



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 5 March 2026

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website—
www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Thursday 5 March 2026

CONTENTS

	Col.
GENERAL QUESTION TIME.....	1
Face-to-face Banking Services	1
The Promise.....	2
Infrastructure (Local Authority Support)	4
HIAL Airports (Accessibility).....	5
Electric Vehicles (Rural and Island Communities)	6
Ardrossan Harbour.....	7
Economic Opportunity (Women).....	8
Secondary School Leavers (Positive Destinations)	9
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	11
Social Security Scotland Investigations	11
Queen Elizabeth University Hospital.....	13
Prestwick Airport (Military Use).....	17
Spring Statement	18
Curriculum for Excellence	19
Legal Rights (Women and Girls).....	21
Fuel Prices	22
Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme	23
M8 Woodside Viaducts	23
Energy Profits Levy	24
Congestion Charging (Edinburgh)	24
Ecocide (Scotland) Bill	25
National Health Service Waiting Times.....	26
BrewDog	26
Breast Reconstruction Surgery	27
DISABLED PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATION IN SCOTTISH DEMOCRACY	29
Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Ind)	29
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)	32
Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	34
Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab)	35
Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Ind)	37
Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)	38
The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart).....	40
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME.....	43
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HOUSING	43
Social Security Budget.....	43
Renewable Energy Infrastructure (North East Scotland)	44
More Homes Scotland	45
Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund	46
New-build Housing (Adaptations)	47
Tenanted Properties (West Wemyss and Denbeath)	48
Social Homes (Retrofitting)	50
DIGITAL ASSETS (SCOTLAND) BILL: STAGE 3	52
DIGITAL ASSETS (SCOTLAND) BILL	55
The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead).....	55
Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	57
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab).....	58
Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green)	60
Richard Lochhead.....	61
DRAFT CLIMATE CHANGE PLAN	64
Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)	64
Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP)	67
Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green)	70
Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)	72
Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP).....	74
The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin).....	76

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con).....	80
Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab).....	84
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green).....	88
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP).....	91
Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con).....	93
Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP).....	97
Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP).....	101
Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	104
Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP).....	106
Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green).....	109
Sarah Boyack.....	112
Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con).....	114
Gillian Martin.....	117
Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP).....	119
ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS SCOTLAND (APPOINTMENT).....	124
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REFORM (SCOTLAND) BILL: FINANCIAL RESOLUTION.....	125
DECISION TIME.....	126

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 5 March 2026

[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, which is the shortest question session of the week.

Face-to-face Banking Services

1. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with the banking industry about maintaining access to face-to-face banking services on high streets. (S6O-05595)

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): Regulation of financial services is reserved. However, the Scottish Government regularly engages with the sector and the regulator through ministerial engagements, such as meetings of the financial services growth and development board.

Scottish Government officials attended a forum convened by the Financial Conduct Authority on access to cash on 15 October 2025. That was an opportunity to raise Scotland-specific concerns directly with the FCA, LINK and Cash Access UK, including concerns about Scotland's rural and remote geography and demographics and about decisions on banking hubs not taking into account individual communities' needs. We continue to urge all financial services providers to listen to and address customer concerns.

Clare Haughey: Yet another bank in my Rutherglen constituency is under threat of closure. By my count, nine bank branches have closed in recent years, which has left Blantyre and Cambuslang as banking deserts.

Many individuals, businesses, churches and organisations need access to cash banking, and online or digital banking does not suit everyone. I am also deeply concerned about the impact that further bank closures will have on our local high streets. Will the minister join me in condemning the decimation of face-to-face banking across Scotland and join my calls for better access to banking facilities for all?

Richard Lochhead: The member raises an important issue. I think that all of us who are constituency members have experienced the loss of high street bank branches and face-to-face transactions. That is a matter of concern to the Scottish Government.

The member might wish to ask LINK to carry out an assessment to ensure that there is consideration of banking hubs and access to cash points in our communities. There are approximately 27 banking hubs in Scotland, with another six in progress through LINK Scheme. We continue to make sure that LINK takes into account Scotland's distinctive needs.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Last month, the Bank of Scotland announced that it would close its branch in Kelso. That is the ninth closure in the Borders since 2022.

I agree with Richard Lochhead that we need to review the access to cash criteria, and the Scottish Conservatives will be pushing the United Kingdom Government to do that. However, does the minister think that we should now organise a round-table meeting with the high street banks, LINK and Cash Access UK so that we can bring this problem to the Scottish Parliament?

Richard Lochhead: Such events have taken place in the past; I have attended them and I am happy for that to continue at some point in the near future. Perhaps the new Government and the new cohort of MSPs will wish to take that forward.

It is important that Scotland's voice is heard. I know that the member represents a largely rural constituency. I do, too, and at one point, my constituency was the hardest hit in Scotland on the loss of banks, so I can identify with those concerns.

The Promise

2. **Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind):** To ask the Scottish Government how it measures success in protecting care-experienced children, in light of reports that its flagship policy, the Promise, has failed to keep vulnerable children safe. (S6O-05596)

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): Protecting children from harm is a key priority for the Government. The Promise directs focus to fulfilling children's rights to be raised safely in their families. The rate of annual registrations to the child protection register fell from 4.1 per 1,000 children in 2018-19 to 3 per 1,000 in 2023-24, and rates of looked-after children also declined over that period. That suggests that agencies are putting safety plans in place earlier, before child protection plans become necessary. The Promise progress framework, which is set out jointly by The Promise Scotland and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, provides a national overview of the indicators that relate to the Promise.

Ash Regan: Safeguarding loses effectiveness when ideological confusion weakens practical

protections across public policy. The catastrophic consequences of diluting sex-based safeguards leave the vulnerable exposed to avoidable risks. Children in care are among Scotland's most vulnerable to exploitation, yet children in care were sold a promise instead of a plan to protect them. Brave survivors and whistleblowers have been left pleading for decisive action to close those safeguarding gaps, against talk of political legacy from those who walked away from an unkept promise.

Leadership is judged by outcomes, not slogans, and promises are not protection. Frankly, can the lack of delivery of robust safeguarding and the lack of legal consequences for all those who exploit vulnerable children be judged to be anything other than a failure?

Natalie Don-Innes: I do not agree with Ms Regan's assumption on the matter. As I said, protecting vulnerable children is a top priority for the Government. We are taking action to protect vulnerable children through the Promise and non-legislative means. The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill is making its way through the Parliament and will add protection for children and young people. On top of that, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills announced last week that we will establish a statutory public inquiry into Scotland's response to group-based child sexual abuse and exploitation. That will speak directly to some of the asks that Ms Regan has brought to me.

Although the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill is making its way through the Parliament, Ms Regan has not reached out to me to engage on any of those matters. She is more than welcome to do so.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): The Scottish National Party Government is delivering policies to support, and improve access to opportunities for, care-experienced young people. Will the minister speak further about how Scottish Government investment is continuing that vital work through, for example, the care-experienced children and young people fund?

Natalie Don-Innes: We continue to invest across the board to support improved outcomes for care-experienced children and young people, which includes providing more than £80 million from the care-experienced children and young people fund. There has been an increase in further education that has led the number of people accessing the care-experienced students bursary to more than double since 2019-20. From April 2026, care leavers will receive a new £2,000 care leavers payment, which will help young people to begin adulthood with much greater security. All that is on top of the Children (Care, Care

Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Bill, which will soon have its stage 3 proceedings in the Parliament.

Infrastructure (Local Authority Support)

3. Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what additional support it will provide to local authorities to address ageing infrastructure, including bridges. (S6O-05597)

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison): Local authorities have a duty under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 to manage and maintain local roads and associated infrastructure in their areas and duties under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to secure the convenient and safe movement of traffic.

The vast majority of funding available to councils is provided by means of a block grant from the Scottish Government. It is then the responsibility of individual local authorities to manage their own budgets and to allocate the total financial resources that are available to them, including on maintenance of local roads and bridges, on the basis of local needs and priorities, having first fulfilled their statutory obligations and the jointly agreed set of national and local priorities.

Tim Eagle: That seems to be passing the buck back to councils, which simply do not have the capital budgets to do the work. My constituents do not want to hear about who did or did not support the budget or what council budgets are not. They care about the fact that bridges are crumbling around them.

We need to see outside the bubble of Holyrood and into the reality of what is happening in our areas. The Cloddach bridge has been closed for more than four years. The Spey viaduct, which was a popular active travel route, is still sitting in the water. Arthur's bridge, which is a pivotal bridge for Lossiemouth, is declining fast. However, councils throughout Scotland, including Moray Council, simply do not have the budgets to fix bridges.

I ask the cabinet secretary to give immediate and urgent consideration to reopening the local bridge maintenance fund to ensure that communities in Moray and throughout Scotland can repair and replace critical infrastructure. Will she do that?

Shona Robison: At no point did Craig Hoy on behalf of the Tories bring to me a proposal for a local bridge maintenance fund as part of the budget negotiations. If Tim Eagle believes that that is important, perhaps he should have had a word with his front-bench colleagues to make it a condition of support for the budget. That is how

things get done in the Parliament—not by the posturing of Tim Eagle and others.

HIAL Airports (Accessibility)

4. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to ensure that Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd airports are as accessible as possible to all residents and users. (S6O-05598)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): The Scottish Government will make available to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd a budget of up to £52.3 million in 2026-27 to ensure that HIAL can continue to operate safe and regulatory-compliant airports. That includes ensuring that HIAL's airports are accessible and compliant with all relevant equalities legislation.

HIAL has a number of initiatives that are aimed at improving accessibility, including accessibility guides for its airports produced by AccessAble. In the Civil Aviation Authority's "Airport Accessibility Performance Report 2024/2025", Inverness Airport, which was the only HIAL airport to be assessed, was rated as good.

Yesterday marked the 40th anniversary of the date when HIAL was officially formed and incorporated by the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority. I thank everyone who works or has worked for HIAL over the past four decades for their commitment to providing excellent service to passengers and for the role that they have played in supporting air connectivity for our rural and island communities.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the unique challenges of the Highlands and Islands, the challenges that customers face in accessing hub airports when there are limited public transport or other options available and the long journeys that those customers often have to make. I was contacted by constituents who sometimes travel hours to use Inverness airport and are offered only a 15-minute free drop-off and pick-up window to collect family and friends, with the risk of incurring significant charges if they stay longer. Those charges start at more than £10 for under an hour and apply even if the flight that they are meeting is delayed or has been cancelled, as it sometimes is before they have left. I have raised the issue with HIAL, which seems indifferent to my constituents' concerns, so will the cabinet secretary raise it with Government-owned HIAL and ensure that my constituents are not penalised for matters that are outwith their control?

Fiona Hyslop: Jamie Halcro Johnston raises an important point—the integration of transport is important. I am sure that he welcomes the £2 bus fare cap pilot that has been introduced, which will

certainly address some of the cost challenges. However, the timing issues and the time available for drop-off and pick-up at airports are best dealt with in an operational manner by the airports themselves. As part of its responsibilities, an airport will want to increase commercial revenue and reduce costs. However, I agree with Jamie Halcro Johnston that that has to be balanced and must recognise the different types of customers that an airport has, which might be different from those at other airports. I will make sure that my officials raise the issue with HIAL, which will have been paying attention to this question.

Electric Vehicles (Rural and Island Communities)

5. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to encourage the uptake of electric vehicles in rural and island communities. (S6O-05599)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): Our £30 million EV infrastructure fund enables local authorities to work collaboratively and with the private sector to invest in public EV charging and target public funding in areas that are less likely to attract stand-alone private investment, including rural and island communities.

In August, I announced that more than £3 million from the EV infrastructure fund would be provided for a collaborative project led by Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership, which includes the councils for Orkney, Shetland, the Western Isles and Argyll and Bute. I also announced that a further £4.5 million would be provided for additional EV charging in rural and island areas across Scotland, which has been fully allocated to 138 projects, which will deliver 266 additional charging points. The rural and island infrastructure fund will continue in 2026-27, as is provided for in our 2026-27 Scottish budget.

Liam McArthur: I welcome the funding that the cabinet secretary has outlined. She will be aware that Orkney has one of the highest take-up rates of electric vehicles anywhere in Scotland. However, I was recently made aware that some insurance providers are starting to refuse island customers coverage due to what they say is a lack of local capacity for the repair and maintenance of EVs. I ask the cabinet secretary to engage with Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Orkney Islands Council, the Orkney Renewable Energy Forum and other local stakeholders to see what can be done to address capacity issues over the medium to longer term.

Fiona Hyslop: That is an important point, and I will ensure that my officials take up that issue, particularly in relation to insurance companies.

On the more substantive point about making sure that we have a pipeline of skills available, we have already been funding colleges to deliver the maintenance and repair training, including for the particular issues that affect EVs, that is required as part of the transition. HIE should be able to be part of that continuing support.

Ardrossan Harbour

6. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what actions Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd will take to improve the resilience of Ardrossan harbour, once it has been acquired. (S6O-05600)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): As I outlined in my statement to the Parliament on 3 March and at the subsequent Ardrossan task force meeting, which was held on the same day, CMAL, as the new statutory harbour authority, is expected to take forward immediate works at the harbour to improve resilience. To ensure the continuation of the two-port operation, CMAL has identified immediate minor works and has therefore already procured replacement fenders and will repair navigation lights. Those initial works will be undertaken as soon as possible and are planned to not disrupt continuing services, thus ensuring improved resilience of the Arran berth.

Kenneth Gibson: I thank the cabinet secretary for returning Ardrossan harbour to the public sector and for that very positive response. Will she confirm not only that CMAL is primed to boost resilience and immediately take control of the site but that plans to fully redevelop that vital Ayrshire port are well advanced and that the regeneration and renewal will ensure a first-class, 21st century, fully functioning port that will serve the communities of Ardrossan and Arran for 60 years or more?

Fiona Hyslop: It is acknowledged that the purchase of Ardrossan harbour is a significant milestone, but momentum on the project is needed. CMAL will review the original detailed design proposals and scope of works, including for the Arran berth realignment. An indicative timeline for design and procurement works is being drafted. Based on current estimates, works could begin in June 2027, but that is subject to the procurement stage, approval of funding and contractor award and mobilisation.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I understand that the save Ardrossan harbour campaign has been involved in discussions with the cabinet secretary about support for businesses over the past few years. It tells me that the cabinet secretary said that that issue could be looked at when the harbour closes for redevelopment. Will the cabinet secretary ensure that campaign

groups such as save Ardrossan harbour and Arran for Ardrossan harbour are at the forefront of decisions that are made? Will she outline when compensation discussions can take place?

Fiona Hyslop: A number of partners will be involved in the redevelopment, not least North Ayrshire Council, which co-chairs the Ardrossan task force. The other evening, we discussed ensuring that, at future meetings, future aspects of development are more fully embraced by the local community, as well as issues relating to immediate investment in the harbour.

I have indicated that, when the harbour has to close for the major redevelopment that is required, we need to improve the port. Everybody knows that, and that is part of the purchase arrangement. We need to ensure that the businesses that will be affected at that time are supported. I have put that on the record and discussed it with the task force, but the decisions will need to be made by a future Government.

