



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

# Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 20 November 2025

Session 6



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 20 November 2025

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

## General Question Time

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good morning. The first item of business is general question time—our shortest question session of the week, colleagues.

### Neurodevelopmental Assessments and Treatment

**1. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the demand for neurodevelopmental assessments and treatment for children and adults, what its assessment is of the recommendations by the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Scotland, such as its four-tiered service model for assessment and intervention. (S6O-05171)

**The Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy and Sport (Maree Todd):** The Scottish Government welcomes the report of the Royal College of Psychiatrists on meeting the needs of autistic people and people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in Scotland. I agree with the royal college that the demand for neurodevelopmental assessment and support now exceeds what Scotland's current mental health infrastructure can deliver and that a different response is needed. We are taking time to consider its report fully, including whether a stepped care model could be considered for neurodevelopmental assessment.

We are also driving forward our improvement work, including the establishment of our children and young people's neurodevelopmental task force and our on-going work with the national autism implementation team, or NAIT.

**Michelle Thomson:** As the minister will be aware from my correspondence and our discussion, the rising pressures and demands are acute and are having an impact on many individuals in my Falkirk East constituency.

The Scottish Government's director of mental health wrote to all health boards to seek clarification of what assessment and support they have in place, because of the diversity across different areas and because the local protocols are different, too. Have there been any findings from that letter, and is the minister able to give us any further information in that respect?

**Maree Todd:** I confirm that we have now received responses from all of the health boards, and we are considering the findings in more detail and what next steps should be taken. The information is not publicly available yet, so there are no findings to share at this time. However, I recognise the member's long-standing interest in this issue on behalf of her constituents and I will ask the Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing, Tom Arthur, to ensure that he shares the findings with her and with Parliament more broadly when they are available.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** Parents and adults who are not parents in the Glasgow region have approached me because they are very worried about access to ADHD assessments for adults. They have been waiting a long time for a pathway to support, and some of them are struggling to continue with work and other responsibilities. What reassurance can the minister give that pathways will be available for people in the Glasgow region to access adult ADHD assessments?

**Maree Todd:** I understand the member's concern. Long waits for support are unacceptable, and I am committed to improving timely access to support, diagnosis and support for autistic people and people with ADHD.

In July, we announced the reopening of our £2.5 million multiyear autistic adult support fund. That fund supports third sector organisations that help autistic adults reach their full potential and supports them, their carers and their families to understand what neurodivergence means for them and to improve their wellbeing.

### Rural Crime

**2. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what legislative action it plans taking in the remainder of this parliamentary session to protect farmers from the threat of rural crime. (S6O-05172)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** Rural crime is a serious issue. It affects individuals, communities and businesses, and the Scottish Government fully supports efforts to tackle it.

The Scottish partnership against rural crime—or SPARC—which is chaired by Police Scotland, brings key justice and rural sector partners together to provide a robust, multi-agency approach to preventing rural crime and to support actions taken at the local level.

The member will be aware of the legislative programme for the rest of the term, and the short time we have left. There are no plans for rural crime legislation in what remains of this session.

**Rachael Hamilton:** Following a meeting in June, the minister agreed to write to the Home Office. The letter highlighted that the Scottish Government had missed an opportunity to introduce a legislative consent memorandum in June 2022 that would have allowed for further safeguards and deterrents to stop rural crime. Since the LCM was missed, rural crime has cost Scottish farmers and rural businesses nearly £5 million, and the letter states that my constituency of Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire is a rural crime hotspot.

Police Scotland and the National Crime Agency wanted regulations to be introduced last summer, so will the minister, despite her answer, introduce an expedited bill and work with me to tackle rural crime before the end of this session of Parliament?

**Siobhian Brown:** I thank the member for her continued interest in equipment theft and the serious issues affecting rural businesses.

For clarity with regard to the LCM, the relevant legislation has not yet come into effect in England and Wales. As the member has alluded to, I wrote to the United Kingdom Government earlier this year regarding the process of its implementation, and it recently published a summary evidence response ahead of planned regulations being introduced. That is an important step towards the legislation being put into effect in England and Wales. I reiterate my willingness to work with the member on legislative options, but it will not be in this parliamentary session.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** As Rachael Hamilton knows, my constituency is adjacent to hers. As a former lawyer, I have to say that I am not too hot on legislation—it is not always the answer.

I refer the minister to the recently published three-year policy by Police Scotland, in collaboration with SPARC, which focuses on such things as the prevention of agricultural machinery theft using technology. There are now 100 specially trained officers, so I hope that the minister will agree that action might be more effective than legislation.

**Siobhian Brown:** There is some great work being done in that respect. The three-year strategy for SPARC was published in June, and for the first time, it has adopted the four Ps model of prevent, pursue, protect and prepare. The refreshed strategy includes a number of actions on how perpetrators will be brought to justice, how rural communities can safeguard against such crimes and how individuals can be diverted from being involved with them. Part of SPARC's work also involves working with other forces in the UK to

disrupt the activity of criminals who travel across our border.

### **Children (Scotland) Act 2020 (Implementation)**

**3. Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when the Children (Scotland) Act 2020 will be fully implemented. (S6O-05173)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** Although some sections of the act have already been commenced, some areas of that wide-ranging act are outstanding. However, we remain committed to commencing them. I am providing updates to the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee on implementation, and did so most recently on 26 September.

Two Scottish statutory instruments on the regulation of child contact services were approved by Parliament earlier this month and will be implemented on 1 April 2027. A further set of commencement regulations is planned relating to hearing the child's views, additional factors for the court to consider and delay in contact and residence cases.

**Ruth Maguire:** Parliament voted for the act with great hopes that it would centre children in child contact cases and address some real difficulties that we had heard about. I am still receiving casework in which children who have witnessed their father terrorising their mother, physically and emotionally, are being forced by courts to have contact with their father, despite restraining orders and so on being in place. Is the minister confident that, when the legislation is fully enacted, it will address that disaster, or do more actions need to be taken to ensure that the judiciary truly puts children's wellbeing at the heart of decisions that it makes on contact?

**Siobhian Brown:** Ensuring the child's best interests is central in any contact case and was the key aim of the 2020 act. I believe that implementation will bring big improvements for children in the cases that Ms Maguire referred to—for example, enhancing how their views are heard and ensuring that child welfare reporters who are appointed to hear the child's views are properly trained in understanding domestic abuse.

The regulation of child contact services will help to ensure that centres are safe, conflict-free places for children. We are also progressing wider work to improve how the civil and criminal courts interact, including how the civil courts get information on domestic abuse.

### **Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (North East Scotland)**

**4. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support tenants and owner-occupiers affected by RAAC in the North East Scotland region. (S6O-05174)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan):** It is a worrying time for those whose homes are affected by RAAC. I met residents in Aberdeen, Dundee, Angus and Clackmannanshire just yesterday to discuss the challenges that they face.

We are working with local authorities, who are responsible for finding local solutions. For example, I recently agreed to Aberdeen City Council's request for flexibility in an existing housing infrastructure fund commitment to allow the council to provide additional support for residents from within its own budget.

I have repeatedly pressed the United Kingdom Government for a central dedicated RAAC remediation fund. It has failed to provide that thus far. In the meantime, I will continue to consider requests for flexibility in existing budgets.

**Maggie Chapman:** Last month, Aberdeen City Council told Torry home owners that they would be offered the full value of their homes before RAAC was discovered, given the £10 million fund that the Scottish Government had made available. However, in the worst-affected city—Dundee—there is still no RAAC fund. Home owners in Dundee and Angus are wondering why they are still waiting for information and support. When will the cabinet secretary announce support for RAAC-affected home owners who face financial ruin in more ways than one in Dundee and Angus?

**Màiri McAllan:** We have to be clear that the arrangements that have been reached with Aberdeen City Council were bespoke to Aberdeen. As I said in my initial answer, they were about offering flexibility in honouring an existing housing infrastructure fund that had not been drawn down. In fact, that was not doable, and we ended up by offering flexibility through the affordable homes supply programme, which allowed the council to create headroom elsewhere. That was a specific response to an Aberdeen-specific case.

However, as I said in my initial answer, I will consider requests for flexibility within existing budgets from any council with RAAC-affected residents.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** RAAC-affected home owners in Aberdeen's Torry who have already sold their homes under value fear paying tax on the compensation and losing benefits. That would pile yet more injustice on a

nightmare that they have faced for years. Will the cabinet secretary instruct officials to help Aberdeen City Council prevent that from coming to pass?

**Màiri McAllan:** Those are entirely matters for Aberdeen City Council to work through with the residents of Torry, and I encourage it to do so.

### **General Practitioner Appointments**

**5. Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work it has been doing regarding people obtaining in-person GP appointments. (S6O-05175)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** The latest published data—Public Health Scotland's general practice in-hours activity visualisation—shows that, as of September, as many as 81 per cent of appointments with GPs and other clinicians in general practice were physical. That is not as high as the proportion before the pandemic, when approximately 87 per cent of appointments were physical, but we always expected the overall proportion of physical appointments to reduce as options for virtual appointments became more available.

In 2022, my predecessor, Humza Yousaf, wrote to GPs to advise them that the de-escalation of infection prevention control measures gave them much greater latitude to see patients in person. That, alongside our record funding increase for core GP services and walk-in clinics, should continue to improve access to one of the critical primary care front doors of our national health service.

**Elena Whitham:** In my constituency, access to general practice remains a concern, particularly in rural communities. The position varies between practices, but constituents contact me regularly about the matter. Does the cabinet secretary agree that investment must be matched by concerted targeted support for recruitment and retention to ensure sustainable care in all parts of Scotland, including Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley?

**Neil Gray:** I absolutely agree with Elena Whitham. A core element of the record funding increase for general practice is contingent on increased employment of general practitioners and wider practice staff.

Alongside that, through our GP recruitment and retention 20-point action plan, we are taking substantive steps to support practices in rural areas. Our £10,000 golden hello scheme incentivises GPs to take up rural positions. The early-career GP fellowship programme is reaching

new rural areas across seven health boards, thanks to our investment this year. Our Scottish graduate entry medical programme—ScotGEM—focuses on rural medicine and healthcare improvement. We also continue to fund the rediscover the joy of general practice project, which supports rural and island practices with short-term GP cover.

### **Shoplifting (Repeat Offenders)**

**6. Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce the number of repeat shoplifting offenders, in light of reports that 10 individuals have accumulated over 1,500 charges in the last four years. (S6O-05176)

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** The Scottish Government recognises the harm that is caused by retail crime. Our budget for 2025-26 has made an additional £3 million available to tackle the issue as part of our record investment in policing. Police Scotland has used that funding to establish a retail crime task force, which aims to prevent such incidents and pursue those responsible. Police Scotland's plan includes specific actions to target repeat offenders by using analytical data and intelligence to carry out proactive enforcement activities in areas that are most heavily impacted. Investment is also being used to develop diversionary programmes that are aimed at reducing reoffending.

**Sharon Dowey:** Retailers Against Crime and other industry partners have made it clear that intelligence sharing is essential in identifying repeat and organised offenders. Given that Police Scotland's retail crime task force has, in its first six months, supported the detection of more than 500 retail offences, will the minister commit to extending and increasing that funding beyond March 2026 to tackle prolific shoplifters?

**Siobhian Brown:** Discussions are on-going with Police Scotland about its budgetary requirements, and I hope that Ms Dowey will appreciate that I will not be making any budgetary announcements during general question time today. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government has confirmed that the Scottish budget will be published on Tuesday 13 January 2026.

### **Gynaecology Waiting Times (NHS Fife)**

**7. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address waiting times for gynaecological diagnostic procedures in NHS Fife. (S6O-05177)

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** This year, we have

allocated an additional £135.5 million to health boards to tackle the longest waits. That includes an allocation of more than £1.1 million to NHS Fife for gynaecology to support extra full-day theatre lists and new full-day out-patient clinics.

I understand from NHS Fife that it is on track to have no patient waiting for more than 52 weeks by our 31 March 2026 target. Beyond that, we are working with the centre for sustainable delivery to ensure that all boards deliver a sustainable solution for the future.

**Alex Rowley:** I have been contacted by a constituent, a 23-year-old woman, who has been advised that she might face a wait of more than a year for keyhole surgery that is needed to diagnose the source of on-going severe pelvic pain. Over the past year, the constituent has experienced two miscarriages, recurring pelvic infections and severe pelvic pain that has significantly impacted her quality of life. I have raised the issue directly with NHS Fife, but I would be grateful if the minister would look at the details of the case, which I will pass to her. It is all very well to talk about 52 weeks, but, in the case of this constituent, that is not acceptable.

**Jenni Minto:** Alex Rowley is absolutely right that that length of wait is not sustainable and is not good for women's health. That is why we have invested the funding. I am very happy to follow up with him afterwards.

### **Future Farming Investment Scheme (Ineligible Applications)**

**8. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will commit to providing full details of why each of the 3,537—or 47 per cent of—applications to the future farming investment scheme were deemed ineligible, including whether ministers raised any concerns when presented with this figure. (S6O-05178)

**The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie):** As a matter of routine, the Scottish Government does not provide individual responses to explain why an individual agricultural grant application was unsuccessful. A breakdown of the broad categories of reasons for applications not being taken forward will be published shortly, and I will write to the member concerned to provide the information on the scoring criteria. Scottish ministers were made aware of the scoring criteria, the numbers of successful and unsuccessful applications and the overall value of support offered, but ministers do not routinely become involved in day-to-day scheme-management issues.

**Douglas Ross:** I am sorry, but that is just not good enough, minister. Surely, routinely, 50 per



cent of applications are not deemed ineligible. Something has gone badly wrong here, and it looks as though the minister was asleep at the wheel and did not even ask any questions. Given the numbers involved and that many people are questioning why almost 50 per cent of applications were deemed ineligible, is there not a duty on the Government to tell each and every applicant why they were deemed ineligible and what went wrong, and to sort it out?

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

**Jim Fairlie:** The scheme was co-designed with the industry—[*Interruption.*]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear the minister.

**Jim Fairlie:** The scheme was co-designed with the industry, including NFU Scotland. It was designed to help eligible active farmers and crofters to improve the environmental performance of their businesses in relation to climate change and biodiversity benefits.

Applications were assessed through a standardised framework that cross-checked application data against the single application form and other system-held data to ensure consistency, transparency and audit defensibility. The scoring model looked for six core objectives: business efficiency, business sustainability, environmental protection, greenhouse gas reduction, climate adaptation and public good.

**The Presiding Officer:** Please be brief, minister.

**Jim Fairlie:** Priority group status, which Douglas Ross asked about, did not alone guarantee funding investment. Applicants also had to demonstrate strong alignment with the scheme objectives and the ability to deliver measurable outcomes.

## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

### Mossmorran

**1. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** In 1998, aged 25, I spent three glorious weeks at France 98. There was no Google, no smartphones, no social media and no Scottish Parliament. It has been almost “30 years of hurt”, as our English friends would say, but we never stopped dreaming. On behalf of the Scottish Conservatives and the tartan army, I congratulate and thank our Scotland heroes. [*Applause.*]

I turn to my questions for the First Minister. Hundreds of Scottish jobs are at risk, this time in Fife. Thousands have already been lost: 400 at Grangemouth; 250 at Harbour Energy; 200 at Hunting PLC; 500 at Apache and 2,000 at Petrofac. Now 400 more jobs are at risk at Mossmorran. Scotland's oil and gas industry is being destroyed before our eyes and the Labour and Scottish National Party Governments are causing that to happen because it suits their net zero agenda.

John Swinney's Government promised a Mossmorran transition plan 18 months ago, so where is it?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I begin by expressing my warmest congratulations to Steve Clarke and the Scotland squad. It was an absolute privilege to be present at Hampden park on Tuesday night and to see such an exciting football game with spectacular goals. The Scotland national team has brought joy to everyone in Scotland and I pay warm tribute to the players for what they achieved on Tuesday. [*Applause.*]

Russell Findlay raises important issues about the future of employment in Scotland. We in the Government will do everything that we can to support the workforce at ExxonMobil in light of the challenges that are now being faced as a consequence of the decision in connection with the Mossmorran plant.

It is absolutely vital that we take forward measures to ensure a just transition, which means that we must manage the issues that confront us in relation to the future of the North Sea oil and gas sector and the implications for other communities.

On Tuesday, the Government signalled our determination to use the learning that has come from the work that we are undertaking on Grangemouth and apply it to the situation at Mossmorran to provide every support that we can to the employees, who are facing a very difficult

future as a consequence of Tuesday's announcement.

**Russell Findlay:** Where is the Mossmorran transition plan that was promised? The reason John Swinney did not produce one is because he instead fixates on net zero policies that will hit Scots in the pocket, such as fining householders £15,000 if they do not get rid of their gas boilers. Scotland's oil and gas infrastructure is being decimated because of Government policies,

Last week, alongside Kemi Badenoch, I held a round-table discussion with leading figures in the oil and gas industry, who all say that the most damaging policy that threatens jobs is the energy profits levy. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Let us hear Mr Findlay.

**Russell Findlay:** Their number 1 ask of Labour's budget next week is that the levy should be scrapped. Today, I am writing to Rachel Reeves to urge her to axe the EPL. Will John Swinney add his name to my letter?

**The First Minister:** For completeness, I point out to Parliament that the energy profits levy was introduced in the first place by a Conservative Government. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear the First Minister.

**The First Minister:** It was also extended by the Conservative Government. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear one another.

**The First Minister:** The issues around the energy profits levy are now acute in relation to the oil and gas sector. I do not need to add my name to the letter that Russell Findlay is talking about, because the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government has already made those representations to the United Kingdom Government.

We are at a pivotal moment in sustaining employment in Scotland's economy as we ensure that we build up to our clean energy and renewables future. That requires the UK Government to heed the concerns that have been expressed by many people, including the Scottish Government, about the continuation of the energy profits levy, which was introduced by the Conservatives.

**Russell Findlay:** The EPL must go, and both Governments must change direction. If they do not, the industry body, Offshore Energies UK, warns that 1,000 jobs will be lost every month until 2030. This is a national emergency.

The Fraser of Allander Institute today released a new report that warns that

"jobs, tax revenues and regional economies"

are

"at risk".

It says that skilled workers are leaving either the country or the industry altogether, and it estimates that the cost to our economy could reach £13 billion. Unless Labour and the SNP change course, Scotland's world-leading oil and gas sector will be wiped out entirely, never to return.

Does John Swinney at least accept that his Government's hostility to oil and gas has contributed to this national emergency?

**The First Minister:** The Scottish Government has put in place practical support to assist the communities that will inevitably be affected by the transition to net zero, particularly as the oil and gas sector in the North Sea, which is a mature basin, reduces. That is a geological factor that we have to come to terms with.

For example, we have set up the oil and gas transition training fund, which supports eligible workers with funding for training to build the skills required for the sustainable energy approaches of the future. We have also put in place the north-east and Moray just transition fund, which is about practical financial support to assist in that transition. Indeed, I was privileged to take part in the opening of the new skills hub, which took place in Aberdeen just a few weeks ago.

The Government will take forward sustained support to assist in the management of the transition, which I recognise is a significant threat to companies and employees. The Scottish Government will do all that we can to support workers, and I appeal to the United Kingdom Government to take sympathetic policy decisions that will also help in that respect.

**Russell Findlay:** That is just an evasive insult to the oil and gas workers. He is offering a sticking plaster for a shotgun wound. The SNP opposes Rosebank, it opposed Cambo and Jackdaw, and it supports a ban on any new North Sea development. John Swinney could change that now, so why does he not? He does not because he is worried that extremists in his party would unite with the Greens and he would lose a vote in this Parliament. Let me make him another offer—my party will support his Government to overturn its presumption against new developments. We will give him the votes to protect thousands of Scottish jobs, so is he prepared to do the right thing?

**The First Minister:** The Scottish Government's position is that any new oil and gas developments

have to pass a climate compatibility assessment to ensure that they are consistent with the agenda that we have to take forward on net zero. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear the First Minister.

**The First Minister:** That is the position of the Scottish Government. Indeed, court judgments in the United Kingdom have reinforced that position, so it is now necessary for the UK Government to consider developments in that context.

We will set out what we have done and what practical assistance we are delivering, such as the measures to support new business ventures in Grangemouth and the transition funds that we have made available in the north-east of Scotland. Those measures recognise that Government has to be an active player in protecting industry and employees, and that is exactly what the Scottish Government will do.

### **Covid-19 (Scottish Government Decisions)**

**2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** I join others in congratulating Steve Clarke and the Scotland men's team on qualifying for the world cup. They have done the entire nation proud. I remember rushing home from school to watch the Scotland v Brazil game in 1998 and the absolute jubilation when John Collins scored that penalty against Brazil, only for that to be followed by a goal. Anyway, we enjoyed John Collins scoring that penalty. Honestly, I am so proud that my kids will get to experience Scotland playing at the world cup, cheer the team on and develop their own memories for the generations to come.

Later today, the Covid inquiry report on political decision making will be published. Covid-19 shook all our lives, with thousands of lives lost in Scotland. The United Kingdom Covid inquiry is vital so that we can learn lessons, acknowledge mistakes and give answers to mourning families. Given that John Swinney was central to the Scottish Government's operations before, during and after the pandemic, does he regret deliberately deleting evidence for the inquiry, which frustrated its process? Will he take the opportunity to apologise?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Covid-19 was incredibly difficult for everyone. I express my heartfelt sympathies to everyone who lost a loved one during the pandemic and to those who suffered a tremendous level of disruption to their lives.

At all times, ministers' actions were based on the best information that was available to them at the time. I have set out to the Covid-19 inquiry the basis of the decision making with which I was involved. The Scottish Government took those

decisions incredibly seriously to ensure that we took the necessary action to protect the population at a time when we had no guidebook on what we were dealing with. We supported establishing a public inquiry so that all Governments can learn the necessary lessons for the future. That is exactly what the Scottish Government will do.

All the actions that I took regarding information were consistent with Scottish Government policy.

**Anas Sarwar:** John Swinney was the Deputy First Minister who deliberately deleted evidence, which is shameful and unforgivable. He was the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills who shamefully downgraded the exam results of working-class kids, and he was the Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery who failed to deliver any recovery.

The most devastating decision that was made by ministers was to send untested and Covid-positive patients into care homes, even when it was known that older people were the most vulnerable to the virus. More than 100 Covid-positive patients and more than 3,000 untested patients were sent into care homes. The devastating consequence was that more than 4,000 people in care homes died of Covid. That is now being investigated by the police. We do not need clinical advice to know that sending people with the virus to live with those who are the most vulnerable to it would lead to deaths. Will John Swinney apologise for that disastrous and catastrophic decision?

**The First Minister:** As I indicated in my first answer, at the time, ministers were dealing with an evolving situation during which advice was being formulated by scientific experts. Clinical experts were assessing the right judgments to be made in dealing with an emerging and fast-changing situation. Ministers were open with the Parliament about the dilemmas and challenges that were involved. Those decisions were subjected to scrutiny by the Parliament and, of course, they are now being subjected to scrutiny by the Covid-19 inquiry.

I have been very clear that I regret the suffering that individuals experienced during the Covid pandemic. It did enormous damage to people, including those who lost loved ones, and to our society, and we are still dealing with the consequences of it. I understand the scale of the impact and the damage that was done. As I have indicated, the Government will listen carefully to the inquiry and respond accordingly to the recommendations that it makes as we seek to learn lessons from a traumatic period in the country's history.

**Anas Sarwar:** We do not need clinical advice to know not to send Covid-positive patients into care

homes. Right across the country, people have the common sense not to visit their granny when they have a cold, never mind putting Covid-positive patients into care homes. John Swinney was the Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery, and this was supposed to be the Parliament's Covid recovery session, but look at where we are.

In one month at the start of this parliamentary session, 16,798 Scots waited for four hours in accident and emergency; now 45,639 are waiting. At the start of this session, 1,810 waited in A and E for eight hours; now 15,821 are waiting. At the start of this session, 96,053 people were waiting for in-patient treatment; now 155,849 are waiting. At the start of this session, 391,938 were waiting for an out-patient appointment; now 559,077 are waiting. John Swinney promised recovery and he delivered catastrophe. He has a shameful record, and it is one that he cannot delete. Is it not clear that we cannot afford another five years of this and that Scotland needs to recover from John Swinney and the Scottish National Party?

