important issues of our national game; it is about hosting Euro 2028.

Stephen Kerr: Mr Adam has intrigued me and, given that we have the luxury of a few extra minutes, I would quite like to hear George Adam's views on giving our football fans the right to have a pint at a match, because that is something that we on this side of the chamber very much support.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are being led astray, Mr Adam.

George Adam: I would like to, but I am sure the Deputy Presiding Officer will stop me from straying from the actual issue under debate. However, I think that that is something that we should discuss in this Parliament in future.

Football brings people together, in between the times when we all fall out about various aspects of the game. As the minister said, today is armistice day, and everyone knows the story of first Christmas of the great war when, in 1914, those on the western front systematically stopped fighting and met in no man's land. They passed each other gifts, drinks and trinkets and they played football, because football is the international language that everyone understands.

I want Euro 2028 in Glasgow to be a celebration of football. Some nations claim that football is coming home when it goes to their nation but we all know that the modern, passing game of football was born in Glasgow, not far from the stadium that will host the games, and that it was in the great Queen's park that we actually moved forward from the rugby-type game played in other parts of the home nations to the silky football that we now regularly see in Scotland.

Clare Adamson: Does George Adam also recognise the work of Elspeth King, who passed away last week? She was a historian who was well-respected across this chamber and who discovered and verified that a football found at Stirling Castle was the first to be recognised as such.

George Adam: That would have been an interesting game, although completely different from the modern game invented in Queen's park, and I recognise that too.

Regardless of what we say and do here, Hampden will be bouncing when the games happen. Our job is to ensure that the law helps us to host well-organised events while protecting people's rights and local livelihoods. Euro 2028 is more than a tournament: it will showcase Scotland to the world as a dynamic, welcoming and ambitious nation. Independent analysis suggests that there will be £2.6 billion in socioeconomic benefits across the UK and Ireland, with real opportunities for tourism and hospitality here in Scotland to benefit.

The bill, as others have said, does three main things: it bans ticket touting for profit; it controls street trading in event zones at set times; and it prevents ambush advertising around Euro 2028. It also sets out clear enforcement powers and includes a sunset clause so that special measures will lapse after the tournament.

On ticket touting, the committee heard clear evidence about whether we are actually tackling modern online resales from sellers that sit outside Scotland. The 2025 bill removes the extraterritorial element that existed in 2020, which means that a question remains about what practical co-ordination is in place across the UK to stop the profiteering that prices ordinary fans out of the game. Fans should not be outbid by bots and scalpers when all they want to do is see their country play. The committee highlighted that, if we need a published cross-border plan with operational guidance from Police Scotland and its counterparts, we should say so and get that done.

On exemptions, the committee has questioned the drafting that would allow UEFA to sell tickets. The committee has the right to do that, and I share the concern. We need absolute clarity that a loophole will not be created for individuals to personally profit. Regardless of who they are and where they got the tickets from, the intent is to enable proper distribution and not open the door to officials touting tickets. I am passionate about beating ticket touts whoever they are, although I equally recognise that the commercial revenue that is generated for UEFA and its corporate partners supports our beautiful game. Tightening the explanatory notes or guidance should give fans confidence that the system will be fair and that they will get value for money on tickets and merchandise.

I have gone round the houses on the issue of street trading, because Glasgow traders help to make our big occasions special. Who has not heard, “Get your hats, scarves and flags here” at many a game? Glasgow City Council needs to work with those traders to ensure that they get an opportunity to operate elsewhere, given that UEFA and its sponsors are spending quite a lot of money on the championship.

On advertising, ambush marketing should not be allowed to hijack the tournament, but the committee has been clear that we must draw a line between commercial promotion and social or political expression. Peaceful non-commercial protest is part of Scotland’s democracy and democratic life and it should not be chilled by event rules. It is essential to strike the right balance between commercial infringement and being careful with civil liberties.

I feel that I have taken quite a bit of time, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise Mr Adam that the clerks have reminded me on VAR that speeches in the open debate should be four minutes and not six minutes, so I would be grateful if he could begin to conclude.

George Adam: I am into overtime, so I will be very quick.

Football belongs to its supporters first and foremost. As a St Mirren fan and as a Scotland supporter, I want kids, families and lifelong fans to get in at fair prices and local businesses to benefit, with their rights being respected. With tighter clarity on online touting, co-ordination, precise exemptions, practical support for traders and proportionate enforcement, the bill can deliver that balance.

Let us make Euro 2028 not just a great tournament at Hampden, but a tournament that feels like Scotland—fair, welcoming and proud.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I apologise for that slight misdirection, Mr Adam.

I call Brian Whittle. You have around four minutes, Mr Whittle.

15:32

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Thank you. We are now back on time.

It is always a pleasure to follow George Adam when we are discussing football. I am sure that it will not surprise members to hear that I am pleased to speak in this debate about bringing a major international sporting event to Scotland. I have spoken many times about the influence of sport, but I welcome this opportunity to do so again and to speak about how it brings culture and resilience—goodness knows, our Scottish supporters sometimes need that—as well as togetherness and confidence. As well as health benefits, sport can also engender aspiration, hope and community. Bringing such international sporting events to Scotland is part of a jigsaw that can help us to move from being a nation of sport watchers to a nation of participation.

As other speakers have said, Euro 2028 offers Scotland an exceptional opportunity to show itself off on a world stage, not only on the pitch, but more widely across the country. Football holds a special place in the hearts of many Scots, and Scotland’s tartan army is always a great ambassador for us across the world.

Euro 2028 is an opportunity for us to welcome football fans from around the world to our shores, and all of us on the Conservative benches want us to make the most of that opportunity. That is why, as my colleague Stephen Kerr alluded to, we have a responsibility to ensure that our preparations,

including the bill, leave us ready to be a welcoming and effective host. That means not only being a good host for the tournament and the many international visitors that it will bring, but also ensuring that the tournament is both welcoming to and welcomed by Scots.

Some aspects of the bill unquestionably cause concern in that regard. Although I appreciate that there are requirements that UEFA and other international sporting bodies demand of any host country on issues such as ticket touting, street trading and advertising, some of the powers that are granted in the bill seem a tad heavy handed.

I am therefore pleased that the bill is being presented well in advance of the event, noting that a lack of time for communication with the public was highlighted as an issue with the previous legislation for Euro 2020. Most people will not necessarily notice the effects of the legislation; however, it is critical that sufficient time and effort is used to inform those whom it affects. The broad restrictions on street trading and advertising, while understandable, raise questions about how the Scottish Government and UEFA balance the commercial interests of the tournament against giving established local traders an opportunity to benefit from the increased footfall. Many major sporting events, from the Olympic games to the open championship, struggle with that balance, but that alone cannot be an excuse for local traders taking a financial penalty.

On ticket touting, although I agree that reselling tickets at vastly inflated rates to desperate fans is an issue that needs to be addressed, I argue that legislating piecemeal for specific events feels like an ineffective approach in the long run. The issue may arise in the public consciousness only when we read reports of resellers offering tickets for major concerts or sporting events at ludicrous premiums, but it should be tackled. The passion that fans have should not be an opportunity for touts to exploit. Both the Scottish and UK Governments should do more to protect fans from that cynical practice. In fact, it will take a unified approach from all UEFA members to tackle ticket touting effectively.

I want Euro 2028 to come to Scotland and succeed, but a successful tournament must bring benefits to Scotland long after the football circus has packed up and left town. If it becomes an event that lands in the country, closes itself off from the economy and disrupts lives and livelihoods for no lasting gain, I will not judge it a success.

Just as I have spoken previously about the importance of legacy from fantastic events such as the Commonwealth games, so, too, must we consider the legacy of Euro 2028. The bill is an opportunity to do that, because legacy is not

necessarily just about investing in shiny new facilities or supporting grass-roots sport—although, obviously, I welcome all of that. Legacy is also in the memory of the event. Was there a welcoming atmosphere? Did Scots feel part of it? Those questions matter, and I hope that the Scottish Government will consider them as the bill progresses.

15:37

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate.

Football is our national sport. It is a passion for many of us in Scotland. I had lots of passion on Saturday, while I was watching Hibs beat the mighty St Mirren 3-0 after failing to do so last season. I am taking my life in my hands by mentioning that in front of George Adam.

I also remember—this will show my age—when Scotland beat Spain 3-1 back in 1984, when Kenny Dalglish turned away and scored a memorable goal. I was at Hampden on that day.

I coached professionally for 11 years with Hibs and during my career was lucky enough to visit Holland, Germany, Denmark and Portugal, sharing ideas and discussing coaching methods. Football is a global language.

It is the dream of every football academy player to play for Scotland. I had the pleasure of coaching players who went on to do that. I know that there are young players in the academies now who are targeting Euro 2028 as an opportunity. I remember watching a young Billy Gilmour many years ago, when he played for Rangers, and thinking that he was a fantastic player. We can all see where he is now.

My son has followed in my footsteps. He now coaches at Nottingham Forest, having previously been at Hearts and Celtic.

We have been talking about legacy, which is key. This year, Scottish football supporters topped a European attendance chart for the third year running. Citing a recently published UEFA report, the Scottish Professional Football League said that

“football fans across Scotland have recorded significantly higher top-flight attendances per capita than any other league in Europe”.

We should be proud of that. UEFA's report, entitled “The European Club Talent and Competition Landscape”, was launched in 2023. The latest report revealed that the Scottish Premiership had 18.5 attendees per 1,000 people at matches last season, which is a 5 per cent increase on the previous campaign. That is 70 per cent higher than any other league in Europe. Portugal's Primeira Liga sits in second place, with

10.7 attendees per 1,000 people, and the Netherlands' Eredivisie is third, with 9.77 attendees. England's Premier League has 6.97 attendees per 1,000 people. Around 4 million fans attended top-flight matches in Scotland last term. That is the eighth-highest attendance in Europe.

I was lucky enough to attend the last two European championships—in 2021 in Scotland and in 2024 in Germany—with my wife, my son and daughter, and their two partners. The memory of singing "Flower of Scotland" at the Allianz arena in Munich at the first game of that championship was incredible. The build-up to the game with Germany supporters was great—we sang and enjoyed German hospitality. Our support was, of course, incredible, and it drove tourism to Scotland. The game itself was fine for only 10 minutes, unfortunately.

Hosting Euro 2028 presents an opportunity for us to build on Scotland's strong track record of delivering major events. The bill will enable Scotland to play its part in hosting the championships, ensuring that Scotland meets UEFA's host nation requirements. It is there to protect us from exploitation, ticket touting, unauthorised trading and so on, and the Scottish Government has worked with partners and key stakeholders in the Parliament. The bill takes action on ticket touting and prohibits the unauthorised sale of championship tickets for profit, above the face cost, and that will apply to all matches. There is an exception for the auction of tickets to raise funds for charity.

The bill will prohibit unauthorised street trading and advertising in designated event zones. George Adam is right to mention the sale of hats and scarves, which is a feature of every Scotland game that we might go to. As some members have said, there is a balance to be struck, as local business needs to see the benefit of the tournament coming to Scotland. The bill will set criminal offences for ticket touting and unauthorised trading and advertising. It will, of course, be an offence to obstruct an enforcement officer.

Scotland will play Greece on Saturday—and Denmark next Tuesday, when I will head to Hampden to cheer on Scotland to world cup qualification. I hope that we will be cheering on Scotland before Euro 2028, when the team heads to the USA, Canada and Mexico for the world cup in 2026.

15:41

Davy Russell (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab): I welcome the Scottish Government getting ahead of the game and introducing the bill. I was involved in the previous

Commonwealth games in Scotland. We were told in 2008 that they would happen, and the six years until they did just zoomed by—they passed really quickly. The preparation work paid off in the end, however. I am sure that the organisers will appreciate the action that the Government is going to take.

Until I took up a political career, I was heavily involved in the current preparations in Glasgow, so I know that the staff involved regard major events there as business as usual, because there are so many happening, whether be they football, Commonwealth games or cycling championships. However, the staff must be commended for how they carry out their duties.

I join the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee in asking the Scottish Government to consider introducing generic legislation to cover large events, which would save a lot of wasted time if we have another big event soon—co-hosting the women's world cup in 2035 being an example. It would be better to have tailor-made legislation for large events, rather than just a specific law for football that covers advertising and security provisions. That would mean not having to waste the Parliament's time for every single event. Although we have not seen proposals for women's events, we should liaise now with the SFA to ensure that women's football in Scotland is adequately represented.

The proposed limitations on profiting from ticket sales are welcome. The effect on charities that auction off tickets has been mentioned, and we should take that into consideration. I am keen to hear how the Scottish Government can work with the organisers to ensure that a selection of affordable tickets is made available through schools and local clubs, including those covering a range of disability facilities, so that the tournament can be as inclusive as possible.

I remind members of the disappointing actions of a minority of football fans during the 2020 Euro finals—which were held in 2021, because of Covid. I would like to see assurances that that kind of behaviour will not be seen in 2028. I believe that it is for ministers to have that discussion with the organisers, Glasgow City Council and the police.

My thanks to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee for its oversight of the bill at this early stage. More work is needed to provide assurances to market traders, local businesses and fans, especially in communications about the proposed legislation. However, I am quite happy to support the general principles of the bill at stage 1.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final speaker in the open debate is Mr Kidd, who has around four minutes.

15:44

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): As we have heard, the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill will provide the legal framework that is necessary for hosting part of Euro 2028 here in Scotland. The bill will ensure that commercial rights, ticketing, trading and advertising are regulated in line with UEFA's requirements, which does not suit everybody entirely, but which is something important to talk about.

Although these are important practical measures—ensuring fairness, protecting fans from exploitation and maintaining the integrity of the event—I believe that today's debate, and indeed any discussion around the Euros, needs to go further than simply regulation. It must also focus on the question of legacy. What lasting impact will Euro 2028 have for the people of Scotland once the final whistle blows?

As Professor David McGillivray of the University of the West of Scotland reminds us, all major sporting events produce legacies—some positive, some not. The difference lies in how deliberately we plan for them. A lasting legacy will not emerge by chance. It requires foresight, investment and co-ordination across the Government, local authorities and sporting bodies from the outset.