Economic Opportunity (Women)

7. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the forthcoming international women's day, what action it is taking to ensure that Scotland's economy provides women with equitable access to economic opportunity, including how it supports them to live free from poverty and financial inequality. (S6O-05601)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes): Women must have equitable access to economic opportunities. In April 2025, the gender pay gap for all employees in Scotland was narrower than the United Kingdom gap, but we know that more needs to be done. A range of Government initiatives help women to enter and progress in work, such as the expansion of early learning and childcare provision and parental employability support. Since April 2020, 70 per cent of parents who have been supported through the no one left behind approach have been female.

Employment law is reserved, but our fair work approach aims to address women's workplace inequalities by encouraging employers to tackle gender pay gaps.

Maggie Chapman: Despite legislation and decades of campaigning for equality, women continue to face discrimination, violence, exclusion and poverty. Engender has called for investment in women and a transformation of our communities. Specifically, it has developed 10 realistic steps to improve the lives of women, covering support for women with no recourse to public funds, social security asks and the need for our economic strategies to work for women.

Will the Deputy First Minister outline the Scottish Government's response to those steps and how she would work to implement them to ensure that all future economic and social policy considerations contribute to Scotland becoming a global leader on gender equality?

Kate Forbes: Alongside those helpful recommendations, we have the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls and a number of other plans to support the objectives that Maggie Chapman outlined. As the person with responsibility for our approach to the economy, I am proud of the efforts and investment that are being made to support women to remain in work or to access employment.

I mentioned our no one left behind approach. We are delivering a person-centred, all-age employability offer in every local authority area, and women make up just under 50 per cent of all participants. There are intersectional barriers to employment that female parents in particular can face, and we need to continue to tackle those.

Secondary School Leavers (Positive Destinations)

8. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that the gap between secondary school leavers from the most deprived and least deprived areas going to a positive destination widened to 4.7 percentage points, which is the largest since 2020-21. (S6O-05602)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): Last week's data publication showed that the percentage of school leavers in a positive destination three months after the end of the school year was 95.7 per cent, which is the second-highest figure on record. Our most recent Scottish Qualifications Authority exam results show that the pass rates for national 5s and highers are up when compared with the results in 2024 and in 2019, before the pandemic.

Compared with last year, the attainment gap has narrowed for national 5, higher and advanced higher qualifications, and the 2024-25 achievement of curriculum for excellence levels, published in December, demonstrate that record levels of literacy and numeracy are being achieved in Scotland's primary schools. That welcome progress demonstrates that the Government's approach to education is delivering results for Scotland's young people.

Brian Whittle: First, I take a moment to welcome Scottish apprenticeship week and the vital opportunities that it creates.

Scotland is missing out on 5,000 high-quality nuclear jobs because the Government refuses to back new projects or include nuclear in its energy

skills passport. Furthermore, funding gaps are forcing colleges to turn away qualified students, including 71 qualified social care applicants and 400 engineer apprentices at Ayrshire College alone. Does the Government accept that its policy choices are actively disadvantaging our school leavers by restricting their opportunities?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Mr Whittle for his warm welcome for Scottish apprenticeship week. I am sure that he was out visiting a local business in his area, as I was in my area, and supporting the important work of apprentices in our communities.

The Government's budget, which Mr Whittle was not able to vote for, provides extra funding for more apprenticeships and for Scotland's colleges, which has been welcomed by the sector. I am sorely concerned that Mr Whittle was not able to vote for that budget, and I hope that he will reflect on that and on the positivity that that extra investment in communities such as his has brought to apprenticeship week.

First Minister's Question Time

12:01

Social Security Scotland Investigations

1. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): John Swinney personally backed Sally Donald to become a new Scottish National Party member of the Scottish Parliament. At her glitzy campaign fundraiser, he gushed about her in glowing terms. Mr Swinney was at the top table, smiling. He was by her side. That was just 12 days ago. Yesterday, Sally Donald was forced to quit as the SNP candidate for Edinburgh Southern. When exactly did John Swinney know that his star candidate was under investigation for benefit fraud?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am going to do my level best to answer the questions that Russell Findlay has put to me, as I always do, but I am not going to talk about individual cases, because it is important that I respect the proper process that the Government has put in place to ensure that issues in relation to social security payments and potential fraud are dealt with properly.

In relation to the specific question that Russell Findlay raises, I first became aware of those issues when the Government received a press inquiry about the subject in recent days.

Russell Findlay: John Swinney's star candidate used a crowdfunder to raise more than £1,200 for her campaign. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We are going to hear Mr Findlay.

Russell Findlay: Anyone who is daft enough to trust the SNP with their cash needs to give their head a wobble.

However, I am more interested in taxpayers' money. That case illustrates so much that is wrong with the SNP's benefits system. Thanks to *The Scotsman* newspaper, we know that Sally Donald may have claimed tens of thousands of pounds in adult disability payment to which she was not entitled. I have repeatedly challenged John Swinney over the SNP's deliberately light-touch benefits system being wide open to abuse, but he is in denial. He told me:

"if there is evidence of fraud, those issues are already addressed by the systems that Social Security Scotland has in place."—[*Official Report*, 18 September 2025; c 11.]

Does he stand by his claim that the system is strong enough to catch benefits cheats?

The First Minister: Yes, I stand by those comments because I believe that to be the case.

I cannot be the only person who is surprised that Russell Findlay has not managed to make a connection between the fact that an investigation is being made, which confirms the point that such activities are undertaken by Social Security Scotland, and the fact that the system is robust in that respect. By his own words—not for the first time—Russell Findlay destroys the arguments that he puts to me in the Parliament.

Russell Findlay: Here is a reality check for John Swinney. Last year, my party revealed that Social Security Scotland had referred just 29 cases of potential fraud to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. On the basis of the level of fraud across the United Kingdom, that number should be in the thousands.

Today, we can reveal another shocking fact. Under the SNP's new benefits system, just three people have been convicted for fraud-related offences since 2022. Out of the almost 1 million people who claim benefits in Scotland, just three people have been convicted of such offences. That is unbelievable.

On the basis of our evidence, does John Swinney agree that the SNP has, in effect, decriminalised benefit fraud in Scotland?

The First Minister: I reiterate what I said in my answer to Mr Findlay's second question: the system is working, because investigations take place when they are required. There is a robust assessment process in place.

What Mr Findlay's question is cover for is his desire to take benefits away from vulnerable people in our society. The fault line in the system that is here—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

The First Minister: —is that Russell Findlay and the Tories, with their credentials as the nasty party of Scottish politics properly restored, are going after vulnerable people in our society. Well, my party is not going to do that.

Russell Findlay: I remember the old John Swinney, who preached about being respectful in here. The mask has again slipped and he has gone back to the angry John Swinney who resorts to silly smears. He still does not get it. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

Russell Findlay: The party of gravy-bus grifters and camper-van capers mugs its own members and robs the taxpayers of Scotland. It has built a benefits system that shouts, "Free money here!" It is a charter for chancers.

Every other party backs the SNP's out-of-control benefits spending, but the Scottish Conservatives will keep telling the truth. The SNP's benefits spending is unaffordable, unfair and unsustainable. We have set out a sensible plan to tackle fraud and to reduce the £7 billion—and rising—benefits bill. Mr Swinney can posture all he wants, but surely he can now see that the benefits system is completely and utterly broken.

The First Minister: I am always respectful in my engagement in Parliament, and I will not apologise for setting out some hard truths to the Tory party.

I did not conjure up the description of the Tory party as “the nasty party”. That description was conjured up and openly used by Theresa May, the former Conservative Prime Minister, who, in a moment of self-reflection, told the Conservatives what they needed to hear. Of course, there has been a resumption of the nasty party under the leadership of Russell Findlay.

One illustration of the characteristics of Mr Findlay's plan is the fact that, if it was implemented, the two-child limit would be restored in relation to the Scottish child payment, which would consign more families and more children in this country to poverty.

One of my objectives as First Minister is to make sure that we succeed in eradicating child poverty. We are already making significant progress on that. In Scotland, there has been a reduction in child poverty while it is rising in the rest of the United Kingdom. Next week, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice will set out to Parliament the next steps in tackling child poverty. This Government will succeed in its determination to eradicate child poverty and consign the Tory party in Scotland to electoral history.

Queen Elizabeth University Hospital

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Last week in the chamber, John Swinney shamefully turned his back on families impacted by the Queen Elizabeth university hospital scandal. Later today, he will finally meet them in an online Teams call. I hope that he will take the opportunity to apologise to them.

Last week, John Swinney said that he could not set up an independent expert panel to answer the families' questions because there was a public inquiry. That was not the first time that he had misled the Parliament and hidden behind the inquiry when it suited him. He knows that the inquiry is not looking at individual cases and, therefore, will not give those families the answers that they deserve.

In NHS Tayside, there is a public inquiry into the Eljamel scandal, alongside an expert panel that is looking at individual cases. What the First Minister

said last week is just not true. Will he now accept that he was wrong, and will he commit to setting up that independent expert panel?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The first thing that I want to say to Mr Sarwar is that I offered no disrespect to families last week. I was simply sitting in my chair, looking at Mr Sarwar and answering his questions. It is my duty to answer questions, and I did that. I simply say to Mr Sarwar that I have to give that matter my attention when I am answering questions in the Parliament.

The second question that Mr Sarwar puts to me is about any scrutiny of individual cases. From my recollection of what he has said to me, Mr Sarwar misrepresents what I said to Parliament last week—not, of course, for the first time. What I said to Mr Sarwar last week is that I would have to consider the question of looking at individual cases. I did not, at any stage, rule it out. Mr Sarwar has, once again, misrepresented me in the chamber, and it is up to me to correct him for that purpose.

In 2020, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport commissioned a case note review, which was undertaken by a panel of independent experts, so some of that work has already been undertaken. The review was led by Professor Mike Stephens and it looked at 118 episodes of bacterial infection in 85 children who received treatment for blood disease, cancer or related conditions at the Royal hospital for children in Glasgow. It published its findings in 2021.

That exercise has been done on a large number of cases. As I said last week, if more cases are to be examined, I will consider that question. However, I have to be mindful of the fact that a public inquiry is now under way to look at all these questions. I reiterate to Mr Sarwar that at no stage last week did I rule out that possibility, and he should stop misrepresenting me in the chamber.

Anas Sarwar: To be frank, patients and families will see right through the nonsense of John Swinney, because they have been hearing it for eight years. This is not the only occasion on which John Swinney has misled Parliament. He has done it for weeks in relation to safety issues at the hospital. Yet again, it has taken whistleblowers and journalists to reveal that infection risks to immunocompromised patients have led to two wards being partially closed.

The First Minister does not want to hear it from me, but perhaps he will listen to the words of the grieving widow Louise Slorance:

“It beggars belief that as this incident was ongoing”,

the health board,

“the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health were publicly proclaiming the hospital was safe. As the leading

expert states 4B is not safe and nobody should be saying it is ... patients like Andrew remain at risk today simply because those responsible prioritise reputation over patient safety."

Shame on each and every single one of you. Public safety and patient reassurance are urgent. They require honesty and transparency. This Parliament voted three weeks ago for all those documents to be published, and they have not been. Will the First Minister stop hiding behind process and do it right now?

The First Minister: Let me address the issues that Mr Sarwar puts to me. Last week, I met some of the families involved in the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, and I will meet many more as part of the conversation this afternoon. They will have my attention and my engagement on all those issues.

Mr Sarwar asked me for transparency on these issues, and I want to be crystal clear with Parliament. The Government received an hospital infection incident assessment tool—HIIAT—amber alert on Thursday 26 February regarding ward 4B at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital, which cares for bone marrow transplant patients. This morning, the Government was advised that that HIIAT alert was upgraded to red.

There is only one factor that has made the difference between the amber alert and the red alert, and that is the upgrading of one aspect of the HIIAT to acknowledge the heightened public anxiety around the matter. It is not because of any increased risk of harm to patients.

It is important for me to put on the record the fundamental clinical consensus that the wards in question are safe. I reiterate the view that I consider the hospital, and its component parts, to be safe. Where issues are identified openly and transparently, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde is addressing those issues and will be required by the Government to do exactly that. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has been engaging with the health board about exactly that, and that is what I expect the health board to do in the period to come.

Anas Sarwar: In that answer, John Swinney reveals the inconsistency at the heart of this Government. The Government received 14 amber and red warnings before March 2018, but still took no action and denied that there were infection risks at the hospital. The First Minister now admits that amber and red warnings come to the Government, so why were those ignored before 2018 so that people died as a result?

Every step of the way, this Scottish National Party Government has attempted to misinform, deflect and deny. Progress has only ever been made when the Government has been backed into

a corner and, even now, it hides behind process rather than just telling the truth.

Let us look at what has been established in the past few weeks. We now know that political pressure was applied to open a hospital before it was ready and safe, and that people died as a result. Shona Robison was the health secretary at the time and should perhaps reflect on her own decisions and on what happened. We know that repeated warnings about infections were ignored and that staff were bullied and attempts made to silence them. We know that grieving families were offered bribes in exchange for their silence and that, despite all that, even now, the truth is being denied and the hospital has not been validated.

Families do not trust John Swinney and he will not release the papers that this Parliament has demanded. Why is he incapable of doing the right thing by families when it comes to that hospital?

The First Minister: I completely and utterly reject that charge.

In relation to the issue of grieving families, I will meet grieving families this afternoon, as I indicated that I would do, just as I met families last week and just as I have, in my constituency capacity, met victims of the Eljamel situation, whom I also met as First Minister on Monday.

On the issue of releasing papers, my understanding is that the papers that were considered by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde have been made publicly available, which addresses the question that Mr Sarwar puts to me. If he believes that any documents have not been released when the Government committed to doing so, he should advise me as to what those documents are, because it is my understanding that those documents have been put in the public domain.

We have established an oversight group that involves representatives of families and is chaired by the chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and by Sir Lewis Ritchie, an eminent clinician, to ensure that there is external interrogation of the issues at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

On the question of openness, I have today put on record the most recent information available to me. I could not be any more open with Parliament on the question, based on the information that is available to me.

I add that the Government has established a public inquiry that will consider all those issues and that we await Lord Brodie's findings.

I say to Anas Sarwar at this particular moment that the Government recognises the deep concern of families. That is being addressed by the steps

that we are taking, and that will continue to be the position of my Government.

Prestwick Airport (Military Use)

3. Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Flight data shows that, in the week leading up to the United States and Israeli attack on Iran, 24 US military aircraft landed at Prestwick airport and some of those came directly from Israel. That is a significant increase in American military activity at an airport that is owned by the Scottish Government. We now know that that was in preparation for their bombing campaign against Iran. Trump and Netanyahu are not liberating the Iranian people from a brutal regime by murdering their children, as they did when they killed dozens of little girls shortly after they arrived for lessons at a Tehran school on Saturday.