**The First Minister:** One of the many flaws in the argument that Mr Sarwar has just put to me is that he is comparing this moment today with the start of this parliamentary session. At the start of this session, the country was still dealing with Covid. We were still in the midst of Covid. We still had a pause—for at least a year beyond the start of this session—on routine scheduled cases because of the priority to sustain the national health service during that period. The idea that Mr Sarwar is comparing like with like ignores—as he always does—the reality of the Covid pandemic and its significant disruption.

I can reassure Mr Sarwar that, under my leadership, the scale of national health service activity is increasing in order to tackle those very issues. We had more than 10,000 extra out-patient attendances in September compared with August. Activity in our national health service has increased: from April to September 2025, there were over 31,000 more appointments and procedures than in the same period in 2024. We are now seeing the total list size and the longest waits coming down. We are also treating more people, with activity increasing significantly compared with last month and last year.

The actions that Mr Sarwar is calling for—of increased NHS activity, increased numbers of procedures and increased solutions for the people of Scotland—are happening, and they are happening under my leadership. They will carry on happening under my leadership, because I am determined to support our population to recover from Covid.

### **Mossmorran (Just Transition Plan)**

**3. Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green):** Like the First Minister and colleagues, I start by congratulating Steve Clarke and the national team. I cannot remember 1998—*[Interruption.]*—so, like many other people across Scotland, I am looking forward for the first time to the experience of having our national team compete in a world cup.

On Tuesday, workers at ExxonMobil's Mossmorran site were locked out of their workplace and told that they would lose their jobs. Two hundred staff and 250 contractors are facing unemployment. Ludicrously, ExxonMobil has suggested that it could support workers to get a job at its other site, which is 500 miles away in Southampton.

We all knew that this was coming. For years, the Scottish Greens called on the Government to develop a just transition plan for Mossmorran. In April 2024, the Government agreed, and it promised that that work would commence within months. That was 18 months ago. On behalf of the workers and their families, who thought that the Scottish Government had their back—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Mr Greer.

**Ross Greer:** —can I ask the First Minister where that transition plan is?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The work that the Government is undertaking, as set out by the Deputy First Minister on Tuesday, is focused on learning from the experience of what we are taking forward in Grangemouth and on the business ventures and developments that can come forward, supported by Scottish Enterprise, to enable us to assist companies and individuals to meet the just transition. That is the work that the Government is taking forward as a consequence of the very damaging decision that was taken on Tuesday. We will support that activity with the assistance and the intervention that the Government has set out.

**Ross Greer:** It is quite clear from that answer that the reality is that there is no plan and the Scottish Government has broken its promise to the workers at Mossmorran. The Government made a commitment to the workers and their community, and it is clear that it has done nothing to fulfil it.

The Scottish Greens have pushed for that just transition plan for years. In 2022, Fife's Green MSP, Mark Ruskell, published plans that he developed. He has held summits that have brought together workers, their unions and the wider community, and he pushed Government ministers to make that commitment in the spring of last year, but we have heard nothing since—not even in the climate change plan that was

published earlier this month, despite Mossmorran being responsible for 10 per cent of Scotland's emissions.

Can the First Minister name a single thing that the Government has done specifically for the workers at Mossmorran since announcing that it would develop a just transition plan for them 18 months ago?

**The First Minister:** The Government has taken forward a number of steps in relation to the work that has emerged from Grangemouth on identifying low-carbon solutions and economic opportunities for Scotland. That is what the Government has done. A range of business opportunities and projects have been developed by Scottish Enterprise and are designed to address the need to provide sustained employment in the Mossmorran area. Those ideas and arguments are central to the propositions that we can take forward. They are part of the Government's transition to net zero and to a just transition, but they happen in the context of the damage that is being done to the whole process by the perpetuation of the energy profits levy. That is clearly damaging, and the Mossmorran leadership has ascribed to it a contribution to the damage to employment that has been experienced at Mossmorran.

#### **Women Against State Pension Inequality (Compensation)**

**4. Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister, in light of the United Kingdom Government's reported decision to revisit compensating women against state pension inequality, what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the potential social security implications for those affected in Scotland. (S6F-04468)

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** We welcome the UK Government's long-overdue announcement to reconsider the decision on compensation for women born in the 1950s who were impacted by the maladministration of the changes to state pension age. Around 336,000 women in Scotland were impacted, and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman recommended that they should receive compensation of up to £2,950 each. The Scottish Government has and always will support the WASPI campaign, and I urge the UK Government to finally do the right thing and compensate the women affected now.

**Clare Haughey:** It is welcome that the Labour UK Government has been forced into this latest U-turn, and it is vital that it stops dragging its feet. WASPI women have waited long enough, with many having died while waiting for justice. Will the First Minister provide any update on the Scottish

Government's latest engagement with the UK Government on steps being taken to set this injustice right, and will he join me in calling on Labour to immediately honour the recommendations of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and deliver full compensation for WASPI women now?

**The First Minister:** I echo and support that call from Clare Haughey. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions the day after his announcement, asking for the earliest possible clarification of when exactly UK ministers were first made aware of the new evidence, and urged him to complete the review at pace. She further reiterated that the Scottish Government has always supported the WASPI campaign and that compensation must be delivered now to right that historic wrong.

#### **Road Deaths and Serious Injuries (Moray)**

**5. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government will take in response to reported figures from the road safety charity, Brake, which show that over the last year road deaths and serious injuries rose by 2.8 per cent nationally, with Moray recording the highest increase, with a rise of 83 per cent. (S6F-04462)

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Any death or serious injury on our roads is a tragedy, and I offer my sympathies to everyone affected by the loss of a loved one. The Scottish Government is taking forward measures on road safety, including investing £48 million in road safety this year, which is a 33 per cent increase on last year's amount, and supporting engineering improvements, education and enforcement nationwide.

I recognise that more work has to be done, and the Government will continue working with partners to reduce harm and keep communities safe.

**Douglas Ross:** This is road safety week, but those figures confirm that Scotland's roads are getting more dangerous—more people are dying or being seriously injured on Scotland's roads, and the figures for Moray are shocking and devastating. In the past year, 43 people have been killed or seriously injured on our roads. Far too many families are grieving the loss of loved ones.

The main road through Moray is the A96, which the Scottish National Party promised to dual years ago. It has launched countless consultations but has failed to dual a single mile of that road. Will the First Minister say whether it is still the SNP's policy to fully dual the A96 from Aberdeen to Inverness, and if it is, will he tell us when it will be done?

**The First Minister:** That remains the Scottish Government's policy position. In my initial answer, I acknowledged the significance and seriousness of road casualties. I acknowledge that the data in Moray shows a significant increase. However, the wider pattern is that, in 2024, the number of casualties as a result of a road traffic accident was the fifth lowest on record and the third lowest outside the pandemic years, and, compared with the 2014-18 baseline, there has been a reduction in road deaths, serious injuries, child fatalities and serious injuries among children. I acknowledge that more has to be done, and the Government is taking forward that work.

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** Eight months ago, I raised the issue of rising road casualties in Renfrewshire. I asked the First Minister why the Scottish Government has delayed introducing speed awareness courses in Scotland, despite first promising to look into them 16 years ago. In his answer, the First Minister said that he would write to me to outline what steps the Scottish Government would be prepared to take. I am still waiting for his letter and, more importantly, we are still waiting for the speed awareness courses. Is this not another case where, when the First Minister is found wanting, he gives us warm words, promises action and then does nothing? When will those courses be introduced in Scotland, as they are in England and Wales?

**The First Minister:** I will look into Mr Bibby's point about my reply—if I promised a reply and it was not forthcoming, I apologise for that. I will look into the issue immediately after First Minister's question time.

As I said in my answer to Mr Ross, the Government has increased the funding available for road safety activity in Scotland by 33 per cent. Road Safety Scotland is undertaking a range of national behaviour change campaigns in 2025-26 relating to motorbikes, speed, drink and drug driving, fitness to drive, distractions and young drivers. Police Scotland and partners have been undertaking road safety activities, including the fatal 5 campaign, the motorcycle safety campaign, the 2 wheels campaign, operation spotlight and national drunk driving week. A whole range of measures have been taken to improve road safety. However, I will look into the specific issue that Mr Bibby has set out for me and will take forward the necessary response.

#### **National Health Service (Public Satisfaction)**

**6. Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to news that public satisfaction with the NHS has dropped to its lowest level in more than a decade, according to the Scottish household survey. (S6F-04472)

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The Government is responding to that information by maintaining its focus on improving the delivery of the national health service. We have seen waits, particularly the longest waits, reduce for four months in a row. There is more to be done, and the Government is making the necessary investment in reducing those waiting times. We are beginning to see the effect of that in the data that is available to us.

**Carol Mochan:** When the First Minister's party first took office in 2007, following eight years of a Labour-led Government, 83 per cent of Scots were satisfied with the NHS. That figure is now just 61 per cent. Does the First Minister agree that a failure to show leadership and very poor decision making have led us to this situation? Given that the Scottish National Party has been in power for almost two decades—almost 20 years—how does he plan to convince the Scottish public that the SNP should be in charge of our most valued public asset, the NHS, for another five years?

**The First Minister:** Carol Mochan asked a question that made absolutely no reference to the impact of the pandemic. The global pandemic resulted in a period of almost two years in which scheduled care essentially had to be paused to enable us to sustain the national health service. Carol Mochan's party leader just asked me about Covid, and yet she has asked me a question about the performance of the NHS that takes no account of Covid.

I am intensely focused on making sure that we improve the recovery of the NHS. In that respect, we saw the number of hip and knee operations reach an all-time high in 2024, which is really welcome.

In the 12 months to September 2025, there was an increase in the number of operations performed compared with the previous year. In September 2025, the number of operations performed was nearly 14 per cent higher than it was in September 2024.

What we are going to do is exactly what I and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care are focused on: we are going to deliver for the people of Scotland, which is what this Government always does.

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** I am sure that Carol Mochan will recognise that, in Labour-controlled NHS England, levels of dissatisfaction are currently at their highest since the British social attitudes survey began, and it is four decades since that came into being. [Interruption.]

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Mr Stewart.

**Kevin Stewart:** In Labour-run Wales, the NHS has the lowest satisfaction rate in the whole of the United Kingdom. Does the First Minister therefore agree that Scottish Labour needs only to look at its colleagues' records on the NHS to know that those in glass houses should not throw stones? Will he reaffirm his commitment to ensuring that the SNP Government continues to tackle the longest waits, increase access to care and improve delivery in Scotland's NHS as a matter of priority?

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that concise questions enable more members to take part. I also remind members that a focus on devolved responsibilities would be helpful.

**The First Minister:** In Scotland, there are more staff working in our national health service now than there were when this Government took office. There are more midwives, more nurses and more dental consultants, and general practitioner numbers are going up. On discharges from Scottish hospitals, 97 per cent happen without delay. More patients are being seen and treated in shorter periods. There were 23,181 operations performed in September 2025, which is 13.7 per cent more than in September 2024. The number of hip and knee operations reached an all-time high in 2024. That is delivery, and that is what people get from an SNP Government.

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to constituency and general supplementary questions. The more concise members are, the more questions we will be able to put.

### **Scottish National Residential Pain Management Programme**

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** In Scotland, people living with chronic pain have been expressing concern that the Scottish national residential pain management programme, which is based in Glasgow and provides intense support to people from all over Scotland who live with chronic pain, will no longer be directly funded by the Scottish Government. The Scottish Parliament voted to create that national service and, since 2015, it has been free for all boards to refer patients to the programme, to help those who are living with chronic pain to self-manage. Will the First Minister investigate why that decision has been taken and why boards will now be forced to pay to refer patients to the service? Will it be a national service for people who live with chronic pain, wherever they live in Scotland?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** It is vital that those services are available. However, fundamentally, we have to take decisions about the sustainability of services as they relate to individual parts of the country where demand for services lies. I will look at the details of what Miles Briggs has raised with me. Obviously, the

Government is focused on ensuring that we have sustainable public services in place, which includes the national health service.

### **Mossmorran**

**Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** The announcement this week that Mossmorran is to close by February next year comes as devastating news to the hundreds of workers and contractors at the site. On Tuesday, ExxonMobil was very clear that the United Kingdom Labour Government's damaging and uncompetitive economic and fiscal policies led to that decision. Will the First Minister outline in a bit more detail what action the Scottish Government is taking to secure a future for the site?

Does the First Minister share my utter disbelief and anger that, although the UK Labour Government can somehow find hundreds of millions of pounds to save steel production in Scunthorpe, provide a £600 million loan guarantee for a petrochemical plant in Belgium and change the regulatory regime to help the car industry in England, it cannot find one penny for Mossmorran?

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Ewing.

**Annabelle Ewing:** The only conclusion to draw is that, when push comes to shove, Scotland simply does not matter enough to the UK Labour Government.

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I share Annabelle Ewing's concern about the lack of intervention from the UK Government when it is able to intervene in other situations in other parts of the UK. She puts on the record the comments from ExxonMobil about what led to the decision, and the unsympathetic and unhelpful actions of the UK Government.

The Scottish Government will do the following things: we will provide direct support to the workforce who are affected, through the partnership action on continuing employment. We will take forward measures that arise from the work that we are doing in Grangemouth to find alternative opportunities for industrial sites. Details of that work were shared with the Parliament on Tuesday by the Deputy First Minister. We will continue our engagement with the company and the trade unions to identify approaches that will help to support the workforce—Ms Ewing's constituents—who are severely affected by the announcement was made. The Scottish Government will do all that we can within our powers to support those who are affected.

### **Mossmorran**

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** The number of questions that we have had this

afternoon on Mossmorran shows the significance of the situation and the concern about its seriousness. The First Minister talks about lack of intervention. Was the Scottish Government aware of the report in the *Financial Times* in September that said that, at that point, ExxonMobil was looking to sell the site? What was the Scottish Government's response to that report and what engagement did it have with ExxonMobil?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The Scottish Government engaged when it was apparent that ExxonMobil was marketing the site, but the announcement that was made this week was one that the Government did not expect to be happening on such a short timescale. We will sustain our engagement with the company as a consequence.

### **Antisocial Behaviour on Buses**

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Mindless vandalism and antisocial behaviour on Stagecoach buses in my region are at a crisis point. Those mindless acts endanger lives, damage vital transport services and cause significant disruption for the communities that rely on those services. What action will the Scottish Government take to protect drivers, passengers and the wider communities?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** Any acts of violence are completely unacceptable in our society and individuals should not be perpetrating those attacks. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport is exploring measures around whether there are any circumstances in which there is a reason or justification for restricting access to public transport concessionary travel as a consequence of any behaviour. Policing in our communities is an essential part of that endeavour but, fundamentally, it is about how individuals behave. Any act of violence is unacceptable in our society.

### **Free-to-air Sports Broadcasts**

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** On Tuesday, people across Scotland were able to watch the national men's football team's historic and amazing victory on free-to-air television, because of a successful campaign by many of us in the Scottish National Party and across the political spectrum. As the current broadcasting arrangement comes to an end, people risk being shut out of future successes and of nights like that one. Will the First Minister put his weight behind the campaign to keep Scotland's international games free to air and will he raise the matter with the United Kingdom Government, broadcasters and football authorities, to ensure that all future "no Scotland, no party" matches are on terrestrial television and available to everyone?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I agree with Fulton MacGregor's point and recognise the importance of there being free-to-air television access for matches of that nature. I will be happy to ensure that ministers support and take forward Mr MacGregor's representations.

The Scottish Government has long called for national sporting events, such as men's and women's football qualifiers, to be protected for free-to-air broadcast. We will continue to make that case on behalf of fans across the country. It is a matter of enormous significance that all of us were able to experience the joyful scenes at Hampden on Tuesday evening. It should be free for members of the public to be able to see those events.

### **NHS Tayside Mental Health Services**

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** I am sure that the First Minister will share my utter dismay at the Auditor General for Scotland's report, published today, on the unacceptable lack of progress on reform of NHS Tayside's mental health services. I have raised that issue with the First Minister on numerous occasions but, from the two Strang reviews to the ministerial oversight group, nothing seems to be able to force real change. The leadership of NHS Tayside has waited until attention is elsewhere, scaled back the process and returned to business as usual. When he is digesting the report, will the First Minister give urgent consideration to appointing external leadership to finally deliver the change that is required?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I am sympathetic to Mr Marra's point. I have constituents who are affected by the issue that he has raised, so I understand its significance.

A whole range of external scrutiny has been undertaken and—frankly—that should be enough for all the action that is required to happen. Earlier this year, officials met the new chief executive and leadership team to understand how they were responding to the challenges. NHS Tayside is committed to addressing those challenges by December 2025, and it has already put many plans in place, including the adoption of a unified strategic approach in relation to the delivery of the service, consistent with the enhanced monitoring and scrutiny executive group.

The next three months will be critical in that endeavour. I give Mr Marra an undertaking that I will review the issue in January, once I have seen the conclusions of the work that NHS Tayside has committed to doing. At that point, I will address the point that Mr Marra has raised. We must expect the leadership of health boards to get on with meeting the challenges that they face. I am not dismissing Mr Marra's suggestion, but I will return



to it once I see what progress has been made by December.

### **Planning Applications (Highlands)**

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Community councils and communities across the Highlands are being swamped with planning applications for pylons, battery storage sites, switching stations and, now, workers' villages. Although some of those applications extend to thousands of pages, communities have only 30 days to respond to the energy consents unit on each application. Given the complexity of those projects, does the First Minister agree that it would be more democratic to extend the 30-day period to allow Highland communities to be fully consulted and to respond?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** There is an important point underlying Mr Mountain's question, which is that communities must have adequate and appropriate opportunities to be involved in decision making in that respect. I hope that that can be undertaken within the available timescales, but I will consider the specific point that Mr Mountain has made about the appropriateness of the 30-day timescale and will write to him in due course as to whether any flexibility can be applied. I cannot quite recall the status of the 30-day period, but I will check that and come back to him.

### **Unborn Babies (Healthcare)**

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** Given the emphasis on healthcare in the report by the abortion law expert group that came out last Friday, can the First Minister give an assurance that the health of all unborn babies, wanted or not, will be at the centre of the Government's thinking?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I recognise that this is a sensitive issue. In 2023-24, the Government committed to undertaking a review of the legislation on abortion. The recommendations in the report are those of the expert group, and the Government fulfilled its commitment to publish those recommendations.

We will, of course, give consideration to these issues, but that will have to involve extensive engagement with a broad range of stakeholders. The legitimate point that Mr Mason has raised will have to be central to the analysis of the issue, along with a range of other matters that will have to be considered in relation to any future actions that the Government may decide to take at some stage in the future.

### **Teachers (Class Contact Time)**

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has

announced a brand-new plan to deliver the Scottish National Party's promise on reducing teacher contact time. Can the First Minister tell us what is new about that plan? I assume that there was engagement and consultation with the councils and unions, so I assume that the strikes at the end of January are now off. When, therefore, will the plan be implemented?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** The education secretary's announcement set out the Government's commitments in that respect and the progress that needs to be made. I answered a question on the subject from Mr Cole-Hamilton last week or the week before—in fact, it was last week, because I then went to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities conference in St Andrews, in Mr Rennie's constituency, at which I set out the Government's expectation that progress is to be made on class contact time. I hope that the education secretary's proposals will help to advance the timescale for implementing those changes, because the last thing that I want to see is any industrial action in Scottish education.

### **Asylum (United Kingdom Government Proposals)**

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** With regard to the United Kingdom Government's asylum proposals, the assessment of the Scottish Refugee Council, which is exhibiting in Parliament this week, is that the proposals risk pushing the national conversation into dangerous territory by mirroring the language and tone of the far right. Does the First Minister agree with that assessment, which I believe will be shared by constituents across Scotland?

**The First Minister (John Swinney):** I share the concerns that Mr Kidd has set out to Parliament. The proposals run the risk of undermining the cohesion of our communities and pushing more people, including families with children, into poverty, destitution and increasing homelessness, and leaving local authorities to pick up the pieces. We need to take a sensitive approach to the whole question of asylum and immigration. Scotland is a welcoming country, and I want to make sure that that continues to be the case in the future.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Douglas Ross for a point of order.

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** In April 2024, Màiri McAllan announced that the Scottish Government would develop a just transition plan for Mossmorran. Russell Findlay and others have asked the First Minister about that plan, but he refused to give any answers.

The ministerial code says that ministers must be open and transparent with the public and the Parliament. Would it be a breach of the ministerial

code and, potentially, the standing orders of the Parliament if the First Minister is aware of where that plan is, but has refused to tell Parliament, or is aware that the development of the plan was never progressed and has not told Parliament that?

**The Presiding Officer:** As members are aware, the content of a member's contribution is not ordinarily a matter for the chair to comment on. However, as a matter of courtesy and respect, I expect all members to strive to be accurate in their contributions.

That concludes First Minister's questions. The next item of business is a members' business debate in the name of Clare Adamson. There will now be a short suspension to allow those in the chamber and in the public gallery who wish to leave to do so.

12:47

*Meeting suspended.*

12:48

*On resuming—*

## **Pancreatic Cancer Awareness**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** I encourage those who are leaving the chamber and the public gallery to do so as quickly and quietly as possible as we move on to the next item of business, which is a members' business debate on motion S6M-19074, in the name of Clare Adamson, on pancreatic cancer awareness month and world pancreatic cancer day 2025. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

*Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month, which takes place every November, and World Pancreatic Cancer Day 2025, which falls on 20 November; believes that, for decades, pancreatic cancer has been left behind; understands that it receives just 3% of the UK cancer research budget; considers that an increase in long-term investment in such research could transform persistent low survival rates; notes the view that there is an urgent need to improve early diagnosis and outcomes for people affected by the condition; considers that extremely low survival rates in Scotland exist largely due to late-stage diagnosis and limited access to robust diagnostics and treatment resources; notes calls for further action to ensure that people at higher risk of cancer are identified earlier and consistently across the country; further notes the view that both the development of a centralised, nationwide case-finding programme is necessary to proactively identify high-risk people across multiple cancer types and that it is vital to ensure that the provisions of the Rare Cancers Bill are fully implemented, including the development of a national prospective observational cohort study for rare and less survivable cancers to support ongoing research; commends all of the charities and activist organisations, and their dedicated supporters, on what it sees as their relentless efforts to improve outcomes for people with this condition, and wishes everyone involved with Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month and World Pancreatic Cancer Day every success in raising awareness of this devastating disease.

12:49

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I thank everyone who supported the motion recognising pancreatic cancer awareness month and world pancreatic cancer day, which is today for 2025, and all the members who took part in the photo call in the garden lobby a few weeks ago. I hope that members of Pancreatic Cancer UK and Pancreatic Cancer Action Scotland are with us today on this important occasion.

Although this might be the last pancreatic cancer debate in this parliamentary session, I trust that it will not be the last that we have in the Parliament, as we have established this regular debate as an important moment when we look at the impact of this incredibly devastating cancer.

Pancreatic cancer is the deadliest common cancer. Each year, just under 900 people in Scotland are diagnosed, and the statistics remain stark. Half of those diagnosed die within three months, eight in 10 are diagnosed too late for life-saving treatment and only seven in every 100 survive beyond five years. I know that it has touched members since our previous debate, as it has touched all of us over the years. On world pancreatic cancer day, it is crucial that we remember that those numbers represent families that will never be the same and lives that are cut painfully short.

The central problem that we face is that of late detection. Symptoms of pancreatic cancer are vague—back pain, indigestion, weight loss and jaundice—and are often viewed as non-urgent in primary care settings. Nine in 10 patients visit their general practitioner multiple times before being diagnosed. However, by that time, the cancer is often too advanced for surgery or other life-saving treatments.