The minister has rightly noted that the projected economic benefit could be as high as £2.6 billion across the whole of the UK, but economic figures alone do not tell the full story. We must ensure that the benefits of that investment translate into real outcomes for our communities in relation to participation, wellbeing, inclusion and pride. Glasgow has a strong record in that regard. From the 2014 Commonwealth games to the 2023 UCI cycling world championships, we have seen how hosting global events can raise our international profile and deliver infrastructure improvements. However, the lesson from those experiences is clear: legacy does not just happen—it has to be built. That means using the inspiration of Euro 2028 to strengthen grassroots football across Scotland. It means improving access to facilities so that every young person, regardless of their background, gender or ability, can take part in sport. It means working with schools and communities to promote health, fitness and social inclusion through football.

The tournament slogan, "Football for all, football for good, football for the future", should guide our approach. We must live up to those words, ensuring that public money that is invested in the event delivers returns in terms of health, opportunity and social cohesion. The legacy must be felt in every corner of Scotland—not just at Hampden park or in the hospitality sector, but in local clubs, youth programmes and communities that see football as a force for good.

Presiding Officer, this is about accountability. Public funding is being committed, and it is our duty to make sure that it is not spent solely on making our stadiums shine for the cameras. Instead, it must help to create a framework for lasting community benefit through sport, inclusion and pride in the place in which we live.

In evidence to the committee, the minister highlighted that the impact of the benefits gained from the tournament will be spread across Scotland, thereby furthering a number of national outcomes. I would welcome it if the minister could expand on that today.

I also support calls for a future chamber debate dedicated specifically to the legacy planning for Euro 2028, to ensure transparency, co-ordination and a clear strategy that aligns with our national outcomes on health, community wellbeing and participation. When the stands are empty, the visitors have gone home and the cameras have turned elsewhere, what will remain is the Scotland that we built through this opportunity. If we do it right, that Scotland will be healthier, more active and more united. Let Euro 2028 be not just a great tournament—and it will be—but a great opportunity to secure a win for us all.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to closing speeches.

15:49

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): There has been a consensus across the chamber that the 2028 tournament will be good for Scotland, good for Ireland, and good for the UK overall.

In his opening speech, the minister talked about armistice day. Interestingly, this morning, I was reading the *Central Fife Times*, which reported on a game between veterans and serving Black Watch members that took place in my home village of Kelty on Saturday. It raised quite a bit of money for Poppyscotland, and after the game, the participants proceeded to the war memorial and laid a wreath. That goes back to the point about how football—the same goes for many sports, but it is certainly football in Scotland—brings people together.

It is worth remembering that at the previous European championships in Germany, the Scotland fans—the tartan army—were praised to the highest by every community they went to, because there was a good atmosphere; it was a party atmosphere. At a time when we see so much division in our country and around the world, football has a key role to play in bringing people together.

The minister talked about Scotland's global reputation for hosting events, and Davy Russell made a point about the staff who are involved in gearing up for such events. We should thank those staff, as Davy Russell did, and recognise that the authority that will have the greatest role to play in 2028, with the support of the Scottish Government, is Glasgow City Council, through its staff. We in the Parliament, therefore, want a guarantee that the council will receive the support that it needs to carry out the functions for the event.

I was speaking to someone about the bill the other day, and they raised a question with me about the infrastructure around Hampden. I think that the minister should be looking at the infrastructure that is in place. That lady gave me the example of the events that she attended at Murrayfield, which hosts all the big events, such as the large Oasis concerts during the summer, and she talked about the transport links. Another member in the chamber has drawn attention to the transport links around Hampden, in particular the rail track, so I hope that the minister would agree that we should look at what improvements need to be made to ensure that the proper infrastructure is in place.

Stephen Kerr made some interesting points, one being that, although we need to pass the bill in order for the games to go ahead, it is all about protecting UEFA's commercial interests. With regard to some of the tradespeople who will lose out as a result of the bill, it is, again, for Glasgow City Council to work with those people, because the event will not happen only on the day. There will be a build up to it, and there will be real business opportunities. I hope that we can work with the council to ensure that on-street traders do not lose out and there will be opportunities for them.

Bill Kidd made an important point about legacy and what we can do to ensure that. The reality is that football is the national sport in Scotland. I talked about my home village—I live near a public park, and every night of the week it is full of young children playing football. There are boys' teams and girls' teams. A lot depends on the coaches, who are often parents or people who love the game, giving up their time to coach and support young people. I hope that part of the legacy of the games will be to recognise the voluntary work that goes on and to put in place much more support to encourage the growth of that. I hope that we will qualify for the upcoming games, but if we invest in grass-roots sports now, we can perhaps have the ambition of one day winning a European cup and the world cup. I hope that that will be the legacy that Bill Kidd spoke about.

15:54

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): First, I declare an interest in the debate as a football fan and a supporter of the current Scottish cup holders, Aberdeen. There were no cheers—that is a shame. I am also a fan of the current UEFA Europa league winners, Tottenham Hotspur. Again, there are no cheers—it is a tough crowd, Deputy Presiding Officer.

It has been an interesting debate; it started with George Adam signing up to Stephen Kerr's new campaign for football fans to be able to enjoy a pint at games. I am looking forward to Mr Adam hosting Stephen Kerr in Paisley and being able to extract a pint out of him, although that may be a challenge.

George Adam: A Diet Coke only.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I have started too controversially—I apologise.

George Adam: I have been working on the idea of having alcohol at football matches for some time. St Mirren is having a pilot on allowing pre-game drinks, and I am quite happy to invite Mr Kerr along to that, so that he and I can have a friendly couple of pints before a game against his team.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Mr Adam is taking advantage of a free bar—that is very impressive.

I join colleagues in thanking committee colleagues and our clerks for all of their efforts, as well as members from across the chamber who are welcoming Euro 2028 to the UK and Ireland.

Euro 2028 will be a tournament with global reach and interest that puts Scotland firmly on the world stage. We can look forward to it not only bringing considerable economic benefits but—as I am sure we all hope—delivering an enduring sporting legacy for years to come. As Brian Whittle touched on, that has not always been the case with other major events.

The joint bid, featuring all of the home nations and the Republic of Ireland, was first announced in 2022. Moving it forward successfully has demonstrated positive co-operation between the football associations and also the Governments of these islands.

Scotland has some experience of large-scale sporting events, with the successful delivery of events for the London 2012 Olympics and the 2014 Commonwealth games in Glasgow, but it is important that Euro 2028 serves to underline Scotland as a world-leading host nation for the future.

To turn to the legislation, we have been here before, as many have noted. Similar legislation was introduced as part of the Euro 2020 hosting

bid, and similar sorts of legislative change were required in relation to the Commonwealth games. As a member of the lead committee, I thank all those who gave evidence again at stage 1.

Of course, the committee has raised the question of the necessity for what the Scottish Government has tentatively dubbed a major events bill, to provide a legislative framework for future events, rather than having to address them piecemeal whenever Scotland is playing host. There is some merit to that proposal, and I am pleased that the Scottish Government has left the door open to look at it in more detail in the future.

Some of the issues that have arisen are the same as those that arose in 2020. As my colleague, Stephen Kerr, noted, this is a bill that legislates with a nakedly commercial purpose. It applies different rules for Euro 2028 than it does for other events, and different approaches, some of which have been understandably controversial. He also pointed to the absurd outcomes that would mean that a charity raffling off a ticket could fall foul of the offences in this bill. On the ticket touting issue, he cautioned that cross-border work will be essential. I am pleased that the Scottish Government has given assurances that policing will, in practice, be proportionate. However, that is no substitute for rigour in legislating.

There has been discussion, including by the committee, about the impact on street trading and advertising. Again, that is nothing new. Similar concerns were raised in relation to the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Act 2020. However, as Stephen Kerr noted, there is ample scope for ensuring that costs do not fall on traders or other innocent parties whose businesses may be disrupted. I doubt that anyone in this chamber wishes to see anything less than firm consultation and collaboration between Government, communities, the police, the city council and local businesses. However, that work must be planned for and become a practical reality over the coming months and years.

I will touch briefly on the contribution from my colleague Brian Whittle. He talked about the passion of fans and how that should not be exploited by touts. Again, I think that we would all agree with that. He also touched on legacy—he was talking not just about the shiny things, but about what is left in the memories of Scots. I am sure that we all remember some of the first tournaments that we watched on television or were lucky enough to attend. I certainly hope that there is an opportunity for many young Scots—boys and girls—to attend these events and experience them first-hand. That opportunity is absolutely vital to ensuring the legacy.

This bill will see widespread support as a result of the enthusiasm for the UK and Ireland Euros,

but the work of this committee and the remarks from around the chamber today are aimed at recognising that the bill—and the tournament more generally—will have an impact. We ought to consider not just the cost to the public sector but the potential disruption to people's lives and businesses and, particularly, the impact on local residents in Glasgow.

As the bill goes through its next stages, I hope that we recognise some of the elements mentioned in the stage 1 report and, where possible, enhance the positives and soften the negatives of an event of this scale coming to Scotland.

15:59

Richard Lochhead: I thank everyone for their speeches. There have been some ups and downs in the debate. Jamie Halcro Johnston went up in my estimation—for the first time, I think—when he said that he is an Aberdeen fan. Paul McLennan went down in my estimation when he reminded us that he is a Hibs fan. In the last home game that I was at in Pittodrie, which was a few days ago, Hibs beat Aberdeen 2-1. That was not the best of experiences.

I enjoyed everyone's speeches, and a lot of serious issues were brought to the chamber. I again thank the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee for its engagement on the bill, which will continue at stage 2. I also join others in paying tribute to Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Life, Police Scotland and other partners, which have done so much to bring all this together and which will have so much to do as we move forward.

I will pick up on a few of the issues in the few minutes that are available to me. However, I will first say that this is an exciting opportunity for Scotland. The Commonwealth games are coming up, then the grand départ of the Tour de France, Euro 2028 and, in between all that, the Open, which will return to St Andrews. There will no doubt be other events taking place across the country. Scotland has a massive international stage over the next three years, and there is also a huge economic and cultural opportunity.

A very exciting few years is coming up for Scotland. Today, we are debating one aspect of that, which is Euro 2028.

Brian Whittle: Paul McLennan highlighted that we are extraordinarily good at watching sport. On the point about 2014, I disagree with Bill Kidd about one thing, which is that we never made the most of the legacy opportunity. In fact, the legacy from 2014—by accident—is that we will get the 2026 games. What will the Scottish Government

do to ensure that we make the most of the sporting legacy?

Richard Lochhead: That is an important issue, and it has been reflected in the speeches of several members. The Scottish Government takes it seriously. I mentioned in my opening remarks the £45 million fund for social impact, which will apply across these islands, plus Ireland. The detail of that fund, how it will be allocated and so on will be worked out in the coming months. There will shortly be more announcements from UEFA, the home nations and so on, and more will be said about that.

Alex Rowley and others mentioned affordability and accessibility. The Scottish Government agrees that the tournament must be inclusive and accessible. I point out that UEFA previously made efforts to offer affordable tickets. During Euro 2024, over 1 million tickets were available for €60 or less, with entry-level pricing at €30. UEFA also says that it reinvests 97.5 per cent of its net revenue back into football, including grass-roots developments and social programmes. We will look carefully at how that pans out over the next few years in Scotland.

Several other issues were raised. Stephen Kerr—I am not picking on him—raised a couple of issues in his opening remarks, which I would like to clarify. The cafe in Mount Florida that he cited is safe. This is about street trader licences, not fixed premises. As others have said, it is important that we take into account the issues regarding street traders, which could include food trucks or people selling scarves or whatever. As we have said before, Glasgow City Council is working closely with those street traders. The traders will potentially be offered alternative locations and the fee for those licences will be waived in such circumstances. More will be said about that by Glasgow City Council in the coming months. Guidance will also be issued to local businesses, including businesses in fixed premises in the fan zones and stadium zones. Those are the facts.

On ticket touting, which several members have raised, it is important that people have fair access to fair prices for their tickets. That is why it is important that we tackle ticket touting. I point out in relation to Stephen Kerr's comment on figures that the maximum penalty on conviction on indictment is an unlimited fine. The limit on summary conviction is £20,000, not £5,000, as Stephen Kerr indicated. Last time around, in Euro 2020, the limit was £5,000. However, as George Adam pointed out, technology has moved on, and ticket touts are perhaps using technology for their own means. Therefore, the higher fine is appropriate in this circumstance, and I hope that it will be a disincentive to ticket touts.

It was initially argued that there should be no exceptions for charities. However, we have put in an exception for charities now. Stephen Kerr says that that does not go far enough, but we must somehow make it easy to implement the provision. There is an official register of charities in Scotland, so when the enforcement agencies are looking at who can be exempt, they must refer to that list of charities. I think that we have taken a fair and proportionate approach to the charity exemption. Other countries do that and some do not. We are doing it because we think that it is the right thing to do.

Stephen Kerr: Is the minister prepared to look closely at the issue of community-based charities that will not be registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator and therefore could be criminalised if they try, as I am sure that many of them would plan to, to raise money for good causes in the community by raffling tickets?

Will the minister also comment on ticket touting and the efforts that the Scottish Government is making to secure co-operation with the UK Government and other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom so that we can deal with the issue holistically, rather than partially, given the limitations on territoriality?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the minister to begin to wind up his speech.

Richard Lochhead: Ticket touting outside Scotland's borders has been discussed with the UK Government. I am sure that more will be said publicly, and that the Scottish Parliament and the relevant committees will be informed, about the outcome of that in due course.

The charity exemption must be easy to implement and enforceable. We are doing a good thing in Scotland by introducing a charity exemption. I think that we have got that right. Of course, stage 2 is coming, and we can have further debates and discussions on that. I am happy to meet members from other parties as we approach stage 2—that offer is open. I already have meetings in my diary with other political parties as we head towards stage 2, and we can discuss any of the issues that members want to raise with me as we move forward.