The Israeli military is rightly banned from using Prestwick airport because of its genocidal assault on Palestine. The First Minister has said that America and Israel's attack on Iran is not compatible with the international rules-based system. In other words, it is illegal under international law, so will he now ban the American military from using Prestwick airport?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Let me reiterate what I have said publicly on the issue. I cannot see how the intervention by the United States and Israel is compatible with an international rules-based system. The implications of this are now being felt very directly by our own citizens, many of whom are stranded in the middle east. The position that the Prime Minister finds himself in, of having to address the security implications for our citizens as a consequence of the American and Israeli action, demonstrates how these issues can escalate out of control very, very quickly indeed and pose direct risks to our citizens.

I am concerned for the wellbeing of Scottish citizens who are trapped in the middle east. We are working with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to seek the repatriation of those individuals as quickly as it is safe to do so, given the risks and threats that are faced.

In relation to the question of the use of Prestwick airport, the Government is in the process of establishing clarity around the use of the airport by the American air force. That process of inquiry is under way. Obviously, when the Government has more to say on that question, we will share that with Parliament.

Ross Greer: The First Minister is right that America's attack on Iran is incompatible with international law, but he is seeking an answer that we already have about the US use of Prestwick airport. We can see the flight data and we can see the flights between Prestwick airport and Israel by

the US military. It is abundantly obvious what they are doing.

Spain, which is a fellow NATO member, has now banned the US military from using its air bases. Its Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, said:

"you can be against a hateful regime ... and, at the same time, against an unjustified and dangerous military intervention that is outside international law."

I believe that the First Minister agrees with that statement. It is very similar to statements that he made when he marched against the war against Iraq in 2003.

The US is using an airport that is owned by the Scottish Government to wage an illegal war, killing hundreds if not thousands of innocent people, but at the moment, Scotland's First Minister is sitting on his hands. This Government says that it stands up for Scotland. Why does that stop the moment it might involve Donald Trump? Why will the First Minister not kick Trump's troops out of Prestwick airport immediately?

The First Minister: I think that it is pretty clear from what I have said over the past few days that I am in no way, shape or form a supporter of what has happened in the course of the past few days—in no way, shape or form. No amount of the characterisation of my stance that Mr Greer has put on the record will demonstrate that not to be the case.

I am taking the steps within Government to establish the detail around the use of Prestwick airport. When the Government has more to say to Parliament about that, we will do so. However, let me reiterate that I believe that the intervention by Israel and the United States is incompatible with the international rules-based system. That has been the position of my Government and it will continue to be so.

Spring Statement

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the United Kingdom Government's spring statement. (S6F-04721)

The First Minister (John Swinney): The UK spring statement provided an update on the various issues in relation to the economic situation. We had hoped that there would be a clear outcome from the spring statement in relation to the energy profits levy, with an immediate end to that profits levy, given the damage that is being done to the North Sea sector as a consequence. We received information about additional consequentials from the United Kingdom Government, which will be spread over a three-year period beginning with 2026-27 and which represent additional funding of less than half of 1 per cent of the budget over a three-year period.

Kenneth Gibson: UK economic growth forecasts have been revised downwards to lower than in the last year of the Tories. Does the First Minister agree that the spring statement was a missed opportunity to abolish an energy profits levy, which is costing 1,000 jobs each month in the North Sea at a time of fuel insecurity; to remove the increased employer national insurance contributions, which have hit the low paid and businesses and have cost 200,000 jobs; and, finally, to deliver justice to the 3.6 million women against state pension inequality—the WASPI women—who have been betrayed by the UK Labour Government? Does he agree that, given that it is bereft of any vision for Scotland, it is no wonder that the best election slogan that Labour can contrive is, “Hold your nose and vote Labour”?

The Presiding Officer: Please answer in relation to devolved competence, First Minister.

The First Minister: On the issues associated with the spring statement, I am still unable to understand how the UK Government can reconcile its supposed enthusiasm for growth in the economy with the increase in employer national insurance contributions, which is so obviously damaging employment growth in many parts of the United Kingdom. Thankfully, though, because of the steps that my Government has taken, unemployment is at a very low level compared with the rest of the United Kingdom.

I did want the chancellor’s statement to address the energy profits levy, which is costing 1,000 jobs each month in the North Sea at a time of fuel insecurity. The challenges that we face in Scotland have not been assisted by the stance taken by the United Kingdom Government in its spring statement, but we will work to ensure that, at all times, we continue to protect and promote the interests of the people of Scotland.

As for Mr Gibson’s characterisation of the Labour Party’s dynamic election campaign, the slogan for which has gone from “Vote Labour for change” to “Hold your nose and vote Labour”, it tells us what we all knew a long time ago—that it stinks to vote Labour.

Curriculum for Excellence

5. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister, in light of the recently published commission on school reform manifesto warning that the curriculum for excellence has been poorly implemented and is harming long-term prospects, what the Scottish Government’s position is on whether a lack of clear, nationally specified curriculum content and standards has contributed to declining attainment and inconsistency across Scotland’s schools. (S6F-04723)

The First Minister (John Swinney): Scottish education continues to perform well, with record levels of literacy and numeracy, a record low in the poverty-related attainment gap in primary schools and a near-record number of young people entering positive destinations.

On the encouragement of the commission on school reform, the Government sought an assessment of curriculum for excellence from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. That review indicated that curriculum for excellence was the correct approach.

Work to update the curriculum to ensure strong alignment between the broad general education and the senior phase is under way. Those reforms are essential to ensure the continued success of our education system.

Stephen Kerr: We have just had the usual self-congratulation from John Swinney. He cannot have read the 2021 OECD review if that is what he thinks the sum content of it was.

Teachers have been warning for years that curriculum for excellence is no longer fit for purpose. It has weakened the emphasis on subject knowledge, has created inconsistency between schools and has coincided with Scotland falling behind international competitors.

The OECD review in 2021—five years ago—warned that there was insufficient clarity about what pupils should learn and how standards should be measured, and yet, all those years on, the Scottish National Party Government has done nothing. Will the First Minister now accept that his Government bears responsibility for the erosion of Scotland’s once world-leading education system, and will he set out what action must now be taken to restore clear standards, strong knowledge foundations and consistent expectations across Scotland’s schools?

The First Minister: I do not accept that characterisation of Scottish education. Attainment levels are at a record high in literacy and numeracy, which is a consequence of the Government’s commitment to the Scottish attainment challenge. The poverty-related attainment gap in literacy and numeracy, across primary and secondary education, is at a record low.

With regard to the delivery of Scottish education, there have been improvements in examination results, as demonstrated by the exam results in August 2025. Those showed the strength of Scottish education.

The Government has taken action to address the issues highlighted in the OECD review in relation to curriculum content. Any curriculum has

to be founded, and if Mr Kerr does not realise that the curriculum is knowledge based to equip young people with the skills that are needed for the 21st century, he has not been paying attention to the content of Scottish education.

I am engaged with those involved in Scottish education the length and breadth of the country, and I see a strong education system with outstanding young people and with a record number of achievements being made in our schools. I am proud of the strength of Scottish education.

Legal Rights (Women and Girls)

6. Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the First Minister, in light of the theme of this year's international women's day being equal rights and equal justice, what action the Scottish Government is taking to improve the legal rights of women and girls. (S6F-04731)

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Scottish Government is strengthening the rights of women and girls. I am committed to ensuring that people are protected from abuse, which is why we are introducing new protections for women and girls via the hate crime legislation and are consulting on other new protections, such as banning the creation of deepfake images.

Significant reforms have also recently been introduced, such as the establishment of a sexual offences court, which provides victims of sexual offences with an automatic lifelong right of anonymity, and providing women with the ability to seek protection from abuse by removing the abuser from their home.

Katy Clark: A number of women members have raised with the First Minister the financial problems being faced by rape crisis centres, which provide a range of practical and legal services to women. Three rape crisis centres, including the STAR Centre, which provides services in Ayrshire, have highlighted significant real-terms cuts, and Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis has closed two of its waiting lists.

The First Minister has talked about active discussions with ministers. As we approach international women's day, will he give a commitment that there will be no cuts, so that services provided by rape crisis centres can continue?

The First Minister: I reassure Katy Clark that the Government wants to put in place appropriate funding for rape crisis centres around the country. We are providing a 5 per cent uplift to the delivering equally safe fund, bringing the total investment in the fund to almost £46 million from 2026 to 2028.

Katy Clark also raised with me issues related to Glasgow and Clyde Rape Crisis. Improvements to the funding position have been made there, and that is also the case in relation to the STAR Centre in Ayrshire, which she also mentioned. I hope that that will reassure Ms Clark that the Government wishes to fund the network of rape crisis centres around the country adequately and effectively.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): It is scandalous that the Scottish National Party Government has spent millions of pounds funding self-identification groups while shutting sex-based women's organisations out of public funding. Ahead of international women's day, will the First Minister commit to finally opening the equally safe and equality and human rights funds to fair and open competition?

The First Minister: The Government sets out to Parliament the investment that it is making. I have set out the uplift to the funds, and all of that provision is put to Parliament in the annual budget, which I am pleased to say Parliament approved last week.

The Presiding Officer: We move to constituency and general supplementary questions.

Fuel Prices

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Industry experts have warned that global uncertainty could lead to increased fuel prices. With that in mind, the Labour Party must rethink its planned hikes to fuel duty, which will hit hard-working families in Scotland hard. Does the First Minister believe that, when Scotland produces far more oil and gas than we can hope to use, energy-rich Scots should not need to pay through the nose to fill their cars?

The First Minister (John Swinney): There is renewed uncertainty about the energy prices that we will all pay because of the events in the middle east, which will cause significant disruption and anxiety in the economy. Therefore, it is essential that we are all mindful of the steps that we take to ensure that those issues are properly addressed. Fundamentally, that onus and responsibility is on the United Kingdom Government in relation to those areas of taxation.

As for areas where we do have responsibility, I was in Inverness yesterday to announce the commencement of the £2 bus fare cap proposal, which will be deployed in the Highlands on 23 March. It is already operating in the Western Isles and Shetland, and it will start in Orkney on Monday. It is another example of this Government intervening to support individuals and reduce the cost of living. I am pleased with the interventions that we are making.

Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme

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

I have been contacted by local church groups concerned about the closure at the end of this month of the United Kingdom Government's listed places of worship grant scheme, a very valuable scheme that I am sure the First Minister is aware of, and which allows places of worship to recover value added tax on repair and renovation costs.

The UK Government has indicated that, from April, a replacement scheme worth £92 million will be established, but it will cover only England. That will, of course, generate Barnett consequential for the Scottish Government, so will the First Minister commit to using those consequentials to establish a similar scheme for listed places of worship here in Scotland?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I will have to look at the detail of the timing of those announcements, but I suspect that the Barnett consequentials that Mr Fraser mentions will have been in the budget settlement on which the Parliament made a determination in last week's budget debate. Of course, following that debate, Mr Fraser did not support the Government's budget.

We will look at the issue and see what we can do to assist. If there are further steps that the Government can take, we will share them with Parliament.

M8 Woodside Viaducts

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The First Minister is aware that there are temporary works on the M8 viaducts and that the project is already four years over schedule. I put on record my thanks to Amey and Transport Scotland for the site visit that I had.

Transport Scotland is now consulting on three options for a permanent solution. One of them is to demolish that section of the M8 and divert it to the M74, at a cost of up to £125 million.

Does the First Minister agree that that option would be a disaster, given the impact on the M74 and the west of Scotland economy, because the issue affects a much wider area than Glasgow? Does he agree that Transport Scotland should remove that option and should reassure businesses, taxi operators, drivers and bus operators that that option will not be taken seriously?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I understand the concern that Pauline McNeill raises. This is an issue that is the subject of active consultation, and Transport Scotland will consider the feedback that comes in. I am sure that the concerns that Pauline McNeill has set out will be

heard in the consultation process. I give her the commitment that the Government will consider carefully the views about the issue that are expressed by all interested parties.

Energy Profits Levy

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The Labour Party betrayed workers, industry and our economy when it failed to scrap its tax on Scotland's energy at the spring statement this week. Not only does that tax destroy jobs, it ruins investment in renewables and puts our energy security at risk at a time of escalating global conflict. Does the First Minister share my view that Labour's tax on Scotland's energy must end now to put us in a position to boost our economy, save jobs and ensure our energy security? *[Interruption.]*

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am not quite sure why Labour members are taking such exception to Mr Stewart's question today. It rather reinforces the lack of concern that Labour has for the employment of people in the North Sea oil and gas sector at the present moment.

I have been raising with the Prime Minister for some months now the necessity of removing the energy profits levy. Because of that levy, we are seeing an accelerated decline in oil and gas activity without the upsurge in renewables activity that we need in order for that to be compensated for.

There is a significant employment threat faced by people in the North Sea oil and gas sector, and the Labour Party is absolutely oblivious to all of that. It does not care about it one jot—*[Interruption.]* Well, this Government cares about the employment of individuals in Scotland. I reiterate my call for the removal of the energy profits levy, and it should happen the sooner the better.

The Presiding Officer: Let us make sure that we can hear one another. People in the gallery would very much like to hear members' contributions.

Congestion Charging (Edinburgh)

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Councillors in Edinburgh have voted to develop a framework for a congestion charge in the capital that could see residents in East Lothian, Midlothian and West Lothian having to pay more than £4,000 a year to drive into the city. The First Minister says that he is interested in the cost of living, so does he agree that it is unfair for my constituents to pay to drive to work, visit family or go to hospital? I know that he is keen on referenda, so does he agree that, as in 2005, that should be decided by a referendum of people across my region?

The First Minister (John Swinney): There is a dilemma at the heart of the question that Miles Briggs raises. On a regular basis, members of Parliament press the Government to enable local authorities to take more comprehensive decisions about their localities.

Over time, Mr Briggs has argued for me to enable local authorities to have more scope to do things, but he is now asking me to intervene to stop that happening. Those are local matters that local authorities must consult on and make decisions about. It is their responsibility to do exactly that.

On the subject of a referendum, I say to Mr Briggs that I think that the next referendum that needs to take place in Scotland is a referendum on Scottish independence—and the sooner the better.

Ecocide (Scotland) Bill

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): It feels as though it is a good time to remind the Parliament and Kevin Stewart in particular that the triple threat of climate breakdown, nature loss and pollution is an urgent danger to our people and environment.

I thank the First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, Gillian Martin, for their support for the Ecocide (Scotland) Bill, which was recently backed by 90 MSPs from six political parties at stage 1. Although the parliamentary committee has stopped the clock on the bill for this session—by a majority of one vote—the threat to Scotland’s nature remains. Does the First Minister agree with me and the majority of people in Scotland that the bill must be a priority for the next session of the Parliament, so that Scotland can benefit from a stand-alone offence of ecocide to deter and protect us from the most severe environmental disruption?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I pay tribute to Monica Lennon for the work that she has done on the bill. I understand that the committee decided not to proceed to stage 2 consideration, which is a matter for the committee.