We know that progress is possible, and we must have better outcomes. It is encouraging that research into early detection of pancreatic cancer is showing progress and has the potential to shift the dial towards earlier diagnosis during the next few years. That is because of organisations such as Pancreatic Cancer UK and Pancreatic Cancer Action, which fund research and are working to help doctors in primary care detect the disease earlier.

One such project is the volatile organic compound assessment in pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma—known as VAPOR—study, led by Professor George Hanna at Imperial College London. His team is developing a breath test for use in GP surgeries to rapidly identify patients with pancreatic cancer. Early results indicate that the test accurately detects the disease at its earliest stages. The study will advance to its second phase in the new year, which will see about 40 hospitals across the United Kingdom, including some here in Scotland, take part in a national trial. If successful, that simple test could transform the way in which people are referred for assessment, allowing the disease to be caught at a stage at which treatment is still possible.

We are also seeing pioneering work from researchers across Scotland. At the University of Glasgow, Professor Nigel Jamieson is leading a project to identify which pancreatic cysts are most likely to turn cancerous. That could allow early intervention for those who are most at risk. Other UK studies are developing blood and urine tests and tools to identify new-onset diabetes that can signal the earliest stages of pancreatic cancer. Each of those projects is a vital step towards earlier diagnosis and, ultimately, saving lives.

However, research alone is not enough. Pancreatic cancer research receives only 3 per cent of the UK's total cancer research funding, despite being on track to become the fourth leading cause of cancer-related death in the coming years, overtaking breast cancer. That imbalance and delay in progress is costing lives, and we urgently need a UK-wide commitment to achieve substantial improvements in survival rates for cancers with the poorest outcomes, including pancreatic, brain, liver, lung, oesophageal and stomach cancer. That must be achieved by the end of the decade.

We wait for the progress that new research will undoubtedly bring, but we must not lose sight of the patients who are facing cancer right now. Since I spoke in last year's members' business debate, another 900 people in Scotland will have been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and many of them will be subject to delays and variation in care.

I have been working closely with representatives of Pancreatic Cancer UK and Pancreatic Cancer Action and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to ensure that the new national hepato-pancreato-biliary cancer pathway covers referral, diagnosis and treatment. It is vital to ensure that no patient slips through the cracks. As part of that, the national centre for sustainable delivery will commence work on an optimal diagnostic pathway for HPB cancers, which is expected to be completed by 2026. I welcome the excellent opportunity to strengthen the diagnosis capacity across the health service and ensure that patients are referred for investigation as quickly and early as possible.

I think that there will be an opportunity for members to visit Pancreatic Cancer Action Scotland's pan can van outside the Scottish Parliament today. I commend Tunnock's, a Scottish icon that I am sure is in all our thoughts, given Scotland's wonderful performance the other night. Every year for pancreatic cancer day, Tunnock's produces tea cakes with an iconic purple covering, and this is a rare opportunity to see those in action. I urge all members to support the incredible work of Pancreatic Cancer Action and Pancreatic Cancer UK in raising awareness of the disease.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can confirm that the Tunnock's wafers on my Loganair flight were suitably badged.

12:56

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** I thank Clare Adamson for securing the debate once again this year. I sometimes wonder where the year goes between these debates. This has become an

annual debate and I hope that that continues to be the case in the next session of Parliament, because these debates are important.

As co-convener of the cross-party group on cancer, I thank the many campaigners who have joined us in the public gallery, not just for joining us but for their advocacy on the issue over many years. Like so many of us, they have had friends and family members who have been devastated by pancreatic cancer, which is what drives their desire for not only life-saving but life-improving healthcare for all those affected by the disease. I also put on record my thanks to Pancreatic Cancer Action Scotland and the Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce for their hard work and the briefings that they provided ahead of the debate.

Today is world pancreatic cancer day 2025. As many of us are aware, pancreatic cancer is one of the six less survivable cancers on which action is still greatly needed to improve outcomes. Less survivable cancers—those of the brain, liver, lung, stomach, oesophagus and pancreas—account for around a quarter of all cancer diagnoses in Scotland, affecting more than 9,000 people a year. That is not an insignificant number. However, in spite of that, the prognosis for those cancers has not improved in the way that we would want—the average five-year survival rate still sits at just 16 per cent.

Pancreatic cancer has the lowest survival rate of all cancers, with just 7 per cent of all patients surviving for five years or longer. In 2010, when Pancreatic Cancer Action was founded, the rate sat at just 3 per cent. Progress has been made, but not fast enough. Every one of us in Parliament wants that rate to improve, which is why so many members speak in the debate every year. Input and support from those with lived experience is crucial in helping us better understand pancreatic cancer. As we know, it is a fast-developing, devastating cancer that needs to be caught early.

Last week, I co-chaired the Scottish cancer conference at the University of Strathclyde, alongside Jackie Baillie. I had a number of interesting conversations about pancreatic cancer that day. There is a real call to ensure that the Scottish Government supports the national HPB pathway—a national approach that aligns closely with the new cancer action plan for 2023–26. The commitment to invest in improving the pathway for less survivable cancers, particularly pancreatic cancer, is really important. I hope that we see that turnaround.

The national model will ensure uniform care across all regions of our country, helping to reduce health inequalities and improve outcomes across Scotland. Therefore, it is a real step forward. It is also hoped that that pathway will address

Scotland's record long cancer waiting times, on which we need to keep a focus as well.

I urge ministers to support the implementation of the pathway to ensure that there is genuine progress on care targets. That call for action has been heard from campaigners for some time and if, as I hope we do, we see that progress, it will very much be down to their hard work.

Scotland has done a huge amount to ensure progress in tackling pancreatic cancer. We cannot forget that and we need to celebrate it. Although outcomes for patients might not be where we want them to be, we have made progress as a country.

I will end on a point of hope. I often come into contact with our former MSP colleague John Scott. Last weekend, I met him on Saturday in Stranraer. He was bouncing around my colleague's constituency delivering leaflets. John is an example of what I pray and hope that we will all see: a case in which cancer is detected early, it is treated and the person goes on to have good life expectancy and outcomes. For me, he is an example of where we should be.

On world pancreatic cancer day, let us honour those whom we have lost, thank those who are still fighting and pledge to do the very best that we can to ensure a brighter future so that those who are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer will be able to seek treatment and tackle their cancer.

13:01

**Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP):** I am grateful to Clare Adamson for bringing the debate to the chamber and I thank her for doing so.

I am delighted to hear Miles Briggs's update on John Scott. Those of us who had the pleasure of serving in the Parliament with Mr Scott all have enormous affection for him, despite political differences. Through Mr Briggs, I pass on my best wishes.

I thank the charities, survivors and family members for their work to keep the spotlight on the condition not only during pancreatic cancer awareness month but year round.

I was keen to speak at the request of a number of constituents who have been in contact with me asking if I would do so, because it enables me to mention their experience and allow their voices to be heard in the debate.

One constituent told me of losing her father to pancreatic cancer last year. The diagnosis came too late, as it often does, which gave him no chance. She told me of the devastation that that understandably caused her and her family. I was able to correspond with the Cabinet Secretary for

Health and Social Care and raise some of the issues in the family's experience of engaging with the national health service for his treatment. I was grateful for the response that the cabinet secretary sent me.

Another constituent spoke of losing her brother and yet another wrote to me to say that they themselves have, sadly, been diagnosed and described the obvious impact that that has had on them.

I send each of those constituents my best wishes. It is for them that I speak in the debate. For too many people, including too many of my constituents, this is a deeply personal debate on a disease that has a sudden and traumatic impact on their lives. I am sure that we will be united—we have already heard that—in pushing for more awareness, more research and earlier diagnosis and treatment for the condition.

The reality is that pancreatic cancer remains one of the less survivable cancers. It is a tough disease to diagnose and treat. Too many people are diagnosed only once symptoms have become severe and, by that stage, treatment options can be limited. The challenge for any health service is that a delay in diagnosis or treatment can prove fatal.

However, those challenges also point us to where we can make a difference as policy makers by improving early detection. I welcome the Scottish Government's detect cancer early programme, which takes a whole-systems approach to early detection that encompasses primary care, diagnostics, public education, data, innovation and screening. The new rapid cancer diagnostic services—including one in the NHS Lanarkshire area in which my and Ms Adamson's constituencies are located—are a further addition to how cancer can be diagnosed.

Clare Adamson's motion rightly points out the need for further research on pancreatic cancer as, at the moment, it receives only around 3 per cent of the United Kingdom cancer research budget. Not only should we consider whatever means are at our disposal and open to us to increase that percentage and the overall spending on cancer research, but, collectively, we must ensure that our excellent, world-class research institutions are able to attract the fullest range of international research funding and that international researchers know that they are welcome to come here to contribute to that effort.

I welcome what will be a consensual debate, given the broad consensus that we have on matters such as the importance of early diagnosis, greater research and the steps that the Government is taking to improve pathways for patients who might need treatment. I look forward

to hearing from the minister what more is being done to improve outcomes for patients with pancreatic cancer in Scotland.

I conclude by thanking my constituents who took the time to contact me about their experiences, whether as a patient or as the loved one of a patient, ahead of today's debate. It is not easy for people to talk about their own ill health or the loss of a loved one, and I am grateful to them for sharing their experiences with me.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Mr Hepburn. I very much echo your comments in relation to John Scott.

13:05

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I, too, thank Clare Adamson for bringing the debate to the chamber, and for all the work that she has done on pancreatic cancer over this session of Parliament.

I am glad that the Parliament is once again marking pancreatic cancer awareness month and highlighting the importance of greater awareness and timely diagnosis. I welcome the opportunity to contribute—I think that I have contributed in each of the previous annual debates.

It is important to take a moment to reflect on the scale of the illness and the profound impact that it has on many families. Others have mentioned the statistics, so I will not go back over them, but I will say that we must always remember that catching the cancer early dramatically improves the chances of treatment and recovery. We know from the statistics that eight in 10 people are diagnosed at a late stage, which means that they are often diagnosed too late for treatment. That is a tragedy. More than 50 per cent are diagnosed in emergency settings, such as accident and emergency, despite the vast majority of patients visiting their general practitioner multiple times before being diagnosed.

For patients, recognising the symptoms of pancreatic cancer represents a first step in diagnosis, especially in the absence of the early detection tests that others have mentioned. Symptoms can be vague, which can make the cancer really difficult to spot, so the public awareness campaigns that are run by charities and organisations to support early detection are crucial. I, too, thank the various organisations that do that work, and those that have contacted me ahead of today's debate for their work and for all the helpful briefings. The briefings show the scale of the problem and the challenge ahead; they also show us what we have to work towards.

Other members have mentioned the importance of research and the related challenges and

barriers, as well as the important tests that can detect the disease. We need all that work to come together so that we can improve survival rates. I noticed that, in the past 15 years, the five-year survival rate has increased from 3 per cent to 7 per cent. It has not moved at pace, but it shows that we can make a difference by working together, including with other nations.

Before closing, I will take a moment, as I often do, to reflect on health inequalities and their impact on outcomes for our constituents. We know that the detection of cancer in our more deprived communities can be very difficult. In those areas, people interact with health services in a very different way, and we have a responsibility to raise this issue time and again. The latest Public Health Scotland data revealed that the incidence of all cancers was 24 per cent greater in the most deprived areas compared with the least deprived areas. Often, that is about early detection and supporting people to get the right advice at the right time.

In previous debates, I have warned about the impact of health inequalities on some of our most vulnerable communities and called for urgent action in that regard. We must do more to empower our communities to speak to healthcare professionals when they need help, and to ensure that a clear and understandable plan is put in place to address any inequalities that people might face.

I thank the guests in the gallery for their attendance and all the members who have contributed to the debate.

13:10

**Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** I am grateful to my colleague Clare Adamson for bringing this important debate to the chamber during pancreatic cancer awareness month to mark today's world pancreatic cancer day.

Since being elected in 2021, I have spoken in all the debates that my colleagues Clare Adamson and Willie Coffey have brought to the chamber on this topic—it is one on which I will always speak up. I extend my sincere thanks to the amazing charities, such as Pancreatic Cancer Action and Pancreatic Cancer UK, to the Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce and to other dedicated organisations. I welcome them all here today. They are at the forefront of raising awareness and fighting for better outcomes for those with pancreatic cancer, and I thank them for that.

Unfortunately, pancreatic cancer is the deadliest common cancer and is often referred to as a “silent killer”, because its early symptoms are difficult to spot. As has been mentioned, around

900 people in Scotland are diagnosed with pancreatic cancer each year, with most being diagnosed too late for effective treatment. Sadly, half of those who are diagnosed with that deadly disease will die within three months and 93 per cent will die within five years.

Those extremely low survival rates are largely due to late-stage diagnosis and limited access to robust diagnostic and treatment resources. That is why I reiterate the common symptoms for the benefit of anyone who is listening: the whites of the eyes, or the skin, turning yellow; itchy skin; darker pee; poo that is paler than usual; loss of appetite; losing weight without trying to; feeling tired or having no energy; and having a high temperature or feeling hot or shivery.

It is vital that we push for long-term investment in research to ensure that we can beat those low survival rates. Currently, pancreatic cancer receives only 3 per cent of UK research funding. More investment and time are needed so that we can ensure fast identification of those who have pancreatic cancer.

We can all agree that more must be done, because this remains one of the deadliest forms of cancer. However, despite those challenges, advances have been made. According to the Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce, Scotland is leading the way on such cancers by identifying them as a strategic priority in the 10-year cancer strategy. If we can translate that into action that results in earlier and faster diagnosis, I hope that we will see significant improvements.

I also welcome the Scottish Government provision of funding from April 2022 to March 2024 for the then pancreatic cancer and hepatocellular carcinoma pathway improvement project. According to Pancreatic Cancer Action, the data from the project has been encouraging and improvements have been demonstrated.

Where do we go from here? Given that time really is of the essence for those who have this cruel and devastating disease, it is crucial that we support and get input from those with lived experience and expertise. As stated by Pancreatic Cancer Action, it is essential that the work and learning from developing and delivering the pancreatic cancer and hepatocellular carcinoma pathway and the Scottish hepato-pancreato-biliary service are incorporated and built on as fast as possible. We must ensure that we focus on the next steps and urgently consider how the benefits demonstrated can be delivered as a priority.

Finally, I pay tribute to my constituents who have, sadly, lost their lives because of pancreatic cancer. Helen, Donald, Billy and Christine will forever be missed by family, friends and loved ones, but they will never be forgotten, and that

applies to many others, too. We must work together in their memory to do everything that we can to raise awareness of that disease and to save lives.

Again, I thank Clare Adamson for bringing the debate to the chamber.

13:14

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries)**

**(Con):** I am grateful to Clare Adamson for securing this important debate, which marks world pancreatic cancer day during pancreatic cancer awareness month.

It is not the first time that I have spoken on this subject in the chamber. As deputy convener of the cross-party group on brain tumours and a member of the cross-party group on cancer, I have always maintained that raising awareness of all cancers is vitally important. As MSPs, we are privileged to have not just the opportunity but the duty to raise awareness.

At this point in the debate, there will always be repetition of statistics, but I make no apology, because highlighting them is so important. Pancreatic cancer is one of the six less survivable cancers and is known as a “silent killer”, because its early symptoms are difficult to spot. The grim reality is that only one in four people diagnosed survives more than a year. In Scotland, survival rates remain among the worst in Europe—we are 35th out of 36 comparable countries—and that is unacceptable.

Around 900 people are diagnosed in Scotland each year, and more than 10,500 across the UK. Tragically, half of those who are diagnosed in Scotland will die within three months and 93 per cent within five years. With incidence rising, pancreatic cancer deaths could soon overtake breast cancer deaths.

One of the major areas of concern is improving pathways for people with pancreatic and liver cancer. Scotland has been leading the way through the then—this is where I get tongue-tied—pancreatic and hepatocellular carcinoma pathway improvement project, whose work was peer reviewed and published in the *European Journal of Surgical Oncology*. The project has delivered statistically significant improvements across all seven key performance indicators for pancreatic cancer, reducing staging times and improving communication. It proved that expedited diagnostic pathways save lives. However, that service was closed—twice.

We cannot afford to lose momentum. The Scottish Government must act faster, by building on what has worked rather than starting from scratch. Late diagnosis remains a critical factor in

influencing outcomes. We need urgent action now, and we need earlier and faster diagnosis, quicker pathways and greater investment in research. Lives depend on that. There is hope. Scotland is working on a national optimal diagnostic pathway for HPB cancers, but time is of the essence. Pancreatic cancer is different—it moves fast, and every delay costs lives.

Previously, I raised awareness of a major problem in Dumfries and Galloway, which was the lack of hospice care. With around 1,200 new cancer diagnoses in D and G each year, the need for accessible, compassionate support has never been greater. That is why I supported efforts to establish a Maggie’s centre in Dumfries, which is the home town of the charity’s founder, Maggie Keswick Jencks. Earlier this year, I was delighted to hear the announcement that a new cancer support centre will be housed locally. That is a giant step forward, because Maggie’s centres across the country are renowned for their holistic approach to cancer care, and having one in Dumfries will make a profound difference to those who live locally.

Returning to pancreatic cancer, the Less Survivable Cancers Taskforce recommends that the Scottish HPB cancer service should become a national initiative, not a regional model. I fully support that, as I did last year.

As I stated in my members’ business debate on rural healthcare yesterday, equity is essential in healthcare. In this instance, equity of access is key—ensuring uniform care across all regions, including Dumfries and Galloway.

Education must be one of the most powerful weapons. Raising awareness is critical, not just for early detection but for improving patient experience and outcomes. I will repeat the symptoms: yellowing of the skin or eyes; darker urine; paler stools; itchy skin; loss of appetite or unexplained weight loss; fatigue; lack of energy; and a high temperature or feeling hot and shivery.

Regrettably, our understanding of the disease is limited, but we know that smoking, obesity and family history increase risks.

Many of us have lost family and friends to pancreatic cancer. Today, on world pancreatic cancer day, once again, I will take the opportunity to remember my pals, Mark Caygill and Peter Murray Usher. This is the most difficult part of any speech—it is not about stats. They were taken far too young. The man who was my mentor, a dear friend and the person who is ultimately responsible for me being here in this place today, is a former Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, Sir Alex Fergusson, who died of cancer only a few months after retiring.

This is Scotland's deadliest common cancer, so we cannot accept the status quo. We must act urgently, collectively and decisively, because lives depend on it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Willie Coffey is the final speaker in the open debate.

13:19

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** I thank my colleague Clare Adamson for again raising awareness of pancreatic cancer. I have tried to participate in the debate on the subject each year in which I have been a member of the Parliament and in memory of my mother, who died from the disease in 1985—some 40 years ago—at the age of only 52. Although it remains one of the most stubborn cancers, progress is being made, with the emphasis on early detection of the vague symptoms that it presents. This will be the last time that I make such a contribution, but I will look in next year to hear the debate and to continue my support for the work that is being done to battle the cancer.

I am grateful to Pancreatic Cancer UK for its briefing. Among the stats and information that it provided, one thing stood out for me—that 80 per cent of people with pancreatic cancer are diagnosed too late. Some members have mentioned that. I hope that that frightening statistic will alert the public to take seriously some of the vague symptoms that can appear. Early detection and diagnosis hold the key to more treatment options and lead to better survival rates.

Clare Adamson and other members have described those vague symptoms, and we need to repeat them—it is always worth doing that. Unexplained weight loss, indigestion, stomach and back pain, new-onset diabetes and even yellowing of the skin have already been mentioned by members, but we have to get that message through to the public. Folk should visit their GP to begin the process of being checked out if they experience those symptoms. Interestingly, around one in five people over the age of 60—as I am—will already have a pancreatic cyst, but only a small percentage of those will develop into pancreatic cancer.

I will take a brief look at some of the research that is going on. At the University of Glasgow, there is work being done to identify the features of higher-risk cysts in order to help doctors make the important treatment decisions. At the University of Liverpool, a test has been developed to identify type 3c diabetes, which may be an early indicator and an early warning sign. As Clare Adamson mentioned, Imperial College London is developing a breath test—a world first—that GPs could perform directly, after which they could make

further referrals if need be. At the University of Essex, a new blood test is being developed that can help with early detection. Those are just a few examples of the fantastic work that is going on, which I hope will make a real difference to survival rates from the cancer.

We hear that family inheritance also plays a part. One in 10 cases are connected with inheritance. Even more work is being done on that, through the family history checker. I wish that some of that work had been funded 40 years ago.

I turn to some asks of the Government—basically, that it offers more support for diagnostic capacity across Scotland. If we are alerting the public to issues and conditions that may be a cause for concern, we need to provide people with easy, localised access to get the help that they might need. We need a centralised service to co-ordinate the family inheritance effort and to identify high-risk individuals across multiple cancer types.

Perhaps, in this day and age, we also need a wee bit more help from artificial intelligence, with the analytics and data analysis that are making great strides in medical science elsewhere. I know that the universities of Strathclyde and Glasgow are deploying AI techniques in their research, and I wish them good luck with that work. I wish all who are engaged in the research the very best of luck, and I ask the Scottish Government to help as best we can to support the research that might help us to begin to win the battle against pancreatic cancer.

Lastly, I thank my colleague Clare Adamson for again bringing the issue to the attention of the Scottish people, through their Parliament.

13:23

**The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto):** I thank my colleague Clare Adamson for bringing the motion to the chamber today and reminding us of the impact that pancreatic cancer can have. I took part in debates on the subject as a back bencher, because I recognise the importance of raising awareness.

I also thank Pancreatic Cancer Action, Pancreatic Cancer UK and others for their continued efforts in raising awareness of pancreatic cancer and supporting people and their loved ones who are facing that diagnosis. I, too, welcome those organisations to the Scottish Parliament today.

I thank my colleagues in the chamber for sharing such valuable contributions to the debate. Like Jamie Hepburn and other members, I have been contacted by constituents, in Argyll and Bute, and I have heard from families who are grieving the loss of a loved one through pancreatic cancer.



I thank them for their courage in sharing their stories, with the heartfelt aim of improving knowledge and awareness.

Pancreatic cancer awareness month comes as a stark reminder to us all of the dreadful impact that a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer can have. The outcomes are typically poor, and we must significantly improve that situation at pace. I thank Marie McNair and Finlay Carson for describing the symptoms so clearly in their contributions. Willie Coffey and Finlay Carson are both absolutely right that we, as MSPs, are privileged to be able to help raise awareness.

The Scottish Government's ambitious 10-year "Cancer Strategy for Scotland 2023-2033", which was published in 2023, makes clear our determination to improve cancer survival rates. Our earlier cancer diagnosis vision underpins our investment in a range of programmes that are aimed at supporting early diagnosis, which will help us to improve survival rates. It includes publishing the refreshed Scottish referral guidelines for suspected cancer, which support primary care clinicians in recognising the symptoms that may indicate cancer, including pancreatic cancer. The guidelines include, for the first time, criteria for non-specific symptoms; that is especially important for pancreatic cancer, as its early signs can be subtle and easily missed.

As Jamie Hepburn noted, we launched Scotland's sixth rapid cancer diagnostic service this year. Those services are diagnosing cancer faster for those with non-specific symptoms. An independent evaluation by the University of Strathclyde found that hepato-pancreato-bili—it is my turn to get it wrong; I will just say HPB—cancers made up 17 per cent of the cancers that were found. I note the valuable work of all those involved in pilot projects to speed up the time from referral to diagnosis and treatment for patients with HPB cancers. Those involved have a key role in making it clear that we must do more for patients with pancreatic cancer across the whole cancer care pathway, not just part of it.

As Carol Mochan noted, collaboration is important. That is why we commissioned the Scottish HPB network to take forward the consensus and develop national recommended pathways for HPB cancers. The SHPBN has started to develop the clinical management pathway for those cancers, which will promote equitable routes to cancer care across Scotland, with patients at the centre. The network has also provided its clinical consensus on what optimal diagnosis for patients should look like to the centre for sustainable delivery, for use in its delivery of the upper gastrointestinal optimal diagnostic pathway, which will include HPB cancers. Those pieces of work will both be delivered in 2026.