I am running out of time. Euro 2028 is a massive opportunity for Scotland. To be a host nation and to have this exciting opportunity, we must pass the legislation, as many members have said.

Three million tickets will be available for matches across the UK and Ireland. During Euro 2024, more than 600,000 fans participated in fan walks from designated meeting points to stadiums, creating a vibrant and unified fan experience. Perhaps we will see that again with Euro 2028.

Euro 2024 had around 2.7 million ticket holders across 51 matches, with fans from more than 119 countries. Perhaps we will experience those benefits in Scotland as well in 2028. Euro 2024 had a cumulative global audience exceeding 5 billion viewers. Euro 2028 presents a great opportunity for Scotland to showcase itself, as do the other sporting occasions that I mentioned that will happen over the next three years.

I conclude by thanking members for their speeches.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-19614, in the name of Angela Constance, on a motion of legislative competence on the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button.

16:03

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I am pleased to open this brief debate on the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, the purpose of which is to rectify an oversight.

I regret that the Scottish Parliament has not had more time to consider the supplementary legislative consent memorandum. The original LCM, which covers the vast majority of the relevant provision in the bill, was debated and passed by the Parliament on 26 June. However, it has since become apparent that clause 53(6) of the bill should have been included in the original LCM and motion.

Since the omission became apparent, officials have worked to develop a supplementary LCM covering the oversight, which was lodged on 4 November. Although I accept that that is far from optimal, I am grateful to the convener of the Criminal Justice Committee for suspending the committee's responsibilities under standing orders to allow the debate to proceed in order to provide Parliament with the opportunity to consider the legislative consent motion before the bill reaches its final form.

Clause 53(6) amends section 25(1) of the Serious Crime Act 2007 by inserting the words

"or an interim serious crime prevention order"

after "order". That will put the breach of an interim serious crime prevention order on the same footing as the breach of a full serious crime prevention order, ensuring that there is consistency of approach across the United Kingdom when dealing with those who might seek to circumvent the restrictions that are imposed on them. It is important—indeed, imperative—that we support the extension of clause 53(6) to Scotland, in order to prevent criminals attempting to get around the conditions of an interim serious crime prevention order simply by moving jurisdiction.

In moving the motion, I recommend that the Parliament consent to clause 53(6).

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 30 January 2025, and subsequently amended, relating to clause 53(6) on the breach of interim Serious Crime Prevention Orders (iSCPO), so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

16:10

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): Today, the Parliament is again asked to consider a legislative consent memorandum dealing with the UK Government's Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill. As a whole, the bill has given my colleagues—both here and in the UK Parliament—significant concern. Against the tide of illegal immigration, the bill proposes little in the way of solutions. It was reported just this week that 39,075 migrants have made the journey across the channel so far this year. Labour has failed to deal with immigration and securing our borders.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I am grateful to my colleague for giving way, because it gives me the opportunity to put on record the view of many of my constituents that this is a thoroughly badly thought-through piece of legislation. Its most important defect is the repeal of the only measure that has, so far, been put in place to act as a deterrent to people trafficking and to prevent people putting their lives on the line and crossing the English Channel at the behest of some of the most vile and evil people that one can imagine.

Tess White: Labour's recent announcement about housing hundreds of asylum-seeking men in barracks in Inverness has alarmed us all due to the questionable suitability of that approach. Instead of being meaningful legislation that will deliver solutions, the bill bulldozes across previous building blocks, such as by repealing key sections of the Illegal Migration Act 2023.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, the Scottish National Party continues to be out of touch with public sentiment. The Scottish Government has appeared to offer an open door to illegal immigration, which is an approach that is not in keeping with public sentiment and that would be damaging to Scotland. The Scottish Conservative and Unionist—

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Will Tess White take an intervention?

Tess White: Presiding Officer, will I get the time back?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Yes, if it is very brief.

Martin Whitfield: Is it the Conservative position that criminals should avoid arrest by simply moving to Scotland?

Tess White: It is ludicrous of Mr Whitfield to suggest that.

The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, unlike Scottish Labour, remains the only party in Scotland that is serious about restoring the integrity of our borders through proper control—I stress “proper”. However, we also respect the competences given to the Scottish Parliament through the devolution settlement and the functions that are reserved by the UK Parliament. Therefore, despite our significant opposition to the bill, we will abstain in the vote on the motion.

I will take this opportunity to raise my concern about the process that the Parliament has allowed for the passing of the LCM. The Scottish Government has highlighted the serious issue surrounding the LCM; it is fundamentally one of criminality, as Mr Whitfield says. However, due to the lack of time, the Parliament has disregarded the usual standing orders, skipped the stage where a lead committee would thoroughly scrutinise the LCM and brought it straight to the chamber. It is much more than “far from optimal”, as the cabinet secretary says—it is much worse than that. It is the third time that this has happened. The disregard for our standing orders and normal process of methodical scrutiny is of some concern to me and my colleagues. Although I understand that there might be little option left, in the interest of time, I urge the Scottish Government to ensure that disregard of our normal process does not become the norm.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the short debate on the LCM.

Urgent Question

16:15

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is an urgent question. To get as many members in as possible, I would prefer short and succinct questions, as always, and answers to match.

Historic Environment Scotland (Board Meeting)

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether the culture secretary will correct the record regarding reports that he told a parliamentary committee that he had not been invited to attend a board meeting of Historic Environment Scotland, despite evidence to the contrary.

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I was not aware of any such invitation when I attended the committee last week. Senior officials have now confirmed that they had not advised me of the request from the former chair, as they were seeking to address a number of sensitive matters at Historic Environment Scotland prior to providing me with advice.

Perhaps the most pressing sensitivity was that the on-going investigations at Historic Environment Scotland included one into the conduct of the former chair, Dr Hugh Hall. Subsequent to his request, Dr Hall then indicated his resignation to the Scottish Government, some months prior to the end of his term. That brought the investigation into his conduct to an end and, as a result, his request to meet the board was superseded.

Stephen Kerr: That is, frankly, nonsense. The cabinet secretary was invited to meet the board of Historic Environment Scotland. Let us stick with the facts—that is what he was asked to do. The fact that he did not know that he had been invited is a separate matter that I will come on to. However, let us be clear about one thing: the ministerial code requires that ministers

“give accurate and truthful information to the Parliament”

and correct any errors at the earliest opportunity.

Does the cabinet secretary accept that he failed in that duty when he misrepresented the facts to the committee last week? Why did it take a set of courageous whistleblowers and a front-page newspaper story for him to act? Will he now apologise for the serious disservice that he did to the chair and board of Historic Environment

Scotland and for undermining confidence in ministerial accountability?

Angus Robertson: I have discussed the matter with officials today. When I questioned why they did not notify me of the invitation sooner, the reason that they outlined was that it was to protect the independence of the investigation, and I understand that.

In the interests of completeness, I point out that officials have today advised me that Dr Hall requested meetings with the board on 24 July in a meeting and by email on 12 and 29 August. At that time, officials advised Dr Hall that, irrespective of a meeting, I was fully engaged with matters at Historic Environment Scotland. Work has since moved on to supporting the efforts of the new chair, Sir Mark Jones, to resolve the well-documented issues at Historic Environment Scotland and appointing the two new interim board members to support Sir Mark, those being Ray Macfarlane and Susan Deighan.

Stephen Kerr: This episode has revealed a cabinet secretary who is completely out of touch with events inside his own office and in one of the most troubled public bodies in Scotland, for which he has a responsibility. Does Angus Robertson not see that, by throwing a senior civil servant under the bus to protect himself, he has done lasting damage to his reputation? Will he accept that shifting blame on to officials is no substitute for competence, and that Parliament and the public deserve a minister who is on top of his brief, not one who seems incapable of managing it?

Angus Robertson: I take very seriously the issues that have been reported at Historic Environment Scotland. I am very clear that, on the whole, HES is an excellent organisation, with hard-working staff who look after one of this country's most valuable assets—its historic environment.

Scottish Government officials have been working closely with the HES board and leadership team to improve the organisation's leadership and governance. As a result of that, together with the appointment of Sir Mark Jones, Ray Macfarlane and Susan Deighan, along with a new chief operating officer, I am confident that HES will soon leave these issues behind it and go from strength to strength.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I advise members that I have received a number of requests to ask a supplementary question. I will try to get through all the requests.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): The serious issues at the top of Historic Environment Scotland are not of Angus Robertson's making, but it is his responsibility as cabinet secretary to give accurate answers to the Parliament and to fix this mess.

Historic Environment Scotland and the cabinet secretary appear to be all over the place, but the one place where Angus Robertson has not been is the HES boardroom. This shambles cannot go on. The cabinet secretary should not be waiting for an invitation to meet the HES board. When exactly will Angus Robertson do his job and meet the HES board?

Angus Robertson: The answer to Neil Bibby's question is quite simple. I have made it absolutely clear to Sir Mark Jones that I am happy to meet the board, under his chairmanship, whenever he feels the time is right.

I hope that Mr Bibby agrees that it is right for us to support the incoming chair of the board and his leadership of Historic Environment Scotland. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members!

Angus Robertson: The chair has to get to grips with a lot of issues at the arm's-length body, and I assure Mr Bibby that I have told Sir Mark Jones that he has my total support. I have appointed two new interim board members to strengthen the team around him, there should be a new chief operating officer at Historic Environment Scotland, and I have given him the assurance that I will give him any support that he needs. That is the Scottish Government's position, and I hope that Neil Bibby supports that, too.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I simply do not believe what the cabinet secretary has told the Parliament. However, if we are to believe his argument that he did not know anything about the requests, what action is he taking to investigate civil servants who have withheld information from a cabinet secretary? Does he believe that the reason why such requests have been withheld from him relates to the concerns—which we have heard from members of his party and of his Government—that he is a lazy minister who is not across the detail of his brief?

Angus Robertson: I make it clear that I asked officials why they did not share the information with me. Although I understand their reasoning, I have been clear that, going forward, I am to be kept informed of any such requests in a timely fashion.

In answer to the question that has been posed to me, the level of engagement between the Scottish Government and Historic Environment Scotland in relation to its problems of governance—

Douglas Ross: What about you?

Angus Robertson: Its problems of governance, as an arm's-length organisation, are extremely serious. We are very closely involved in supporting

Historic Environment Scotland, under the new chairmanship of its board, to ensure that it emerges from the challenges of its own making and is able to perform the functions that, I hope, all of us across the chamber believe are its core business.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I take this opportunity to remind all members that we have to listen to the member who has the floor and that we do not need running commentaries or heckling from sedentary positions.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): The quality of the protection and care of Scotland's heritage and history is at the heart of this matter, and it is essential that Historic Environment Scotland has the trust and confidence of the public in that regard. Will the cabinet secretary say more about how the Scottish Government is working alongside the new chair to ensure that trust is restored as swiftly as possible?

Angus Robertson: Paul McLennan has asked a very important question, which relates to issues that I have already narrated to Neil Bibby. We need to ensure that Historic Environment Scotland, under new leadership, has the resources at its disposal to deal with the issues relating to its leadership that have come to public attention. That is why my officials and I have been very supportive in ensuring that Historic Environment Scotland has the capacity to deal with the challenges that it is trying to deal with. That has involved the appointment of a new chairman of the board, which I have undertaken, the appointment of two new interim board members, which I have undertaken, and the provision of support relating to the appointment of a chief operating officer for Historic Environment Scotland.

Those are the appropriate Government interventions to ensure that Historic Environment Scotland is able to deal with the problems that exist in the organisation and to move on and focus on the key role that it performs in our country.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The cabinet secretary was quite definite in his response to me and Stephen Kerr in committee that he has neither attended nor been invited to attend any HES board meeting, despite his predecessor, Fiona Hyslop, doing so and despite knowing that the organisation has been in crisis. However, we now know that Angus Robertson's claims are not true. There was at least one invitation to attend a board meeting.

Stephen Kerr has written to urge the First Minister to refer Angus Robertson to the First Minister's independent adviser on the ministerial code. Has Mr Robertson spoken with or been in communication with the First Minister about that

letter from Mr Kerr, or about the potential of the incident being investigated by the First Minister's independent adviser on the ministerial code as a breach of that code? Will Angus Robertson refer himself and save the First Minister from having to make that decision?

Angus Robertson: I have already answered the substantive point that the member raises in my first answer to Stephen Kerr. I was not aware of the invitations to the board, and the record will show that to be the case.

It is up to other people if they wish to launch, take part in or call for investigations. I know that it is the job of Opposition parties to do that. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden.

Angus Robertson: I need to make sure that the new leadership of Historic Environment Scotland has the resources at its disposal to get itself through the difficult process that it needs to get through as an arm's-length body, and that is what I undertake to do as cabinet secretary.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): What does the cabinet secretary think his negligence says to the communities in Dirleton and Melrose, where HES properties are still surrounded by Heras fencing? Is it not the case that if the minister spent more time on his day job and less time adding to his air miles, he might finally be able to fix those problems?

Angus Robertson: I think that Mr Hoy is aware—I hope he is—that the operational management of Historic Environment Scotland is for Historic Environment Scotland. I share with him the wish that our historic sites are able to be open, and that is why the Government has provided Historic Environment Scotland with the funds. It is only a shame that Mr Hoy voted against that in the budget.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the urgent question.

Motion without Notice

16:27

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): 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 4.27 pm.—*[Graeme Dey]*

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

16:27

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): There are two questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-19613, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-19614, in the name of Angela Constance, on a legislative consent motion on the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

We will have a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

16:28

Meeting suspended.

16:31

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on motion S6M-19614, in the name of Angela Constance. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McLennan.

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Apologies—I could not connect, either. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Robertson.

Liam McArthur has a point of order. We need his microphone to be switched on.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had a similar problem—I could not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McArthur.

The Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans (Graeme Dey): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect, either. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Dey. 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)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Ind)
 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)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Ross Greer]
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)

McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Michael Marra]
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Maggie Chapman]
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Fulton MacGregor]
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)

Abstentions

Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-19614, in the name of Angela Constance, on a legislative consent motion on the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, is: For 84, Against 1, Abstentions 23.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 30 January 2025,

and subsequently amended, relating to clause 53(6) on the breach of interim Serious Crime Prevention Orders (iSCPO), so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. We will move on shortly to the first of this evening’s two members’ business debates.

Offshore Energy Workforce (Energy Transition Institute Reports)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-18800, in the name of Liam Kerr, on the insights of the "Striking the Balance" reports of the Energy Transition Institute at Robert Gordon University. The debate will be concluded without any question being put, and I invite members who wish to speak to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the report, *Striking the Balance*, which was produced by the Energy Transition Institute at Robert Gordon University; understands that it provides predictions for the future of the offshore energy workforce in the UK, which, it states, employs around 154,000 people, including in the North East Scotland region; understands that the report states that a best case outcome could see a need for 210,000 roles in offshore energy production, but that this would only be achievable through the installation of a further 6GW approximately of offshore wind each year and by managing the decline of oil and gas production over a prolonged timeframe; notes the report's claim that the worst-case situation anticipates around 400 oil and gas job losses in the UK each fortnight across the next five years; acknowledges with concern the report's claim that, if Scotland does not pursue renewable activities comprehensively and oil and gas production continues to decline, employment across the offshore energy industry could drop from around 75,000 jobs in 2024 to a figure in the range of 45,000 to 63,000 in the initial years of the next decade; welcomes the growth predicted in the report of the number of offshore renewables jobs in the UK, notes with concern, however, the suggestion in the report that the sector will likely struggle to absorb the amount of former oil and gas workers before 2028; recognises the report's cautioning that a decrease in offshore energy jobs of nearly 20% could take place without decisive or prompt action, and commends the work of the Energy Transition Institute in producing what it sees as rigorous data regarding a pressing issue in Scotland.

16:35

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I am grateful to cross-party colleagues for their support for this debate. Signing a motion in Parliament does not necessarily mean agreement with it. Rather, it shows a willingness to debate, to listen and to test arguments that may not accord with one's own views, and any debate on oil and gas can often polarise views. I am somewhat appalled that members of the Green party, so recently a party of Government and one that has called a debate on oil and gas for tomorrow, have not only refused to sign my motion, which I carefully drafted to avoid being divisive, but have not bothered even to attend to hear arguments that might challenge their ideology.

This debate is not about ideology; it is about the evidence contained in the "Striking a Balance" report from the Energy Transition Institute at Robert Gordon University. That is not a lobbying document or a press release; it is a rigorous, data-driven assessment of the future of the United Kingdom's offshore energy workforce, and its conclusions should give every member pause for reflection.

The report warns that, without urgent co-ordinated action, the UK's oil and gas workforce could shrink by around 400 jobs every fortnight for the next five years, which is the equivalent of losing the entire Grangemouth workforce every two weeks. It also warns that, if Scotland's Government fails to pursue renewable energy at scale while continuing to let oil and gas decline, almost 30,000 direct employment offshore industry jobs could be lost by the early 2030s.

Those are not just numbers on a spreadsheet: they are people, families, mortgages and communities, especially in North East Scotland where one in every six people works directly or indirectly in oil and gas—a figure that is one in every 30 people across the entirety of Scotland.

On the economic point, I was told last week that Shell alone contributes £12 billion to the UK's gross domestic product and accounts for 78,000 jobs, which means that this is not only an energy issue but an economic and social one.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind): Does Mr Kerr agree that the real tragedy of those prospective job losses—which are on a scale that is greater than in the 1980s, when we saw the closure of Ravenscraig—is that they are entirely avoidable if we resume the policy of maximum economic recovery, which we used to have when I was energy minister, and reduce the profits levy? Those two things will prevent job losses on a scandalous scale.

Liam Kerr: Fergus Ewing is absolutely right, and I could not agree more because the "Striking the Balance" report justifies exactly what we have just heard.

The report reaches three fundamental conclusions. First, the demand for oil and gas is not going away. By 2050, the UK will still require significant amounts, only about 30 per cent of which will be for domestic purposes. We will need oil and gas to heat our homes, to keep the lights on, to make our mobile phones, to fuel our cars, buses and trains, to run medical equipment and to make fertiliser.

Today, the UK produces about 20 per cent of the oil and gas that it uses. Even if we achieve net zero and even if Jackdaw and Rosebank go ahead, the UK will still need to import more oil and gas than it produces to meet demand, which

means more imports from countries such as the United States of America, where production emissions are three to four times higher than ours, countries with dubious regulatory or human rights records, and countries that might capriciously switch off our supply.

Secondly, there will be no just transition without the oil and gas industry. The real choice is not one between oil and gas or renewables; it is a choice between a managed transition that maintains a viable domestic industry while building up renewables, hydrogen and carbon capture, and an accelerated decline of exporting jobs, losing skills and importing higher-carbon energy at a higher cost.

The difference between those futures lies not in geology or technology but in political decision making. That is the subject of the third conclusion, which focuses on the role of both of Scotland's Governments. The UK Government's fiscal regime is now one of the most regressive in the world. Investment allowances have been stripped out, creating uncertainty. Meanwhile, Norway provides a stable and progressive regime, continues to invest and uses the proceeds to fund its transition. That is why Fergus Ewing is right—we must see an end to the energy profits levy and the UK Government's ridiculously naive ban on new oil and gas licences.

The Scottish Government, meanwhile, says one thing in Aberdeen and another in Glasgow. The “no new oil and gas” rhetoric that was reiterated by former First Minister Nicola Sturgeon just last week may win headlines, but it sends a chilling message to the very workforce that will deliver net zero. No one can ignore the fact that the Scottish Government's draft energy strategy still contains a presumption against new oil and gas. It is the people of oil and gas who will drive the transition, but half of Aberdeen's energy workforce hold a degree qualification and if policy tells them that they have no future here, they will simply go elsewhere, representing a loss to our economy, a grave loss to our population and a loss to any chance of delivering the transition.

As the report highlights, there is a very narrow Goldilocks zone between 2025 and early 2030 in which the UK must sustain and repurpose its existing workforce. If we run down oil and gas before renewables are ready to absorb those skills, the opportunity will be lost, and so will tens of thousands of jobs.

I think that we all share the same desired destination—a Scotland that is prosperous, sustainable and secure and which runs off a genuinely balanced energy mix. The question is how we get there. The “Striking the Balance” report makes it clear that the window of opportunity is closing. If we act wisely now, we can

secure the sweet spot of the transition, protecting jobs and skills while cutting emissions. If we act too slowly or ideologically, we risk losing the workforce, the supply chain and the capacity to deliver any transition at all.

This is not about oil and gas versus renewables. It is about the North Sea and the energy transition—a transition that, if managed properly, can secure Scotland's energy future and the livelihoods of the people who will power it.

16:42

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): I thank Liam Kerr for lodging his motion, which I am happy to support. I commend Professor Paul de Leeuw and the team at the Energy Transition Institute at Robert Gordon University for producing the excellent “Striking the Balance” report, which sets out predictions for the future of the UK offshore energy workforce across three scenarios and through the prisms of policy, cost pressures and industry dynamics, among others.

Underpinning the analysis is some important context. First, despite the UK oil and gas industry decline, demand remains, as we heard from Liam Kerr. As such, around 70 per cent of our oil consumption will be met from imports. Secondly, global electricity and gas demand increased sharply in 2024, and transformative action is required now to meet future demand. Thirdly, Scotland's energy future is at a critical juncture.

On offshore wind, the scenarios in the report model the delivery of 50GW, 70GW and 90GW respectively by 2030, with similar scenarios being considered across hydrogen and carbon capture, use and storage. To develop the low-case scenario of 50GW by 2030, the UK requires to install around 35GW of new wind capacity, or nearly 6GW annually. That is about one turbine each day.

What does that mean for our future energy workforce? The report highlights that securing UK content to 2030 will be crucial to sustaining a world-class offshore energy supply chain and workforce. As such, energy policy must evolve to incentivise domestic production through, for example, tax and policy incentives.

I welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to the oil and gas transition training fund. I also welcome the findings in the “Transition On Our Terms” report, which states that workers want action to create “good ... unionised ... jobs” in renewable industries, and “support” for their transition into those jobs,

“with profits ... returned to workers and communities”.

I also welcome the latest just transition fund announcement of £8.5 million for clean energy supply chain development.

Liam Kerr: I am enjoying the member's contribution. Does she agree that what is needed is for both Scotland's Governments to come out with a genuine, holistic strategy to govern the transition, the oil and gas industry and the energy mix?

Audrey Nicoll: I will come on to policy, which is often overlooked but is absolutely crucial.

In addition, the recently published UK Government "Clean Energy Jobs Plan" has emerged. It is certainly ambitious, but the reality is that the energy profits levy is costing jobs and investment. Frankly, it is infuriating that, yet again, the north-east is likely to see further job losses—this time, at Port of Aberdeen, which has experienced a 25 per cent drop in oil and gas activity over the summer. Ports are a critical part of our infrastructure for delivering manufacturing growth, so I again call on the UK Government to urgently change course on that damaging levy.

The "Striking the Balance" report states:

"Based on current public commitments and announcements, the UK should be able to deliver the scenario 3 outcomes. Without intervention, however, it is likely to fall short of delivering the outcomes outlined in either scenario 1 or 2."

That concern is also reflected in the House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee's report, "The future of Scotland's oil and gas industry".

I draw on the words of Bob Sanguinetti, chief executive at Port of Aberdeen. Earlier this week, he said:

"Supporting existing energy business is the most likely way of accelerating the transition, drawing on the expertise and project management skills to deliver the vast scale of potential developments in renewables."

There is so much more to say. Again, I thank Liam Kerr for the debate.

16:47

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Liam Kerr on the debate and on his contribution.

I welcome the publication of the RGU Energy Transition Institute's latest report. It is a serious piece of work that is grounded in evidence, and it sets out clearly what Scotland must do if we are to protect jobs, maintain energy security and build a truly managed transition.

My colleague has, rightly, focused on the impact that not investing in the sector will have on jobs in the north-east and across wider Scotland. However, the report goes further than that. It says:

"The North Sea's future success depends on a well-managed transition".

Its message is unmistakable. We cannot deliver a credible transition without continued investment in our domestic oil and gas sector, and we certainly cannot deliver it if Government policy is vague, confused or subject to the political mood swings of Labour and the Scottish National Party. However, that is exactly what we have at the moment.

The First Minister refuses to give a straight answer on whether exploration should continue. One day, he hints at new licences; the next, he dodges the question entirely, with vague assertions about drilling continuing if net zero targets are met. That is ill defined, and no one knows how it is to be measured.

Labour, which has ramped up the energy profits levy and has a ban on new licences, is no friend. Clearly, Ed Miliband's aim is to destroy the North Sea oil and gas industry. However, Labour somehow thinks that 13 jobs at Great British Energy in Aberdeen will save the day. Anas Sarwar is flip-flopping on the issue of new developments. He was opposed to Cambo in 2021 but is now pleading with his masters—Starmer, Reeves and Miliband—to change course. The penny must have dropped that his party's hostility towards oil and gas is a direct threat to our energy transition.

The fiscal landscape and the uncertainty are not harmless political noise; they shape investment decisions and they have real consequences for the people I represent in the north-east. I heard that first-hand at a meeting with Shell last week. Conservative MPs and MSPs were there, as were Scottish National Party MPs and MSPs. Labour politicians would have heard from Shell themselves if they had even bothered to turn up.

The RGU report is crystal clear on the point that failing to support a stable level of domestic production risks major job losses, skills flight and long-term damage to our supply chain. If we do not back our home-grown sector, final investment decisions will move abroad, and the workforce will follow. That is not a theoretical risk. My constituents in the north-east already feel the impact of mixed messages and political drift. Communities there are built on decades of expertise, innovation and hard work. If we fail to give the industry clarity and confidence, we put thousands of families at risk and undermine the very capabilities that we need in order to deliver the energy transition. We can see that on the front page of *The Press and Journal* today, with Aberdeen harbour laying off jobs because of the lack of oil and gas throughput, while the throughput for renewables is not there yet.

Let us be absolutely honest: if we shut down our domestic sector too quickly, Scotland will not consume less oil and gas; we will simply import more of it, normally from countries with higher emissions and lower standards, and with none of the economic benefits staying here at home. That is environmental irresponsibility dressed up as virtue.

The RGU report calls for “coordinated action”, long-term planning and a clear pathway for the offshore workforce. Scotland can lead the energy transition and the north-east can remain the beating heart of the UK’s offshore workforce, but that requires honesty about the journey, certainty for industry and respect for the communities whose livelihoods depend on the decisions that are taken. The RGU report shows the path, and it is time for Government to follow it.

16:52

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I, too, thank Liam Kerr for bringing this important debate to the chamber, as we need to think through the insights that come from the “Striking the Balance” report. This is a pivotal moment for our energy transition, and the question is not whether Scotland and the UK move away from fossil fuel reliance; it is how we make that shift in a way that is fair, planned and inclusive for workers and communities and that delivers for our economy at the same time, maximising opportunities, whether for manufacturing or for utilising the raft of new technologies that are becoming available.

First, we must plan ahead. As colleagues around the chamber have said, we know that oil and gas production in the North Sea will be part of our energy mix for decades to come. However, as the report correctly highlights, the pace and shape of workforce supply and demand will define whether we have a fair transition or one that negatively impacts on people’s employment opportunities and the local economy. We cannot leave the skilled workforce scrambling for opportunities; we need to ensure that the opportunities are there for them.

One key issue on which we have been lobbying is the oil and gas passport. The energy and skills passport can ensure that workers who have built their careers in oil and gas have their training, experience and qualifications all recognised as they move into a range of other jobs, whether in renewables, carbon capture or the decommissioning of existing platforms.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will Sarah Boyack give way?

Sarah Boyack: No—I am going to keep moving.

I wish to raise a point that was first raised by Audrey Nicoll. It is vital that we recognise the role of trade unions, and of people having long-term, negotiated terms and conditions. That is one of the things that the trade unions in the North Sea have managed to do over the decades.