The issues that Monica Lennon raises about nature loss, biodiversity and climate change are sustained, important priority issues that cannot be avoided. That is why the Government is committed to our policy agenda. Should the Government be re-elected, it will consider the issues that Monica Lennon has raised with me. We all have to recognise that there is now a much more divided debate on the issue. It is important that leadership is deployed to ensure that we address the necessity for climate action and restore nature loss. That is what I am committed to doing in the programme of my Government.

National Health Service Waiting Times

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I remind members of my entry in the register of members’ interests.

This week, new figures have shown a 6.1 per cent increase in the number of NHS operations performed in the past year. Meanwhile, child and adolescent mental health service waiting times of more than 18 weeks are now at their lowest level since June 2013, with CAMHS targets having been met consistently for more than a year. That follows last week’s news that waiting lists in Scotland are continuing to fall, with waits of more than a year having decreased for eight consecutive months. Does the First Minister expect continuous improvements to delivery across our national health service?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I expect that to be the case, because the Government has committed to reducing long waits in our NHS. As my colleague Clare Haughey has said, there have been eight months of continuous reductions in long waits for out-patients and for patients with a treatment time guarantee. The latest data this week shows that operation numbers are up by 5.6 per cent in the 12 months to December 2025. General practitioner numbers are up and 16 walk-in GP centres are being delivered across the country. I know that the Labour Party absolutely loathes the GP walk-in centres, but I am pleased that they will provide more access to healthcare services in Scotland. The national performance against the 18-week CAMHS standard has been met for the past year. I assure Clare Haughey that the Government, under my leadership, will continue to deliver the improvements in the national health service, and we will continue to do what is already in place.

BrewDog

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): This week, BrewDog, which is based in Ellon in Aberdeenshire, announced the loss of 484 jobs and the closure of 38 pubs after the company fell into administration. Nine of the bars that have closed are in Scotland, including two in Aberdeen and one in Inverurie. Unions, workers and investors have all voiced anger at how the sale of the business was handled, with staff being told that they had lost their jobs during a 15-minute conference call.

BrewDog is the latest in a string of companies to have closed pubs in the north-east so far this year, and BrewDog’s former chief executive has pointed to business rates as a factor in the company’s downfall. What is the Scottish Government doing to support staff who have lost their jobs at BrewDog? When will the First Minister finally put a

stop to the Scottish National Party's stealth tax on our hospitality sector?

The First Minister (John Swinney): With the greatest respect to Mr Lumsden, I think that the issues in relation to BrewDog's situation have a great deal more to do with other factors than with business rates levied by the Scottish Government.

On the question of business rates, however, in the budget that was passed last week—which Mr Lumsden did not support—the Government put in place support and reliefs totalling, if my memory serves me right, more than £900 million in relation to business rates relief. We are supporting transitional relief as part of that figure to assist businesses in the hospitality sector.

The Government will, of course, engage closely with the BrewDog employees. I am deeply concerned about the way in which they have been treated. It is appalling for members of staff to be treated in this fashion. The partnership action for continuing employment initiative that the Government puts in place to support employees who lose their jobs will be available to help those from BrewDog who have lost their jobs.

Breast Reconstruction Surgery

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I met a constituent last Friday who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2018. She has had successful treatment, with a mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and she was assured that she would receive breast reconstruction surgery following treatment, which will likely involve multiple visits from Shetland to Aberdeen breast clinic. However, she has thus far failed to establish when that will happen. It is evident that the lengthy delay is having an impact on her mental health and wellbeing and, consequently, that of her family.

Does the First Minister know whether years of delay for breast reconstruction surgery is usual? Will he ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to engage directly with me about that specific case, to try to get some answers for my constituent, who has already been through so much?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am very sympathetic to the point that Beatrice Wishart raises, and I have answered questions on the topic before. I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to engage directly with Beatrice Wishart on this question.

The theatres that undertake activity to tackle breast cancer and other cancers are the same theatres that are used for breast reconstruction surgery. Where we have backlogs in the aftermath of Covid, clinical priority has been attached to the immediate treatment of life-threatening conditions

that individuals face. Sadly and regrettably, that has led to significant delays in breast reconstruction surgery. That is the rationale for where we find ourselves.

I will ask the health secretary to engage directly with Beatrice Wishart to support her constituent. I simply express my regret and apologies for the delay that has been experienced, which is for those reasons and those reasons alone.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister's question time. Our next item of business is a members' business debate. There will be a brief suspension to allow those leaving the chamber, including the public gallery, to do so.

12:47

Meeting suspended.

12:49

On resuming—

Disabled People's Representation in Scottish Democracy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I ask members of the public who have come to visit us today—and they are very welcome—if they are leaving the chamber to please do so quickly and quietly, because we are about to move on to our next item of business.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-20598, in the name of Jeremy Balfour, on recognising lived experience and strengthening disabled people's representation in Scottish democracy. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the value of lived experience in informing effective scrutiny and legislation and ensuring that those views are embedded across legislation passed at the Scottish Parliament; commends events such as the Parliament Disability Summit, first held in 2023, which highlighted disability issues and allowed disabled people across Scotland, including in the Lothian region, to be at the forefront of political discussion; welcomes that the Summit will be held again on 21 February 2026 and notes the view that this Summit should continue on a biannual basis; notes with concern reports that disabled people remain significantly underrepresented in elected office in Scotland, with 5% of the current MSPs declaring a disability compared with 24% of the general population; understands that people from other protected groups also continue to face underrepresentation; acknowledges what it sees as the many barriers that exist in society which discourage or prevent disabled people and others with protected characteristics from standing for election; welcomes initiatives such as the Access to Elected Office Fund run by Inclusion Scotland, which, it understands, helped 14 disabled candidates in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election through assistance with transport, communication and/or personal assistance, and notes the calls on all political parties, the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body and the Scottish Government to continue to work collaboratively to remove barriers, promote inclusion and strengthen disabled people's representation and participation in Scotland's political institutions, while also taking steps to improve representation and participation for all groups protected under the Equality Act 2010.

12:50

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Ind): I am grateful to colleagues across the chamber for their support for the motion. I am sad that it has not gained the support of all parties in the Parliament. I hope that that is not a comment about their support for disabled representation, which is an issue that I

am sure all reasonable members can agree is worthy of parliamentary time. I say gently to my former colleagues in the Scottish Conservatives that the fact that none of them has supported the motion reflects on the party that I no longer recognise in regard to disability issues. For two other parties to feel that disability is not an important enough topic for them to even attend the debate speaks of where we are and where we still have to go.

The core of this afternoon's motion is laid out in its first line:

"That the Parliament recognises the value of lived experience in informing effective scrutiny and legislation and ensuring that those views are embedded across legislation passed at the Scottish Parliament".

If we hold that to be true, we owe it to the people of Scotland, whom we serve, to make a conscious effort to ensure that Parliament looks as similar to the people whom it serves as possible.

In the time that I have been in Parliament, we have made progress. We have seen changes in legislation that give greater protection to people with disabilities. We have seen the Scottish Government pick up the challenge around changing places toilets. We have seen more money go to disability charities. However, we still face some major issues.

This morning, I received an email that said:

"Glasgow IJB ended its funding for Scottish Huntington's Association to provide specialist services on 1 January—a decision condemned by cross-party MSPs and further called into question by Glasgow City Internal Audit. One thing is beyond dispute: Huntington's families were not consulted. A decision was made about that community without its knowledge or input. That should not be so."

There are still people with certain disabilities, such as learning disabilities and hidden disabilities, who are not getting the coverage, help and support that they deserve and require. There are also issues around employability. Too many people—again, particularly those with learning disabilities—are not getting the employment that they want and are capable of carrying out. I have to say that I think the Parliament missed an opportunity when it decided not to appoint a disability commissioner. I understand the arguments that were brought by some against doing so, but I think that the disability community is still struggling to come to terms with that decision.

To be more positive for a moment, a couple of Saturdays ago, the minister, Pam Duncan-Glancy, Emma Roddick, Carol Mochan and I held the disability summit here in the Parliament. Such events help to inform policy and decisions. It was a great success. Almost every desk was filled by people with lived experience of disability. I am

pleased that the summit has been held for a second time and hope that, whoever comes back after the election, it will become a biannual event. Unfortunately, although such events are vital in making the voices of disabled people heard, they do not come along enough.

We have to examine what outcomes came from the disability summit and what real differences it will make to the lives of people with disabilities. As I said, progress has been made in representation across protected characteristics, even during my 10 years in the Parliament. However, we must recognise that we still have a significant way to go. Only 5 per cent of MSPs have declared a disability but, in Scotland, 25 per cent of people have a recognised disability. That difference is unacceptable and something needs to be done about it. Let me be clear: I do not blame the electorate. I am here thanks to the people of Lothian region. Other members who have disabilities are also proof that people in Scotland are not against electing members with a disability. The issue is that not enough is being done to encourage disabled candidates to stand.

I understand that that is a somewhat cheeky point to make now that I sit as an independent but, having been a member of a party for 40 years, I think that all parties in and outwith the Parliament need to do much more to attract people with disabilities. Encouraging and promoting disabled candidates must start at the grass roots and parties should do everything in their power to make the election process as accessible as possible. However, it goes beyond that. What do we expect of our members?

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): Does Jeremy Balfour agree that the parties could emphasise the list system in the Scottish Parliament as a great way for disabled people to get higher up the party system, and that it is a great way for parties to give them priority?

Jeremy Balfour: That debate needs to happen. Interestingly, other Commonwealth countries have been even more radical on that. Some of the east African countries have disabled-only lists, so a candidate has to have a disability to be on such a list. It is competitive among different individuals, but that is one model. South Africa, for example, has gone much more down the route of getting political parties to have more disabled candidates. There are questions such as whether delivering leaflets is essential for party members to be seen as possible candidates. There are also questions about how accessible buildings are. All political parties need to address such issues.

We have made progress. The access to elected office fund has been put into legislation and will be implemented for Scottish Parliament and local

elections. I hope that the United Kingdom Government will consider the scheme for Westminster elections as well. The fund allows disabled people to have the help and resources that make an even playing field. The administration of that scheme has been helpful. I and other members of the Parliament have benefited from it.

One fear that people have about standing and being elected is what the Parliament will be like. From my experience of working in many different roles over the years, the Scottish Parliament is one of the best places to work for disabled people. I have found from every individual working here a willingness to be helpful, kind and open to suggestions. If disabled people are worried about being elected, they need not be, because the Parliament, from the chief executive down, has done more than I could have ever hoped to make it that way from my first day.

This might be my last long speech before the election. Like all members, I do not know how the electorate will vote come May. However, a simple message needs to be picked up after May by whoever is elected: nothing for us without us. The Parliament cannot make decisions on what is best for disabled people if disabled people are not here.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Balfour, you will need to bring your remarks to a close.

Jeremy Balfour: If the Parliament is to serve the people effectively, it must reflect the people effectively.

As the motion in my name says, it is the job of political parties, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government to drive progress. I hope that that will be taken up by whoever is elected in May.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I gave Mr Balfour some latitude, but I advise members that we are starting again at 2 and that the security personnel must be allowed time to come in and clear the chamber. We move to the open debate, with back-bench speeches of up to four minutes. I intend to ensure that members comply with that.

13:01

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I welcome today's debate. I thank Jeremy Balfour for bringing the motion, which I supported, before the Parliament. I agree with much of what he has said and I did not realise that that might be one of his last speeches in the chamber.

Strengthening disabled people's representation is not a peripheral issue. It is central to building a democratic system that works for everyone. Lived experience enriches our scrutiny, improves our legislation and ensures that policy is grounded in the reality of people's lives.

Throughout my time in the Scottish Parliament, particularly through my work on health inequalities, diabetes and lung health, I have seen at first hand how crucial lived experience is to good policy making. As co-convenor of the cross-party groups on diabetes and lung health, I have had the privilege of hearing directly from people managing long-term conditions, many of which are invisible and misunderstood. Their insights have shaped our understanding of the challenges that they face and the actions that are needed to tackle those challenges. That reinforces why people living with a disability or hidden conditions must be included at every stage of political and policy development. Their exclusion has real, measurable consequences.

Misunderstanding continues to be one of the greatest barriers that people with hidden disabilities face. A person living with type 1 diabetes may struggle with glucose levels, which can sometimes change unpredictably. I know that because I am one of those type 1 people. Someone with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or severe asthma may live each day managing breathlessness. However, because those conditions are not visible, many people feel judged, doubted or dismissed when they ask for the support that they need. The stigma stops people participating fully in society, and it prevents far too many people from considering roles in public life.

Raising awareness of those challenges has been an important part of my work, whether during debates on topics such as world COPD day or world diabetes day, or through engagement with communities across my South Scotland region.

However, awareness alone is not enough. We need structural change. I therefore welcome the Scottish Government's efforts to embed disabled people's voices into policy making, including through the disability equality plan. Developed in co-production with disabled people's organisations, the plan commits to building disability competence across Government and includes targeted investment to address long-standing barriers. Initiatives that are supported by the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland such as strengthened mental health support, improved advice services and the Cabinet takeovers by disabled people's organisations, the most recent of which happened in February, demonstrate a growing commitment to meaningful engagement.

Representation matters deeply. Disabled people remain significantly underrepresented in elected office, not because of a lack of ability or ambition but because of the barriers that they collectively face, which need to be removed. The access to elected office fund, which was created by the Scottish Government and delivered by Inclusion

Scotland, has shown what is possible when proper support is provided.

We must continue to build on that progress. The evidence is clear that disabled people face higher levels of poverty, poorer health outcomes and barriers in employment, housing and education. Those inequalities intersect with the inequalities facing people with other protected characteristics. That alone makes the case for ensuring that people who have a disability help to shape the policies that directly affect them. Empowering disabled people strengthens our democracy and leads to fairer, more compassionate decisions.

I welcome the cross-party commitment that we will have today, and I reaffirm my commitment to working with colleagues and communities to remove those barriers and support disabled people's full and equal participation in Scotland's political life.

13:05

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I am pleased to speak in this afternoon's debate, and I thank Jeremy Balfour for bringing the issue to the chamber.

The motion for today's debate speaks to the simple but important principle that lived experience can strengthen our democracy. Although statistics and political theory are no doubt important for making policy, they cannot be the only things that influence how the Parliament decides on law. Legislation must also be informed by the experiences of those who the decisions affect. That is why we support having politicians who have a variety of life experiences, as that can improve the choices that they make.

We should also support the inclusion of groups who are underrepresented in politics, which is why initiatives such as the Parliament's disability summit are so important, as the motion highlights. The summit demonstrates clearly how the political debate improves when underrepresented groups, including disabled people, are fully involved in the wider political debate. Jeremy Balfour's motion says that disabled people are underrepresented in Scottish politics, which is a trend that is also happening in the United Kingdom, across Europe and in the United States.

A study in 2024 found that disabled people in the UK and the US feel better represented by disabled candidates. That was driven partly by a sense of shared identity but also by a feeling that they are better represented by candidates who share their disability. The study also highlighted evidence that non-disabled people also see disabled political candidates as bringing

a range of traits and skills to the table",

which is important partly because disabled candidates offer different life experiences, as we know. That reminds us of the need to tackle the remaining barriers that discourage and prevent disabled people from participating in politics, as that should help to unlock the potential that many individuals can offer to the political system.