As members have said, a pancreatic cancer diagnosis is devastating for those who are diagnosed and for their loved ones. I cannot stress enough the importance of person-centred care, to ensure that all patients get access to support throughout their cancer journey and that their voices and needs are heard.

The Scottish Government continues to support and invest in our single-point-of-contact pilots. Those aim to ensure that all patients have a point of contact to support them in navigating their cancer care, thereby improving shared decision making between the individual and their clinical teams and access to timely reporting of results. It has been found that the single-point-of-contact pilots have had more than 30,000 patient interactions, freeing up more than 3,970 hours of clinical nurse specialist time and improving experiences. We are actively considering how we best scale up that approach in order to benefit all patients with cancer in Scotland.

Through the transforming cancer care programme, the Scottish Government is working in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to improve the service that we offer patients with cancer. That partnership is worth £27 million and is the first of its kind in the UK. From April 2024 to March 2025, more than 6,000 people across Scotland were supported through the programme by a specialist key worker, who signposted them to emotional, financial and practical support. That includes considering what local community assets and support services are available. I recognise Carol Mochan's points about inequalities, and I believe that this service goes some way towards alleviating those.

We have taken important steps to improve care for people at every stage of their journey. This autumn, we published the "Palliative Care Matters for All" strategy, alongside refreshed national guidelines and new training resources to support those who deliver care.

I, too, would like to reflect on the positive news that Finlay Carson mentioned about the Maggie's centre in Dumfries and Galloway, which makes a profound difference to those living with cancer and their families. We are working to strengthen bereavement support, where required, and to ensure that spiritual care is not just available but truly embedded in everyday practice.

Investment in our understanding of pancreatic cancer is key to the ability to prevent, identify and treat it. Our strategy makes clear the importance of research to our strategic aim of improving cancer survivability and providing excellent equitably accessible care to patients in Scotland. The Scottish Government's chief scientist office directly funds research projects and fellowships. Last year, we committed more than £620,000 to

fund two research projects at the University of Glasgow. The first project is looking at cells in pre-cancerous lesions that are at high risk of progressing to pancreatic cancer, and the second is looking at how cancer cells and immune cells interact in a way that can affect responses to initial chemotherapy. Our chief scientist office will continue to work with the University of Glasgow as the research progresses.

I want to make clear the Scottish Government's enduring commitment to improving pancreatic cancer outcomes and supporting the importance of raising awareness. In doing so, we can improve early diagnosis rates as well as patient experience and overall outcomes. I look forward to seeing flashes of purple in support of pancreatic cancer awareness month, which will include lighting up the Scottish Government buildings St Andrew's house and Victoria Quay tomorrow.

I thank everyone for their contributions and I especially thank the charities that are in the Parliament today. I hope that we can move to improve outcomes for patients with pancreatic cancer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate.

13:32

*Meeting suspended.*

14:00

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Climate Action and Energy, and Transport

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. The next item of business is portfolio question time, and the portfolio is climate action and energy, and transport.

### 30th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties

**1. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government, in relation to its climate policies, what it hopes to achieve through its representation at COP30 in Brazil. (S6O-05179)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin):** The Scottish Government's representation at COP30 delivered on our programme for government commitment to lead on climate action internationally. At COP30, I pressed for the scaling up of quality finance to meet the needs of the most vulnerable; advocated for greater recognition of states, regions and devolved Governments in global climate processes through Scotland's leadership roles as president of Regions4 and a co-chair of the Under2 Coalition; and confirmed funding for loss and damage, human rights and adaptation projects as part of the £36 million climate justice fund. I also showcased our climate justice and loss and damage programming, ensuring that the voices of the global south were amplified.

**Rona Mackay:** I welcome the Scottish Government's funding for loss and damage, human rights and adaptation projects, which were announced at COP30 last week, and the continued commitment to climate justice and action. Can the cabinet secretary say any more about the Scottish Government's domestic work to reach net zero, including through the recently published draft climate change plan?

**Gillian Martin:** I thank Rona Mackay for giving that context. Our climate change plan is very important when we represent internationally what we do and share our thoughts on how we can all decarbonise. Our plan sets out 150 actions across transport, buildings and agriculture that are aimed at meeting Scotland's carbon budgets while supporting people to make and adjust to the changes that are required.

The plan introduces new measures to accelerate the transition to electric vehicles, electrify industry and reduce emissions while making Scottish industry more competitive. The plan also describes how we will ensure that the opportunities that net zero presents for new jobs and economic growth, better infrastructure and energy security, cleaner air and improved public services are seized and fairly distributed as part of a just transition.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Can the cabinet secretary confirm whether she flew business class to Brazil and the total cost of the trip for her and her officials? Can she explain why that money would not have been better spent on constituents who are seeing their communities ruined by monster pylons and battery storage?

**Gillian Martin:** A Government does international engagement as a matter of course. It is very important that every Government—whether it is a devolved Government in Scotland, the UK Government or any other Government—engages with international partners on items of great importance. Climate change is a global emergency and it requires an international response.

Douglas Lumsden knows that every Government will have expenses associated with any international travel, and he knows how to find out my expenses for that trip.

### Clyde Metro Proposals

2. **George Adam (Paisley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update regarding plans for the proposed Clyde metro. (S6O-05180)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** The on-going stage of the development process for Clyde metro, known as the case for investment, is being led by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport. It is being supported by Glasgow City Council, with Transport Scotland providing a project assurance role. That key stage, which will inform decisions around network selection, phasing and implementation, is well under way and is anticipated to be complete in 2027.

**George Adam:** The cabinet secretary will be aware that one of the proposals for Clyde metro is to have a rail link from Glasgow airport through Paisley Gilmour Street station. Given that Paisley Gilmour Street is one of the busiest stations in Scotland, does she not agree that having that link would make the entire project more viable and offer economic success for the town of Paisley? Does the cabinet secretary agree that the station would be one of the more important parts of the Clyde metro, as it is smack in the centre of the universe of Paisley?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The on-going stage of the development process for the Clyde metro will inform decisions on network selection, phasing, implementation and funding. I confirm to George Adam that the work includes consideration of access improvements to Glasgow airport by public transport. I am sure that he will make representations to Strathclyde Partnership for Transport on the case for links to Paisley Gilmour Street as part of that process.

The Clyde metro is a transformational project. It would address the gaps that he has identified in public transport provision in the region and make sure that there is connectivity between sectors of education, employment, leisure and tourism, and it is clear that Paisley is one of the key areas that need to be connected. However, as I set out, it is SPT's role to develop those network selections.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that the fragmentation of control between the Scottish Government and the regional transport partnership militates against efficiency, when compared to other jurisdictions that have delivered metro rail very efficiently, such as Madrid? For example, the advanced manufacturing innovation district Scotland—AMIDS—south project in Paisley cannot consider very light rail in order to get a quick win with a shuttle train between the airport terminal and Paisley Gilmour Street because of the lack of span of control between rail and road, and because road projects always take priority by default.

**Fiona Hyslop:** It is open to Transport Scotland to work with SPT on all those connectivity issues at the request of SPT. I am sure that Paul Sweeney will make those representations to Strathclyde Partnership for Transport as it sets out the network selections and connections. If he is saying that we should centralise all the decision making over transport in Scotland, I am not sure that that would be good, but synergy between rail and road and other forms of public transport, as has been set out in the options for Clyde metro, would make sense. I encourage everyone to look at the issue from a place-based perspective.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Reform):** I agree with the cabinet secretary that the Clyde metro could be transformational, but we need to see more detail. She mentions that there could be some kind of update by 2027. Will that provide more detail on what routes there might be and the kind of transport that would be on them?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The case for change, which strengthens the rationale for Clyde metro, will be set out with a vision and objectives. The development of potential network options to address problems and opportunities will also be identified in the case for change, as well as the emerging shortlist of network options, which is

what Graham Simpson is asking for. Those will be taken forward for further development. That will all be considered along with the potential modes for Clyde metro, including bus rapid transit, tram, tram-train and metro, which also relates to the question that Paul Sweeney asked.

### **Climate Change Impacts (Nature-based Solutions)**

**3. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting communities and local authorities to adapt to the impacts of climate change, including through nature-based solutions. (S6O-05181)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin):** Nature is one of the best tools that we have to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Nature can support our physical and mental health, cool our urban areas in summer and, critically, protect our places from heavy rain and floods.

Scottish Government funding streams such as the £65 million nature restoration fund, the water environment fund, our network of climate action hubs and practical resources from NatureScot and Adaptation Scotland support the huge efforts of community groups and local authorities, which are already delivering those nature-based solutions on the ground.

**David Torrance:** A recent poll by the MCS Foundation found that although more than a third of Scots do not feel informed about what action is being taken to meet their climate targets, a clear majority still see climate action as important, with 66 per cent of people saying that they would replace their current fossil fuel boiler to help tackle climate change. The Government's existing support, including Home Energy Scotland's advice service and the roll-out of local heat and energy efficiency strategies, already helps individuals and local communities to make the right decisions about how to decarbonise their home heating.

Will the cabinet secretary say more about the differences that those services are making and confirm the Government's continued commitment to delivering a national advice service so that households can make well-informed and confident choices about the future of heating their homes?

**Gillian Martin:** I am pleased that David Torrance highlights the local heat and energy efficiency strategies and Home Energy Scotland. It is absolutely the duty of a local MSP to highlight the support services that are available to allow households to decarbonise. It is crucial that we help people to make informed, positive climate choices. Councils have completed their first round of local heat and energy efficiency strategies, which help to set out likely solutions across

Scotland. The right solution in each case is dependent on individual properties and choices, and those choices need to be informed and made with advice.

Our Home Energy Scotland advice service continues to support thousands of households annually with free bespoke and impartial advice to make their homes easier, cheaper and greener to heat. The service also points people to sources of grant support, including the warmer homes Scotland scheme and the Home Energy Scotland grant and loan schemes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 has not been lodged.

### **Energy Infrastructure (Domestic Supply Chain)**

**5. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I apologise to the chamber for my late arrival—I had not realised that the timetable had changed.

To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the growth of the domestic supply chain for energy infrastructure. (S6O-05183)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin):** We are directly supporting the sector through the just transition fund and our commitment to invest up to £500 million over five years in offshore wind infrastructure and manufacturing. That includes support for projects such as those involving Maritime Developments, Verlume and Sumitomo's cable factory. We are also supporting ports across Scotland—including at Ardersier and Kishorn—which are critical to the deployment of all those projects. Over the past 18 months, we have invested almost £150 million and have leveraged about £740 million of wider investment into 10 projects, which have the potential to support about 5,000 jobs across Scotland. That is just the start—we have seen that port developments can support hundreds more jobs indirectly.

**Brian Whittle:** If we are to make the most of the economic opportunities that come with modernising and expanding our energy infrastructure, having a strong domestic supply chain is vital. We are already hearing warnings from across the sector that, due to a lack of domestic manufacturing capacity, it risks missing out on tens of billions of pounds of inward investment. However, we are still not even close to providing enough college and apprenticeship places to meet the demand for engineers, technicians and those with other trades that those sectors are desperate to recruit in order to build that capacity. In fact, many places for such courses are being cut because of financial pressure. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that, without a skilled workforce, we cannot

possibly hope to reap the benefits that would come from modernising our energy infrastructure and that cutting places is the absolute worst thing that we could be doing?

**Gillian Martin:** I am glad to hear Brian Whittle focus on the economic opportunities that are associated with energy infrastructure. He makes very good points that are often missed by his colleagues about the economic importance of that.

A source of great dismay to me has been that there are no local conditions as part of the National Energy System Operator's procurement of an energy and electricity upgrade system. I have written to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero about that issue. When we did our ScotWind round, we made sure that there were local procurement and local content provisions within the conditions. Doing so meant that the economic growth would stay in Scotland. We have also recently invested in a programme of offshore wind skills training provision, and we recently opened the offshore wind skills hub in the city of Aberdeen.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 has been withdrawn.

### United Kingdom Railways Bill

**7. Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the outcome of its discussions with the UK Government regarding its Railways Bill. (S6O-05185)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** The UK Government's Railways Bill has, as we understand it, been informed by the success of the Scottish Government's policy of integrated management of track and train in Scotland's railway. Our preferred policy position remains that it is in Scotland's best interests for rail powers to be devolved fully. However, we support the bill's policy intent, as it seeks to maximise the benefits of greater rail industry integration while respecting current devolved responsibilities. The bill will allow the Scottish Government to have greater accountability for rail infrastructure, reflecting the significant financial investment that we make. It will also give the Scottish ministers new powers to give directions and guidance to Great British railways on Scottish railway activities.

Although we are supportive of the bill, it will be subject to further scrutiny, including through the Scottish Parliament's legislative consent process, which we are now going through. Further updates will be provided in due course.

**Bob Doris:** Despite the majority of funding for Scotland's railways coming from the Scottish

Government, not all aspects of them are fully accountable to the Scottish Parliament. The cabinet secretary addressed that point in her initial response. The bill will not alter the fundamental reality of that.

The Scottish National Party has shown what can be achieved when decisions about Scotland's railways are taken in Scotland. Notwithstanding what the cabinet secretary has already said, does she agree that, despite the UK Government's current position, the bill provides a major opportunity to devolve powers over Scotland's railways fully into the control of this Parliament and Government and to let us get on with the job of running the best railways in the UK?

**Fiona Hyslop:** In Scotland, public ownership by the SNP Government has created the opportunity to deliver a railway that is truly run for the benefit of passengers, our communities and our businesses. Our approach is widely admired and even envied elsewhere in Great Britain. Our counterparts in Wales and the north of England want to follow the success of our devolved model, which has resulted in consistently higher passenger satisfaction in ScotRail train performance than the GB average.

It remains our strong position that the best policy is to devolve rail powers fully, which would enable us to build on success and would reflect the level of funding that we provide to Scotland's railway—more than £1.5 billion this year. However, within the limitations of the bill, I have secured greater ministerial powers of direction for the aspects of rail that we fund and set strategy for.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** Proposals in the Railways Bill would require the UK Secretary of State for Transport to set an overall target of a 75 per cent increase in the amount of freight moved by rail by 2050. I am keen to understand what engagement the cabinet secretary has had with the UK Government on rail freight. Does she agree that maintaining open access for rail freight companies is the best way to ensure that goods can be moved more effectively across Scotland?

**Fiona Hyslop:** As part of the bill's development, I have had extensive discussions in person with Lord Hendy, the rail minister, and the secretary of state, Heidi Alexander. Issues of cross-border travel are part of continuing discussions—intercity travel and freight are essential parts of rail development, as are aspects of access. The issue of open access is critical to the UK Government's decision making. We have set out in our strategy and our high-level output specification that freight is essential. I am pleased to see that the UK Government has copied that and reflected in its position the need to increase rail freight. That is encouraging, but, until rail powers are fully

devolved, we will always have to protect Scotland's interests in our on-going discussions with the UK Government.

**Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** It would seem that the UK Government takes a more positive approach, because the Railways Bill's policy documentation says that all three Governments—UK, Scottish and Welsh—support the reforms and will continue to work together to deliver benefits. I urge the Scottish Government to work co-operatively on the bill, and I am encouraged to learn that work is being done on a memorandum of understanding between our two Governments.

The issue of freight has already been raised. What benefits can the cabinet secretary see from the Railways Bill in relation to increased partnership working between Transport Scotland and Great British rail?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The bill will give ministers control and direction over railways in Scotland. That includes the infrastructure that is currently under Network Rail and the infrastructure that we have in public ownership in relation to ScotRail and the Caledonian Sleeper.

I have had numerous extensive discussions with the UK Government, and those discussions continue. I am co-operating extremely well—I am sure that the UK Government would acknowledge that. However, I have been absolutely clear, as I was in the Parliament during our debate, that there is no way in which I would countenance any diminution of our devolved responsibilities.

We have to chart a way forward, and the bill is part of that. Claire Baker referred to the memorandum of understanding, which will be critical for the issues relating to rail freight, as set out by Sue Webber, and other matters. The bill includes aspects that, currently, we would be asked about or consulted on by the secretary of state. The situation will be reversed for some issues—for example, we will set the strategy for rail freight—but we will reflect and consult with the secretary of state on other matters. Therefore, in some instances, the roles will be reversed, and good co-operation and understanding will be required.

Although I support the bill, as I have said, we will have to go through the legislative consent memorandum process. Of the 90-odd sections of the bill, 27 will affect Scotland, so that is an extensive piece of work that will go to the committee. I hope that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government can work constructively with the UK Government to ensure that we get the best result for Scotland. Full devolution would be the best result, but, short of that, I think that we can work with the bill.

## Draft Climate Change Plan 2026 to 2040

**8. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it is making in discussing Scotland's draft climate change plan 2026 to 2040 with stakeholders and MSPs. (S6O-05186)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin):** I wrote to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, the Climate Change Committee, the United Kingdom Government, environmental non-governmental organisations, the Just Transition Commission and business and third sector groups to inform them of the draft plan's publication. A public consultation on the plan is now open on the Government's website, and we will hold public engagement activities to make it as active and inclusive as possible. We will also continue to convene the climate change plan advisory group to gather expert views and will continue to engage with members of the Scottish Parliament throughout the consultation period.

I have offered meetings to the NZET Committee's convener and to numerous MSPs—those invitations went out in the past couple of days—and my door remains open for anyone across the chamber to engage on the draft plan. I certainly include Monica Lennon in that if she wants to discuss the plan with me.

**Monica Lennon:** I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for that welcome update. Organisations across the energy, manufacturing and housing sectors are expected to deliver the clean heat ambitions that are set out in the draft climate change plan, but many are saying that they cannot plan properly for the scale of the challenge, especially now that the heat in buildings bill has been kicked down the road until after the election.

I recognise the wider engagement that the cabinet secretary has carried out, and I welcome her offer today. What can she say to stakeholders who think that there is a lack of certainty and who want that effective engagement to continue?

**Gillian Martin:** I refer Monica Lennon and anyone from those sectors to the statement that was made by my colleague Màiri McAllan. She gave some of the reasons why she thought that it was best to publish a draft heat in buildings bill in this parliamentary session, but she could not make a commitment to get the bill through by the end of the parliamentary session because we do not have certainty about the UK Government's warm homes plan or the electricity and gas pricing arrangements. That information is critical when it comes to taking a view on the measures that we can take, because the price of electricity is fundamental to the plans for decarbonisation of heat in Scotland. I refer Monica Lennon and

anyone else who wants details on that to the statement that Ms McAllan made on Tuesday.

The draft bill is out for consultation. It is available for people to see, and the certainty on it and the trajectory are there for people to see. Ms McAllan was certain that she wanted to give that certainty.

**Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):** Scotland will fail to meet its target to reduce food waste by one third by this year. In 2019, the Scottish Government said that it would deliver sustained communication to drive change. Unfortunately, that change was to increase food waste. What work is on-going to engage consumers and businesses to deliver behaviour change?

**Gillian Martin:** Maurice Golden will be aware that we have a circular economy route map, which has been worked on with the involvement of local authorities. We are working with them to reduce food waste, in particular, across the 32 local authorities. We are also working closely with my colleagues in the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on that. I can signpost Maurice Golden to the more recent circular economy announcements about the publishing of the route map and the results of the engagement work that has been undertaken as a result of the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024.

## Offshore Wind

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a statement by Gillian Martin on offshore wind. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:23

**The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin):** Offshore wind development presents an era-defining opportunity to grow our green economy for the benefit of communities across Scotland while supporting our energy security and our journey towards net zero.

Through our world-leading ScotWind and innovation and targeted oil and gas—INTOG—leasing rounds, Scotland is at the forefront of offshore wind development globally, with a potential project pipeline of more than 40GW. That is more than 40 per cent of the United Kingdom's total pipeline, which is one of the largest in the world.

Our abundant natural resources, world-leading subsea engineering capabilities, strong skills base in oil and gas production, and extensive potential pipeline of projects mean that we are uniquely positioned to lead the global charge on offshore wind and to be at the heart of Europe's energy transition for decades to come.

Most importantly, Scotland's offshore wind journey is about opportunities for the people of Scotland: opportunities for our communities and our workforce; opportunities for our young people who are just starting out in their careers; opportunities for supporting a just transition; opportunities for reinvigorating coastal communities; and opportunities for growing our economy in a sustainable way.

Although I acknowledge the uncertainty that global market dynamics—including the decisions by some to pivot away from renewables—are currently bringing to the offshore wind sector, there should be no doubt that offshore wind remains one of Scotland's most significant economic opportunities and our key competitive advantage in the energy transition. Indeed, as several recent strategic acquisition and investment decisions by committed developers have demonstrated, it is clear that there is confidence in Scotland's offshore wind market.

The Scottish public sector continues to be steadfast in its backing of the offshore wind industry. The Scottish National Investment Bank's investment in the Pentland project, which was announced yesterday, sends a clear signal to the

market that floating wind technology is of critical importance for Scotland's energy transition, our supply chain and our economy. It also marks the bank's and the United Kingdom National Wealth Fund's first joint investment.

Our pipeline of offshore wind projects continues to turn potential into reality. For example, the Moray West and Neart na Gaoithe offshore wind farms became fully operational earlier this year. They have a combined capacity of 1.3GW, which is enough to power more than 1 million homes. In addition, Inch Cape offshore wind farm is now under construction. The company took me through its plans at Montrose port the week before I stood alongside its micropiles on the quayside at the port of Leith as I launched the climate change plan.

We estimate that the potential capital value of the Scottish offshore wind market could be around £100 billion, given full deployment of the potential pipeline. We are in a unique position to maximise that potential and build on Scotland's already strong reputation as a destination for offshore wind investment.

A key ingredient is our approach to leveraging wider investment. In the past 18 months alone, we have invested around £150 million in the offshore wind supply chain and ports. That has leveraged around £740 million of wider investment in 10 projects, which have the potential to support around 5,000 jobs in communities across Scotland, including at Ardersier, Montrose, Scapa, Lerwick, Nigg and Kishorn.

Scotland has already seen significant commitments from capital and inward investors. The development at Ardersier port, which has the potential to support around 3,000 jobs and reskilling opportunities, is one of the largest regeneration projects in the Highlands for decades. Forth Ports has invested £150 million in expanding offshore wind capabilities. Sumitomo is investing £350 million in a subsea cable factory, which is projected to support around 330 jobs over 10 years, and, just last month, Mitsui & Co Europe Ltd and MOL—Mitsui OSK Lines Ltd—announced plans for a multimillion-pound upgrade at the Port of Nigg. I was glad to meet them last month.

One of the most significant opportunities lies in the offshore wind industry's ability to support well-paid, secure and sustainable employment for people across Scotland. As it continues to grow, the offshore wind sector is providing opportunities to those who are entering the job market for the first time, as well as those who want or need to change careers as part of a just transition.

Last week, we published "Scotland's Offshore Wind Skills Priorities and Action Plan". Developed in partnership with industry and public sector partners, the plan sets out initial actions that are to

be taken over the next two years to support the pipeline of skilled workers that will be needed by the offshore wind sector right across Scotland.

The actions build on existing work that is aimed at upskilling Scotland's renewable energy workforce, which includes the recently launched energy transition skills hub and the oil and gas transition training fund, which is supporting our valued oil and gas workers to retrain and upskill and move into new renewable energy job opportunities.

We are also working hard to manage the marine space in a planned way that ensures that the interests of the marine environment and all marine users, including our valued fishing sector, are properly considered. That is central to our considerations as we update the sectoral marine plan for offshore wind energy and work to support the delivery of strategic compensation and a Scottish marine recovery fund.

I am, of course, fully aware that where there is an opportunity to be realised there will also be challenges that need to be overcome. Current global market dynamics are bringing uncertainty, which is exactly why the Government chooses to back the sector and provide it with the regulatory, policy and investment stability that it needs to grow.

However, action also needs to be taken by others. We continue to work closely with the UK Government on our shared ambitions around clean power to deliver economic growth and energy security and to support net zero ambitions, but we need action on critical issues that relate to reserved powers. To secure project delivery in Scotland, the UK Government must prioritise the reforms that are necessary to make transmission charges fairer so that there is a level playing field for Scottish projects, and it must bring forward grid connection dates. A lack of certainty on network connection dates and the unfair transmission charging regime are the most significant barriers to the delivery of Scottish offshore wind projects.