Douglas Lumsden: Speaking of the trade unions, there was once a “no ban without a plan” campaign. Is that something that Labour supports, or has it abandoned that like it has abandoned the rest of the north-east?

Sarah Boyack: That is the point, and that is what comes through in the report. We need to work with the trade unions now because, as change accelerates, they need to be at the table to design the just transition, safeguarding the jobs that we have already but also thinking about standards going forward.

One of the really important recommendations in the report is on the need to ensure that supply chains are enhanced and the level of UK manufacturing content in renewables is increased. The report identified that projects to raise the level of UK content in renewables—aspiring to 40 per cent, for instance—would themselves generate thousands of additional jobs. We might think that we produce all of that content here, but we do not.

To realise that opportunity, we need strong signals and investment, so that we get manufacturing plants to open here—I note that the Sumitomo one is being established. We also need more supply chain confidence and investment in local communities. I agree with everyone that the next five years are crucial, and the UK Government’s recent announcements reflect that. The national clean energy jobs plan forecasts hundreds of thousands of jobs over the next five years, but it also explicitly sets out how to support workers in the fossil fuel sector into jobs in clean energy as well as how industry can collaborate with trade unions and education providers.

We can look at how our existing offshore plants could be more energy efficient. For example, offshore wind can reduce the carbon emissions of existing oil and gas. We need that as well as things such as shipping investment to make sure that we have the manufacturing that will support activity in the North Sea.

The build it in Britain ambition is about backing manufacturing and home-grown supply chains and, in particular, supporting coastal and industrial communities. That ambition is critical, because it shows that the UK Government understands that just transition means new jobs and new investment. It is not just about decarbonising our economy; it is about building things in. Grangemouth is a key test case for us. We have

lost the refinery, so we need to see more investment.

Historically, there has been a lack of industrial planning from the Tory Government and previously from the SNP. In just the past year and a half, we have seen Labour supporting the Grangemouth area, with its role in the £100 million growth deal, project willow, and the investment of additional money from the national wealth fund. We need to secure a future for people who are living in those communities, so that there is a fair transition. That means investment to the tune of hundreds of millions of pounds, from not only the Government but the private sector.

Liam Kerr: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Boyack is concluding her speech.

Sarah Boyack: It is about turbines, cables and platforms being made here in Scotland, so that people are trained here and communities benefit. We need to plan ahead and work together across our Governments, supporting high-quality jobs, securing our energy future and making sure that, in the next five years, we turn ambition into delivery so that the words “just transition” mean something real for workers and our communities.

16:57

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind): In congratulating Liam Kerr for bringing the debate to the chamber, it is a matter of sadness and shame that the Scottish Government has not arranged a full day's debate on our energy situation in Scotland. I hope that the minister will comment on that.

Perhaps the world's foremost energy expert is Daniel Yergin, who won a Pulitzer prize for his book on the oil industry, “The Prize: the Epic Quest for Oil Money and Power”. He remarked that the transition from wood to coal took 200 years and the transition from coal to oil took 100 years, from the discovery in Pennsylvania in 1859 to the 1960s, when oil overtook coal as the most widely used fuel.

My point is that transitions take a long time. It takes a long time for things to be done. My God, I was even once told by a rather rueful director of transport at Highland Council that it took five years to build a lay-by. How do we think that we are going to transform everything in Britain, which gets three quarters of its energy needs from oil and gas, by 2030—or by 2045, as the Scottish Government says? It is for the birds.

I worked closely with Paul de Leeuw when I was energy minister, and I regard him as a friend. I have a great deal of admiration for his work and the work of his project director. However, I wonder

whether even the lowest scenario of the three scenarios that he sets out on hydrogen, carbon and wind is over-optimistic—I cannot go into the details, because I do not have the time. What I see at the moment is the disengagement of investment from offshore wind. There are troubled times ahead. That is what I am hearing, for various reasons. I am sure that the minister will be aware of that.

Let us look at our oil and gas industry in Britain. North Sea production is among the cleanest in the world. The Greens are not in the chamber—that is a shame, because there is always a possibility that one can learn things in life, even from the most unlikely quarters—but if they were here, they would hear this: the emissions from North Sea production have fallen by 34 per cent since 2018. That is a reduction of one-third in just six years, which is a tremendous achievement. The average is 21kg of CO₂ per barrel, which can be compared with fracking gas in the USA, which produces 76kg of emissions; and the level for Qatar is about the same.

Our total emissions from production are a quarter of those elsewhere. Surely a true Green—like myself, for example—would welcome that. I am not against roads or cars—I am against emissions. I am not against oil and gas production in the world—I am against the dirtiest oil and gas production in the world. I cannot help but try to apply logic to problems, and if we apply logic, we see that the world should surely be moving to try to encourage everywhere to replicate the level of emissions reduction that the UK has achieved. We should take the lead—incidentally, there is a lot of money to be made in that, too.

In our daily lives, we rely on oil and gas for everything. The protesters who glued themselves to Pall Mall were using a petrochemical product. The protesters who despoiled a Van Gogh painting by throwing paint at it were using an oil and gas product—I do not know if they knew that. My partner, who is an anaesthetist, uses anaesthetics every day, and just about every anaesthetic drug is a by-product of oil and gas. Do the Greens want us to go back to the days of chloroform and the gag and—without wanting to be grisly—amputation by the saw? That is what they are asking us to do, with the primitive, crude, illogical approach that they take.

Why can we, in Britain, not do what I think that the majority of people in Scotland and south of the border want us to do, which is to support our oil and gas industry, which is the best in the world? For five years, I had a ringside seat and I saw that for myself, all over the world. I saw that our engineers were respected as the best in the world. Let us value them and praise them. As Gary Smith said,

“Oil and gas is not the enemy”.

It is part of the future, along with our renewables.

17:02

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I congratulate Liam Kerr on securing the debate and on his very logical contribution. I thank Professor Paul de Leeuw and Sumin Kim of the Robert Gordon University Energy Transition Institute for their work in putting together the “Striking the Balance” report.

As an Aberdonian—a north-east loon—who has many family members and friends working in oil and gas, I know how vital the energy industry is to the area that I represent and beyond. As the report tells us, in 2024 there were around 154,000 energy jobs in the UK, with 75 per cent of the people in them working in oil and gas and the remaining 25 per cent in renewables. In the UK, about one person in every 215 among the working population has an energy-related job. In the north-east of Scotland, one person in every six who are in work is employed by the energy industry. Striking the balance is, therefore, absolutely essential to protect jobs, the economy and the communities of the north-east. If that balance is not struck, the people I represent will be left to the same fate as miners and mining communities were in years past, and there will be no just transition.

We know from the report that, between 2023 and 2024, a balance was struck. About 5,000 oil and gas jobs went, but the renewables workforce increased by about the same amount. The report highlights that a just transition can be achieved, but that it will not be easy. It says that a balance can be achieved with the possibility of growth in the offshore workforce.

However, my fear is that the worst-case scenario—the loss of 82,000 oil and gas jobs, with only 45,000 renewables jobs gained—is more likely than the best-case scenario in which there would be jobs growth. Why do I say that? Well, the UK Labour Government is ignoring the experts—academics, industry, the workforce, the trade unions and communities. UK Labour is wedded to the energy profits levy, which is impeding North Sea investment; it is thirled to halting further exploration; and it is failing to invest enough in the renewables sector.

The report says that, in order to strike the balance,

“Planning the plan requires coordinated action”,

but the problem is that Labour has no plan. Shutting down the North Sea prematurely and importing oil and gas from elsewhere is not a plan. Stopping the likes of the Jackdaw gas

development would mean no St Fergus and no Mossmorran, and it would make it nigh-on impossible to get the Acorn carbon capture project off the ground.

Sarah Boyack: Does Kevin Stewart have any idea when the Scottish Government’s energy and just transition plan will appear? We have been waiting for it for more than two and a half years.

Kevin Stewart: The most important thing is to recognise that these matters are reserved. The UK Labour Government is in the driving seat, because energy is a policy area that is reserved to Westminster.

My advice to the Labour Government and to Ms Boyack would be that, if they are truly serious about delivering for communities across the country when it comes to energy, they need to put together an energy security plan, combined with a plan for the transition to net zero. None of that has happened. It has happened in almost every other country, but it does not fit Ed Miliband’s agenda. That is the problem with Labour’s approach—it is all far too ideological.

I talked about that possible loss—no Jackdaw, no St Fergus, no Mossmorran and no Acorn. Because of ideology and the lack of a plan, thousands of jobs would be lost, there would be more fossil fuel imports and energy security would be endangered. That would be unforgivable.

Labour must listen, it must change its ways and it must walk us back from the cliff edge that my constituents and others are currently facing.

17:07

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To be frank, I find it a bit rich listening to Kevin Stewart go on in the way that he has done. I have sat in this Parliament, as the rest of us have. I say thank goodness for the *Official Report*, because it will show that the SNP and its leadership have consistently demonised the oil and gas sector.

Kevin Stewart might wish to intervene, and I am happy to let him do so.

Kevin Stewart: I repeat what I said at the very beginning of my contribution, about Mr Kerr’s logical contribution. Mr Kerr and I, among others, were involved in a debate on Friday, and we agreed on most points. The problem is that, in this place, this issue becomes far too political. What we need here is logic. Let us follow the logic of the academics, such as Paul de Leeuw, and let us put aside the party-political aspect that often comes across.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Stewart—that was a long intervention.

Stephen Kerr: That is all very good from Kevin Stewart, but, unfortunately, some of us have a longer-term memory of what the SNP has been up to over the past four and a half years—certainly, in the time that I have been in this Parliament. If they wish, SNP members can disown Nicola Sturgeon, but she popped up last week and repeated all the same stuff that she said as First Minister. They can disown Humza Yousaf on the same basis, but the reality is the reality.

This is a debate that goes to the very heart of the future of Scotland's economy. Are we going to go for commonsense economic principles? Are we going to go for economic growth? Are we going to put the people of Scotland first, or are we going to remain entrapped by the ideology of a fringe group of extremists who would like us to return to the stone age? That is the choice that we have to make.

I feel sorry for Ben Macpherson, because this is not his brief. I am a bit perplexed as to why he is the minister who is responding to the debate, other than the fact that the motion is about a university paper.

In that paper, Professor Paul de Leeuw—I think that that is how it is pronounced—writes that

“Sustaining Scotland as an energy powerhouse requires hard choices”,

and that,

“without intervention, Scotland's supply chain and workforce will be impacted disproportionately.”

He also called for “honest and candid dialogue”.

Therefore, I welcome what Kevin Stewart said—I should make that clear—because we should be evidence led. I do not know how many speeches I have given in the Parliament in which I said that policy should be evidence led and based on fact, not fiction or fantasy. If we do not come up with a common UK policy framework on energy—one that achieves what we want it to achieve—in the words of Paul de Leeuw, we will be sacrificing our “energy resilience” and our national security.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Does Mr Kerr listen to “The Life Scientific” on BBC Radio 4? It had a prominent climate expert, Pierre Friedlingstein, on today, who explained that this is not a matter of economics; it is a matter of survival. He said that if we do not do more to tackle the climate crisis and our use of carbon, we will all pay the price.

Stephen Kerr: We will not do that at the price of tens of thousands of jobs, or at the price of making our country poorer. No parliamentarian here should be arguing for that kind of pathway forward, because it is nonsensical. There have been plans and strategies and promises of jobs in the renewables sector until our ears bleed. None of

that happens, because we are in denial about economic reality when we refuse to see things as they really are and, instead, transpose some fantasy.

There is lots that could be said, but I am already over my time so I will not continue, except to say that I have now lived long enough to see the day when Fergus Ewing proclaimed himself in this Parliament to be a Green. I feel incredibly privileged to have been in the chamber to hear that. However, I also know that he speaks inordinate common sense on this subject, as he does on many others. His comments are based on economic fact. I ask all members to consider that, particularly as we look ahead to tomorrow's debate on the future of Rosebank. That will be a very interesting debate. No doubt, though, as is the way of the Scottish Parliament, the motion will be amended out of sight by the SNP and Green majority.

I will close with the words of Kemi Badenoch:

“We are in the absurd situation where our country is leaving vital resources untapped while neighbours such as Norway extract them from the same seabed.”

Doing that is madness.

17:13

The Minister for Higher and Further Education (Ben Macpherson): I thank colleagues for what has been a good and important debate with an honest exchange of views and insights. I also pay tribute to Liam Kerr for bringing the debate to the Parliament and for the constructive way in which he drafted his motion and presented it at the beginning of the debate. That is exactly the sort of approach that we collectively need on this extremely important issue and challenge.

I welcome the opportunity to close for the Government. This paper is absolutely relevant to the skills agenda and the necessity for retraining to ensure that our people can maximise the opportunities and transition using their skills and knowledge. The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy is at the 30th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP30—where this whole question is being discussed at a global level.

Although Scotland is a very small contributor to emissions in terms of the international situation, we are a well-respected voice on what we are doing to transition to net zero, to use our expertise, to help those who are affected by climate change and, as part of the collective global challenge, to seek to reduce emissions at the global scale, because that is what is needed. We are an important voice in the room, while others

are much bigger contributors of fossil fuel emissions.

I want to start my summing up by restating our firm commitment as a Government to delivering a just transition to net zero for workers, communities and businesses across Scotland but particularly in the north-east, and it is only right that many colleagues from that part of Scotland have contributed today.

As I have said in other debates on this topic, and as others have emphasised during today's discussion, for those of us who represent constituencies elsewhere, the oil and gas sector is an incredibly important industry, not just because of its national significance to all of our lives and our economy but because of the indirect jobs that it enables in other parts of Scotland, including in my constituency.

The strength of the industry in the north-east and Scotland's oil, gas and energy industry overall is world renowned, which members have rightly emphasised.

Another issue that has been rightly emphasised is that energy policy is reserved to the UK Government. Today's discussion emphasises that it is right that we debate both devolved and reserved policy, especially when they interact.