That work includes programmes such as the access to elected office fund, which is run by Inclusion Scotland. That should go alongside continued efforts to tackle other inequalities that disabled people face in their day-to-day lives. For example, we know that the number of disabled people in employment has increased over the past decade, but it is still very small when compared with the number of non-disabled people in employment. For groups across society, tackling one form of inequality often means tackling other forms alongside that.

Members across the chamber agree that the Parliament should fully reflect Scotland and what Scotland represents. That means that we must be committed to removing unnecessary barriers to inclusion, and if we truly want to be inclusive, that must include our political system. Those barriers include disabled people and many other demographics who remain underrepresented in politics as a whole. Lived experience should not sit on the margins of discussion. It should be recognised as part of the effective scrutiny that proper law making requires.

Promoting inclusion and ensuring that there is diversity across political issues and across the political divide is vital. The Parliament should be grounded in the realisation that it affects everyday lives across Scotland.

13:09

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Jeremy Balfour for bringing the debate to the chamber. I take the opportunity to thank Jeremy Balfour for all his work and contributions in the area. The member is a champion of the cause and is very vocal about these issues, and I mean that in the best possible way. He also has practical ideas on how we break down barriers, engage with disabled constituents and fully include people in decision making, and I thank him for that work.

Over the five years that I have been in the Scottish Parliament, I have been pleased and encouraged by members' engagement with the disabled community, including those from a range of backgrounds and with a range of disabilities. However, as has been mentioned by others, that does not mean that we are doing enough or doing things in the right way.

While researching for this debate, I read about the history of the slogan "Nothing about us without

us", which Jeremy Balfour mentioned. It relies on the principle of participation and has been used by disabled people's organisations throughout the years as part of the global movement to achieve the full participation and equalisation of opportunities for, by and with disabled people. We can all agree that we have made advances, but that we have not yet achieved all of the slogan's aims. We should understand that that is part of how we move forward.

I really wanted to speak in this debate, because I was lucky enough to attend the second Scottish Parliament disability summit, which was held here with a large number of groups representing disabled people, young people with disabilities and young people caring for loved ones with disability. The chamber was packed with so many people. The summit took place on 21 February, in person at the Scottish Parliament and online, and brought together disabled people, carers, advocates and allies to reflect on the progress and, importantly, to look at the future. As Scotland heads towards the next election, it is so important to ensure that disabled people are part of the conversation.

The summit offered an opportunity to invite disabled people in Scotland and their organisations to discuss ideas for change. What would they like there to be in place to help the Parliament to achieve or create a more inclusive society? Questions were asked about the progress they wanted to see in relation to transport, social care, inclusive education, social security and, importantly, voting.

I was lucky enough to co-chair a group with a fantastic young woman, Eilidh Henderson, who generously shared her experience and that of her family during our session on social care. Eilidh took the lead on the first online breakout session, which was a first for the summit. I note that Eilidh would be happy for me to say that, after a couple of technical problems, the session went very well. It was facilitated technically by the Parliament staff. Eilidh and I made sure that an extra breakout was added because we recognised that being on screen for such long periods of time can be difficult and exhausting for people.

All the feedback so far has suggested that the online option helped allow others to be in that breakout session and that the experience overall was positive. People mainly talked about their experiences, but one thing that they mentioned that the Parliament will need to look at is self-directed support—the expectations for it and where it has failed people.

I am aware of the time. Before I close, I add that I was lucky enough on that day to have not only Eilidh but a young woman from Cumnock called Emma McEwan who was with me observing.

Emma hopes to work with young people. She found it fascinating to be around people in a situation where disabled people were in control of the narrative and the agenda. Emma reported back that that gave her a better understanding of everyday life for people with disabilities and the barriers that they encounter. We must make sure that that happens more in the future.

13:13

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Ind): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate and I thank my colleague Jeremy Balfour for bringing the matter to the chamber. His commitment to disability rights has meant that he has kept it on the agenda, and I hope that he is able to continue to do that in here after May—or, if not, from outside this place, as I will be doing.

The value of lived experience matters. Our job in here is to represent constituents and to improve lives, and we can only do that well if we represent the breadth of experience that exists. This parliamentary session has seen an improvement in representation, which has been reflected not only in legislation, but in the way that our Parliament does its business. I put on record my thanks to the brilliant staff in security, information technology, facilities management, the chamber desk, catering, the Scottish Parliament information centre, legislation and cleaning—with a special mention for the brilliant Brenda Law—for taking inclusion so seriously and making me and others feel so welcome. I also thank the Presiding Officer for leadership on that and for agreeing to host the first ever parliamentary disability summit in 2023, to celebrate international disabled people's day. I hope that it becomes a biannual summit.

Although, in this session, much has been done on inclusion that we can be proud of, we are not there yet. Almost one in four people in Scotland are disabled, yet only 5 per cent of members in this place say that they are. People from other protected groups continue to face underrepresentation in here, too. There should be nothing about us without us. Policy and practice and the laws that govern them should work for all of us. To get there, we need to have a more representative Parliament.

When I was elected in 2021, I was the first permanent wheelchair user to become an MSP. Although I am extremely proud of that and of my time here, it should not have taken so long. I will not be returning here in May, but I will continue to fight for disabled people to take their rightful place in society and here in their Parliament. I will leave the ladder of opportunity to enable disabled people to come after me. We are here, surely, to improve the everyday lives of the people we serve and to ensure that the people who come next take us

further and faster on our journey to a Scotland that will be a land of opportunity for all of us.

We cannot afford to backslide, because the distance to go is too great. Too many disabled people cannot get out of their beds because they have no social care. Too many disabled people are trapped in their own homes because those homes are inaccessible. Too many disabled people cannot get around Scotland because they cannot get on public transport. Too many disabled people are not in work because of all that, as well as the negative attitudes that mean that some employers are afraid to employ disabled people.

In preparing for today's debate, I was reminded of the training on disability equality that I gave to MSPs in 2017. One member said to me, "The experiences you describe are unacceptable. Why aren't disabled people beating down the doors of this place to get it fixed?" I replied, "Because you can't get here to beat down the doors if you can't get out of bed." It is that basic, and until we sort out the basics, representation of disabled people on the high street, in workplaces and in this legislature will be a pipe dream for too many. We must not let being a representative stay in the dreams of disabled people. We must allow them to realise it, because disabled people have a place in here, too.

Let us leave the chamber with renewed resolve to make that happen. It will not take rocket science, but it will take change—in small places, close to home, in housing, in care, in transport, in employment and so on. It will also take bravery on the part of all members who return and the new members who enter Parliament with them. I wish everyone who ever occupies these benches all the best of luck in the world to deliver a fairer Scotland, because disabled people need them to. I will continue to work day and night, out of here, to help to make that happen, too.

13:17

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I thank Jeremy Balfour for lodging the motion. When I attended the disability summit with him a fortnight ago, it was lovely to see so many adjustments across the Parliament, from ramps around the building to live captioning throughout the event at the front of the chamber. It would be wonderful to see such adjustments being made, and disabled people from across Scotland taking their place in the chamber, on a more regular basis, but, sadly, a lot more needs to be done by political parties, Government and society at large if that is to become a reality.

The behaviour that we saw at First Minister's question time, which has been evident in many recent FMQ sessions, which targets people—mostly those with hidden disabilities—who claim

benefits and tars neurodivergent and mentally ill people with allegations of fraud without knowing their personal circumstances sets us back. I am deeply concerned by that level of completely disgraceful targeting, which today involved a named disabled woman who does not sit in this Parliament and who was, therefore, unable to reply. That is never acceptable. As well as sending a message to the person who is targeted, it tells every neurodivergent activist, employee or constituent out there that they are deserving of suspicion and undeserving of holding office. We must do better.

I am delighted that some of my constituents, including one with autism, attended last month's summit. It was a long way for my constituent to travel, but he has a lot to offer policy making, as many disabled people do. In the past 48 hours, there has been a great deal of negative attention on disability, which has included screenshots flying around on social media of the types of adjustment that a disabled person who claims ADP might need, captioned with comments such as, "Does this sound like an MSP?" It has even been highlighted in newspapers that an ADP claimant has been seen enjoying life and shopping with her friends, as though that suggests that she cannot be disabled.

We belong in public life and deserve to enjoy our lives as much as anyone else. I wish that the symptoms of autism did not trigger such a visceral, judgmental response. If the public reaction is that a neurodivergent person does not sound like an MSP, that is our failure, not the failure of the neurodivergent person.

Of course that person can be an MSP. Of course someone who is capable with adjustments in place is just as deserving of taking up a role as someone who requires none because the environment has already been designed with them in mind. Of course the necessary adjustments should then be put in place and the individual should not be out of pocket, especially when adaptations often cost eye-watering amounts of money.

If someone needs a ramp to take up the office of Presiding Officer, there should be a ramp. If someone needs Braille to press the right buttons in the chamber, that must be provided. If someone needs to claim benefits to pay for adjustments to manage their autism, they should be supported and welcomed into the workplace.

I regret that we will lose so many of the disabled MSPs who sit in the Parliament, regardless of what the election results might be, because so many are not seeking re-election. However, it does not surprise me, and we need to do better. I have sent a list of suggestions to the Presiding Officer that

could make the Parliament and the induction for MSPs more accessible.

I hope that this debate, Jeremy Balfour's words and the many people who are crying out for change are listened to and that more disabled people are able to stand for and take up seats in the Parliament in the future.

13:21

The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart):

I give my sincere thanks to all the members who have contributed so thoughtfully to today's debate. I also thank Jeremy Balfour for bringing the motion to the Parliament.

The strength of feeling across the Parliament shows just how deeply we value the lived experience of disabled people and the vital role that it plays in strengthening our democracy. The motion before us underscores that point clearly by recognising that lived experience is essential to effective scrutiny and better legislation.

As members have referred to, the Scottish Parliament recently hosted its second disability summit, which I was delighted to take part in. The themes that we heard about—representation, participation and accountability—speak directly to today's debate. The summit reinforced that lived experience must continue to guide scrutiny and policy making across the Parliament.

Jeremy Balfour took time to acknowledge the progress that has been made, and he was right to point out that we have more to do. I pay tribute to Mr Balfour's relentless campaigning for disabled people's rights. Emma Harper also exemplified the value of lived experience in shaping good policy development.

Lived experience is essential evidence that is rooted in the disability rights movement's principle of nothing about us without us. I have had the pleasure of seeing the Purple Poncho Players, who exemplify that principle through music and art, showing us how essential it is. When such evidence is systematically gathered, and gathered ethically, it strengthens committee scrutiny, improves policy design and, ultimately, enhances the quality of our laws.

That direction of travel is clear across the Parliament and it is embedded in the Scottish Government's approach to disability equality. Our disability equality plan was developed with disabled people's organisations, Inclusion Scotland, Glasgow Disability Alliance and Disability Equality Scotland. Disabled people's voices shaped the work from the start. The first phase of the plan focuses on the priorities that the DPOs identified, which were supporting disabled household finances, enabling full participation in

communities and national life and improving mental health.

To underpin that, our recent budget set out a £3.5 million multiyear funding commitment to disability equality, providing certainty for disabled people's organisations and disabled leaders. That will build and strengthen capacity across the DPO sector and among disabled people, leading to improved participation and inclusion in communities and national life.

Members will also be aware that, on 3 February 2026, we held the Cabinet takeover. That was the first of its kind in the United Kingdom, so it was a landmark moment that placed directly at the Cabinet table the lived experience of disabled people as equal partners. It did not simply gather views; it brought disabled people into the centre of Government decision making.

Jeremy Balfour has referenced, and the motion highlights, the important reality of the fact that only 5 per cent of current MSPs declare a disability, compared with—according to my figures—24 per cent of Scotland's population. That disparity absolutely matters. Representation shapes the discussions that we have—as it has done today—along with the priorities that we set and the solutions that we design. Democracy is at its strongest when it reflects the full diversity of the nations that it serves. Alexander Stewart, Emma Harper and Carol Mochan acknowledged that.

As many members have highlighted, too many barriers still exist, whether those are structural, financial, attitudinal or practical. Those barriers discourage or prevent disabled people and others with protected characteristics from putting themselves forward for elected office.

Recognising those barriers is the first step to dismantling them. The access to elected office fund is an important part of that work. In the 2021 Scottish Parliament election, it supported 14 disabled candidates. In the 2022 local elections, 46 people received support and 22 of those were elected. That demonstrates clearly what is possible when barriers are removed. That progress is worth acknowledging, and it underscores why initiatives must continue to grow.

Many disabled people belong to other underrepresented communities, and that intersectionality matters. We will keep listening to and working with those with experiences that cut across race, disability, sex, sexual orientation, religion and belief, so that our actions reflect the whole person, not just one part of their identity.

The responsibility for change is shared by us all across Parliament, political parties and communities. Of course, language matters, as Pam Duncan-Glancy and Emma Roddick have

highlighted very effectively, reminding us all to be mindful of being respectful and not to add to the stigma that can, often, still attach.

The debate has reaffirmed a simple truth: democracy works best when everyone can fully participate in it. We have made progress, but we absolutely have more to do. With the multiyear commitment and the momentum from the Cabinet takeover and the second disability summit, we will support more disabled people to participate, lead and be represented across Scotland's public life.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

13:28

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Social Justice and Housing

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is portfolio question time, and the portfolio on this occasion is social justice and housing.

Social Security Budget

1. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of the United Kingdom Government's reported austerity policies on the Scottish social security budget. (S6O-05603)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We are investing somewhere in the region of £150 million a year to mitigate the impacts of UK Government welfare reforms. Any further reforms emerging from the Timms review of the personal independence payment or wider changes that are aimed at reducing the UK benefit bill could reduce our block grant. The strategic concern is that the UK Government's chaotic approach to reform means continuing uncertainty for our funding settlement. Our approach to managing that risk is outlined across the fiscal sustainability delivery plan and the medium-term financial strategy, and is reflected in the balanced annual budget propositions.

Marie McNair: A few weeks ago, I sponsored an event in the Parliament with Professor Gerry McCartney and Dr David Walsh from the University of Glasgow to present the findings of their book, "Social Murder? Austerity and Life Expectancy in the UK". It shows that the UK Government's austerity policies are the main driver behind a decline in life expectancy in the UK. The event heard that most of those austerity policies are still in place and that they will be added to as a result of the health element of universal credit for sick and disabled people being cut by 50 per cent next month. Does the cabinet secretary agree that those appalling findings should shame successive UK Governments? Is it not fundamentally clear that only with independence can we fully protect our constituents from harmful austerity?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I welcome the work of Professor McCartney and Dr Walsh on the adverse impacts of UK Government austerity on life expectancy. Their research reflects that

reducing poverty and inequality is key to improving life expectancy.