This year's contracts for difference allocation round 7 is a pivotal moment to inject fresh momentum into Scotland's offshore wind sector and build on the strategic investments in our supply chain that have been made to date. In my ask of the UK Government I have been clear that the final budget for allocation round 7 must facilitate the deployment of fixed and floating offshore wind projects in Scotland while ultimately keeping prices affordable for consumers. Let us be clear that an underfunded auction would jeopardise the delivery of Scotland's offshore wind pipeline, undermine investor confidence and risk pushing investment and jobs that are of critical importance, not least to those in the north-east, towards other markets.



We will continue to work constructively with the UK Government and other partners to ensure that Scotland's offshore wind sector reaches its full potential, because we all need to play our part. It is imperative that all of us, as Scotland's elected representatives, advocate for the sector, given the size of the prize for our economy, energy security and net zero ambitions. In doing so, we will reinforce to investors that Scotland is a prime destination for investment in offshore wind projects, supply chain and infrastructure.

Offshore wind offers not just an energy solution but a huge economic and social opportunity for the people of Scotland. Although I acknowledge that there are challenges to be overcome, the fact remains that Scotland is seen globally as a country that is leading the way and one from which others can learn; a country that is doing everything within its power to deliver the benefits that our tremendous potential pipeline of offshore wind projects represents, and in a way that ensures that the environmental impact and the interests of all marine users are properly considered; and a country that is working hard to deliver sustainable opportunities for our supply chain that translate into good-quality, well-paid jobs for the people of Scotland and support prosperous, sustainable communities.

The opportunity before us all is vast. Let us continue working together to seize it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for those, after which we will move on to the next item of business.

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of her statement, but it seems rather tone deaf of her to come here and talk about the jobs of tomorrow when jobs of today are being lost at Mossmorran and right across the North Sea oil and gas sector, with the Government's presumption against new oil and gas. However, north-east fishermen will be dismayed to hear that the Government wants to sell our fishing communities down the river yet again, given the announcement. With it, the Government is sticking two fish fingers up to our fishermen. The scale of these projects is massive, and each and every time a new project is consented, it severely restricts where our fishermen can fish. What fishermen are asking for is simple—protection from reckless spatial squeeze, recognition that fishing must remain an integral part of Scotland's future, and a moratorium on new offshore wind until the full impact on our fishing grounds is fully understood. Will the cabinet secretary urgently get around the table with our fishermen to ensure that they are not sacrificed on this Government's

ideological pursuit of net zero, and will she also instruct developers to engage constructively with our fishermen to ensure that they are properly compensated for their loss of fishing grounds?

**Gillian Martin:** If I am in ideological pursuit of anything, it is prosperity and economic growth for the people of Scotland. It is a little bit strange that an energy spokesperson from another party, who would like to be standing where I am right now, would completely and utterly miscalculate a huge part of the energy sector and not give it support. It is astonishing that someone who represents the north-east, and who wants to continue to represent the north-east, would say to the people of that area that he is not interested in the future of the North Sea's floating offshore wind or offshore wind. *[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Lumsden.

**Gillian Martin:** It is a very strange attack, but I am not in the business of giving political advice to Douglas Lumsden.

I meet representatives from the fishing industry regularly, and I meet Elspeth Macdonald from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation regularly. I saw her this week, albeit informally. We have a fundamental role to play in managing the marine space. We are clear that the expansion of offshore wind must be achieved sustainably and with the consideration of other industries. The sectoral marine plan, which we are currently updating in consultation with all interested parties, is underpinned by comprehensive impact assessments that identify opportunities—*[Interruption.]* Deputy Presiding Officer, It is very difficult to deliver the answer.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I get that. Please resume your seat for a second. I am a bit weary of all the sedentary chit-chat. When a member has the floor, that is the member whose voice we want to hear. We do not want to hear any other voice.

**Gillian Martin:** The sectoral marine plan is underpinned by comprehensive impact assessments that identify opportunities and constraints for development. Those assessments are informed by the latest scientific evidence and extensive stakeholder engagement, including that from the fishing sector.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance notice of her statement. Shell has returned its CampionWind lease to Crown Estate Scotland. Is she worried that other leaseholders are considering handing back their licences? What will she do to develop confidence in offshore wind and its supply chains and to promote new manufacturing?

The cabinet secretary referenced the Pentland project with investment from Great British Energy, the National Wealth Fund and the Scottish National Investment Bank, each of which has the option to invest up to £50 million. Does the Scottish Government have a plan to ensure that we will see more of that funding to get training opportunities and to create permanent jobs and investment?

Feedback from the renewables sector is that speeding up planning decisions is crucial to building investment confidence so that we can get manufacturing investment in Scotland rather than importing renewables components. For example, manufacturing renewables components at the port of Leith would be a huge opportunity. What is the Scottish Government doing to deliver on that ask? When will we see the energy strategy and the just transition plan?

**Gillian Martin:** I was going to praise Sarah Boyack for being a spokesperson who understands the economic value of what we are trying to do. Her Government in London has had a strong record of championing this area since it came into government, along with the Scottish Government; it is one of the areas of agreement that we have.

Where we do not have agreement is on the impact of the energy profits levy on confidence. Some very interesting work was done on the EPL by Offshore Energies UK, which put a proposal to the UK Government to set out how it can get more funds into the Treasury as a result of a reformed EPL. I hope that Scottish Labour has looked at its proposals and is advocating for them to be taken forward in the budget. People from the offshore wind sector and other energy companies tell me that that is the single biggest blocker to investment. However, I am still hugely confident that we will see ScotWind projects develop.

Obviously, Shell has made a different decision. It has, more generally, pivoted away from renewables projects because it wants to concentrate its operations on oil and gas. That is highly regrettable, but after the decision was made, I had a call with Crown Estate Scotland. It told me that there is interest in that licence and that it is confident that it will have new tenants, which is hugely encouraging. It told me that it was one of the most sought-after areas in the ScotWind round of licence auctions. It said that, apart from reaching out to organisations that were interested during the first round, it has had contact from interested partners.

Sarah Boyack mentioned some of the projects that are progressing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Cabinet secretary, I ask for a wee bit more succinct

approach. Otherwise, we will not get through all the members who wish to ask a question.

**Gillian Martin:** I am happy to leave it there.

**Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP):** The cabinet secretary will be aware that more than half of ScotWind projects are floating offshore wind projects. Given the technological challenges in that sector, it is essential that, to support its deployment, we attract the blade and cell manufacturing for floating offshore wind to Scotland. Given Mingyang's proposals for an integrated offshore wind production facility in Scotland, what engagement has the Scottish Government had with the company to support that investment? Will it engage with the UK Government to ensure that decisions are made in support of that proposal at pace, in order to allow that investment to go ahead?

**Gillian Martin:** We welcome Mingyang's smart energy proposals for the £1.5 billion investment in a new turbine manufacturing facility at Ardersier port. The Deputy First Minister and I have been making representations in support of that, in exactly the kind of cross-Government deliberations that the member would expect.

It is not just the offshore wind supply chain that will yield a great amount of economic activity for Scotland, although, as I outlined in my statement, that is where the real prize is. The cable manufacturers that we are attracting to Scotland should also be considered when it comes to the transmission cabling that is required. That is happening right now. I wrote to the UK Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero about the fact that the National Energy System Operator has no local procurement conditions around transmission cabling. That would provide a great deal of comfort to those who are willing to base themselves in Scotland and give them additional orders that would turbocharge their investments and create economic value locally.

**Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I want to bring this back to the voice of local people. A few weeks ago, I asked at First Minister's question time how local people could engage on the proposed Moray FLOW-Park plans. Last week, 600 people crammed into Universal hall in Findhorn and Nairn community centre to put their views across. Murray Sampson of Moray Firth Wind Sports asked a question that is relevant not just to this project but to many projects. "Can we bring it back to basics?", he asked—"Look at Nairn, Findhorn, Burghead. Look at the beauty. Is there anywhere that the Crown Estate looks at and just says, 'No way'?" Today, I bring the voice of far more than the 600 people who were in the room with me last week—I bring the voice of fishermen and communities who do not feel listened to. Just like Murray Sampson did, I ask the cabinet

secretary whether she ever hears the concerns of local people and just says, “No way.”

**Gillian Martin:** I think that anyone in my position, whether it is a Labour, Scottish National Party or Conservative energy secretary, would adhere to the processes that are set out in UK and Scottish legislation on anything to do with planning.

On the development that Mr Eagle referred to—Moray FLOW-Park—no marine licence applications have been submitted. The project remains at a very early stage, although I believe that exploratory surveys have been undertaken by the developer. The developer is encouraged to engage with stakeholders and the local community. Such engagement is the very least that we should expect. Until an application comes in, I will not be in receipt of all of the developer’s plans. The consenting around the development will have to be undertaken thoroughly and rigorously. I do not think that anybody standing in my position, of whatever party stripe, would, without any knowledge of a development, applications or impact assessments, make a judgment on a project, whether it is based in the marine environment or terrestrially.

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** Neart na Gaoithe, Inch Cape and Berwick Bank come on shore or will do so in my constituency, East Lothian. The cabinet secretary recently visited Had Fab in my constituency to highlight successful contract awards. Had Fab is a successful fabrication company in East Lothian, employing many local people and local apprentices. What more can be done to grow local supply chains and all tiers of procurement through offshore wind farm development?

**Gillian Martin:** When I was at Had Fab with Paul McLennan, Martin Whitfield and the former Secretary of State for Scotland, it was to celebrate a contract that the company had won for manufacturing. However, I was there previously to meet its many apprentices, and I was blown away by their enthusiasm for the fact that manufacturing was happening in their locality and that they would, effectively, have jobs for the rest of their lives.

On what Paul McLennan said about ensuring that we have more manufacturing in Scotland, we have £500 million invested in the offshore wind supply chain across five years. That money is for not only the development of supply chains but the pivoting of existing ones, because Scotland’s unique selling point is that we have a vibrant energy supply chain already. At the moment, the order books for many of those companies are largely oil and gas related, but they are pivoting towards renewables opportunities. They will pivot back and forth for years to come, so, as part of the

ScotWind licensing obligations, there has to be local procurement. That was the smart thing to do. I would like to see it happen for transmission infrastructure as well.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland)**

**(Lab):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement.

Continued uncertainty and chaotic decision making from private offshore renewables developers are harming workers and communities in the North East Scotland region. The mismanagement of UK oil and gas revenues by the privatised fossil fuel industry means that workers now face an unsure and unjust transition. It is critical that we do not repeat the same mistakes with offshore renewable energy.

One of the key recommendations in the Future Economy Scotland report “Rethinking ScotWind: Maximising Scotland’s Offshore Wind Potential” was for the Scottish Government to explore taking public equity stakes in offshore leasing and development. Does the cabinet secretary recognise the considerable long-term benefits that up-front investment from the Scottish Government would bring to renewables development? Will she ensure that the people of Scotland benefit from our common natural resources?

**Gillian Martin:** I found very little to disagree with in Mercedes Villalba’s question. I absolutely stand behind a lot of what she said.

ScotWind licences are available, but as licences in other areas for other projects in the future are granted, whether they be onshore or offshore, there will be an opportunity for Governments to take a stake in them. That is the right thing to do. In relation to onshore projects, I point out that, more recently, I have ensured that local communities have first option on repowering opportunities for wind farms on the Forestry and Land Scotland estate. I had in mind the ethos that Mercedes Villalba mentions.

If the transition is to be just, the wealth that is associated with the generation of energy should go to the people of Scotland who are hosting all the infrastructure. That should be in the form of not just community benefits but equity stakes. Fundamentally, developers should not wait for legislation on that; they should offer opportunities for communities to benefit from the funds that are generated as a result of production. They do not have to wait for Government to tell them to do that. It is the right thing to do and the way to get people on side for their developments. I would say that it is the smart thing to do.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** A number of members who have pressed their request-to-speak buttons have still not been called. I wish to

take all of them, but I need more succinct questions and answers.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** Ensuring that we retain the workers and the skills for the green energy transition is integral to the success of new projects. However, only this week, the chief executive of Flotation Energy warned that the UK Government's energy profits levy was

"wiping out 1,000 oil and gas jobs a month—losing many of the workers whose skills"

are

"needed for renewable projects".

Does the cabinet secretary share my concerns that Labour's energy policies are continuing to jeopardise Scotland's just transition?

**Gillian Martin:** I would go further than that: Labour's energy policy with regard to the EPL is not just Labour's energy policy but the energy policy that the Conservatives had. They are turning their backs on taking responsibility for that.

During portfolio question time, I mentioned that Offshore Energies UK has worked across the sector to put together a proposal for the UK Government that would generate more funds for the Treasury while making investment in projects and, indeed, in the decommissioning of projects more viable for oil and gas companies.

Let us face the fact that many of the oil and gas companies about which we are talking, with notable exceptions, are also investing in ScotWind projects.

I share the member's concerns. There is a knock-on effect. The EPL is disproportionate. Indeed, it feels to me like a tax on the north-east, because it is jobs in the north-east that are being taken away. Everybody who has talked about the job losses is absolutely right. It was also supposed to be a temporary measure.

In the upcoming UK budget, there is an opportunity to unlock investment and certainty in the whole energy mix. I really hope that Rachel Reeves takes up OEUK's offer. It is a sensible and very carefully worked out offer, and I urge her to read it.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I make another plea for more succinct answers, cabinet secretary.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** Only those who want to rip up the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and drag us back to the 20th century would fail to recognise the incredibly powerful role that offshore wind could play. However, we are in danger of repeating a missed opportunity in the development of onshore wind. Unlike some European countries that have managed to ensure

a high proportion of public and community ownership of onshore wind, Scotland's community ownership is marginal.

How does the Scottish Government intend to ensure that we do not repeat that missed opportunity? Instead of merely asking the developers to make a voluntary contribution to community benefit, how do we intend to lock in public ownership and community ownership?

**Gillian Martin:** There are a number of things to say, but I have been asked to be succinct. We have the community and renewable energy scheme Scotland, into which we have put additional money, so that we can meet demand for community ownership of renewable energy. I mentioned to Mercedes Villalba the repowering opportunities. I am giving first options to community groups that want to take up those options.

Patrick Harvie made a good point about where the powers lie for mandating community benefits, which could include community ownership or part ownership. They lie with the UK Government. I am pleased to say that, where the Tories turned their back on communities and did not take up that option when they were in power, the current Government—[*Interruption.*]

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Lumsden! Cabinet secretary, please resume.

**Gillian Martin:** The current Government is at least consulting on the matter. I am hopeful that the consultation will confirm what the Scottish Government has been saying for years, which is that communities must have more tangible benefits.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** My colleague Jamie Greene asked for this statement last week, following news of Shell handing back its lease. I do not disagree at all with the cabinet secretary about the importance of ScotWind, not least in relation to its economic potential for our country. However, Shell's decision is a concern.

What discussions have been had with Shell about the basis for its decision, and what discussions have been had with the winners of other leases to see whether Shell's concerns are felt more widely? What action will the Government take on the back of that?

**Gillian Martin:** I have had discussions with Shell. In recent months, Shell has made it clear that it is pivoting its business towards oil and gas. That is extremely regrettable. It is not for me to give Shell advice on commercial decisions, but it has made that unfortunate decision. However, I do not think that that takes away from the fact that a great deal of other developers are pressing on with their developments.

Liam McArthur will have heard me say that I had discussions with Crown Estate Scotland, which was able to tell me that it already has interest in the CampionWind area. I mentioned in previous answers that the licensable CampionWind area was one of the most sought after in the initial round, so I have complete confidence that other companies that have not pivoted away from their renewables ambitions will be looking at that as an option now that Shell has released its licence back to Crown Estate Scotland.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** The recent Pentland offshore wind farm investment announcement clearly highlights the huge economic opportunities of pursuing net zero. Given the huge number of jobs—more than 1,000—that it will support and the substantial contribution that it will make to our economy and energy supply, does the cabinet secretary agree that Pentland also illustrates well the opportunity to secure a strong, just transition? Might related investment opportunities be put at risk by those who would talk down our net zero ambitions, including some in the chamber?

**Gillian Martin:** Bob Doris makes a very succinct point, as did Patrick Harvie, Sarah Boyack and Liam McArthur: offshore renewables provide Scotland's future economic growth opportunities. Those who sit here and give out misinformation about that or who do not support it are not supporting future jobs in Scotland.

I agree that energy transition will deliver jobs, growth and energy security. Talking down that huge opportunity risks delaying action. I am delighted that those in the Parliament who talk down such an opportunity are in a very small minority.

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** The cabinet secretary talked in her statement about the size of the prize, but the fact is that the fixed costs of renewables are still massively subsidised, with huge costs being passed on to the consumer. Seagreen alone has earned £48 million with no output. Will the cabinet secretary assure us that developers that are in receipt of public money actually produce energy for public consumption?

**Gillian Martin:** Here is another individual who cannot get behind the renewables industry or recognise the economic opportunities for Scotland. Green electricity is the cheapest—*[Interruption.]*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please resume your seat for a second, cabinet secretary.

I have already spoken about my weariness with the constant barracking from sedentary positions on the Conservative side of the chamber. It is neither courteous nor respectful.

**Gillian Martin:** Green electricity—the electricity produced by renewables—is the cheapest form of electricity. There are issues with transmission charges, with the transmission network use of system charges and with the contracts for difference, which I have mentioned already. We have asked the UK Government look at those issues because we want to ensure that there are favourable terms in the auction round.

We need a rebalancing of electricity and gas prices, without which it will become difficult for us to decarbonise. My predecessors and I have been advocating for that for some time. It desperately and seriously needs to be looked at, and I know that I have a great deal of support in that regard from many inside and outwith the chamber.

**David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP):** It is very welcome that more than 1,000 jobs are expected to be created and supported throughout the construction and operation of the Pentland offshore wind farm. Will the cabinet secretary explain how the Scottish Government is investing in Scotland's skills base to ensure that the people of Scotland continue to benefit from jobs for the future?

**Gillian Martin:** I am happy to do that. More than £120 million has been invested in the north-east through the just transition fund and the energy transition fund to support the region's transition to net zero. The offshore wind industry has the potential to create thousands of well-paid jobs.

As I said in my statement, we published "Scotland's Offshore Wind Skills Priorities and Action Plan" last week, and David Torrance will have seen that the First Minister has opened the energy transition skills hub. That went down very well in my home city of Aberdeen, where we are seeing a great deal of demand for training, not only from young people who want to come into the industry but from those who want to transition out of other areas of work.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Reform):** Households and businesses are already struggling with high energy bills, and offshore wind projects come with enormous costs. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the impact on consumers of replacing affordable oil and gas with expensive and heavily subsidised offshore wind?

**Gillian Martin:** Offshore wind may be subsidised at the moment, but it has the potential to be the greatest opportunity for energy security that the UK as a whole will ever have. It is strange to talk about subsidy without mentioning nuclear power, which is the most heavily subsidised form of energy in the whole of the UK. I will leave that there.

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

A 40GW pipeline of potential projects is both welcome and massive, and is a fantastic opportunity, particularly once we add the development in the rest of the UK. We know that 35 per cent of embodied carbon can be saved if new turbines are manufactured using recycled content and that 95 per cent of turbines can be recycled. Will the cabinet secretary commit to supporting the creation of a decommissioning hub here in Scotland?

**Gillian Martin:** I thank Maurice Golden for being one of the more sensible Conservative Party voices on energy, although I do not know whether that will embarrass or delight him.

Maurice Golden pointed to another economic opportunity. As part of our onshore wind sector deal, we committed to working with the sector on blade remanufacturing. I would be happy to speak to him about any projects that he thinks would be worth while, because his suggestion sounds eminently sensible and would be another economic opportunity, so I thank him for it.

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

## Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-19802, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill. I invite members who wish to take part in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

15:00

**The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** I begin by thanking the Economy and Fair Work Committee for its constructive stage 1 report on the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill. I welcome the support that the committee expressed for the general principles of the bill and the observation that it has the potential to play

“a vital role in improving the lives of the people across Scotland.”

The bill’s central aim is to create a new and consistent platform for local economic development in Scotland—a new format that recognises the economic agency of every pound of public money, alongside the necessity for the public sector to partner with businesses and communities in pursuit of sustainable economic growth.

When I assumed responsibility for the bill, I was keen to ensure that this legislation, which aims to add value to economic policy objectives, also works as a public service reform measure. I pay tribute to Tom Arthur for the work that he has done previously on the bill and for his commitment to the principles of community wealth building.

Any Government must be thoughtful when it seeks to make changes to the public sector partnership landscape through legislation. However, community wealth building’s focus on growing all forms of local businesses, creating and protecting jobs, extending greater ownership and influence to communities, and looking to attract more investment into our local economies can improve the outcomes that we achieve from economic development activity.

The bill obliges future Scottish Governments to publish a community wealth building statement. The statement will set out the measures and actions that will be taken to advance community wealth building in Scotland across the pillars of the economic development model: spending and procurement; fair work and employment; assets, land and property; and new business growth and investment.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

The minister mentioned procurement, so I wonder whether he agrees with the comments from the Federation of Small Businesses that, for the bill to be effective, targets should be included in the community wealth building plans for each public body and local authority, and that there should be targets for the amount of public spend in local economies.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back for that, Mr McKee.

**Ivan McKee:** That is a very fair question. Mr Fraser will know that I have had extensive engagement with the FSB on this issue. I have met its representatives face to face to talk through its proposals on the more general issue of procurement, which it is very interested in, and on thresholds. We are taking forward that work through a separate consultation, which has been launched.

On targets, our perspective as a Government is that those targets are best set locally, not least because each local area will have a different dynamic around what it wants to include, largely due to the size of the local area. Smaller local authority areas will have less scope for procuring in that local authority area than others will. We think that the targets are best set centrally, but the guidance that we will bring forward will indicate that local authorities and community wealth building partnerships should seek to include those local targets as appropriate.

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I respect what Mr McKee is saying about setting those targets locally but, in his discussions with local authorities, is he also prepared to press them to disaggregate the data that they collect in order to show data about women-led businesses? That is an area of oversight, and we are still struggling to get data about the amount of capital that goes to women-led businesses.

**Ivan McKee:** Ms Thomson raises a valuable point. AccelerateHER has been at the Parliament this week, highlighting the challenges that women-owned businesses face in securing funding. We will set out the guidelines for the data that local authorities should collect, and that will be a consideration as we work through the process.

After the Government's first statement on community wealth building, an updated statement would be required within the subsequent five-year period, with a progress report published after each five-year period. The statement and statutory guidance will assist local authority-led partnerships to produce their own community wealth building action plans. Should the bill pass, those plans must be produced within three years and they would be reviewed every five years.

The bill has been informed by the desire to enable democratically elected local government to lead a process of active reform and improvement without creating an attendant complex bureaucracy. Local authorities would sit at the centre of a core partnership of relevant public sector anchor bodies. They would be partnered by our enterprise agencies, health boards, colleges and regional transport partnerships—in other words, the relevant bodies that are identified in the bill.

Among the many important recommendations in the committee's stage 1 report was the call for clear guidance to help community wealth building partnerships to develop plans and implement actions in concert. I have replied to the convener of the Economy and Fair Work Committee with a detailed response to its report.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** Community Land Scotland has suggested that we think about including the Scottish National Investment Bank, national park authorities, Forestry and Land Scotland and Crown Estate Scotland, given their influence and ownership of landholdings. Would the minister look at that to enable new opportunities for community wealth building and ownership?

**Ivan McKee:** It is important to recognise that all those bodies are already involved in the process as specified public bodies. It is important that we get the right and proportionate approach so that the plans can be pulled together effectively in a way that has the most impact. All those bodies are already included as specified public bodies, which is a proportionate way to proceed. Community wealth building will absolutely be part of the work that those bodies will be required to do and they will have input into the process, but it is important to recognise which bodies will be most central so that we can make the most effective impact.