Douglas Lumsden: I completely understand that most energy policy is reserved, but the Scottish Government published the draft energy strategy and just transition plan two and a half years ago. It has been a draft document since then. When will we see the final version of that plan?

Ben Macpherson: I refer the member to the answer that was given on that point just last week in the chamber, I think.

I am glad that the member raised that issue. I say this without meaning to be party political, but there have been other times when the publication of strategies and plans by the Scottish Government has been derided by other members. I am glad that there is now an enthusiasm, when it is right and appropriate, for plans and strategies, because they are an important part of how we drive policy and allocate resources.

In relation to reserved policy, a point was made about the energy profits levy. Although a levy on big business—not just energy businesses—was appropriate during the pandemic, when we saw, for example, our supermarkets making a significant profit, it is important to emphasise that the energy profits levy should end or be completely reformed at the earliest possible opportunity, and we continue to call on the UK Government to do that.

It is interesting that Norway was cited as an example. In relation to where we are now with the economy of the north-east and all of Scotland, we could have received so much more benefit from decades past if investment had been made proportionately and appropriately into Scotland, given the amount of resource that went into the UK Treasury from the north-east oil and gas industry. It is important for context to emphasise that on the record.

It is also important and appropriate to note what people have said about the need for fossil fuels and how that is considered in the context of a maturing basin. It is possible to acknowledge that we will need to continue to utilise fossil fuels in our economy and in our lives and note the benefits of moving to net zero and being less reliant on fossil fuels.

Liam Kerr: Will the minister give way?

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Kevin Stewart: Will the minister give way?

Ben Macpherson: I will take Liam Kerr, and try to bring in the other members if I can.

Liam Kerr: I wanted to give the minister the opportunity to respond to Clare Adamson's intervention on that point. I think that we all accept that demand is not going away. Therefore, the less we get domestically, the more we must import, at higher emissions, from regimes that are less well regulated and not so clean, as Fergus Ewing pointed out. Does the minister agree that the environmentally responsible thing to do is to get oil and gas from the North Sea?

Ben Macpherson: Important considerations have been raised in those points, which I am sure will be debated during tomorrow's discussion in the Parliament. It is important to emphasise that these are global energy markets of supply and demand. It is not as simple as either/or, as the situation has been portrayed. We need to think about that carefully.

I am conscious of time, Presiding Officer, but I will take Kevin Stewart's intervention.

Kevin Stewart: I thank the minister for giving way. To follow up on Mr Kerr's point, I think that the logic and the Climate Change Committee's figures on the UK's oil and gas requirements over the piece to 2050 clearly show that, if we shut down the North Sea too quickly, we will be much more reliant on imports from the United States and Qatar. It has been pointed out that bringing liquefied natural gas from the United States has three times the carbon footprint of taking oil and gas out of the North Sea. That is illogical. Does the minister agree that we need to be logical in all this rather than illogical?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, please start to conclude.

Ben Macpherson: I think that we do. We also have to be collaborative and not combative, because, for all communities in Scotland, there is such a challenge from the impact on the economy, the necessity of energy security for everyone and the interaction between, as things stand, the UK and other Governments.

Today's debate has been important and useful in the collective discussion. I and other ministers will welcome further dialogue on these matters.

There are important considerations with regard to skills. As has been stated, the north-east of Scotland has more people engaged in the offshore energy industry than anywhere else in the UK, and we appreciate and understand that the risks of energy transition will be felt more acutely in that region. That is why we have invested more than £120 million in the north-east through our energy transition fund and just transition fund, supporting supply chains, delivering growth and helping workers to access new opportunities. We will continue to do that and to undertake other initiatives. If members with an interest in the matter want to write to me, I can supply more information on the initiatives that are being undertaken, and we will seek to keep members informed. There is so much more that we could discuss, but I will conclude on that point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. There will be a short pause before we move to the final item of business.

Secondary Breast Cancer

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-19043, in the name of Emma Harper, on supporting people living with secondary breast cancer in Scotland. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that October 2025 is Breast Cancer Awareness Month; welcomes the raising of awareness of secondary (metastatic) breast cancer, which, it understands, is an incurable disease that affects an estimated 61,000 people across the UK, including around 4,000 in Scotland; acknowledges that this condition occurs when cancer cells spread from the breast to other parts of the body; understands that it is one of the leading causes of death among women under 50 in the UK; believes with concern that many people are unaware of the condition and its symptoms, and that misconceptions persist around its nature and terminology; understands that Public Health Scotland does not currently collect comprehensive data on metastatic cancer, particularly in cases where it is a recurrence of primary breast cancer; notes commitments made in the Scottish Government's 2016 strategy, Beating Cancer: Ambition and Action, and the 2023-2026 Cancer Action Plan, to progress data collection; further notes calls from charities such as Make 2nds Count and Breast Cancer Now for improved national data collection, better access to specialist care and increased investment in research and support services; commends the work of these organisations in supporting patients and families, raising awareness and advocating for change, and notes requests for the Scottish Government to ensure that the commitment to improve data collection on metastatic cancers is fulfilled by March 2026, and that people living with the condition are better supported, counted and empowered.

17:23

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am grateful to colleagues across the parties in the chamber for supporting my motion, and I thank Make 2nds Count and Breast Cancer Now for their support ahead of the debate.

I declare an interest, as a registered nurse. If I went back to January 1988 and told the newly qualified Emma Harper RGN about the advances in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer that have taken place since then, the young Emma would have been amazed and chuffed with all that progress.

The risk of dying from cancer is at its lowest level on record. Public health campaigns have helped to change lifestyles and tackle risk factors, while treatment and diagnosis have advanced hugely over the decades. We should acknowledge that, along with the fact that we are doing some incredible work in treating primary cancers with surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, endocrine therapy and medication such as trastuzumab—I

had to write that down twice so that I could make sure that I said it properly. Trastuzumab is a type of targeted therapy drug, known as a monoclonal antibody, for breast and stomach cancers. It is used if tests show that the cancer cells have too much of a protein called HER2. Those life-changing and life-saving leaps forward in prevention and treatment are all welcome, and we all hope that there is more progress to come.

However, we should and must do better with regard to metastatic cancers in particular. We can go back through years of mortality statistics for primary cancer because Public Health Scotland and its predecessor bodies have been collecting that data for decades. Unfortunately, however, that is not yet the case for secondary and metastatic cancers, including secondary breast cancer.

At best estimates, around 4,000 people across the country are affected by metastatic breast cancer, but the numbers alone cannot convey the human impact of living with a condition that you know cannot be cured. Until we know accurately the scale of the challenge that we face, it makes meeting that challenge harder than it needs to be. Improvements in care and research would benefit hugely if we had a better data collection and analysis service and knew for certain how many people in our country are affected.

I hope that the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health will be able to update us on progress on making that happen. However, as I said, the numbers are just that—numbers—and they do not convey what the individual impact is, not just on those who are living with secondary breast cancer but on their friends, family and loved ones.

Secondary cancers are often misunderstood. People often assume that they are a further, separate condition, when in fact they have metastasised from primary breast cancer or another cancer. The original condition may have been treated successfully but, unfortunately, cells from the original tumour break away and seed in other tissues and organs of the body. That is one of the biggest tragedies of secondary breast cancer: people may think that they are clear, but they face further heartbreak down the line.

We have a job to do in educating the public and spreading awareness of the facts about secondary breast cancer, not just so that people know about the symptoms for their own health but so that the people around those who are diagnosed with metastatic cancer are prepared and equipped for that diagnosis and are as ready as they can be to give the love and support that their loved one needs.

I know that there are treatments for secondary breast cancer, using a combination of

chemotherapy, radiotherapy and other targeted and immunotherapy treatments. I am also aware of the recent denial of two specific medications by the Scottish Medicines Consortium. Both Make 2nds Count and Breast Cancer Now have responded to that decision, and I know that there are many disappointed people voicing their concerns.

I welcome to the public gallery women who are living with secondary breast cancer, whom I and other members met earlier today in Parliament. I thank the minister for also taking the time to meet them. It was a dreich day outside, and folk got a bit soaked, so it was welcome to meet them in the Parliament cafe. We covered issues such as needing specialist nurses or other healthcare practitioners for secondary cancers, and the challenges that people who live in rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders face in being able to see specialists.

I acknowledge that digital technology can be part of the engagement with, and care for, people with secondary breast cancers. I am, however, looking forward to progress being made to establish a Maggie's centre in Dumfries, which was announced in August this year.

Members know what it is like to lose a colleague and friend to secondary breast cancer. Ahead of the debate, I have reflected much on the mentoring and advice, and the friendship, that I had from Christina McKelvie MSP. Christina was an amazing person, an amazing MSP and a fabulous minister. It was Christina, through Keith Brown, who asked me to take forward the motion and debate today. It will be a short debate, in fact, because I am aware of the time.

Let us all leave here today resolving to do better and to look at data, care and treatment for people in rural areas. We need to improve the lives of those who are living with secondary breast cancer and secondary cancer and metastatic disease. We need to improve their chances so that their life lasts much longer, as long as possible. I look forward to hearing colleagues' contributions and the minister's response.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Harper—looking at the number of colleagues who want to participate, I am not sure that I agree that it is going to be a short debate.

17:29

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife (Con): I am pleased to speak in the debate and I thank Emma Harper for bringing this important issue to the chamber. I also thank Breast Cancer Now and Make 2nds Count for their helpful briefings for the debate. Those organisations have worked tirelessly, alongside many fantastic

organisations in the third sector, to highlight the issue of secondary breast cancer. I hope that colleagues can join me in paying tribute to some of those organisations and the important work that they do, which includes funding vital research, pushing for better access to specialist care and supporting patients and their families. That work reminds us that, although research and data are crucial, compassion and care are just as important to so many people.

October marked breast cancer awareness month, which was an opportunity to pause and recognise all those who have been affected by the condition in the past, and all those who are presently living with breast cancer. As Emma Harper's motion highlights, it is also an opportunity to raise awareness of secondary breast cancer. Despite the condition's serious nature, awareness and understanding of secondary breast cancer remain far too low. For example, many people are unaware that breast cancer can return and spread to other parts of the body, and there are many misconceptions around the symptoms that occur. Just as with many types of cancer, raising public awareness of secondary breast cancer is vital, and breast cancer awareness month is a huge opportunity for us to do that.

For many people, living with the condition can mean a continuous cycle of hospital visits, treatment and much uncertainty. All too often, the experience is made even harder by a lack of recognition. The truth is that no accurate data exists on how many people are suffering from secondary breast cancer in Scotland. Public Health Scotland data shows that around 4,200 patients were living with secondary breast cancer in 2023. However, that does not include those who were diagnosed following a recurrence or spread of the disease.

For our national health service, and for the many important third sector organisations that work alongside it, the lack of data means that it can be very difficult to tackle the issue. Without that data, we do not know how many people are living with the condition or are being treated, and we do not know how we can ensure improved outcomes for the future. That means that there are potentially thousands of people across Scotland who are not getting the treatment and support that they require.

It is now nearly 10 years since the Scottish Government first committed to collecting data on those with secondary breast cancer in Scotland. It is time that we finally see real progress on the issue, and I hope that the minister will make that assertion in summing up.

We also know that access to specialist nurses and palliative care is not consistent across health boards in Scotland. Patients deserve better than a

postcode lottery in dealing with cancer treatment, and better links between oncology services and palliative care are required.

I hope that the Scottish Government can commit to delivering on its "Cancer Action Plan for Scotland 2023-2026" and ensure that no one who is living with secondary breast cancer is ever made to feel invisible or forgotten again because, at the moment, they are.

17:33

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am wearing my secondary cancer pin this evening to mark the particular circumstances of those who are diagnosed with secondary breast cancer. It is a group of people who are too often unseen, living with secondary, or metastatic, breast cancer.

Secondary breast cancer occurs when the cancer cells spread from the breast to other parts of the body. It can develop months, or even years, after an initial diagnosis. Although it is currently incurable, it is treatable, and with the right care, people can live well for longer. It is estimated that 4,202 people in Scotland were living with the condition at the end of 2023.

However, we count only those whose first diagnosis was metastatic; the figure does not include people whose cancer returned after a primary diagnosis. That means many people who are living with the disease are not fully captured in the data sets. We live in a world of data now. Artificial intelligence is taking over the whole planet, and our health services have to do better at collecting the data that is important for scientific research in order to improve the lives of people with breast cancer and secondary breast cancer.

Having the data is essential, as it helps to ensure that people have access to the treatment, support and specialist care that they need. Without that data, we cannot fully understand the impact of secondary breast cancer, or why and how it happens, plan services effectively or ensure access to innovative treatments—as Emma Harper mentioned—that rely on genomic testing.

Around 1,000 people in Scotland die from breast cancer each year, almost all of them from secondary breast cancer. The impact reaches far beyond the individual, touching families, friends and communities. I hope that members do not mind me saying that I am just off the phone to my sister, who was diagnosed with breast cancer last year and who was attending the hospital with the thought that she might have had a secondary breast cancer. Fortunately for our family and for her, that was not the case.

I also want to speak about a person who is close to all our hearts: Christina McKelvie, who was a friend and a passionate advocate for women's health, for fairness and for dignity in care. She worked tirelessly to ensure that the voices of those who are often overlooked were brought to the forefront in the Parliament. We miss her deeply, and we miss her compassion, energy and unwavering belief in a Scotland where no one should be left behind.

I am very honoured to have taken up the mantle of hosting the wear it pink event in the Parliament on behalf of Breast Cancer Now. It was at that event this year that I was able to talk to several women who were living with secondary breast cancer, and I heard their plea that more needs to be done to understand and support those who are living with the condition in Scotland. Along with better data, access to the right treatments is critical. Genomic testing can determine eligibility for new targeted therapies, helping to slow disease progression and improve quality of life. Expanding access to those tests across Scotland will ensure that patients can benefit from the treatments that are best suited to them.