The changes to the UC element are one of a number of reductive policies that successive UK Governments have inflicted on the most vulnerable people in our society. Despite our repeated raising of the issues with the UK Government, it persists with those harmful policies. The member is correct that only with full powers of independence can Scotland realise its full potential.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): That nonsense is all too predictable from Scottish National Party members and ministers. Let us look at the facts. There is no sustainable way to fund—
[*Interruption.*]

I do not know what they are shouting "human beings" at. They just want to spout about independence, and I want to talk about helping people get back into work, because there is currently no sustainable way to fund the ballooning costs of benefits. The SNP spends £1 in every £7 on welfare. By 2030, the cost will hit £10 billion, with 1 million Scots receiving benefits by that date. Should the Scottish Government not have some ambition to help our country get back to work by planning to reduce the benefits bill and to help people get back to work?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Scottish Government very much encourages people to get back to work, which is one reason why we have a lower unemployment rate in Scotland than in the rest of the UK.

My colleagues were shouting "human beings" because we need to remember that these payments go to some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society. It is important to have the context in this. The proportion of the Scottish Government resource budget that is needed over and above the funding that is received from the UK Government through the block grant adjustment to meet the Scottish Fiscal Commission's forecast will be around 1.7 per cent each year from 2026-27 to 2029-30.

Renewable Energy Infrastructure (North East Scotland)

2. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the social justice secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the protection of people's human rights in relation to new renewable energy infrastructure, including the proposed SSEN Transmission 400kV overhead power line in the North East Scotland region. (S6O-05604)

The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart): Regarding the specific proposal that the member

raises, I am unable to comment on live applications.

In June last year, I met the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy to discuss areas of her portfolio where different groups experience particular impacts in relation to net zero, climate justice and just transition. The member can be assured that we will continue to engage on and consider those matters carefully.

Regarding new infrastructure, it is important to note that Scotland's fourth national planning framework, known as NPF4, ensures that the potential impacts of proposals on communities and nature are important considerations in the decision-making process. Matters relating to electricity networks, including legislation and regulation, are, of course, reserved to the United Kingdom Government, with strategic planning undertaken by the National Energy System Operator, and the Scottish Government has no role beyond its statutory planning and consenting functions.

Tess White: Human beings matter, and my question relates to the Scottish Government and its powers. Can the minister confirm that the proposed infrastructure will conform to all statutory and regulatory requirements and that consent will not be granted unless the Scottish Government is satisfied that the design properly reflects foreseeable and lawful land use? In the light of the serious safety concerns that have been flagged to the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets about minimum statutory clearances and transmission line sag heights, can the minister also confirm that the infrastructure will not endanger agricultural workers?

Kaukab Stewart: As I have already said, I cannot comment on live applications.

More Homes Scotland

3. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it anticipates the establishment of more homes Scotland will lead to additional social housing being built in Fife, in light of reports of long waiting lists in the region. (S6O-05605)

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan): More homes Scotland will bring together housing, land, planning support and delivery expertise to simplify, scale and speed up the delivery of homes across Scotland, including in Fife. A design phase is under way and I will update Parliament on the detail this month.

Our record £926 million budget for the coming financial year and our commitment for the first time to multiyear funding certainty will give confidence to the sector, as will the £39 million that we have provided to Fife this year to acquire properties

immediately, helping to reduce the use of temporary accommodation.

Annabelle Ewing: I am sure that we all agree that more homes Scotland must be laser focused on delivery. In that regard, what consideration will be given to making Fife the first test case area for the new body, with regard to funding and to the location of social housing, in order to tackle the chronic shortage of decent homes for people living in the kingdom?

Màiri McAllan: I welcome Ms Ewing's suggestion of a test case. The whole point of the current design phase is to draw on existing good practice while challenging ourselves, and the housing industry across Scotland, to identify ways to simplify, scale up and speed up.

The agency will be for all of Scotland, and my officials and I continue working closely with all councils, including Fife, to tackle the housing emergency. I reiterate that their expertise is helpful, as is the strong investment of around £153 million that we have made for affordable homes in Fife during the first four years of this session of Parliament.

Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund

4. Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the child poverty practice accelerator fund and how it is supporting families in Scotland with the cost of living. (S6O-05606)

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I was delighted two weeks ago to announce round 3 of the child poverty practice accelerator fund, which supports the national mission to eradicate child poverty. Over the next two years, we will make almost £1.9 million available to enable projects to test innovative ways to support that mission. That builds on the fund's first two rounds, which have supported a range of work, including work to improve the uptake of income maximisation support. Local authorities and health boards are already undertaking transformative work to tackle child poverty, and the fund supports them to do just that.

Jackie Dunbar: While the Labour Government continues to sit on its hands, it is encouraging to hear about the bold action that the Scottish National Party Government is taking to tackle child poverty and help families with the cost of living. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if the United Kingdom Government is serious about tackling those issues, it must listen to the Child Poverty Action Group and finally scrap the benefit cap?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I very much agree with Jackie Dunbar. Analysis by Policy in Practice has found that, across the UK, as a result of the

benefit cap, one in 10 children hit by the two-child limit would not benefit from it being abolished and a further one in 10 would benefit only partially. Keeping the benefit cap has been a conscious choice by the UK Labour Government and it is a disappointing one, to say the least.

In the coming year, the Scottish Government will invest £15.5 million to help to mitigate the impact of the benefit cap, but I urge the UK Government to scrap it at source as soon as possible.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary clarify how many families in Scotland are impacted by the benefit cap? One of the main drivers is high rents, and most of the people who are affected by it are concentrated in the south of England.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: One of the issues that particularly impact people with high rents is the freezing of the local housing allowance by the UK Government. That is another area where the Scottish Government is having to do the UK Government's job for it and support people to keep them in their homes. We are doing that alongside our mitigation of the bedroom tax, which, again, the UK Labour Government has decided to keep.

New-build Housing (Adaptations)

5. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government how it is ensuring that newly built housing is adaptable for future needs. (S6O-05607)

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan): Scottish building standards already include provision that supports accessibility in new homes and enables future adaptations as occupants' needs evolve. Those provisions help to create inclusive, flexible environments and reduce the need for later alterations. By way of example, the standards already require a designated future shower space on the main living level, space to allow the installation of a stair lift, and guidance on robust wall construction to support adaptations such as grab rails.

During the passage of the bill that became the Housing (Scotland) Act 2025, I committed to advancing, within the next two years, both accessibility and adaptability across all tenures through a Scottish accessible homes standard.

Gillian Mackay: In my region, there have been instances of disabled people having to wait for lengthy periods for housing that meets their needs. None of us knows when we might need accessible housing, and, with an ageing population, it seems sensible to invest in that type of housing stock. What action can the Scottish Government take to support local authorities to adapt existing housing that is in their control, to ensure that the long

delays that we are seeing in housing being allocated can be shortened?

Màiri McAllan: This matter takes a lot of my time as housing secretary and, equally, as an MSP. Constituents are frequently in touch with me about it.

I am determined that the design of new-build homes should be such that they are accessible and adaptable and that our standards should drive that to the greatest possible extent. Equally, I am conscious that most people will grow old in the house that they are already in, so it is also a concern of mine that the adaptations system should be person centred and speedy. That is why we are updating the standards for new builds, and it is why I have committed to reviewing the adaptations programme across the board in order to drive those improvements.

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): I welcome the fact that the recently passed Scottish budget for 2026-27 will invest in Scotland's housing sector. Can the cabinet secretary speak more to the Scottish Government's plans to build our future by maximising growth and investment?

Màiri McAllan: Marie McNair is absolutely right. The Government has put a great deal of emphasis on driving the delivery of more homes in the coming years and on driving simplicity, scale and speed. That will be done via the record £4.9 billion of investment that we have committed to in the coming four years, coupled with the certainty that we have offered. That is intended to deliver at least 36,000 affordable homes across Scotland and to support our all-tenure ambition by building the strength of the housing sector generally. All of that will be aided by the development of more homes Scotland.

Tenanted Properties (West Wemyss and Denbeath)

6. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any recent discussions it has had with Fife Council regarding a solution for households in West Wemyss and Denbeath that were issued with eviction notices, following the sale of their tenanted properties by Wemyss estate to Torah Capital last year. (S6O-05608)

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan): I understand that this is a very difficult time for those who are affected, and I am concerned about the significant impact that could arise for them and their community.

I am being updated by officers from Fife Council, and I met them and the council leader on 11 February. I also met David Torrance, the constituency MSP, on 29 January. I have

committed to Fife Council that I will remain engaged with it as it supports the affected tenants and as it considers what options might be available, and it intends to report to me on those options.

Claire Baker: In 2007, Wemyss estates disposed of properties in Coaltown of Wemyss. After a focused campaign, along with support from the Scottish Government, the properties were eventually sold to Kingdom Housing Association, which resulted in continued tenancies. Does the cabinet secretary share my disappointment that that option was not pursued on this occasion and that, instead, the properties were sold to the private company Torah Capital, which has subsequently issued eviction notices? Is the cabinet secretary able to give any indication of whether financial support will be available for Fife Council or a housing association, if it is needed, to facilitate the purchase of those properties?

Màiri McAllan: The situation that has emerged and the background to it are regrettable. My heart goes out to the tenants who are affected by it. I understand that many of them have been in that area for a very long time and that it is a very close-knit community. None of us would want to see that disrupted.

That is why I have sought updates from Fife Council officers on this matter since the moment that it arose. I believe that they are considering the options very carefully, and I have committed to them that they can come to me with options to be considered and I will consider each of them and what the Scottish Government might be able to do to provide support.

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): I am sure that we all share deep concern regarding the ongoing situation in West Wemyss and Denbeath. Can the cabinet secretary advise what engagement she and her officials have had with Fife Council to offer support and monitor any further developments?

Màiri McAllan: I thank David Torrance for the question and for the time that he and those in his office took to meet me and explain some of the background and the available options as he saw them.

As I said to Claire Baker, I am in discussions with Fife Council. I am aware that it is considering options such as acquisition to support the tenants who are affected. It has committed to keep me updated on any developments, and our respective officials continue to engage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer : Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Social Homes (Retrofitting)

8. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to support registered social landlords with the costs of retrofitting the building fabric of social homes to make them energy efficient and fit for the future. (S6O-05610)

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing (Màiri McAllan): The Scottish Government recognises the importance of improving the energy efficiency of social homes to tackling the twin challenges of environmental degradation and fuel poverty. Since 2021, we have provided almost £90 million of funding to social housing providers via the social housing net zero fund, which has supported the installation of clean heat and energy efficiency measures in more than 13,000 homes. In our budget for the coming financial year, we committed to continuing existing capital programmes for the retrofitting of social homes, and I confirm that the social housing net zero heat fund will open to applications shortly.

Paul Sweeney: Community-based housing associations in Scotland are leading the way on retrofitting Scotland's ageing tenement stock. Reidvale Housing Association, of which I am very proud to be a board member, has been leading the charge in retrofitting and making fit for the future Glasgow's historic sandstone tenements through the extensive renovation of a building at Bellfield Street, in Dennistoun. That is thanks to its securing a £1.2 million grant via the Glasgow local voids programme, which was funded by the Scottish Government's housing investment budget.

That is a good news story that everyone can celebrate. However, with 70,000 pre-1919 tenements in Glasgow, there is a huge amount of work to be done. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that development shows the power that social landlords can have in improving their housing stock, and what commitment will the Government make to build on the momentum that is being driven by Reidvale and other community-based housing associations?

Màiri McAllan: Like Paul Sweeney, I acknowledge and thank housing associations for the work that they do on retrofitting. I do not for one moment underestimate what a significant task it is, given the associated costs and the disparity in tenure and housing types that we are dealing with across Scotland. All of that is against the backdrop of some 30 per cent of people in Scotland living in fuel poverty and very volatile electricity prices. It is a complex picture, and our registered social landlords are working very closely with the Government on that task. I mentioned the £90 million that we have provided so far and the 13,000 homes that have benefited, and I have said that

the social housing net zero heat fund will shortly open to continue that work.

The Deputy Presiding Officer : That concludes portfolio questions on social justice and housing. There will be a brief pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3

14:20

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is stage 3 proceedings on the Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill.

In dealing with the amendments, members should have the bill as amended at stage 2—SP bill 75A—the marshalled list and the groupings of amendments. The division bell will sound and proceedings will be suspended for around five minutes for the first division at stage 3. The period of voting for the first division will be 30 seconds. Thereafter, I will allow a voting period of one minute for the first division after a debate.

Members who wish to speak in the debate on any group of amendments should press their request-to-speak button as soon as possible after I call the group.

Section 3—Presumption of ownership

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Group 1 is on control in relation to digital assets. Amendment 1, in the name of the minister, is grouped with amendments 2 to 4.

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): Commercial law of Scotland has developed to reflect the realities of how people use and trade in assets. The amendments in the group seek to do that by adjusting what the bill says about the level of control that someone needs to have over a digital asset to be treated as its presumptive owner and as having physical possession of it. I thank the United Kingdom's jurisdiction task force for recently sharing with my officials, on an embargoed basis, its draft guidance on control of digital assets. That work, which explores the various arrangements that are used to control digital assets, has informed the thinking behind the amendments.

For commercial and practical reasons, it is common for multiple people to have control over the same digital asset. So-called multisignature arrangements, for example, involve multiple people each being able to use their own private keys to access the digital wallets in which a digital asset is held, and each person can initiate transactions in respect of the asset. The bill, as introduced, refers in various places to a person needing to have exclusive control of a digital asset. That requirement for being exclusive does not comfortably accommodate the reality of multiple people legitimately having control over an asset, so my amendments remove the requirement.

Amendment 1 removes the requirement for control to be exclusive from section 3, which currently says that a person will be presumed to own a digital asset if they have exclusive control over it. Anyone seeking to rebut the presumption that a person with control of a digital asset is its owner will ultimately have to establish a better claim to ownership of the asset. Establishing that the presumptive owner's control is not exclusive does nothing to prove that someone else is the asset's true owner, so raising exclusivity in the context of section 3 is therefore a red herring.

Amendment 2 removes the requirement for control to be exclusive from section 4, which provides that the common-law rules about how people come to own physical things apply to digital assets, too. Those rules generally require a person to have possession of a thing to become its owner. The legal concept of possession has both a physical and a mental aspect. The physical element of possession is a problem in relation to digital assets, because they are not physical things, so section 4(1)(b) develops an analogy by stating that exclusive control of a digital asset is to be treated as physical possession of it.

Having further considered the different ways in which digital assets may legitimately be in the control of more than one person and how those scenarios can be mapped on to the law's approach to physical things, the Government now takes the view that control is the better analogy for physical possession.

That the law does not require exclusive physical possession of a tangible thing to acquire ownership of it can be illustrated by thinking about a parcel being delivered through a letterbox in a two-person household. Once it lands on the doormat, the law would treat both householders as having physical possession of the parcel. The fact that both people are regarded as having physical possession does not present problems for the law in relation to corporeal moveables, and neither should it in terms of digital assets. The current situation is similar to a digital asset being dropped into a digital wallet to which two people would have access. The law can cope with two people having physical possession of a tangible thing, so it is logical that it would be able to cope with two people having control of a digital asset.