In my response to the committee, I set out plans to conduct an inclusive and collaborative development process for the guidance. I aim to start that discussion as soon as possible so that there will be clear guidance that will be informed by successful practice, noting that too high a level of prescription is not desirable in practice. The majority of our local authorities are already pursuing community wealth building policy and objectives, and I am confident that the approach, which is built on collaboration and empowerment, has the best chance of success.

To reflect the fact that some local authorities will want to work together, the bill makes provision for neighbouring councils to work on a regional basis. That will provide local flexibility for community wealth building partnerships. Whatever the pattern of uptake in that context, all community wealth building partnerships would be expected to set

plans that are complementary to their existing objectives to revive local economies and empower local communities.

I want to touch briefly on some points that were raised in the committee's report. First, I recognise that community wealth building is a place-focused economic development model spanning a number of relevant policy areas. The bill's aim is to create a foundation for a consistent and progressive approach to local and regional economic development. As it beds in, it will become a new and vital place for dialogue about any changes that are required in law across a wide range of policy areas.

The second crucial aspect is the involvement and empowerment of communities. It is important that community wealth building is a signal that our communities must be connected to activities involving councils and others, with support to lead economic activity.

The third point relates to finance. The financial memorandum accompanying the bill was informed by real cost information that was gleaned from local authorities and other public bodies. The figures highlight the costs of administration. It is right that those estimates are scrutinised, but they set out a realistic picture of the cost of implementation. I know that some stakeholders raised the issue of wider implementation costs. Although that is a valid point in the broader context given the wide scope of community wealth building, that involves consideration of the deployment of funds across a range of contributory policy areas, which will be determined with regard to specific future policy interventions.

The next Scottish Government and subsequent Administrations will be tasked with considering how all relevant Government activities contribute to community wealth building, whether directly in areas such as procurement or fair work and skills, or in a wider range of policy areas in which public investment or regulation might flex and change to assist our economy to grow in a way that is successful, sustainable and fair. I look forward to working with the committee and members on the next legislative stage, and I invite members to work with me on that.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members who wish to participate in the debate to make sure that they press their request-to-speak buttons.

I call Daniel Johnson to speak on behalf of the Economy and Fair Work Committee.

15:10

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

I am delighted to speak on behalf of the Economy and Fair Work Committee in the stage 1 debate on the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill. I apologise for not being in Parliament in person. I acknowledge the receipt of the letter from the minister, which he mentioned and which we received this afternoon.

I thank everyone who responded to our call for views and the witnesses who gave evidence during our stage 1 scrutiny. I extend my thanks to those who enabled our visits to Alloa and Irvine, which provided invaluable local and practical insights. I also acknowledge the previous work by the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, on whose work we also relied.

Community wealth building is a proven economic development tool that aims to retain wealth within local communities, to foster engagement and cohesion and, ultimately, to enrich the lives of residents. As the committee heard, many local authorities across Scotland have already begun implementing community wealth building measures, either on their own account or as part of the Scottish Government's pilot. The bill seeks to formalise the approach to ensure the adoption of community wealth building as a model of economic development across the country.

As members will have seen from our report, the Economy and Fair Work Committee is supportive of that general aim. However, the committee heard from some who felt that legislation might not be necessary to achieve the aims that are stated in the bill and that alternative measures, such as ministerial guidance or direction, could be used to achieve the same aims. Some also felt that new powers and additional metrics could be added to the bill to strengthen its aims. The committee heard from some, including Neil McInroy, the chair of the Economic Development Association Scotland, that a legislative approach such as the one used in the bill contains a clear "obligation to act" and ensures involvement from across the public sector, and therefore is of benefit.

Generally, the committee supports the measures in the bill, but we believe that in some areas they could be strengthened and extended. The publication of a community wealth building statement and the establishment of partnerships by the Scottish Government are welcome steps, but they are only part of the solution. Throughout our evidence gathering, the importance of there being clear, detailed and practical guidance under section 9 of the bill was repeatedly emphasised. To ensure consistent adoption of guidance, it must help local authorities and partnerships to



understand the objectives and the means of achieving them.

Crucially, the guidance must address capacity challenges in local authorities, partner organisations and community groups. As Matt Pearce from Development Trusts Association Scotland warned, without that support, community wealth building risks becoming a burdensome and disengaging process. Accordingly, the guidance must set out clear expectations—particularly around governance, co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms—that encompass the public, private and third sector and, most importantly, local communities.

To realise the full potential of community wealth building action plans, it is essential that local authorities and their partners are properly resourced to do so. Many witnesses expressed concern about the capacity of organisations that are already under great financial pressure to engage in the development and delivery of those plans. The City of Edinburgh Council told us that the financial memorandum presents “an incomplete picture” of the resources required. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities echoed that concern, warning that, without proper funding, action plans risk becoming “a tick box exercise”.

The bill has triggered a financial resolution acknowledging the significant expenditure involved. We also note the minister’s suggestion that some resources could be drawn from existing budgets. However, the committee remains concerned that, without additional support and consideration of the total additional effort that the legislation may require, inconsistent or limited delivery may result.

Although community lies at the heart of the concept of community wealth building, the bill makes no reference to the community groups, third sector groups or private sector representatives in the partnerships. That omission was highlighted by many witnesses and respondents to our call for views. Witnesses, including the Scottish Community Alliance, called for the bill to formally recognise third sector and community groups as being essential to delivery.

The committee also received evidence regarding the need for mechanisms that enable direct citizen involvement in the development of community wealth building plans and approaches. The committee therefore recommends that guidance produced under the bill should set out a clear expectation for local authorities and partnerships to engage with the third sector, and I urge the Government to undertake further work on developing practical approaches for citizen engagement.

I also note that the committee raised a question about the rationale for the selection of the specified bodies that are required to be consulted. In our report, we highlight suggestions from witnesses and stakeholders for additional bodies that could usefully be included in the list.

The bill does not specify how the impact of community wealth building action plans will be measured, leaving that to local authorities and their partners, as noted in the intervention taken by the minister. Witnesses emphasised the need for consistent, high-quality data, warning that without it, progress cannot be accurately assessed. I emphasise that that is not simply about the targets; it is about having consistent metrics, with the targets being set by the partnerships. Having consistent metrics will allow comparison across community wealth building plans.

The FSB highlighted the importance of standardised reporting and, as has been noted, that measuring the value created for local small and medium-sized enterprises is critical to understanding how well community wealth building is being delivered. To support consistency in the sharing of best practice, the committee recommends a set of core common metrics to be agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and that those should sit alongside area-specific goals, allowing flexibility while enabling meaningful comparison.

In addition to our recommendations for improving the bill, the committee heard that complementary reforms in other policy areas are essential to maximise the impact of the legislation. Stakeholders consistently highlighted that procurement reform is key to enabling community wealth building. Proposals included lowering the threshold for mandatory consideration of community benefits; raising the threshold for regulated procurement and allowing direct awards to local suppliers where community benefits are evident; prioritising social value in procurement scoring; and standardising procurement reporting, particularly in relation to SMEs.

There were also calls to expand the definition of supported businesses to allow public bodies to restrict tenders by geography or company size; to streamline the asset transfer process and review the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015; and to strengthen powers of compulsory purchase and examine the possibility of the introduction of compulsory sale orders.

With the right support and complementary reforms, the bill has the potential to significantly improve the lives of people and communities across Scotland. The Economy and Fair Work Committee supports the general principles of the bill and looks forward to receiving further detail

from the Scottish Government ahead of stages 2 and 3, should the Parliament approve the principles of the bill at decision time.

15:17

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I start by echoing the thanks of the committee convener to all those who gave evidence to the committee in relation to our stage 1 scrutiny. I also thank our clerking team, the Scottish Parliament information centre and my fellow committee members, who worked on a mostly consensual basis in agreeing a unanimous report, which I commend to the chamber.

The first question that we have to address when looking at the bill is what community wealth building is. It is one of those terms, a bit like “wellbeing economy”, that is bandied around a lot but not easily understood. The committee’s report attempts to answer that question. Community wealth building seeks to utilise the economic impact of anchor organisations, which can be public, private or third sector, to stimulate and retain economic activity in a local area.

As the minister outlined, there are five pillars to community wealth building. They are spending, which involves maximising the benefits of public procurement; workforce, which involves increasing fair work and skills development opportunities; land and property, which involves ensuring that land and property are used to benefit communities, SMEs and the environment; inclusive ownership; and finance. For example, community wealth building is about better using the vast sums that are spent by public bodies to support more local businesses, employ local people and ensure that derelict properties are brought back into productive use.

With that definition, I think that we can all conclude that community wealth building is a good thing, regardless of our different political perspectives. Indeed, good work on developing community wealth building in different parts of Scotland by local authorities and others is already going on, as the committee heard in its evidence.

That takes us to the second question: what is the point of the bill, and what will it achieve? On one level, the answer to that question has to be: not a great deal. Essentially, the bill will require Scottish ministers to prepare a national statement setting out the actions that it will take to reduce economic inequality and to support economic growth by ensuring that wealth is generated and retained in local and regional areas. It will also require public bodies, including local authorities, to produce and implement community wealth-building plans.

That is fine, but it is already obvious that the bill might deliver very little in terms of practical outcomes. As the committee noted, the bill’s aims

“could potentially be delivered through non-legislative means”

without the necessity for a bill at all, because much of what it aims to do is already in the power of the Scottish Government. Moreover, the relevant public bodies that are listed in the bill are relatively few. Key public bodies are not on the list. That includes, for example, large landowners such as Forestry and Land Scotland, Crown Estate Scotland, ferry operators, Marine Scotland, ScotRail and the Scottish National Investment Bank.

The Scottish Conservatives will support the bill at stage 1, because it is a useful step in the right direction. However, our concern is that, without more concrete provisions, we are unlikely to see much progress being made. I will give some examples of how the bill might be improved. The Federation of Small Businesses has stated that, although it is supportive of community wealth building as a concept, the bill should include

“statutory targets for procurement spending with local and small firms and standardised rules for reporting on that spend.”

The FSB’s head of policy and external affairs warns:

“Without clear benchmarks and transparency, there’s a real risk the Bill won’t deliver the change towns, villages and local businesses expect.”

**Ivan McKee:** I addressed the point regarding specific targets in my opening remarks, but I would be interested to hear how Murdo Fraser envisages that such targets would operate and how he would set those targets, given the significant variation in economic base, size and scale across Scotland’s 32 local authorities.

**Murdo Fraser:** We can explore that as the bill progresses. I will say very clearly that I am not proposing a top-down approach to the setting of targets, because I entirely understand the minister’s point that they need to be set at a local level and, crucially, in consultation with stakeholders, including the business community. It is important that the local plans, when drawn up, include targets so that some ambition is baked into them.

According to the FSB’s research,

“Nearly three quarters of small businesses who bid for public contracts find the process ‘complex and challenging’”.

That needs to change if we want to see the benefits of public sector spend supporting local businesses.

Another point that was made in evidence to the committee was that community voices have to be engaged when local action plans are being devised. We need to see communities—that includes the local business community—being consulted and engaged. It is also important that unrepresentative bodies and voices are not allowed to dominate discussions.

There is also the question of resources. Some witnesses told the committee that they have issues with the lack of estimates for the implementation costs of the action plans. There will be a resourcing issue for local authorities and other public bodies in drawing up those action plans, and those resources could be spent on delivery of measures, rather than bureaucracy. The minister, in giving evidence to the committee, acknowledged that the financial memorandum does not include the cost of implementation of those action plans. It is unclear at present what that cost would be or where those resources would come from. Without resources in place, the requirement to implement action plans might not be deliverable.

The bill will achieve very little in itself. It will require resources to produce and deliver action plans, and unless we see implementation of those plans, it will make very little difference. If we want to see proper community wealth building, the bill is only a first step. Much more needs to be done if the promised benefits are to be delivered.

15:24

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I remind members of my voluntary entry in the register of members' interests.

What the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill could be about is direct action; new statutory powers—not just words but deeds. It could rekindle the radical tradition that dates all the way back to Robert Owen and the Fenwick weavers. It could put forward a vision of hope: Scotland as a centre for co-operative development—a Mondragón of the north; a new era of economic democracy. It could be providing the leadership for a genuinely democratic green industrial revolution; one that is not wholly dependent, as this Government would have it, on foreign direct investment—our energy resources and our new industries once again colonised by private interest, which is a policy courted, incentivised and boasted of by the Scottish National Party, with the result that Scotland is turning more and more into a branch economy.

This bill could properly resource, revamp and place on a statutory footing Co-operative Development Scotland, arming it with the instruments of investment that it demands and the

technical assistance and expertise that it needs, and giving it new legal powers to intervene in the economy through an industrial reform and common ownership act—a Marcora law for Scotland—to give workers a new legal right to buy an enterprise when it is put up for sale or even facing closure. The bill could give workers the power to appoint a financing member to assist in such a buy-out, and it could have the power to place a duty on employers to advance contractual redundancy entitlements to co-invest and help to self-fund that buy-out, underpinned by tax incentives like non-domestic rates relief where there is a co-operative conversion, exemption from land and buildings transaction tax, and progressive procurement policies, like reserved contract status for co-operative, inclusive and democratic business models. That could be done by amending section 11 of the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 and regulation 21 of the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2015.

At the same time, the bill could usher in an action plan to start insourcing services that the Scottish Government currently outsources, like the much-criticised prisoner escort service, and the insourcing of all that public money wasted on management consultants, by simply drawing instead on the expertise of the workers who are delivering the services. I have often thought that, if the Government had listened to the workforce at Ferguson Marine instead of hiring highly paid turnaround directors, rear admirals and naval commodores, and international management consultants, the ferries would have been in the service of our island communities years ago.

We should stop seeing trade unions simply as a last line of defence for working people. They should be seen as an alternative line of advance for working people, through which workers can participate in the running of our public services like water, like the railways, like the national health service and like local government services.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** In his speech, will Richard Leonard have a kind word to say about small and medium-sized businesses and the opportunities that they currently feel denied of when it comes to public sector procurement?

**Richard Leonard:** I have got five minutes, so I will devote my speech to what I think is important, and Stephen Kerr can devote his speech to what he thinks is important.

The Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill could be about democratising organisations like Scottish Water so that we avoid a repeat of the industrial relations debacle that we have witnessed in recent years, where excessive executive bonuses signed off by ministers are the norm while workers' wages are constrained.

If this bill is to become serious about building a strong and resilient economy, it must become far more radical and far more progressive. We should be asking questions such as: why on earth should those who create the wealth not own the wealth that they create? Why should we not have a system of economic governance based on one member, one vote, instead of one share, one vote? Why should we not foster an economy where labour hires capital instead of capital hiring labour? Where is the courage? Where is the conviction? Where is the vision in this bill?

Shifting the balance of power in Scotland should not simply be a piecemeal and an occasional part of what this Parliament is about. It ought to be its very essence. Instead, what this bill offers is an instruction to others—to local government, to regional transport partnerships, to health boards, to colleges, to enterprise agencies—to come up with action plans while the Government simply has to issue a statement every five years. Instead of closed horizons like this, we should be opening them up.

So, Labour will support the principles of the bill tonight, but we will be pursuing radical, progressive, socialistic amendments.

15:30

**Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** It is fair to say that at the Economy and Fair Work Committee session where this bill was presented to us, the response from the committee was pretty nonplussed. The bill does not actually have in it any of the significant changes in powers that can only be provided by legislation: improvements to the compulsory sales order system, a compulsory purchase order system, changes to powers of local authorities so that they can legally procure locally what they need. Those things all still need doing and I am disappointed that the Scottish Government did not take this opportunity to do them.

However, we are debating the bill in front of us, rather than the bill that we wish we had. In its present draft, the bill sets out an intention in legislation—it is not totally clear that what is in it could not be done without legislation, but it is, at least, an alignment of policy intention in the right direction, even if it is not yet much of a step forward.

I am somewhat concerned that there is not a wide understanding in the Government and the public sector of what community wealth building is. When Adrian Gillespie, chief executive officer of Scottish Enterprise, was at the committee in September, I asked him what role Scottish Enterprise should have in community wealth building. His response was:

“The major contribution that we make to community wealth building is in creating and protecting high-value jobs”.—[*Official Report, Economy and Fair Work Committee*, 17 September 2025; c 4.]

That is an excellent goal and an important outcome, but it is absolutely not community wealth building if those high-value jobs are for companies that are owned by private interests, which own the assets and keep the profits. That is company owners and shareholders building wealth for themselves, which is fine—I do not have an issue with private profit, provided that it pays its taxes, does not pollute the environment and treats people fairly—but it is the exact opposite of community wealth building. In his defence, Adrian Gillespie went on to talk about fair work, community regeneration and place making, which are elements of community wealth building.

Handily, there is a good description of what community wealth building is on the first page of the bill:

“facilitating and supporting the generation, circulation and retention of wealth in local and regional economies.”

That means that assets are owned locally and by communities, and that the benefits, including profits, are retained locally and by the community. This bill needs to make sure that more money, including public money, can be and is spent locally. That means removing the legislative and other barriers that prevent local authorities from buying locally. Cheapest is not always best. Councils and public bodies need to be empowered to choose local businesses, co-operative businesses, social enterprises and small businesses when they buy goods and services.

The bill needs to ensure that public assets are optimised for public good. For example, local authorities must be supported to turn buildings and facilities that they do not need any more into places that support their community—whether by housing charities, social enterprises and small businesses or as community centres where people can meet, learn and connect—rather than selling or renting them to the highest bidder, or leaving them empty.

The bill needs to ensure that more assets are owned by communities and that the profits and benefits of those assets are kept locally—whether that involves a community-owned energy scheme, where the profits are spent on local infrastructure, or community woodlands that are maintained for the use and benefit of the people who live there.

The Scottish Greens support the principle of the bill but we would like to see a lot more in it.

15:33

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (LD):** So far, we have heard some very passionate—if a little

predictable—speeches, with people nailing their political flags to the mast. You would think that there was an election around the corner.

One thing that there should be consensus on is that economic growth has to be the number 1 priority for the next Scottish Government, whoever it is and whatever it looks like. If that is not its ambition, Scotland will have a problem—indeed, this Parliament will have a problem. We have to drive up wages. We have to achieve maximum employment. We have to make Scotland an attractive place for people to come to, work in and live in—and, importantly, stay in if they are already here.

We have to give every young person across the country the opportunity to work and live in their own community, instead of having to leave their own town or even the country, because the buoyant economy that that will result in is what will give the next Government the money that it needs to fund good public services. Given what I have heard and what I have read in the stage 1 report, the bill has been left wanting, and I do not think that it will help us to meet any of those ambitions in any meaningful way.

I must also question why, with just four months left until dissolution, such a bill has reared its head at stage 1. Is there a need for the bill at all? What is in the bill that the Government cannot already do? That is entirely unclear to me from the evidence that the committee took.

As Richard Leonard rightly said, all that the Government will have to do is simply come to the Parliament once every five years and make a statement about what it thinks that other people have or have not done. Where is the duty on the Government to deliver community wealth building? There is no such duty in the bill.

Nonetheless, if such a statement must be made, here is what should be in it, but will not be—I have a list. There should be an update on new so-called anchor organisations. An assessment should be given of the impact of new and emerging technologies on our economy and our job market, including the challenges and opportunities that those technologies present to us as a country. The statement should also identify specific locations, towns, areas and regions, or even industries, that the Government believes will require additional support from its anchor organisations.

More importantly—I agree with Murdo Fraser on this—what is missing from the bill is statutory targets to ensure that it achieves any of its objectives. Without such targets, the bill will simply be lots of worthy words on paper that will result in absolutely no meaningful action.

I hope that amendments to address those omissions will be forthcoming. If others do not lodge them, I certainly will.

The bill must recognise the full potential of community wealth building. The work that was done in Preston, on which the committee took evidence, resulted in £200 million being invested back into the local economy. The area halved its unemployment rate and the local authority managed to remove itself from the list of the 20 per cent most deprived areas of the UK. I am not saying that community wealth building was the only factor at play in relation to that metric, but it unlocked something very important that we in this country have never been able to unlock—local public procurement. As a country, we have failed to do that for many years.

I am also concerned that, by putting all the onus on bodies such as local councils, which already face a £5 billion black hole in their finances by the end of this decade, the process for which the bill provides will simply become a tick-box exercise for councils, rather than allowing them to turn their attention to the real crisis that they face.

**Ivan McKee:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jamie Greene:** I wish I had time. Unfortunately, I have 30 seconds left—unless I can get the time back.

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

**Jamie Greene:** In that case, I will take an intervention from the minister.

**Ivan McKee:** My intervention relates to the point about our not delivering on procurement. Across the UK, the average percentage of procurement spend that goes to small and medium-sized enterprises is 20 per cent. What does the member think the percentage is in Scotland?

**Jamie Greene:** Are you answering a question or asking a question?

**Ivan McKee:** Asking.

**Jamie Greene:** My question to the Government is, what more is it doing to ensure that local procurement is easy? We have heard the evidence. Nobody in the chamber could think that it is easy for a small business to get a procurement contract with the NHS, Education Scotland or Transport Scotland. We all know small businesses in our local communities that are struggling to get public procurement spend. I hope that the answer to the minister's question is way more than 20 per cent, but it should be nearer 70, 80 or 90 per cent. If it is up there, I will be really happy.

**Ivan McKee:** The answer is 47 per cent, which is actually higher than the percentage of the economy that small and medium-sized enterprises make up. They get more of their work, proportionally, from the public sector than bigger enterprises do—and more than they do from private sector contractors.

**Jamie Greene:** That is great, so let us do more of it. Let us make sure that more local businesses in our communities benefit from that. That is what community wealth building is; it involves building wealth in our local communities by ensuring that SMEs in our own back yards are able to compete, including by taking out some of the horrendous red tape that they have faced for too many years. We must do better, and I am glad that the minister agrees that we are on the right path.

I will conclude simply by saying that, like others, we will not stand in the way of the bill, but I do not want us to have a bill just for the sake of having a bill at the end of this process. It must be meaningful, and it must deliver its intended purpose of improving the wealth of communities across the country.

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

15:39

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** I am enjoying the debate thus far.

Richard Leonard might have surprised Anas Sarwar and Keir Starmer with his socialistic approach, as it has been sadly lacking in the Labour Party of late.

This is more than just a piece of legislation. It is a commitment to transforming our local economies and creating a Scotland where economic success is genuinely shared by everyone in every place. Like other members who have contributed thus far, I think that we need to build on what is already there.

As Lorna Slater said, I would like to see us move forward on compulsory sale orders. We have already seen the changes to compulsory purchase orders that I put through, but there is still more to do. Beyond that, we must get procurement right. I note that Elena Whitham is sitting to the right of me, and that one of the companies that had benefited in her local area, Mossgiel Organic Farm, recently lost a contract, which is to the detriment of all. Those kinds of things must be resolved.

Community wealth building is fundamentally about making economies work for our people and our communities. It is about addressing economic and wealth inequality by actively supporting the

generation, circulation and retention of wealth in our local and regional economies.

The principle behind community wealth building is sound. It is nothing more than increasing the velocity of money at the local level, and the concept of the velocity of money is brutally simple. The more hands that a pound spent by the Government or public sector passes through, the better. In the worst-case scenario, a pound that is spent at a large multinational company does not circulate in Scotland at all—it simply goes back to its headquarters in London. In the best-case scenario, however, that same pound spent at a local company can work its way through many Scottish hands. The local company pays its local suppliers, contractors and employees, and that money is spent again at other local companies, which in turn spend the money yet again with their local suppliers, contractors and employees, and so on.

That is vital, because when money flows into and is kept in an area, whether through good jobs, local business growth or profits being reinvested locally, new opportunities are created and more wealth is retained. That rewires the economy to deliver prosperity across economic, social and environmental dimensions. Key to making that work are anchor organisations and local businesses. Anchor organisations such as local authorities, the NHS, universities and enterprise agencies get the ball rolling by spending money in the local economy.