People who are living with secondary breast cancer and their families deserve to be seen, counted and supported. Accurate data, timely access to treatments and specialist care are all essential in achieving that. We have to work together to improve the situation, in particular with regard to data collection and consistency across health boards.

I pay tribute to everyone who is in the public gallery, whose voices have been heard today—it is so brave and important that you have come to speak to us, and I thank you very much for doing so.

17:38

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I thank Emma Harper for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I also take a moment to thank Christina McKelvie and note the incredible work that she, too, did for breast cancer awareness. I thank the women from Breast Cancer Now and the Make 2nds Count campaign who took time to speak with us today, many of whom are in the public gallery.

In my region of Glasgow, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has one of the highest rates of cancer incidence in Scotland, so this matter is deeply personal for my constituents. Secondary breast cancer is one of the leading causes of death among women under 50 in the United Kingdom. It affects around 4,000 people in Scotland, but gaps in data collection mean that we do not yet have the full picture. Without that data, people with

incurable secondary breast cancer are not properly planned for and are not guaranteed to be able to get the treatment that they require. That is the message that I heard when I spoke to women in the Parliament cafe this afternoon.

I agree whole-heartedly with the women who spoke to us today that improved national data collection is crucial so that we can detect and support people who are living with the condition. I ask the minister to reflect on the importance of that, and on the likelihood of fulfilling the Government commitment on data collection and the importance of doing so by March 2026.

Organisations such as Make 2nds Count, Breast Cancer Now, Maggie's, Marie Curie and the Beatson West of Scotland Cancer Centre in Glasgow work tirelessly to support women, and some men, who are living with breast cancer, and I put on record my thanks to those organisations. They support patients and families such as two of my constituents who have recently come through their breast cancer journey: a mum and daughter in the same family. Cancer rocks families to the core, as it did that family—it was no different for those two brave women. Its weight puts a strain on families and on their resilience and recovery. For my constituents, that strain was eased hugely by family and friends, and—crucially—as a result of the work of organisations such as those that I mentioned.

Much of that strain was health related, as one would expect, but it was also financial. Attending appointments, taking time off work, spending money on travel to and from healthcare and support centres and lower take-home pay as a result of time off work all affected my constituents' finances, and still do. That is why I believe that, in addition to ensuring that social security supports people, employers must be supported to ensure that their processes, policies and sick-pay schemes are appropriate for someone with a terminal diagnosis.

When someone is living with cancer, tight finances affect not just day-to-day life—sadly, all too often, they affect treatment choices, too. The women I spoke to today told me that there are drugs available on the NHS for free in England that they cannot access in Scotland. Those drugs target cells and can improve outcomes for women, yet the Scottish Medicines Consortium has rejected them for use on the NHS here, leaving a situation in which only women with money can afford to access them. Those drugs are used elsewhere, and women are rightly wondering, "Why not here?" I ask the minister whether she can set out why that is the case and what she might do to try to ensure that women in Scotland can access the same life-changing therapy as women elsewhere.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): I hear what Pam Duncan-Glancy says, but would she acknowledge that there are significant medications in Scotland that are not available elsewhere? It is a mixed picture across the UK, with HER2 treatment, for example, being available in Scotland but not elsewhere. I suppose that it is a challenge for every authority to find out what they can and cannot afford.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you the time back, Ms Duncan-Glancy.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I thank the member for that intervention, and it is all too real for people to hear that this issue comes down to money. I acknowledge that there are some drugs available in Scotland that are not available elsewhere. Nonetheless, it is still the case that women in Scotland really would like to be able to access some of the life-changing drugs that are available elsewhere, just as women elsewhere might want to access some of the drugs that are available here.

The mum and daughter I mentioned are not alone in experiencing financial hardship as a result of cancer. We heard much about that in last week's debate, which was led by Paul Sweeney, on the research that found that people are dying in the margins and dying in poverty.

I turn briefly to one other health inequality and risk factor that is associated with breast cancer. It concerns the experience of disabled women, in particular wheelchair users. I put on record my huge thanks to the staff at Gartnavel breast clinic in Glasgow for the way in which they helped me and my chair to navigate a mammogram machine. That was, I have to say, no easy task, and those staff were, and are, exemplary. However, they are working to provide such a good service in a system that could, I think, make some improvements for disabled women.

The current advice from Public Health Scotland on "Breast screening for wheelchair users" says that a mammogram is suitable only if women can

"attend in a manual wheelchair with removable sides ... hold themselves upright ... lean forward to allow their breasts to be positioned in the X-ray machine ... hold their arms clear of their chest and the X-ray machine"

and

"hold the position".

The guidance goes on to say that

"Mammography is not suitable without all of the above"

and advises women instead

"to remain breast aware and speak to their GP".

It states that a woman who has symptoms

"should be referred for assessment".

That is all crucial but, given that the logistics are tricky, I wonder whether there may now be an opportunity for us to reflect on that guidance and see whether we can improve it, and perhaps put in place something more proactive to support women in those circumstances who are experiencing breast cancer.

I will end my remarks on the contribution of research to improving and saving lives. World-class research in precision medicine is taking place right now in Scotland, in Glasgow, and I am incredibly proud of that. It is providing hope to millions of people around the world that one day, breast cancer, including secondary breast cancer, will indeed be curable. The experience is worrying, painful and hard, but it is incumbent on us all to ensure that our constituents who are living with the condition are empowered and have access to world-class care, and can live with the hope that it will, one day, be curable.

17:45

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I am grateful to Emma Harper and, of course, Christina McKelvie, for bringing the debate to the chamber and giving us the opportunity to discuss an important issue that touches every constituency, every community and, perhaps, every person in Scotland—certainly every person in the chamber.

It feels weird to speak for Christina because she never needed anyone to do that but, thankfully, this is an issue that she was consistent and clear on, so I have no need to make any assumptions when I say this. She was determined to help those around her, consistently encouraging women to check themselves regularly and, crucially, to attend all their screening appointments. A constituent of mine recently had a clash between an event and a breast screening, and she said to me, "I know which one Christina would have told me to go to." Over and above those repeated calls to action, what sticks in my mind from our conversations was her fear of getting that diagnosis. From thoughtful poetry to a quick passing comment in the middle of dinner, it was always on her mind. I know that many people are living with that fear today and they need support with it.

The motion rightly commends the work of charities such as Make 2nds Count and Breast Cancer Now. I have engaged with Breast Cancer Now on a number of occasions, not only when it is in the Parliament offering us pink feather boas, hats and sunglasses at its photo booth but specifically on looking at what policy changes should be prioritised if we are to improve the diagnosis, treatment, support and awareness of secondary breast cancer. Its campaign to improve

the collection of data on how many people are living with secondary breast cancer is absolutely necessary if we are to look at what more is needed in terms of resources, advice and support for those patients. I have also been grateful for its interest in looking at local situations and taking that approach of deep diving into what is happening in all health boards, including the five in my region, not just the national picture.

Those organisations provide a critical safety net of emotional, practical and social support that is vital for people who are living with an incurable diagnosis such as metastatic breast cancer.

I also want to mention Maggie's Highlands. I have had the pleasure of visiting the charity's premises next to Raigmore hospital and meeting the hard-working, passionate and friendly team, seeing for myself as I enjoyed a cup of coffee that folk of all ages were coming in and out, maybe following an appointment at the hospital, maybe because a loved one had just received news and maybe just because they were having a bad day. They were all welcomed to a safe space with a supportive environment and people.

That is particularly important when we consider that many of my constituents are travelling vast distances to get to the hospital and it is important for them to know that respite is waiting for them just to the side of the hospital building. Maggie's helps to mitigate the isolation that is felt by patients who are often far from home when they receive difficult news. It offers a point of connection and a sense of community. Its services, including support groups and workshops on things such as managing stress and living with on-going cancer, are exactly what is needed to empower patients and help them to navigate the continuous nature of secondary breast cancer.

Emma Harper: The Maggie's centre in Dumfries is in progress. Does the member agree that it would be absolutely fitting that a Maggie's centre is located in Dumfries, because it is the home town of Maggie Keswick?

Emma Roddick: I was not aware of that until just now, but it certainly sounds fitting. Personally, I would love to see a Maggie's being made available to everyone, because the strength and support that I have seen people get from that charity is deserved, no matter where they live. The success of the model is a demonstration of partnership working done well. As Parliament calls on the Scottish Government to better support people living with the condition, we must ensure that that vital partnership is not just maintained but robustly funded and integrated into the overall cancer strategy.

We have heard from many members this evening about how personal the issue is to them. I

know that they have that in common with many of those whom I represent in the Highlands and Islands. I will continue to work with Breast Cancer Now, Maggie's Highlands and any constituent who reaches out for support in dealing with services to get the best possible help and progress for those who are at risk of or are living with secondary breast cancer.

17:49

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I thank my colleague Emma Harper for bringing this debate to the chamber. Secondary breast cancer occurs when cancer cells spread beyond the breast, often months or years after the primary diagnosis. It can also be found at the same time or even before the primary cancer. By the end of 2023, for 4,202 patients in Scotland, it was their initial diagnosis.

Despite the Scottish Government's commitment in its 2016 strategy, "Beating Cancer: Ambition and Action", and in its "Cancer Action Plan for Scotland 2023-2026" to improve data collection on secondary and metastatic cancers, data for secondary breast cancer is currently not routinely or consistently collected across Scotland. Public Health Scotland's estimates only count people who had secondary breast cancer as their initial diagnosis and do not count diagnosis following a recurrence or spread of the disease. That is concerning, because breast cancer is one of the leading causes of death for women under 50.

We could reduce that statistic if data was collated both from those who were initially diagnosed with secondary breast cancer and from those who developed secondary breast cancer after an initial breast cancer diagnosis. That would help us to understand which populations see a recurrence of breast cancer and why, which treatments both sets of patients are accessing, what is working, which patients could try new treatments and whether both types of patients are getting the support that they need to cope with their diagnosis. Without knowing how many secondary breast cancer patients Scotland really has, how can the Scottish Government recruit enough specialists or properly workforce plan for tailored cancer services and support? Could screening and preventative health measures have reduced the risk?

I acknowledge that the debate is focused on supporting people living with secondary breast cancer but, predictably, I turn my thoughts to what we can do more of before that diagnosis. Artificial intelligence is transforming breast cancer imaging across multiple modalities, such as mammography, ultrasound, MRI and tomosynthesis. Recent studies show that AI can match—or, dare I say, outperform—radiologists in

image reporting, which helps to reduce human error. However, its strength lies in amplification—doing more—and not in automation. AI gives health professionals more time with their patients and allows them to offer more personalised care and better patient choices. We need to invest in healthcare technology in Scotland's NHS to make that the standard and give our NHS professionals the tools that they need to make a difference.

Alongside screening sits prevention. The European prospective investigation into cancer and nutrition—EPIC-Europe—which is co-funded by Cancer Research UK, is one of the biggest studies into the links between diet, lifestyle and cancer. Thirteen years ago, it found that those who were most physically active were 13 per cent less likely to develop breast cancer and that those who were moderately active had an 8 per cent lower chance of developing breast cancer. It is thought that physical activity may lower certain hormones and inflammation, helping to reduce the risk of breast cancer developing or progressing. We knew that 13 years ago but, according to the latest Scottish health survey, in 2024, only six in 10 adults in Scotland met the recommended levels of physical activity. The data has not significantly moved since 2012. Thirteen years ago, Sara Hiom, director of information at Cancer Research UK, said that we would be pleased to hear that

“You don't have to train like an Olympic athlete”.

I am pleased to hear that. Exercise can include anything that leaves us slightly out of breath, such as doing the garden, walking the dog or housework. That is the whole point, but somehow that message is not getting to the communities that it needs to reach, and it is that lack of awareness that we need to address.

17:53

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I am grateful to my colleague Emma Harper for securing this incredibly important debate. I also thank those who have joined us tonight in the public gallery for their support. It is very much appreciated.

Last month, I spoke in my colleague Clare Adamson's debate for breast cancer awareness month. In my speech, I called for more to be done to beat secondary breast cancer, for which there is currently no cure. As I mentioned, approximately 1,000 women in the UK die each month due to secondary breast cancer, with an estimated 4,000 people in Scotland impacted by it. I agree with Breast Cancer Now that this is a matter of urgency and that we must dramatically improve outcomes for those whose cancer has spread.

Of course, it would be remiss of me to speak today without mentioning my dear colleague

Christina McKelvie, who we sadly lost to metastatic breast cancer. Christina was strong and passionate about tackling inequality and injustice. After seeing her battle, we must all strive for greater awareness and for more effective research for those affected by this cruel disease. We cannot accept anyone else losing their life to breast cancer.

I recently met one of my constituents, who is a breast cancer nurse, to discuss breast cancer awareness and to push for more to be done. During our discussion, my constituent urged me to call for better data collection for those who live with incurable secondary breast cancer. As noted by Breast Cancer Now, without proper data, thousands of people are missing from and not counted in statistics, not planned for by NHS Scotland and not guaranteed to get the treatment and care that they need. That is crucial—without the data, we will always be limited in how we can improve things. According to Breast Cancer Now, by not counting them, we leave people with secondary breast cancer feeling that they just do not count.

Breast Cancer Now is joined by Make 2nds Count in calling for improved national data collection, better access to specialist care and increased investment in research and support services. I thank both groups for their work to support patients and families in pushing for change. I back their calls for the Scottish Government to ensure that it fulfils its commitment to improve data collection on metastatic cancers, given that breast cancer is one of the leading causes of death in women under 50. It is vital that we do everything that we can to beat the disease, and that includes collecting the data that is needed.

It is also essential that those who are impacted have good access to clinical trials. Research that was carried out by Make 2nds Count and Professor Janet Dunn, head of cancer trials at Warwick clinical trials unit, found that the majority of secondary breast cancer patients have never had a conversation with their clinician about clinical trials. However, the metastatic and secondary breast cancer survey also demonstrated that patients are keen to be involved in research but face barriers to inclusion. Therefore, it is welcome to note that, following that research, Make 2nds Count launched a UK clinical trial registry, which is a one-stop shop for trials that are suitable for breast cancer patients.