Given how common multiparty control arrangements are, it would be a problem if the law could not cope with them. For both physical things and digital assets, it is the mental aspect that is required for legal possession of a thing that will determine whether one, or both, or none of the people with control of a thing becomes its owner.

Amendments 3 and 4 get rid of the material in section 5 that defines exclusive control and

creates a presumption about when someone has it. If amendments 1 and 2 are agreed to, the material in section 5 explaining the concept will, of course, be irrelevant.

I ask members to support the amendments in this group.

I move amendment 1.

Amendment 1 agreed to.

Section 4—Acquisition of ownership

Amendments 2 to 4 moved—[Richard Lochhead]—and agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That ends consideration of amendments.

As members will be aware, the Presiding Officer is required under standing orders to decide whether, in her view, any provision of the bill relates to a protected subject matter—that is, whether it modifies the electoral system and franchise of Scottish parliamentary elections. In the case of the Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill, in the Presiding Officer's view, no provision relates to a protected subject matter. Therefore, the bill does not require a supermajority to be passed at stage 3.

Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M- 20944, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill at stage 3. I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button, and I call the Minister for Business and Employment to speak to and move the motion. You have a generous seven minutes, minister.

14:27

The Minister for Business and Employment (Richard Lochhead): Thank you for the far too generous seven minutes.

I welcome the members who have chosen to be present for the debate. I have moved lots of legislation over my 17 years in government. Although this is a short technical bill, it deals with a relatively complex area and those of us who have paid close attention to the bill over the past few months have had our vocabularies expanded—I certainly have.

Despite the fact that it is short and technical, the bill is an important foundation stone in ensuring that Scots law can deal with an area of technology that is constantly evolving and becoming increasingly commercially important. The value of Scotland's blockchain technology market is projected to reach £4.48 billion by 2030. We have a blossoming financial technology sector in Scotland that has grown from just 26 companies in 2018 to more than 260 today, and many of them are directly involved in developing digital assets. The opportunities that initiatives such as distributed ledger technology offer to create wealth and high-quality jobs are enormous, and the bill is a way for this Parliament to play its role in creating the legal framework that Scotland needs to realise its full potential in this area.

As I said, this is a short bill—only three pages long—but it is an important one. To put it simply, its purpose is to ensure that Scots law can recognise certain digital things as objects of property, despite them being neither physical things nor intellectual property in the usual sense. The digital things that it covers are only those that are “rivalrous”—perhaps one of the new words that we have come to learn during the progress of the bill. Physical things, such as a coin, are rivalrous. If I give someone the coin, I no longer have it. If I give it to someone, I cannot give it to them again. That is in effect the definition of “rivalrous” in the bill. The same is true of, say, a bitcoin, because the system stops me spending it twice. That is another fundamental principle of the bill. It is not true of other types of digital things, such as a

photograph on a phone, which we can share with any number of people without losing our own copy or our ability to share it with even more people. Digital things of that kind are therefore not rivalrous, and the bill does not include them in the definition of the types of digital assets that it covers.

Ultimately, it remains up to the courts to decide how to treat the digital things that the bill does not provide for. Under the bill, digital assets are incorporeal property, which is qualified by sections 3 and 4, which cause those assets to be treated in certain ways as corporeal or physical property as opposed to incorporeal property, because that more closely reflects how people who deal with digital assets tend to think about them. Of course, digital assets are not physical things, so the bill accommodates that by saying that having control of a digital asset in the way that section 5 describes is the equivalent to having physical possession of it.

In a leading text on the possession of corporeal moveables in Scots law, Dr Craig Anderson explains, in the context of physical things, that

“to possess, one must establish control over the property”.

In essence, the bill provides the courts with a proxy for physical possession to overcome the difficulty that digital assets cannot be physically possessed. That done, it leaves the courts with the necessary space to develop the law, just as they have developed the law to reflect practical and commercial realities in relation to things of every other kind. That means that legal principles that are developed in the context of corporeal moveables can be applied and developed in relation to digital assets, too. For instance, that includes the idea of civil possession, by which an agent's possession of a thing on behalf of a principal allows the principal to become the owner of the thing. In a novel area such as this, it is right that the courts should have the same latitude to develop the law in response to new technologies that they have historically enjoyed when dealing with physical things of all kinds.

During the passage of the bill, we touched on the possibility that there may be a need for further legislation in relation to digital assets—for example, to deal with their treatment as a matter of private international law. The bill will not be the last legislative work on digital assets. As was discussed with the committee at stage 1 and reiterated at stage 2, there will be a need for legislation in the future to deal with a number of issues on the wider area of law, given how fast the world is changing around us and how fast technology is developing. We will continue to legislate in the future. We have to ensure that our legal system adapts in due course. However, the

bill provides a necessary foundation and it does what the expert reference group recommended to the Parliament, which is now being implemented.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill be passed.

14:32

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

Like the minister, I commend the members who have joined us in the chamber. I am sorry that the public gallery cleared as the minister got up to speak—I am sure that that had nothing to do with the content of his speech.

I do not intend to say a great deal about the bill, as my comments in the stage 1 debate a few weeks ago covered all the key points that I would be making. No substantial amendments to the bill have been lodged, either at stage 2 or at stage 3, but some significant technical changes have been made that are welcome. I reiterate the thanks that I expressed at stage 1 to members of the Economy and Fair Work Committee and to the committee clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre for their assistance in helping members to understand the legislation and scrutinise it. I do not know whether this will be the last bill that the Minister for Business and Employment will bring to the Parliament—I expect that it may well be—but I commend him for the way in which he has approached the bill and the co-operative approach that he has led. As I have done previously, I wish him all the best for the future as he looks to pursue other avenues beyond the Parliament in a few weeks' time.

The bill is significant but is not in any way politically controversial. It represents a significant step forward in modernising Scots law to deal with changing circumstances—in this case, the creation of digital assets. Those assets did not exist at all two decades ago, but changes in technology have led to their creation, and it is important that the law is adapted to take account of those changes. As I said during the stage 1 debate, the bill is necessary because Scots law, as it previously existed, did not recognise digital assets as property—or, at least, it did not properly define them. The bill will classify them as incorporeal, moveable property, which is property that is not attached to land and which does not have a physical existence.

The bill will allow the trading of digital assets and provide a legal framework for those who transact with them. It will also provide protection to someone who acquires a digital asset for value and in good faith. That is important because, without that reassurance, those seeking to purchase a digital asset in Scotland would be unclear on what their legal remedies might be.

There was some discussion during stage 1 scrutiny about what exactly purchasing in good faith would mean in practice. At the time, I raised concerns about drafting that had been brought to us by the Faculty of Advocates.

It is important to note that the bill is just a first step. Further changes to the law will be needed to take account of the growth of digital assets. Changes will need to cover, for example, areas of private international law and insolvency. Where digital assets are traded between individuals living in different jurisdictions, which law should apply in relation to the death of an individual who holds digital assets? What laws of succession should apply to them? Where a digital asset forms part of an insolvency, how should that be treated? Those will all be matters for a future Parliament to consider. I am sure that the Scottish Law Commission, which does such good work in keeping our law abreast of developments in society, will continue to do good work in researching those areas.

We will, no doubt, return to those points in future but, in the meantime, on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives, I am pleased to confirm our support for the bill at stage 3.

14:36

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I am pleased to speak in this stage 3 debate as a member of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, which has scrutinised the bill over recent months. I thank everyone who has provided evidence, as well as my fellow committee members and our clerks for their thoughtful work throughout the process.

Although it is a relatively short bill and the number of amendments was limited, it is vital that legislation in such a fast-moving and technical area receives careful scrutiny. As we move further into a digital age, clarity in the law becomes increasingly important. For that reason, Scottish Labour will support the bill today.

I start off in an unusual position, having agreed with the previous two speakers—one from the Government and one from the Conservatives.

Digital assets are becoming an essential part of Scotland's economic landscape, as has been mentioned in the debate. Their importance and the opportunities that they bring will only continue to grow.

The Economy and Fair Work Committee supported the Scottish Government's property law approach for defining digital assets as the best way of future proofing the definition. However, several stakeholders noted that the terminology and approach would not be familiar to those who work in the sector, which could make it difficult for

those working with digital assets to ensure that the law applies to them in the way that they expected. That summarises the concerns that we discussed about the implementation and understanding of digital assets. When the bill is passed, we need to reflect on how to communicate it so that people understand how the law will work.

The stage 3 amendments that the minister lodged are particularly important in relation to the removal of the requirement for “exclusive control”. Those sensible amendments have improved the clarity of the bill. The concept of exclusivity is not necessary for establishing ownership, and removing it brings the law on digital assets more in line with how we treat physical property.

For legislation of this nature, it is crucial that the legal framework is understandable and workable. As Dr Alisdair MacPherson and Professor Burcu Yüksel Ripley have highlighted, Scotland has very limited legislation in relation to new forms of digital assets, so reform is needed to provide certainty for individuals, businesses and our courts.

The committee noted that the environmental impact of digital assets has not yet been fully considered. The minister acknowledged that that sits within a wider discussion about energy consumption and sustainable power sources, which are issues that apply to many emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence. As Scotland has significant renewable energy capacity, we should ensure that the development of digital assets aligns with our ambitions for net zero. Continued research into the environmental implications of such technologies is essential.

Digital assets have the potential to support our transition to net zero in practical ways. For example, the Scottish Government’s energy skills passport—launched as a digital platform to help workers to move from the oil and gas sector to the renewables sector—shows how digital tools can support workforce transition, but delays and limited uptake demonstrate the need for clearer systems and better integration. Our agreeing to a stronger legal framework for digital assets today might help to ensure that such initiatives are more effective in the future.

Ultimately, the bill’s purpose is to clarify the status of digital assets as property in Scots private law. Doing so will provide greater certainty for individuals, businesses, investors and the legal sector.

As new technologies emerge, new risks will inevitably follow. It will be the Parliament’s responsibility in future years to ensure that the law keeps pace. We need to use digital technologies in ways that are fair, transparent and beneficial for Scotland. Let us agree to pass the bill, because it will reflect progress.

14:40

Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green): The Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill is a narrow bill that defines the existence of digital assets in Scottish law. That is necessary because of the absence of a body of case law that covers the matter. The bill clarifies that digital assets are capable of being treated as property and owned within our legal framework.

The bill responds to expert recommendations from the digital assets in Scots private law expert reference group and others. Their work has highlighted the gaps, risks and practical challenges that arise with attempts to categorise digital assets in our long-standing legal framework. The bill draws directly on several of their recommendations, especially those on defining digital assets and clarifying the principles of ownership and control. Their expertise has shaped much of the bill’s structure and rationale.

The bill seeks to be technology neutral and future proof. It establishes a legal baseline that will need to have frameworks of regulation and guidance built on top of it.

I recognise that “digital assets” is a very broad category in relation to what the bill will now allow us to legally consider as things. Some can have positive and constructive impacts on our society, whereas some might be harmful or at least risky. I am sure that colleagues share my distress at the energy-intensive nature of bitcoin mining, for example. At a time when we are racing to electrify our industry and transport to try to keep ahead of a collapsing climate, the fact that so much energy is being used to generate speculative assets that can be used to avoid taxation, bypass legislative safeguards and otherwise undermine the reliable and transparent operation of our economy is clearly a cause for concern.

Digital assets are evolving rapidly, and our legislative response will need to be sufficiently dynamic to manage the risks that increased use and legitimacy of digital assets, such as blockchain-based currencies, bring. As I said in the stage 1 debate on the bill, I believe that such currencies, if unregulated, present a significant risk to individual investors and to the structure of our banking system, and that robust regulation will be required to mitigate those risks. The Scottish Government, like other Governments around the world, will need to be informed and proactive to keep ahead of those risks. They are too great and too closely linked with fundamental elements of our economy and banking system for us to wait for a crisis before acting.

Members of the Economy and Fair Work Committee enjoyed taking evidence on the bill and attempting to get our heads around the technical

and legal challenges and opportunities that digital assets present.

The Scottish Greens will support the bill at stage 3, but we expect the Scottish Government to move quickly to provide guidance and further legislation to address the broader risks that digital assets present.

14:43

Richard Lochhead: Clearly, this has been a short debate, but we have gone over some of the reasons why it is an important debate, and I will turn to that issue shortly.

First, I thank Murdo Fraser for his kind comments. The great news for him is that this is not my farewell speech—that is still to come—so he will have the joy of hearing that, as will all 128 other members of the Parliament, on the day before we break up for the election. I am sure that he will look forward to that with bated breath.

However, this is my last speech on legislation. Over my 17 years in government, I have brought to the Parliament proposals for a plastic bag levy, tenant farming legislation, legislation to help Scotland to prepare for flood risk, marine legislation and various other legislation. All those pieces of legislation were a lot longer and more time consuming than this bill—or, indeed, the UEFA European Championship (Scotland) Bill, which I led on a couple of weeks ago and was also quite short—but they have all been about preparing Scotland for the future and responding to the challenges and opportunities that our nation faces.

When I became a member of the Cabinet for the first time in 2007, just after the Scottish National Party had been elected as the Government for the first time, with about five other members of the Scottish Cabinet, it was, if I recall rightly, the month before the iPhone was launched. I ask members to think about that for a second. Nowadays, our lives depend on our smartphones and we carry out all our lives on them. I ask members to think how the world has changed in that short space of time.

That is at the heart of what the bill is about. Despite the fact that it is legalistic and technical, it is important. It is about the world that is changing around us.

Murdo Fraser: Will the minister give way?

Richard Lochhead: With trepidation.

Murdo Fraser: When that tremendous technology of the iPhone was invented, did the minister think that the world would spend most of its time watching cat videos?

Richard Lochhead: I suspect that that is the case only in Murdo Fraser's household. The rest of us are watching Aberdeen Football Club and more worthy causes on our mobile phones. I suspect that we all spend far too much time on our smartphones.

When I learned during the progress of the bill—as, I am sure, other members of the Parliament did—that hundreds of thousands of Scots own crypto assets, it brought home to me just how quickly the world is changing. Perhaps I have a lot more to do to keep up, as do others. That was a startling statistic, and there were others.

All that changing technology has implications for commerce, which the bill will help to address. It also has consequences for the environment in energy use and water use, as Lorna Slater and Sarah Boyack mentioned. We do not understand the consequences of all that yet, but we have to start thinking through and preparing for them. The more technology we use, the more processing power is required. That, of course, means more energy and electricity, so we must get the balance right by protecting our planet while taking advantage of new technologies as they come along.

I listened to the comments that members made about the need to keep all those issues under review and ensure that our law is kept up to date with fast-changing technologies. That was also discussed at stages 1 and 2, as we touched on some of the areas that we need to return to. Work is also taking place in the rest of the United Kingdom on some of those issues, and we will listen to what the expert groups elsewhere in the UK say about what needs to be done in future legislation.