The next link is Scotland's small businesses, which are the backbone of local economies. They can expand wealth to create local jobs, support community life and reinvest locally. However, that virtuous circle is currently struggling to work because almost three quarters of small businesses that bid for public contracts find the process complex and challenging.

Change is therefore needed, and the bill is a significant step towards ensuring the consistent implementation of the community wealth building model of economic development across Scotland. It will place duties on Scottish ministers and various public sector bodies to work collectively and to use the economic levers that are at their disposal to create meaningful local action. The bill will harness their impact by leveraging their spending power through procurement and their role as an employer to help to create jobs, reduce supply chains and strengthen local and regional economies.

However, it will be vital to keep local small businesses at the heart of the process, and we need to ensure that the vital economic leverage of our anchor organisations truly benefits the small and micro-enterprises that employ more than 900,000 people in Scotland.

I support the bill, and I will vote for it today.

15:44

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

I begin by joining colleagues and the committee in supporting the general principles of the bill. We all want the regeneration of our local economies to create new wealth and, crucially, keep it within the communities that we represent.

Over the years, we have seen legislation that aligns with the pillars of community wealth building, such as the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014, the more recent national planning framework 4 and the 2022 national strategy for economic transformation, which identified community wealth building as a key equality policy. There are concerns about individual measures, but it is important to recognise that the Scottish Government has shown a commitment to the underlying principle. That gives me hope that ministers will be open to strengthening the bill at stage 2 and beyond, to ensure that it delivers tangible economic benefit. It needs strengthening.

The committee made the point that both communities and councils must be empowered if the legislation is to succeed. Around two thirds of local authorities already have or are developing community wealth-building plans. That is encouraging, but councils are also being asked to deliver more with fewer and fewer resources. It is concerning that the financial memorandum reflects only the cost of developing plans, not implementing them. Without proper resourcing, the risk is obvious—the plans will become box-ticking exercises rather than engines of local economic change.

However, it is not only about new money. The bill also fails to make the best use of the money that we already spend, particularly the vast sums spent in public procurement. Imagine the impact if more of that spending was directed towards small and medium-sized enterprises and microbusinesses—both of which are the backbone of our local economies. That is why the Federation of Small Businesses has proposed setting local spending targets. Those proposals should be taken seriously.

Some people question putting targets in law, but without hard targets, change simply does not happen.

**Ivan McKee:** I want to explore where the member is on targets. Murdo Fraser asked for targets, and when I asked him where they should be set, he said that they should not be set top down. Jamie Greene called for statutory targets, which I presume means that they would be set top down. Where does the member think the targets

should be set? If they are not top down, would they be statutory? If so, how would that work? What is the role of the Government in setting those targets?

**Maurice Golden:** To use a Scottish Government phrase, it has to be a process of co-design with our local authorities.

In all seriousness, I think that a top-down approach might be very difficult for our island communities—I am looking at the Deputy Presiding Officer, who hails from Orkney—to give one example.

However, with the bill there is an opportunity to deliver more for the SMEs and to develop sustainable local solutions that keep wealth circulating in communities. We could go further. Targeted support for materials could create ripple effects across multiple sectors. Take textiles, for example. Supporting farmers to grow native fibres, such as nettles, would in turn support rural manufacturers, retailers and service providers. I am afraid that I do not have the time to fully explain that point, but I want to be clear that, in the bill, we have an opportunity to build new wealth for our communities.

I hope that the Government will work constructively with members and outside stakeholders to strengthen the bill to ensure that that happens.

15:48

**Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):**

First, I thank Richard Leonard for mentioning the Fenwick Weavers Society, which, in 1761, established the world's first co-op. The rest of his speech made me wonder whether I had wandered into the wrong debate, but I enjoyed it, nevertheless.

The Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill must be one of the shortest bills that I have seen during my time in Parliament—all in, the main content of the bill is only seven pages long, so it was a bit of a surprise that our Economy and Fair Work Committee managed to write 53 pages about it.

The aim of the bill is fairly straightforward: it requires all of our councils and relevant public bodies to prepare and publish a community wealth building action plan and to implement it. It is simple enough.

Some members of the committee asked why we need a bill to put something in place that some authorities are already implementing, and when great work is taking place not just in the pilot areas but in other areas. The short answer, though, is that it is to ensure that all councils do it, because we know that some do not. It also allows us to

have a consistent approach to embedding the principles of community wealth building throughout Scotland.

Having been lucky enough—if that is the right phrase—to have lived through the past attempts at community wealth building in my council many years ago, the work that I see taking place now seems to be the right approach. I remember well huge community planning partnership meetings, packed with officials, stakeholders and councillors, and the poor community groups sitting by the side, waiting patiently for their turn to speak, hoping that some progress would be made for them. That approach did not work, in my view. It was too big and overarching, and it was not really localised. It was all driven from the top down—an approach that has been mentioned a few times this afternoon.

In contrast, what I see happening now works. In North Ayrshire and East Ayrshire, I have seen small local groups coming forward, and dedicated and talented officials who, instead of driving the process from the top down, work with local people to help them to progress their vision. That is absolutely the key to success. When that approach is in place, community groups see it working and more of them come forward to participate.

I have been fortunate to have visited communities with colleagues from the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee and from the Economy and Fair Work Committee and seen for myself the work that is taking place. The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee visited Millport, in Great Cumbrae, to see the amazing work there to restore the old town hall. I visited it again on its open day just a few weeks ago. We also saw some local projects that were under way to establish a small gin distillery in the town and a new camping business.

The convener of the Economy and Fair Work Committee mentioned Irvine. The committee heard from local people from the Ardrossan Community Development Trust, which was doing great work to regenerate the promenade, introducing things such as accessible deck chairs for the community and building inclusive play parks.

Just down the road in my area in East Ayrshire, a number of projects are under way that fit in with the community wealth building approach, backed up with £3 million-worth of investment to help the work along. One such example is the net zero accelerator project, which supports local businesses to cut their energy costs and reduce emissions. The project has been recognised nationally and has received an award at the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities excellence awards. To date, it has supported 50

businesses to reduce more than 14,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide, while creating more than 100 jobs and unlocking around £37 million in contract value for participating firms. It is a real green dividend that is paying off locally.

All those examples are working under the umbrella of community wealth building. They work because they are being driven by local people, ably supported by officials who care about and support their communities.

The bill really is as short as I said at the beginning of my speech, but sometimes the smallest things can make the biggest difference. I urge all colleagues in Parliament to get behind the bill at stage 1 and give all of our communities across Scotland a chance to participate in that exciting work.

15:53

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the Scottish Government's political support for community wealth building through the introduction of its bill. Community wealth building offers an economic approach that can help local economies to create well-paid, secure jobs, promote fair work principles and meet the needs of local communities.

I pay tribute to Councillor Joe Cullinane and the then Labour administration in North Ayrshire for their pioneering work on community wealth building. As the first council in Scotland to launch a community wealth building strategy, North Ayrshire rejected the failed economic model that has increased inequality, hoarded wealth in the hands of a few and hollowed out public services. Instead, the council's strategy prioritised a different approach, which used its economic levers for the benefit of local people. Indeed, the council used its existing levers, such as procurement, local spend, and land and assets, to deliver on community wealth building. The council also brought together various local bodies, such as Ayrshire College and NHS Ayrshire and Arran, to help to make community wealth building a success.

It is clear that community wealth building has been a success in North Ayrshire. I could list many examples, but I will just give a few: 26 per cent of North Ayrshire Council's total procurement spend now goes to local businesses; the council's community benefits wish list has ensured that public sector contractors deliver on the needs of local communities, such as the transformation of a former army barracks into a thriving community centre in Barrmill; the skills for life vocational programme for parents delivered more than 130 placements with the council and 45 placements with wider public and third sector organisations



between 2017 and 2022; a former steelworks site has been developed into the Lochshore park hub; the construction of three solar farms has been supported to meet local energy needs; and Kilwinning-based Shuttle Buses has been transitioned to employee ownership, empowering all 70 members of staff in the process.

North Ayrshire demonstrates that community wealth building can be successful, which is why it is important that we get the bill right. However, as it stands, the bill lacks ambition and scope. I agree with the points that Richard Leonard and Lorna Slater made. I also agree with the points made by members from various political parties—Kevin Stewart, Maurice Golden and Jamie Greene—about the need to seriously consider procurement and local spending.

The bill provides a framework that requires ministers to publish a statement, but there is no detail on what that statement should entail in resourcing and other support from the Scottish Government to make community wealth building a reality. Although the bill requires local authorities and relevant public bodies to publish their action plans, it contains no specific requirements for what should be included in those plans.

I reiterate the concern that, without proper resourcing and support from the Scottish Government, and with no clear action plan requirements, community wealth building will be implemented inconsistently across the country. The bill also fails to deliver further economic levers for local authorities to ensure ambitious and wide-reaching community wealth building approaches.

I hope that the minister will reflect on the issues that have been raised in the debate and that, at stage 2, we can be more ambitious with a clearer bill that can deliver community wealth building for communities throughout Scotland.

15:57

**Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** I, too, agree with the overall finding of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, which welcomes what the bill could do. However, that can be considered only a cautious welcome. Notwithstanding the reply from the minister a short while ago, there is considerable mileage between “could” and “will”, especially when one considers the finance pillar, so I will limit most of my comments to that.

It is worth quoting the wording on what the finance pillar concerns. It is about

“Ensuring that flows of investment and financial institutions work for local people, communities, and businesses.”

On rereading the stage 1 report and the minister’s reply today, I thought that perhaps not enough consideration had been given to financial

institutions. Of course consideration has been given to the role of public sector bodies in directing funding, but the private sector—still a vital lifeline for access to finance—should also be considered. The traditional high street banks typically allocate a very small fraction of their lending to social enterprise, which means that they need to rely on specialist lenders or, more frequently, on their own retained earnings, grants and impact on investment. As the FSB noted, and as the minister knows, access to finance is still a critical issue, particularly for SMEs.

Much more thinking also needs to be done about how local authority pension schemes might be used. As the minister knows, there are specific considerations on that in Scotland. For example, there is no specific pooling policy, as there is in England and Wales. The Scottish Government’s local investment guidance indicates interest in scaling up local projects but, without statutory guidance, we will see no movement, especially when we consider risk-return criteria, which are vital for those pension schemes.

The use of credit unions for funding is still problematic and will continue to be, given their lack of experience and bandwidth. To be honest, I do not see that changing.

The committee’s report sought further guidance on the role of local authority pension schemes, credit unions, community bonds, such as the current pilot by South Lanarkshire Council to match citizens’ investments and guarantee projects, and on share issues. I would add to that employee buy-outs. It would be useful to hear further reflection on how the minister might approach all those matters in his closing remarks. In that regard, I noted Willie Coffey’s comments on what is happening in his area.

I sympathise a great deal with the comment from COSLA that we could run the risk of the bill becoming a “tick box exercise”. I echo the sentiment of members thus far that the bill has some way to go before it can have real impact.

COSLA also made an excellent point about the culture change that is required to fully embed community wealth building. A change in culture is very complex and difficult to achieve. To be honest, I do not see a recognition of that in any of the Government statements thus far. Culture change is a bold change.

Finally, I reiterate the need for disaggregated data collection for women-led businesses. I am disappointed that the Scottish Government is not doing more to mandate data collection in that regard. The minister noted that AccelerateHER, sponsored by me, is at in the Parliament this week. That organisation fundamentally aims to close the investment gap for women founders and

help them to scale their businesses. However, if we do not collect the data, we cannot make a change. I urge the minister to consider that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** We now move to closing speeches. I call Lorna Slater to close on behalf of the Scottish Greens.

16:01

**Lorna Slater:** The bill needs to ensure that the people of Scotland have a genuine say in how their communities develop and how they face the future. What kind of town do they want to live in? What kind of spaces would they like to meet their neighbours in? What kind of, and how much, renewable energy infrastructure are they willing to host?

I am likely to lodge a number of amendments to the bill in the interest of trying to get it to take us further down the road towards genuine wealth building across Scotland, to ensure that more people have a share in Scotland's economic success. It must be about more than good intentions; it needs to have measurable outcomes.

That brings me to my first question, which is about the excellent stated purpose of the bill, which is to

"reduce economic and wealth inequality between individuals and communities in and across Scotland".

The stated purpose closes by saying that that is to be done,

"by facilitating and supporting the generation, circulation and retention of wealth in local and regional economies."

However, in the middle, there is a phrase about supporting

"economic growth in and across Scotland".

The usual measure of economic growth is gross domestic product, and every single witness at the EFW Committee said that GDP was not a good way to measure success in community wealth building. I ask the Scottish Government to reconsider the bill's published intention and to make clear both the outcome that it is trying to achieve and how it will measure success and progress.

As others have suggested during the debate, there is a need to agree on data collection and standards, metrics and targets. We need to understand where we are and where we are going, and we will need to see how effective those action plans are. I suggest to the minister that the approach taken in the Circular Economy (Scotland) Act 2024 to co-design standards and targets might provide a process for him to follow.

I would like the bill to mandate the creation of targets; for example, to have a certain percentage of co-operative businesses in a region or for a certain percentage of local authority money to be spent on local procurement. It is very important that the development of community wealth action plans includes community trusts and existing democratic development organisations where they exist, because they are the ones that are already doing that work and have local knowledge and experience.

I would like to see energy issues being called out explicitly in the bill. The generation of affordable, renewable energy is something that everyone in Scotland should have a stake in and benefit from—certainly those whose communities host renewable infrastructure; they should absolutely get material benefit from doing that.

Another area that I am considering involves the creation and retention of community assets and how we support the transfer of unwanted public assets to communities to be used for the public good. For example, I am interested in the status of local authorities' common good registers, which need to be kept up to date. Are they? Are the things listed on those registers actually being used for the common good? Can we add more things to those registers?

This bill at stage 1 legislates for only two things. One is to mandate that the Scottish Government create a community wealth building strategy, although not that it then has to follow it—but we will come to that. The other is to mandate that certain public bodies get around the table with local authorities to come up with community wealth action plans. Neither is a bad idea, and I look forward to working with all members at stages 2 and 3 of the bill to make them better.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Richard Leonard to close the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour.

16:05

**Richard Leonard:** For me, it is simple: we should have local economies where far more power rests in the hands of local workers and local communities and is not left in the hands of absentee directors in faraway boardrooms. We should have a redistribution of wealth and power. We should have a democratic alternative to extractive capital and neoliberal economics, because we have seen, over the past decade and a half, just how badly exposed to economic shocks we are.

In the end, this is about political will and political priorities. By offering people hope out of despair and by offering a democratic renewal in the economy, in place of widespread discontent, we

would be offering them an alternative to the politics of division and of the authoritarian right.

There are some self-evident and conspicuous holes in the bill. What about supporting credit unions, some of which the Minister for Business and Employment and I met just yesterday, when they were lobbying Parliament? What about legislating to empower municipal, community and co-operative ownership of energy, as Lorna Slater said? What about our local government pension schemes, which are worth £60 billion? Are they not relevant public bodies? The Strathclyde pension scheme alone is valued at £28 billion, yet little of that is reinvested in the local economy and, even when it is, that is usually through financing vehicles that are themselves absentee multinational corporations or venture capitalists. What about the Scottish National Investment Bank? Should that public bank not have a statutory duty to support democratic forms of ownership in our economy?

What I am talking about is community wealth building from the root up: a mosaic, not a monolith, and not a command economy but one that is decentralised and socially owned. I am talking about a democratic socialism that embraces municipal ownership, co-operative ownership, worker participation and worker ownership and control.

I am bound to say that what this bill illustrates is the insufficiency of nationalism and a Scottish National Party Government that has long ago abandoned its radicalism. The bill should be a new path to those old ideals of co-operation, solidarity, democratic reform and of peace and prosperity, founded on principles that are rooted in a collective view of society.

Many of us in the Labour Party come from a radical, democratic and socialist tradition that finds its contemporary form in a community wealth building movement. It is of no surprise to me that two of the movement's outstanding leaders—Matthew Brown in Preston; and Joe Cullinane in North Ayrshire, who Katy Clark spoke of—are, and have been, Labour Party municipal socialists. The Labour Party should never be about the promotion of market forces and excessive wealth accumulation. It should always be about people before profit and the more equal society. That is who we are and who we always should be.

What we are witnessing with this bill is not just shallowness, moderation or timidity. What we are witnessing is an abject abdication of responsibility. The Scottish Government promised to bring forward a community wealth building act

“to redirect wealth, control and”

community

“benefits to local economies”.

It is my fear that the bill, in its current form, will do little to even measure that and will do nothing whatsoever to drive it. This bill does not rewire the economy—a property that Kevin Stewart claimed for it earlier. If the Government wills an end, the Government must also will the means to it—a point that both Katy Clark and Maurice Golden made in the debate

We will vote for the bill in principle. We will seek to amend it. We will seek to co-operate with the Government in that task, because, in the end, it is in all of our interests to make this a community wealth building act worthy of the name.

16:10

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** It is always interesting to find out which Labour Party has turned up for a debate, and we can see very clearly which Labour Party has turned up today. I salute Richard Leonard's steadfast commitment—for all the years that I have known him—to the socialist principles of overturning the bourgeoisie and establishing a people's republic.

**Murdo Fraser:** Roll the tumbrels!

**Stephen Kerr:** Indeed—do not encourage him, please.

The Scottish Conservatives do not disagree with the ambition that ministers claim lies behind community wealth building, because stronger local economies, vibrant high streets and genuinely resilient communities are aspirations that we should all support. Our disagreement is about not the principle but the method. The method that is set out in the bill is flawed, limited in ambition and weighed down by bureaucracy.

When I listen to Government ministers' speeches generally—and, certainly, to speeches from members of the Labour Party and of other leftist parties in the Parliament—on community wealth building, what strikes me most is the astonishing lack not just of scale and vision but, in some cases, of connection to reality. Too often, we hear community wealth building spoken about as though awarding a handful of small contracts to a handful of small organisations represents some great leap forward in economic transformation. It is nothing less than box ticking, it is small-ball economics and it is hardly a strategy for rebuilding Scotland's prosperity.

Community cafes, volunteer-led woodlands and social enterprises are all valuable contributions to civic life, but they should not be the ceiling of our ambition. Scotland cannot content itself with a narrow circular economy of microcontracts that are passed around a small number of actors. We must be bolder than that. If we are to build genuine

national and community wealth, we must harness the full entrepreneurial spirit of the Scottish people. That is why the five pillars matter—not as slogans but as levers for a genuinely ambitious economic strategy.

A lot has been said about procurement. Anchor institutions can and should play an important part in reshaping the Scottish economy at its foundations, by supporting productivity, capability and scale, rather than simply rewriting procurement guidance. Procurement should be strategic, not performative.

On employment, better jobs come from investment, innovation and productivity, not from state mandates or new duties. Growth improves wages. We cannot tax our way to growth, Richard Leonard. Bureaucracy depresses wages.

On land and property, the Scottish state—the largest landowner in the nation—is sitting on unproductive assets. If ministers were serious, they would release land for productive use by those who can create jobs, investment and prosperity. Instead, we get more frameworks.

On ownership, co-operatives and social enterprises have a role, but they are not inherently superior to private enterprise. The Government's ideological tilt risks distorting procurement and squeezing out the very businesses that drive Scotland's tax base and innovation.

On finance, we should be unlocking real investment by modernising pension structures, empowering—yes—local financial institutions, such as credit unions, and supporting capital formation across Scotland.

However, none of that requires this bill. The Government has the power now to do those things. The problem is that the bill does not do the things that genuinely build wealth. Instead, it does what the Government so often does: it creates new duties, new partnerships, new statements, new plans, new reporting cycles and new ministerial powers; it centralises; it prescribes; and it expands ministerial discretion while offloading obligations on to public bodies that are already stretched to breaking point. The bill demands action plans, but with no obligation to demonstrate results and no requirement to show improvements in productivity, business growth, wages or investment. Compliance is measured in paperwork, not outcomes. Scotland has had enough of government by process.

Local authorities, health boards, colleges and enterprise agencies all warned the committee of the substantial new burdens that the bill will create, but the financial memorandum claims that the cost will be minimal. That is simply not credible. There are obligations without resources,

responsibilities without clarity and expectations without realism.

Let me say this plainly: the bill hands ministers sweeping powers to issue binding guidance, revise national statements at will and add public bodies to the statutory regime with limited scrutiny. That is not decentralisation; it is the expansion of state power through the back door.

If we have real ambition and real vision, Scotland can be a genuine leader in community wealth building—not the limited, bureaucratic version that is set out in the bill, but a model that unleashes the full entrepreneurial capacity of the Scottish people. The framework that is before us contains elements that we can support, which is why we will vote for the bill at stage 1, but let us be honest: as drafted, it is far too narrow, process driven and centralised to deliver the transformation that ministers claim will be delivered.

As, I think, the minister knows, real community wealth is not created by another statutory plan or another set of ministerial powers; it is created by investment, enterprise, the productive use of land, competitive procurement and the hard graft of growing businesses. It is created when the Government steps back from ideology and steps up to support innovation, skills and local success. Only when we couple the principles of community wealth building with the natural entrepreneurship of the Scottish people will we see the gains in productivity, investment and prosperity that Scotland urgently needs. That is the challenge for the Government as we move to the next stage of the bill. If ministers meet that challenge, the Parliament can turn an underpowered framework into something that is worthy of Scotland's potential.

16:17

**Ivan McKee:** I thank all members who have contributed to this wide-ranging debate, which has taken various twists and turns over the past hour or so, although that was not totally unexpected.

I will start by reflecting on some of Daniel Johnson's comments about the committee's consideration of the bill. First, is the bill necessary? Indeed, that was the first question that I asked officials when I took over responsibility for the bill last year. Daniel Johnson answered the question quite effectively by noting that it will provide a clear obligation to act.

It is important that we consider the bill as being a step in a process. Many have recognised the significant work that has already taken place over a long period to build community wealth and the mechanisms that come with it, whether that is what we have done on procurement, which I will come back to, what has happened with community

asset transfers or the range of support and interventions that the Government has provided. The bill is a step on the journey as we cement and embed community wealth building in communities across Scotland.

The next step on the journey will involve providing the platform, standards and requirements that local authorities and partners will need to step up to. Willie Coffey and other members recognised that that is exactly what the bill will provide.

It is absolutely true to say that the guidance will contain answers to many of the issues that have been raised today. I have been clear that we need to pull together the content of the draft guidance at an early stage. That guidance will lay out what local authorities and their partners are expected to provide as part of the process. The setting out of those expectations and that floor is an important part of the process. The guidance will include evaluation mechanisms, which have, rightly, been mentioned, including by the committee. It will also include how the wider business community, the third sector, community groups and others should be involved in the process. The requirement to consult them is central to the approach.

There has been much talk and back-and-forth about targets. To be clear, the Government believes that locally set targets can be an important part of taking forward community wealth building at a local level—I think that everyone agrees that it would not be the right approach for the Government to set those targets. When we talk about statutory targets, members need to be careful about what exactly they are asking for. The guidance will set out that local authorities will be able to put together targets; that requirement will be set out. However, I do not think that anyone wants to see a statutory setting of numbers by the central Government.

**Stephen Kerr:** Does the minister accept that most of the members who commented on the setting of statutory targets spoke not about the setting of specific numbers but the idea that we need to have some measurable outputs? Currently, nothing in the bill comes anywhere near to being a measurable output.

**Ivan McKee:** I accept that. I talked about that with the committee, and I have talked about it with stakeholders. It is important to design the system in a way that gives scope for local authorities and their partners to set targets locally. Members are clear that, although a requirement can be set, the targets need to be set locally.

I want to touch on the issue of procurement, which was raised by a number of members. I would like to think that no one works harder than I do in engaging with local businesses. This week, I

have engaged with more local businesses and Scottish start-ups to get them plugged into procurement across the Scottish public sector. Our procurement team, which works tirelessly on the issue, recognises that the £16 billion that is spent across Scotland's economy by public sector organisations is a huge engine for growth. I make that point repeatedly during all my engagements on the matter.

I absolutely recognise that there is more work to do. There are more opportunities to be opened up and more mechanisms to be created to streamline processes. We continue to work tirelessly on that. I just ask that members reflect on the progress that has been made.