My sincere thanks go again to Breast Cancer Now and Make 2nds Count for all their outstanding work, and to my constituent for taking the time to meet me and to explain the importance of collecting data for secondary breast cancer.

In memory of those we have lost too soon, we must continue to work together and strive to improve outcomes and survival rates for those living with metastatic breast cancer.

17:57

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Ind): I, too, thank Emma Harper for securing this important debate and for acknowledging the powerful work of Make 2nds Count and Breast Cancer Now in giving a voice to those who live with incurable secondary breast cancer.

Behind every statistic, there are real people—mothers, daughters, sisters and friends. There are people such as Rhoda, one of my constituents, who bravely shared her story with me by email. Rhoda was first diagnosed with secondary breast cancer back in 2012. She told me that, by the time she had found the lump, the cancer had already spread to her lymph nodes and bones. With surgery, radiotherapy and on-going hormone treatment, she was stable for many years and was able to continue to work full time and volunteer in her community. However, earlier this year, sadly, her cancer recurred and spread further.

Despite her courage and determination, Rhoda told me that what troubles her most is not her illness but the lack of progress in recording how many people in Scotland are living with advanced breast cancer. She asked me how we can plan cancer services when we do not even know how many people are affected. It is a simple but profound question, which gets to the heart of the debate.

As others have mentioned, we do not know how many people in Scotland are living with secondary breast cancer. Although new diagnoses are recorded, cases where breast cancer has returned or spread are not consistently tracked or published. As a result, thousands of people such as Rhoda are in effect missing from our health data. They are not reflected in official numbers, NHS Scotland does not plan consistently for them and, without being properly counted, they cannot receive the care and support that they need and deserve.

Almost 10 years ago, the Scottish Government committed to changing that. That commitment was renewed in the cancer action plan for 2023 to 2026. However, here we are, nearing the end of that plan period and the promise remains unfulfilled. As other members have done tonight, I therefore ask the minister to give us more information on that. Without comprehensive data, we cannot plan services, target resources or make fair and informed decisions about access to treatment. As Rhoda rightly pointed out, how can we decide which new cancer drugs to fund or

negotiate fair prices with the companies if we do not even know how many people might benefit?

It is not just about data; it is about dignity and treatment. People who are living with secondary breast cancer deserve to be recognised, counted and properly cared for. We should have confidence that decisions about their treatment are built on real understanding, not on guesswork or gaps in information. We need to make sure that those who are living bravely with secondary breast cancer, like my constituent and many others across Scotland, are no longer invisible to the system. It should be there for them and we should know who they are.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am conscious that a couple of colleagues still want to participate in the debate. In order to have sufficient time to allow them to do so, I am minded to accept a motion under rule 8.14.3 of standing orders to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Emma Harper to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Emma Harper]

Motion agreed to.

18:02

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate the member and colleagues on their contributions to date, but it would not be possible to contribute without speaking of our late colleague Christina McKelvie, who died earlier this year from metastatic breast cancer. That cancer spreads to another part of the body when cells break away from the original tumours in the breast and travel to other parts of the body. It can come back months or years after the original diagnosis and treatment, and almost 30 per cent of women who are diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer develop metastatic disease.

I understand that Christina attended a breast screening programme in December 2020. In February 2021, she announced a short medical leave, and another short period of leave followed in September, after which she told us that she had completed treatment for breast cancer. She was also told then that she was in remission, and back came the old cheery, breezy Christina—her worry, her fears and her tears, she kept to herself and her nearest and dearest. In June 2022, when the breast cancer charity moonwalk event was held in Edinburgh for the first time in three years, she participated as part of a cross-party team of women and also sponsored the wear it pink campaign.

However, last year, Christina was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer and went on leave in August 2024 to focus on her treatment. I remember her coming shortly before that to tell a wee group of us, with our coffee, that they had found a large lump on her neck. We feared for her but, of course, said nothing, because there was nothing to be said. She died earlier this year, aged only 57.

Within a few years, she had coped with breast cancer, rung the bell and got back to her smiley, stylish self—her hair had grown back—only to find that this cruel disease had returned.

Christina was unlucky, if I may put it like that, but she tried many treatments. That said, many people live long, productive lives with stage 4 breast cancer, with a variety of treatment options and new medicines being tested every day. If one treatment stops working, there is almost always another one to try.

Support is key at any time, but perhaps especially when cancer returns, after all the treatment, side effects, hair loss and remission—it is cruel. I hope that many have support from family and friends, as Christina had, particularly in her partner, Keith Brown. However, the family, too, will need support. There are professionals and charities such as Macmillan Cancer Support and Breast Cancer Now, community nursing teams, general practitioners and specialists, and even Citizens Advice can help with benefits and other financial or legal issues. It is bad enough coping with the disease without money worries.

I thank my colleague for securing the motion for this sensitive debate in the chamber and for the opportunity that we have had to remember our colleague. As we are, she would, at the very least, have been looking to improve treatments and slow the progress of the disease while seeking a cure, and she would have urged there to be better access to support and care, all of which require, as colleagues have said, better and accurate data.

18:06

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I, too, thank Emma Harper for securing the debate, and I welcome and thank those who have joined us in the public gallery. As I outlined in a previous debate that Emma Harper led, there cannot be anyone in the chamber who has not been touched by cancer and who does not have either their own cancer story to tell or that of a loved one, family or friend. In this session of the Parliament, we have been impacted by the death of our friend and colleague Christina McKelvie, as well as the cancer journeys of other colleagues—Edward Mountain and Ruth Maguire—as we were in the previous session by the situation of our friend and

former colleague John Scott. It is important to acknowledge those things in any workplace. In my maiden speech, I shared my story of losing my mum to breast cancer when I was seven and she was 44. I remember the loving story that Emma Harper told about her sister, Buffy, in a previous debate. It is important that we take the opportunities to share such stories.

Yesterday, alongside Jackie Baillie, I chaired the Scottish cancer conference at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow. Yet again, it was a successful conference that got me thinking about the amazing people who I have had the honour to meet as an MSP over the past decade serving in the Parliament.

Two individuals who I take the opportunity to pay tribute to are Lisa Fleming and Jen Hardy. Both were at the heart of Make 2nds Count, which was founded in Edinburgh and has gone on to become a UK-wide charity that focuses on giving hope to women and men who are living with secondary metastatic breast cancer. Both have done so much remarkable work to continue to meet the needs of people who are living with breast cancer.

Jen Hardy went on to form and found Cancer Card, which is a cancer support directory that provides personalised support services. Lisa Fleming founded the House of Hope, which recently opened in the capital and is Scotland's first bespoke support and wellbeing centre specifically for those who are affected by breast cancer.

There is something remarkable about women in Edinburgh using their personal experience to drive change and improve the lives of others who are living with cancer. Jen Hardy and Lisa Fleming, like Maggie Keswick Jencks before them, have used their cancer diagnosis to help to improve the lives of other people. Clare Adamson eloquently outlined the need for better data to help to achieve that. Make 2nds Count and Breast Cancer Now are clear that we need to see further progress in that key area, and I agree.

I do not think that men who are living with secondary breast cancer have been discussed in the chamber very often. Approximately 40 men in Scotland are diagnosed with breast cancer each year. It is interesting to note that, according to research by the University of Aberdeen, the incidence of male breast cancer in Scotland increased between 1992 and 2017. That rising trend was most pronounced in the north of Scotland and in rural areas. We need to understand the data to help us to analyse why that is happening.

For many people who are living with secondary breast cancer, there has been significant and—I

think that we need to say this—welcome progress to help them to access drug trials and plan for the next steps of their treatment. It has been remarkable to see how those whom I have known for the past 10 years while serving in Parliament have carried out research on and talked to their advisers about the medical advice in order to push forward for better and kinder treatments.

The final word in Emma Harper's motion is "empowered", and my final word is on empowerment. The debate, I hope, is about empowerment and for Parliament again to hear about the need not only to carry out more work to raise awareness but to advocate for change and investment in the data that can help to drive that—our research communities are desperate to be part of that work. The Scottish Government needs to take more action to ensure that we continue to improve data collection on metastatic cancers and that people who live with the condition are better supported, counted and empowered.

18:10

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): I begin by expressing my sincere thanks not only to Emma Harper for bringing this important motion to the Parliament today but to my other fellow MSPs, who have all provided meaningful and thought-provoking contributions to our discussion. I also thank Emma Harper, Clare Adamson, Emma Roddick, Marie McNair and Christine Grahame for all bringing the name of Christina McKelvie back to the chamber. Her passion for and focus on ensuring that breast cancer and secondary breast cancer were kept at the forefront of people's minds were such a great representation of how an MSP and minister can be. I thank them all for bringing a smile to my face, because when Christina is mentioned, that is what I do—I smile. She also gave me so much support.

I, too, associate myself with the motion's commendation of the work of the charities Make 2nds Count and Breast Cancer Now. Thankfully, both charities are active members of the Scottish Cancer Coalition, and I gratefully appreciate their contribution to the national conversation on breast cancer issues. I value their vital work to support women living with secondary breast cancer in Scotland. I have met both charities on several occasions since I became Minister for Public Health and Women's Health and look forward to continuing that important collaboration.

Breast Cancer Now published its five-year strategy at the end of September. I was pleased to note that we continue to be aligned on our priorities for cancer in the coming years and that its three key themes of earlier diagnosis, care and support, and new treatment echo the ambitions of

our 10-year cancer strategy for Scotland, which we published in 2023.

I will touch on what Miles Briggs commented on. It is right to say that we are hugely privileged when we meet those living with cancer. They explain to us the way in which we can try to improve people's lives not only in Edinburgh but more widely across Scotland. I feel very strongly about that.

At lunch time today, I was pleased to meet charities that support those with secondary breast cancer and campaigners who are living with the condition. I, too, very much welcome them all to our Parliament today. I thank them for their time, and I acknowledge the variety of experiences that they shared with me. I assure them that my officials meet health boards' cancer management teams monthly to identify challenges, explore solutions and share best practice. I have specifically asked that they reflect on the conversation that I had with those who I met earlier today.

I am aware that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care is due to meet Breast Cancer Now and the campaigners Jen Hardy and Alison Tait in January 2026 to further discuss how we can support women living with secondary breast cancer.

We know that one in nine women living in Scotland will develop breast cancer at some stage in their life. Breast cancer is the second most common cancer in Scotland and the most common cancer detected in females. Miles Briggs was right to talk about men living with breast cancer and secondary breast cancer.

We know that early diagnosis is vital, and we continue to fund our detect cancer earlier campaign "Be the Early Bird". Urgent suspicion of cancer referrals continue to be prioritised, and we are treating more patients with cancer on time within both standards compared with the same quarter six years ago. We have specifically invested in driving up productivity and tackling waiting lists, with support from the national centre for sustainable delivery. Together, our actions will further enable NHS Scotland to maximise capacity, build greater resilience and deliver year-on-year reductions in the number of patients who have waited too long for treatment.

Moreover, we are committed to ensuring that those who are diagnosed with secondary breast cancer receive the best possible treatment and support to live well. Our strategy has a range of measures that are aimed at benefiting all those who live with cancer, including the implementation of a single point of contact to support patients throughout their journey and after discharge. That approach ensures that people who are recently diagnosed with cancer have person-centred

support and can discuss their specific circumstances.

We are working in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to improve the service that we offer patients with cancer through the transforming cancer care programme. That joint partnership, which is worth £27 million, is the first of its kind in the UK, and it ensures that people who are affected by cancer in Scotland have access to a specialist key support worker who can provide, and signpost them to, emotional, financial and practical support. As Pam Duncan-Glancy mentioned, that financial support is very important, and we are already seeing the positive impact of that work.

However, we do understand that there are still areas in which we can improve—indeed, I heard as much earlier—and that is why we are continuing to invest in initiatives that support earlier and faster diagnosis and drive person-centred holistic care. We will continue to work with Macmillan, other third sector partners and health boards to determine any new actions that are required to further improve the experience of people who are diagnosed with cancer. I noted Pam Duncan-Glancy's comments about support for people living with disabilities, and I am happy to look at the points that she has raised with the screening team.

With regard to Alexander Stewart's comments on palliative care, I agree that such care is very important. I was pleased to launch the "Palliative Care Matters for All" framework earlier this year, and I was also pleased that a palliative care doctor won doctor of the year award at the NHS Scotland health awards last week.

There has been a lot of comment on access to medicines and, as I said earlier, I met campaigners today, who shared their concerns about the Scottish Medicines Consortium's decision not to recommend the drug elacestrant on the NHS in Scotland. The SMC operates independently of Government and must base its decisions on the best possible evidence. I know that it continues to keep access to new and emerging medicines under review, and the Scottish Government continues to work with the NHS and the SMC on improving access to new medicines. I assure members and those to whom I spoke earlier that doctors can still request to use elacestrant on a case-by-case basis, if they consider that it meets a person's clinical needs, and I also state that the Scottish Government would encourage the pharmaceutical company to make a resubmission to the SMC.

Clare Adamson recognised the importance of genomics. The Scottish Government is improving the diagnosis and targeted treatment of disease

through continued investment in genomics, and we recognise the importance of genomic testing.

I will make a final point on data collection. I, too, recognise the importance of data, and I know that it is an important issue for Breast Cancer Now and Make 2nds Count, as well as for patients, including those whom I had the pleasure of meeting earlier today. I appreciated the open and honest discussion that was recently held in Parliament, and I have heard clearly the requests from members across the chamber.

In our cancer action plan, we committed to improving data collection for metastatic cancers, starting with metastatic breast cancer, and my officials are working closely with Public Health Scotland on a thorough review of our options in relation to the collection of data on secondary breast cancer. That review will consider the clinical time that is required to do that work and how it can improve services and outcomes for patients as a priority. We will agree the best method of data collection by the end of the current cancer action plan period in 2026.

I finish by thanking Emma Harper and her colleagues for their contributions, as well as Breast Cancer Now, Make 2nds Count and other organisations that provide vital support and empowerment to people living with secondary breast cancer in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:19.

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