For example, south of the border, 20 per cent of public procurement money is spent on small and medium-sized enterprises. For the Scottish public sector, the figure is 47 per cent—more than double the figure south of the border. We should be proud of that, while recognising that there is further to go. It was interesting to listen to Katy Clark reflect on the wonderful work that is being done in North Ayrshire. I had the pleasure of visiting the Lochshore initiative recently to see the great work that is going on there. She held up the figure of 26 per cent as a fabulous local achievement—which it is—but we should recognise that the figure of 47 per cent has been achieved across the whole of Scotland, according to the reported data.

Members mentioned compulsory purchase orders and compulsory sales orders. A consultation on the matter is being held now, with some great work being done by Roseanna Cunningham and an expert group. Following the consultation, the Government will bring forward proposals on how to modernise the CPO system to make it even more effective. The introduction of compulsory sales orders is also being considered as part of that process. That work is under way.

Likewise, there have been calls from some quarters for changes to procurement thresholds. Some members mentioned that, but they should be aware that we already have a consultation on that issue. Legislation is not needed to change the thresholds. The quickest way to make those changes is through the process that we have taken forward through that consultation, rather than doing it through the bill.

Some of the interventions in the debate were very effective in focusing on what is already happening locally. As I mentioned, Willie Coffey and Katy Clark highlighted some great examples, which point to the fact that community wealth building is not new—it has been embedded in many parts of the country. Great work has already been taken forward, but the bill will give us structure and a framework.

We also need to minimise the bureaucracy that is involved. Members know that no one is more focused on minimising bureaucracy than I am. I want to make the process as streamlined as possible by providing the focus, requirements and framework so that all parts of Scotland can move up to the level of the best examples that have been identified.

This is not the end of the journey—we can continue to do much more beyond what I have set out to deliver the bill's objectives on public spend, the fair work agenda, the management and control of assets, community ownership and support for businesses. We also want to ensure that the other types of ownership that we all want to see more of are supported across the country.

I look forward to working with members as we take the bill forward over the coming weeks and months to deliver the next stage in the journey towards more thoroughly embedding community wealth building in support of Scotland's growing economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

## Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill: Financial Resolution

16:25

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-18938, in the name of Shona Robison, on a financial resolution for the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. I call Ivan McKee to move the motion.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill, agrees to any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3A of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act.—[*Ivan McKee*]

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

## Covid-19 Inquiry Modules 2, 2A, 2B, 2C Report

### **The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is a statement by Kate Forbes on the publication of the United Kingdom Covid-19 inquiry module 2 report. The Deputy First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

16:26

### **The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):**

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on people across Scotland, and its impact continues to be felt today. In recognition of the loss, hurt and suffering experienced by people across Scotland and the rest of the UK, it is vital that we learn lessons from the pandemic to make improvements for the future. We want to make effective and practical changes to learn from past events and ensure that we are prepared and ready for future challenges, such as another pandemic.

The Scottish and UK Covid-19 inquiries are playing a valuable role in helping us to do that by scrutinising the approach taken during the pandemic and holding decision makers, including the Scottish Government, to account. Today, I welcome the publication of the UK Covid-19 inquiry's module 2 report, which was published this afternoon. The report examines decision making and political governance across the United Kingdom during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was a period that profoundly affected every aspect of our national life.

The Scottish Government has fully engaged with and supported the evidence-gathering process for the UK inquiry. The First Minister and I gave oral evidence during the module 2A public hearings in Edinburgh in January 2024, alongside many other current and former ministers and officials, contributing to the wealth of evidence collated by the inquiry. I extend my thanks to the chair and the inquiry team for their efforts in preparing the report. I am conscious of the immense responsibility that the inquiry team holds in ensuring that important lessons are learned for the future.

I appreciate that timing of the publication of the independent report means that members will have had limited time to review the report prior to this statement, but the same is true of me. However, given the significant public interest, I thought it important that I update Parliament on the day of publication within the parliamentary day. I am giving a statement today so that I can provide a

more detailed update than a response to a parliamentary question would allow, and to provide the opportunity for members to ask me questions on such an important report.

As the report is published, my thoughts turn to the many families across Scotland who lost loved ones during the pandemic. In recognition of the hurt, loss and suffering that are felt by so many, we are committed to learning from the past.

I enormously appreciate the contributions of all the organisations and individuals who have shared their experiences with the inquiries, often revisiting traumatic events and profoundly challenging periods of their lives. Their contribution has been vital in helping to tell the story of the pandemic and in allowing the inquiries to play their role in scrutinising the decisions that were taken.

During the pandemic, the Scottish Government's foremost priority was to protect the public from the novel coronavirus Covid-19. We had to learn and adapt rapidly, implementing unprecedented measures to limit transmission and safeguard our most vulnerable communities. With the benefit of hindsight, we acknowledge that some choices, which were made in good faith at the time and under immense pressures, might not have been the right ones.

As the Parliament will be aware, in July 2024, the UK inquiry published its first report, which looked at resilience and preparedness. We published our response to that report in January this year. Since then, we have taken forward further key actions, including participating in a UK-wide exercise to test Government pandemic preparedness and publishing a report setting out improvements and changes that have been introduced to the Scottish resilience landscape.

Following publication of the module 1 report, there was collective discussion on the recommendations across the four nations ahead of our publishing our response. In considering the inquiry's findings for module 2, we remain committed to working constructively with our counterparts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure that our collective response to any future emergency is effective, practical and well co-ordinated.

The Scottish Government will now take the necessary time to carefully consider the findings and recommendations. We are committed to a thorough and thoughtful review process, and we will respond fully in due course. Those who have been affected by the pandemic, particularly those who bore some form of loss, have placed a great deal of trust in the Scottish Government not just to take on the challenges that Covid posed but to be open and transparent in our approach.

Taking into account the views of people who lived through and experienced the pandemic will be vital in helping to shape our response to the recommendations. That is why our response will be informed by wide stakeholder engagement, including a dedicated Covid inquiries response engagement group, which brings together representatives from key stakeholder organisations. It includes, among others, voices from organisations representing bereaved families, as well as those working with disabled people, minority ethnic and other marginalised communities, and older people. Members of the group will provide their learning and insight to the Scottish Government during the development of the response to the recommendations, ensuring that the interests of their member groups are fully represented. The group, which I will chair, will meet over the coming weeks to discuss the report and its recommendations. I look forward to engaging directly with those who have generously offered their time, expertise and challenge to support that vital work.

We will now take the necessary time and space to carefully and comprehensively examine the inquiry's report and its recommendations. That will enable us to reflect meaningfully on the findings, consider the implications in depth and engage constructively with the content, ensuring that any subsequent actions or responses will drive meaningful improvement. The engagement group will play a vital role in providing robust and effective challenge as we navigate this journey.

Although today is an important milestone in the UK inquiry's work, we must remember that it is one part of a careful and thorough process. We will continue to fully engage and work with the UK and Scottish Covid inquiries, and we look forward to their future findings. It is vital that our national response to any future emergency is informed and strengthened by the lessons that we have learned from the Covid pandemic. We remain committed to being open and transparent, and focused on delivering a response that delivers improvements for the future.

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

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I thank the Deputy First Minister for her statement and for advance sight of it. I echo her thanks to the inquiry chair and the team for the preparation of this very detailed report. That said, I wonder what the point was of scheduling the statement this afternoon. It is deeply disappointing that the

statement was scheduled for a time just half an hour after the 800-page report was published, with no time for members to read—far less to digest—the very detailed information that is contained in it. That appears to be part of the pattern of secrecy and cover-up that was exposed by the inquiry.

In 2021, the then First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, told journalists that nothing would be off limits in providing evidence to a public inquiry. We now know that both she and the current First Minister, John Swinney, deliberately deleted WhatsApp messages, seemingly under official guidance, to dodge freedom of information requests in the future. They have taken no responsibility for those actions.

Moreover, no minutes were kept of the gold command meetings between ministers and senior advisers. The Scottish inquiry counsel said that it is

“difficult to understand what precisely the ultimate decision-making process is when there is no record of how those decisions were ultimately taken.”

Shockingly, those gold command meetings were so secret that Kate Forbes herself told the inquiry that even she did not know that they were happening until a year after they started.

The absurd boast that the Government is committed to transparency is an insult to those who lost loved ones. Out of respect to them and all Scots, will the Government now commit to scheduling, after a suitable time has passed to allow the report to be digested, a full debate in the Parliament in Government time, so that we can properly discuss what is in the report?

**Kate Forbes:** I suspect that, if I had not scheduled a statement, I would have been called to the chamber to give one, and I wanted to make myself available to all Opposition members as quickly as possible. I reassure Murdo Fraser and others that I am sure that there will be plenty of further opportunities for scrutiny and debate.

On the issues that Murdo Fraser identified, he will understand many of the changes that have already been implemented, particularly after the report of module 1. He will understand that we carefully considered the recommendations from the Martins review of the Scottish Government's use of mobile messaging applications and non-corporate technology and that, on 20 June this year, a new policy came into effect that ended the use of mobile messaging applications to conduct Government business.

Murdo Fraser talked about gold command meetings. As set out in our closing statement to the Covid inquiry, gold meetings were not convened to make decisions to apply or lift measures.



In general, in response to the inquiry's report, I would say that we are committed to learning lessons from the pandemic. We will consider all recommendations that are made in the module 2 report. I have already offered, and I repeat again, my deepest sympathies and condolences to the many thousands of people who lost loved ones. We acknowledge that mistakes were made and that lessons must be learned. The decisions that were taken by the Government were entirely focused on fighting the pandemic and protecting the people of Scotland, but we will review the report in detail.

As Murdo Fraser has said, it is a large report, and I fully accept that, in the space of 30 minutes, none of us in this room will have had time to digest it. I understand that other Governments were planning to issue lengthy written statements, but I do not believe that our parliamentary procedures would have allowed for that. It felt like the issue was too important just to be put into an answer to a parliamentary question, which is why I am here.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I would like to thank the Deputy First Minister for her statement but, I regret to say, it tells us precisely nothing. It is disappointing that John Swinney is not responding, given that he was central to decision making. In my view, the statement is a masterclass in spin because it fails to address the substance of any recommendations and talks only about process. I am reminded of the tale of the emperor's new clothes.

We know that the Scottish Government was not prepared and failed to take action quickly enough. We know that hospitals were emptied of older people, who were sent to care homes, untested, when they were Covid positive, which led to a devastating 4,000 deaths. We know that the impact on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups was not considered and that John Swinney downgraded the exam results of working-class kids based on their postcode.

What we know today is that most members of the Cabinet were sidelined. They were not included in decision making, no minutes were taken and there was wholesale deletion of WhatsApp messages by Nicola Sturgeon and John Swinney.

Families who lost loved ones deserve answers. Will the Deputy First Minister have the grace to apologise for the errors that were made by her Government and will she tell us when we will have the formal response to the Covid inquiry's recommendations?

**Kate Forbes:** In response to Jackie Baillie's questions, I put on record again that we acknowledge—as we have acknowledged in the past—that mistakes were made and that lessons

must be learned. As I said, our decisions were entirely focused on fighting the pandemic. It was an unprecedented, systemic threat to global health, to healthcare systems, to economic activity and to wider society. Jackie Baillie talks about the things that, she says, she knows—everybody in Scotland has a similar list, because they lived it. They understood the impact that it had on them individually.

In relation to the Government's response, I made some comments about process. The member will appreciate that I have to provide statements to the Opposition as far in advance as possible; that is not ideal when the Covid inquiry report landed at 4 pm. I reassure her that I would be happy to give the Parliament more information.

We have committed to Baroness Hallett that we will respond to the inquiry in a timely manner. There are requirements to respond in a timely manner built in to the process. The way we did that in response to the module 1 report was to give an initial response. Here, we also have to do as much as we can to engage with the stakeholder group that I talked about, because, this time, the recommendations are a lot weightier—if I can put it like that. We will engage with the engagement group and I would be happy to come back to the Parliament in due course to give a more fulsome update on our response.

**Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** Will the Deputy First Minister join me in acknowledging that the most meaningful way to recognise the loss, hurt and suffering of the people of Scotland during the pandemic is to learn from the evidence and continue to make measurable improvements in pandemic planning and preparedness? Will she reaffirm the Scottish Government's commitment to delivering on those outcomes?

**Kate Forbes:** As I said in my statement, it is in recognition of the loss, hurt and suffering experienced by people across Scotland that it is vital that we show that we have learned the lessons from the pandemic, and that we make improvements for the future. We are committed to delivering on those improvements.

On 30 September, we laid our first report on the issue, "Scottish Government Report on Whole System Civil Emergency Preparedness 2025", in Parliament. That set out the resilience structures that are currently in place in Scotland and the work that we have already undertaken in response to the module 1 report to improve our approaches. We have committed to laying a report every three years for the Parliament to scrutinise.

Whole-system civil emergency preparedness includes preparedness for pandemics, but it is worth recognising that the next civil emergency

may not look like the last Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, we need to ensure that we are as resilient as possible. To make that whole system work, we have established a specific programme of work to improve our preparedness across all the Scottish Government. Ministers have oversight of that work and senior officials from across the Scottish Government are progressing it. I assure Fulton MacGregor that I am totally committed to delivering on those outcomes.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** The Covid inquiry exposed the deeply troubling way in which decisions were made by senior ministers and advisers during the pandemic. In a WhatsApp message about her own Covid rules for hospitality, Nicola Sturgeon said:

“it’s all so random.”

Her chief of staff wanted

“a good old-fashioned rammy”

with the UK Conservative Government about furlough policy and wrote in a notebook about

“political tactics calling for things we can’t do to force the UK”.

A civil servant who was working for John Swinney expressed concern that putting restrictions on Spain could endanger an independent Scotland joining the EU.

What does the cabinet secretary say to Scots who lost family members and livelihoods during the pandemic, who will be appalled by how politics influenced the Scottish Government’s decision making at a time when all decision making should have been scientifically backed?

**Kate Forbes:** I say to those who are listening that decisions that the Scottish Government made involved judgment by ministers that was informed by scientific advice and other considerations, which included analysis of harms through the Scottish four harms process.

Brian Whittle rightly referred to the hospitality sector. Having engaged with that sector on an almost weekly basis for two years, I understood intimately the extent of the brunt of the impact that it felt from some of the non-pharmaceutical interventions, including lockdowns. We remain committed to understanding the impact of the NPIs, as they are called, and learning lessons for the future about managing pandemics. However, I say quite clearly that the decision to implement NPIs, including lockdowns, was never taken lightly.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** On holding to account and lessons learned, others will rightly focus on the human impact of the measures that were taken, but I want to focus on the £4.1 billion

that was awarded in 28 failed contracts to those with connections to the Conservative Party. I do not know whether that is mentioned in the report—if it is not, it should be. The case of Michelle Mone is the most publicised—contracts that were worth £200 million went to Medpro, which made £60 million in profits on the back of that, for defective products.

I understand that, before the election, Labour undertook to introduce legislation to recover some of those moneys, which were fraudulently obtained. Can the Deputy First Minister advise whether Labour is pursuing that legal remedy?

**The Presiding Officer:** I invite the Deputy First Minister to respond on matters for which she has responsibility.

**Kate Forbes:** Our procurement processes in Scotland were robust. They were overseen by my colleague Ivan McKee. Audit Scotland’s report on support for business and the economy during the pandemic highlighted the particularly robust approach that we took to fraud to ensure that as much funding as possible was spent on businesses that desperately needed it.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** The Deputy First Minister has said that we have had only a brief opportunity to read the report. However, I have no doubt, from my brief reading of it, that public confidence in the Scottish Government’s decision making will be significantly affected.

Important decisions were made through informal structures, which reduced transparency and, ultimately, accountability. A number of witnesses who were involved in the UK Government’s response to Covid-19 told the inquiry that, in their view, part of the reason for the divergence in approach between the UK Government and the Scottish Government was a desire on the part of the Scottish Government on a number of occasions, for political rather than policy reasons, to adopt measures and language that were different from those adopted by the UK Government.

How does the SNP plan to rebuild the public’s trust in Government after such findings? Can the Deputy First Minister indicate when another statement will be made so that we can scrutinise the issue? Does she accept that that must happen well before the end of the parliamentary session?

**Kate Forbes:** In relation to the first part of Carol Mochan’s question, I assure her that, even during the rapidly evolving and intense circumstances of the pandemic, which we all remember, the Scottish Government sought to maintain its usual process of formal collective decision making. We were open, transparent and accountable in respect of the decisions that were made. I

personally recall the number of statements that I gave to members in the chamber, making myself open to scrutiny and debate. Our former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, gave updates to the public and made herself available to the press on a regular basis.

Another point that I would like to put on the record is that co-operation between the Scottish Government and the UK Government during the pandemic was frequent and collaborative. There was wide-ranging collaboration and co-ordination on a range of issues, including testing, vaccine roll-out and public health measures. I know that to be a fact, and I am hopeful that it is recognised in the report.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, it was clear that co-operation between Governments, stakeholders and organisations was vital to tackling the virus and keeping the country safe from harm. Will the Deputy First Minister reaffirm the Scottish Government's unwavering commitment to working closely with local and national partners to make effective and practical improvements in pandemic planning and preparedness following the publication of the module 2 report?

**Kate Forbes:** The short answer is yes. Rona Mackay is right to recognise that, for the whole-system approach to work, we need all parts of the public sector to be involved.

I talked about exercise Pegasus, which was the UK-wide pandemic preparedness exercise. Learnings identified from the public inquiries and from exercises such as Pegasus are being captured and worked on in that programme of work to ensure that we are as prepared as possible.

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** It has already been remarked that, before the pandemic, all nations of the UK were too reliant on assumptions that preparedness planning should be based on a flu pandemic. In speaking to the new report today, the inquiry chair said that, in the early stages of the pandemic,

"All four governments failed to appreciate the scale of the threat or the urgency of response it demanded"

and relied

"in part on misleading assurances that the UK was properly prepared for a pandemic."

In taking forward the work that the Deputy First Minister referred to, which is a broader approach to crisis planning and preparedness, does she recognise that we are in the early stages of that work and that we are not well prepared for the kind of crises that we might face? In particular, does she acknowledge that poverty and inequality

exacerbated the risk that many people faced and would face in future emergencies and that, ultimately, a more equal society would be a more resilient society?

**Kate Forbes:** In response to module 1, which covered the questions around preparedness, we provided the inquiry chair with a progress update in July 2025, which set out the action that had already been taken to deliver the recommendations in module 1. That included work to improve our approach to risk assessment and the findings of a significant horizon scanning project.

We will provide the inquiry chair with a further progress update in January 2026, precisely in response to the recommendations of module 1 and to the points that Patrick Harvie has outlined. He is absolutely right to make the point that, in terms of resilience, we cannot assume to know what the next civil emergency or pandemic will look like. That is why exercise Pegasus, which is a UK-wide test that we have come through, tested our ability to respond to a hypothetical pandemic and tested all the processes.

Patrick Harvie is also absolutely right about the equalities and human rights considerations. That is why the population health framework highlights health inequalities. Addressing those health inequalities remains a top priority for the Government, because the evidence is quite clear.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** In the pages of the report, we learn that our entire pandemic response was dictated by those in a small clique at the heart of the Scottish National Party Government, none of whom are in the chamber this afternoon. That clique had a damaging distrust when it came to working with others and no strategy at key moments.

The inquiry rejects Nicola Sturgeon's assertion that meetings of gold command were not decision-making meetings; it says that the group

"diminished the role of the ... Cabinet"

and reduced the transparency of decision making as a result. Does the Deputy First Minister accept that that reality crucially undermined democratic oversight and any suggestion of openness by her Government and, in turn, that it has robbed families of answers and of evidence about the innermost calculations behind the decisions under which we lived and under which, sadly, too many of us died?

**Kate Forbes:** I can respond quite clearly to Alex Cole-Hamilton that the primary decision-making forum in the Scottish Government is the Cabinet. That remained the case during the pandemic and it remains the case today.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** There are profound lessons to be learned from the impact of the pandemic on those with protected characteristics, health inequalities and those living in poverty. The evidence highlights unequal effects across different age groups and for those living with learning disabilities. There is also the issue of digital inclusion at such an important time. Can the cabinet secretary outline how such inequalities, including those linked to age or learning ability, will be addressed in future public health planning, based on the evidence that has emerged in the aftermath of the pandemic?

**Kate Forbes:** For the reasons that Clare Adamson set out, improving health and reducing health inequalities across Scotland remains a clear ambition for the Government. The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, in collaboration with others, published the population health framework in June, which is about taking a cross-Government and cross-sector approach to improving the key building blocks of healthcare. There are initial priorities in that document on embedding prevention into our systems.

Three local authority areas have been established as Marmot places through the collaboration for health equity in Scotland. In response to the recommendations from the expert reference group on Covid-19 and ethnicity, we have taken targeted action to tackle the healthcare inequalities that are experienced by minority ethnic communities. That is built into the Government's approach.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** There is no point in the Deputy First Minister saying that the Cabinet made all those decisions. The report states clearly that the Cabinet was not involved at all. I cannot understand why the Deputy First Minister would stand there and say something that is clearly not true.

The inquiry report also concludes that efforts to differentiate Scotland's Covid response from that of the rest of the UK were counterproductive. In the few minutes that we have had to look at the report, we have seen that paragraph 5.154 states:

"The idea of eliminating the virus from Scotland was inappropriate and destined to fail in the light of an open border with England and there being no agreement with the UK government to close it."

Paragraph 5.155 states:

"... the use of different language by the Scottish Government to express policy intent led to challenges in its development of guidance."

The Deputy First Minister used the word "fact" earlier—we all remember the travesty of acronym nonsense that was "FACTS". Does the Deputy First Minister not understand or not accept, based

on what I have just read, and in the light of Nicola Sturgeon's infamous text message to Liz Lloyd that said that her "aim" was to be maximally different, that the response was at times driven by political rather than public health consideration?

**Kate Forbes:** I fundamentally disagree with that characterisation. The member has completely misquoted and come up with a distortion in saying that the Cabinet was not involved at all. That is not representative of the report; it is total nonsense. As someone who sat through Cabinet, I can vouch for that.

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** While some drank and danced in Downing Street, young people across Scotland were some of the most affected throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Like many others, my own daughter saw her transition from primary school to secondary school disrupted, with long-term impacts still being felt. Will the Deputy First Minister speak to the importance of the views of young people throughout the inquiry and advise how the Scottish Government will use their experiences to inform its response to the module 2 report and its findings, and how we will prepare for such a threat again?

**Kate Forbes:** Elena Whitham spoke movingly about her own child and the personal impact that the pandemic had on so many of Scotland's children. There is a module that looks specifically at the impact of young people, particularly through the education system.

All communities in Scotland have a personal testimony of how Covid impacted them, and the views of young people are incredibly important as we address the impact of and learn from Covid-19. The member may be aware that both inquiries sought views from young people to inform their work, and we will engage with a wide range of stakeholders and organisations to inform our response to the report, so that it is based on lived experience.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** The Deputy First Minister has defended Cabinet responsibility during Covid and has gone as far as to say that she disagrees with the conclusions of the report. The report says that the decision to close schools in Scotland was taken by John Swinney and the First Minister alone, and that the Cabinet should not have been "sidelined". Does she agree?

**Kate Forbes:** I can reassure the member, happily, that the only person I disagreed with was Stephen Kerr.

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau Motion S6M-19845, on a committee substitute.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that Sue Webber be appointed to replace Annie Wells as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.—[*Graeme Dey*]

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

## Decision Time

17:01

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S6M-19802, in the name of Ivan McKee, on the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-18938, in the name of Shona Robison, on a financial resolution for the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill, agrees to any expenditure of a kind referred to in Rule 9.12.3A of the Parliament's Standing Orders arising in consequence of the Act.

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-19845, in the name of Graeme Dey, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a committee substitute, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that Sue Webber be appointed to replace Annie Wells as the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party substitute on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

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

*Meeting closed at 17:02.*



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