I put on the record my thanks to members of the expert reference group for giving so generously of their time. That applies particularly to the group's chair, the Rt Hon Lord Hodge, and Professor David Fox of the University of Edinburgh, who continued throughout the project to be most generous in sharing their enormous intellects with my officials, the committee and everyone else who was involved in the process. That is very much appreciated.

I also thank the Economy and Fair Work Committee for its thorough scrutiny of the bill. It is a short bill, as we have all said many times, but it is not simple. It is better for the careful attention to the technology and legal issues with which it grapples that it got from the committee, which was most ably assisted by its clerking team, whom we thank, SPICE and the committee's expert advisers from the University of Aberdeen: Professor Burcu Ripley, Dr Alisdair MacPherson and Mrs Donna McKenzie Skene.

I thank all the stakeholders from the areas of law and technology in Scotland who submitted their views to the various consultations and responded to the Scottish Government's consultation as well as the committee's call for evidence.

I say a special thank you to members of my policy team, who are sitting at the back of the chamber, and members of the Scottish Government's legal team, who are also here. More than with any of the other bills that I have worked on that I mentioned earlier, I had to depend a lot on their advice—even for pronunciation. They helped me out greatly throughout the process.

This is not my farewell speech, but, as I look to my post-politics life, I now feel partially qualified as a Scottish lawyer. I do not know whether that profession is morally upstanding enough compared with politics, but we will find out in due course—perhaps Murdo Fraser can give us some advice on that.

I thank all members for their contributions, and I commend the motion in my name to the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I note that there are quite a few years involved in becoming a qualified lawyer, but that could lie ahead of the minister.

That concludes the debate on the Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill at stage 3.

Draft Climate Change Plan

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-20964, in the name of Edward Mountain, on the draft climate change plan, on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

14:50

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Helpfully, my office has written the word “farmer” at the start of the speech, to which I have added “Not yet.” However, because we will be talking about agriculture, I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I have a farm in Moray.

I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. I thank my committee colleagues and the clerks for their work not only to scrutinise the draft plan but to produce our report over a fairly hectic three days. As I will touch on later, the process has, to my mind, been frustrating and slightly unedifying, but I am content that we as a committee have played our part well.

The committee held nine evidence sessions, a call for views and a targeted online consultation. We met young people and got out and about, with a visit to Aberdeen. I thank all of those who engaged with the committee during that process.

As the lead committee, we proposed dividing up the work on the draft plan, and I thank all the other committees involved for their work to ensure that this was a cross-committee effort. There are now four committee reports on the draft plan, including our own, and six other committees sent letters to support our work.

The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2024 followed advice from the Climate Change Committee that the targets to reduce emissions by 75 per cent by 2030 were no longer achievable. The 2024 act moved to a system of five-year carbon budgets, replacing annual targets, and moved back the date by which a plan was required.

The draft plan in front of us is the first under the changes made by the 2024 act, and the first statutory draft plan since the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. After the end of the parliamentary scrutiny period, which falls today, the Scottish Government must lay a final climate change plan, reflecting on the views that it has heard. The cabinet secretary has said that it is her intention to do so before dissolution in just a few weeks, but, legally, it does not have to be done within that timeframe.

As a committee, we acknowledge that there has been good progress overall, with emissions having more than halved since 1990. Recently, however, momentum has been lost, and we heard that more challenging actions will now be needed across more sectors.

We agree that delivery must be the central focus of the final plan, but we found that the draft falls somewhat short as a delivery-focused document. The plan should clearly set out how the Government will use its powers to drive down emissions. Where it does not have powers, it should be clearer about that.

We found four areas that the Government should consider. First, we recognise that all climate policy is underpinned by modelling, which is intrinsically uncertain. However, we heard that the information on emissions, costs and benefits—and the latter two, in particular—does not give the detail needed to scrutinise the Government's assumptions. The Government should welcome informed and constructive criticism of the data and assumptions that it has used, and the final plan should provide more of that. We accepted that it would be challenging for costs and benefits modelling specifically to set out where and on whom costs will fall, but we also asked the Government to reflect on whether the draft falls short in signalling to the public and stakeholders what costs and incentives there are and who will have to pay those costs.

Secondly, we discussed the approach to monitoring in the draft plan, which includes a proposal for early warning indicators to account for the fact that accurate emissions data comes with a delay. However, the draft does not say what those indicators will be. We recommend that they be published at the earliest opportunity to ensure that corrective action can be taken when required. They should also be performance indicators, and have a clear link to the corresponding policies published in the plan.

Thirdly, we noted that delivering changes throughout the economy is a complex task; it needs co-ordinated action across the breadth of Government and with multiple partners over long periods. We discussed dependencies on UK Government action, particularly on electricity, where lower electricity costs would help—and, indeed, are desperately needed in several key areas if we are to decarbonise at the pace that is being asked.

Fourthly, we noted the critical role for local government, which I am sure the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee's convener will touch on in her contribution. We also heard evidence of the support that communities

and individuals need and the role that they could play in reducing emissions.

Although we welcomed the reopening of the climate engagement fund, we recommended that the Scottish Government communicate clearly what the plan means to people's everyday lives and work with communities and others to do that. The agriculture, land use, buildings and industry sectors were considered by the rural, local government and economy committees respectively, and we agreed whole-heartedly with their conclusions and recommendations.

I will now briefly touch on the three sectors that we considered. On energy, we discussed the reliance of the draft plan on negative emissions technologies and asked the Government to set out how it would monitor whether those technologies were on track to come online in time to meet its ambitions. The committee considers that the plan relies in large part on electrification, without laying out the absolutely vital issue of how electricity costs will be reduced. We also found the plan to be insufficient in setting out how the Government proposes to meet the substantial increase in renewable energy required to electrify key technologies, especially in the absence of an updated energy strategy.

On transport, we noted that the plan places significant reliance on the uptake of electric vehicles. There is a considerable move away from the 2020 climate change plan update, which committed to an ambitious target of reducing car mileage by 20 per cent by 2030. The draft plan now proposes only a 4 per cent reduction.

We heard particularly concerning evidence from industry that plans to electrify heavy goods vehicles were totally unrealistic. The industry instead suggested that a role for drop-in biofuels would be more appropriate, and we have asked the Government to explore that.

On waste, the committee was concerned that projections for energy from waste emissions might be underestimated, following the decision to delay the enforcement of the ban on biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill shortly before the plan was submitted.

A thread that runs through the plan is just transition, and it includes the welcome addition of just transition indicators. The Economy and Fair Work Committee led that work, but we heard evidence on it, too, and we recommend that the Scottish and UK Governments work together on site-specific just transition plans where they are needed.

I will finish on the process of developing the climate change plan. I say, with regret, that the Parliament is in the same place as it was five years

ago. We are doing this work right at the end of the parliamentary session, something that I counselled against as convener when we started the process.

That has been extremely challenging for committees, but it is not the primary concern; the key issue is that the Scottish Government has only three weeks if the cabinet secretary is to meet her own deadlines to finalise the plan and meet the timetable. That is bad practice, because it lowers confidence in what should be a robust process. We must remember that the Government will have to consider all the committee's reports and the consultations with the public and then implement all of that in the final plan.

I look forward to hearing members' views on whether the wait was worth it and whether, in the next few weeks, the draft climate change plan can be turned into a climate change plan that will get delivery back on track.

Presiding Officer, I will just say that, on the basis of the process alone, I have been underwhelmed by, and am deeply sceptical of, the way in which the Parliament has dealt with this issue.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Mountain. Can I ask you to move the motion, please?

Edward Mountain: I apologise, Presiding Officer. My notes do say to move the motion at the end of my speech, but I did not see them.

I move,

That the Parliament notes the findings and recommendations in the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's 10th Report, 2026 (Session 6), *Report on the Draft Climate Change Plan* (SP Paper 1031), and the reports and letters from other committees, as referenced in the report.

15:00

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): Thanks for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on behalf of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. First, I offer my sincere thanks to all the stakeholders who engaged with the committee throughout its scrutiny of the draft climate change plan. As it is likely that this will be the last time that I speak in the chamber as convener of that committee in this session, I want to put on record my thanks to the committee clerks.

Given the scope of the plan and its cross-cutting nature as it relates to health outcomes, what was paramount was our ability to draw on a solid evidence base. I am pleased to say that the level of oral and written evidence that we received allowed us to produce what I believe to be a comprehensive report in relation to the health remit.

I thank the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee for its innovative approach to scrutiny, in particular, which has enabled contributions to be made from across portfolios. The need for greater cross-committee working is something that we have talked about at length in this chamber, and I am grateful to all the committees that have taken the time to contribute to the plan's overall scrutiny. I look forward to more scrutiny work being done on the same basis, and I commend the example that has been set across the chamber and in the committees.

Turning to the health committee's report, I begin by saying that, as part of its scrutiny, the committee held three evidence-taking sessions with a focus on the potential co-benefits of emissions reductions for health, and on the draft plan's potential impact on health and social care services. The draft plan is presented as being necessitated by, and having the purpose of addressing, the health risks associated with climate change. Under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, as amended, the plan must set out policies and proposals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions across all major sectors of the economy. Although health and social care is not one of the sectors that the plan is required to cover, some elements of health and social care emissions will be nested within the residential and public buildings sector and the transport sector, which the legislation requires to be covered.

I also remind members that the population health framework, which was published in June 2025, states that

"a just transition to net zero"

is among Public Health Scotland's commitments to support health and wellbeing. In that context, the committee welcomes evidence that a growing number of health boards are implementing sustainable travel schemes for patients and staff, and encourages further sharing of best practice in that area. The committee also notes that

"health boards should maintain momentum in collaborating with other authorities and providers to ensure that large hospitals are treated as sustainable, connected transport hubs for people attending appointments as well as visitors."

The draft CCP identifies several health benefits from policies and proposals to reduce emissions in other sectors, including those in relation to cleaner air, warmer homes, healthier food, health-promoting natural and built environments, high-quality public services and fair work. One of the core themes of both the oral and the written evidence that we received was the significant health impact associated with emissions and the scale of potential co-benefits from mitigating them. However, the committee also heard from witnesses and respondents that health and

inequality outcomes should be made explicit in the plan and that those co-benefits should be integral to policy appraisal and budget decisions, instead of being treated as secondary considerations.

The CCP cuts across the building blocks of health and the measures in the plan should be more explicitly treated as a public health intervention. The committee echoes calls from Public Health Scotland for a “health in all policies” approach, in which climate measures are designed and delivered to reduce emissions while maximising health gains, thereby contributing to improved life expectancy and reducing health inequalities.

The disproportionate effects of climate change on disabled people, those with long-term conditions, unpaid carers and lower-income households have long been established. In that context, the committee highlights the importance of designing mitigation measures to avoid widening existing health inequalities. It is also vital that the role of social care is recognised within that wider prevention agenda.

The issue of air quality and the impact on it of certain pollutants was raised extensively in evidence, and the committee echoes calls from witnesses for improved monitoring frameworks and action in those areas. Any changes to monitoring should track indoor and outdoor air quality outcomes to ensure that improvements in buildings and transport deliver improvements for, and do not risk undermining, health and wellbeing.

More specifically, the committee notes a lack of quantifiable metrics in that area, which could lead to difficulties in tracking delivery and outcomes. We therefore call for clear indicators of health, wellbeing and equity impacts, alongside the metrics on emissions outcomes. Those indicators should reflect place-based variation, and public health expertise should be embedded in their design and interpretation, so that co-benefits and risks are properly captured and used to inform appraisal and budget decisions.

Finally, the committee notes the complex role of food in meeting climate and health objectives. Although I am conscious of the fact that that issue is not explicitly explored in the plan, the committee highlights the concerns that it raised in its report on the proposed national good food nation plan about the risks of taking a siloed approach, and it reiterates its call for the Scottish Government to set out more clearly how it will work to foster improved cross-sectoral and cross-portfolio collaboration to further strengthen the NHS, as well as wider approaches to sustainable procurement and minimisation of food waste.

It is clear that the draft climate change plan is incredibly broad in scope. The committee

commends the plan, in so far as it recognises the health benefits associated with policies that reduce climate emissions across sectors. However, more can be done to make those links more explicit, and I hope that members in future sessions will continue to pursue the same level of cross-portfolio working throughout the scrutiny process to ensure that the final plan delivers on all its intended outcomes.

15:06

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I am pleased to contribute to today’s important debate on behalf of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee.

We examined the buildings element of the climate change plan and the role that local authorities have to play in delivering the plan’s ambitions. As buildings are the fourth-largest emitter of carbon in Scotland, it is critical that we take action on decarbonising how we heat our homes and other buildings if Scotland is to meet its net zero target. In practical terms, there needs to be a huge shift away from gas heating to technology such as heat pumps.

Sadly, stakeholders told us about their frustration that we have had a lost decade in which, even though it has been clear what actions could make a difference, instead of getting on and delivering those, we have been mired in lengthy planning and strategising. As a result, people lack confidence that the climate change plan can deliver.

Back in 2023, the Scottish Government announced that it would deliver a sea change through the heat in buildings bill that it would introduce in this session of Parliament to legislate for the installation of heat pumps in our homes. That legislation never arrived. Instead, the Government has published a draft bill, which some would say has greatly altered the original vision for decarbonising homes.

I highlight that because one of the committee’s key concerns is that, at the moment, very few homes use a heat pump. Only around 7,000 heat pumps were installed in 2024. In stark contrast, Nesta in Scotland has estimated that around 110,000 heat pumps will need to be installed over the course of the next parliamentary session, which is equivalent to 22,000 a year. The climate change plan does not set out how that dramatic change will take place, although it commits to a new heat in buildings strategy and delivery plan, which is to be published this year. I hope that that will prove to be the driver for change.

In the meantime, the Climate Change Committee’s report on Scotland’s progress in reducing emissions agrees with our conclusion

that, fundamentally, the draft CCP lacks sufficiently detailed plans for buildings. In particular, there will need to be a rapid acceleration in reducing emissions in 10 years' time, but it is not clear yet how that will be enabled. The CCC's report describes that as a "delay and catch-up" approach, which carries significant risk. It says:

"A more plausible approach"

would be to scale up

"the recent steady increase in heat pump installations".

My committee identified a number of components that will be critical in delivering such an approach. First, we need to have a national retrofitting plan that sets out how we will go about making our homes more energy efficient. Tenement buildings, which make up around 30 per cent of our urban housing stock, represent a significant challenge, as do our rural properties, which are typically older and colder.

The first step is to ensure that we have enough people trained in the right skills. A skills plan must be a component of a wider retrofitting plan and it must include traditional building skills. Building the right skills for Scotland's varied housing stock presents a huge economic opportunity, but it is not going to happen without leadership.

We also need to build the demand for decarbonising homes. People need to want to have technology such as heat pumps installed, and it needs to be made possible and easy for them. They need to know where to go for trusted advice and help with planning what they are going to spend money on. The committee recommends that the Government supports the creation of one-stop shops that can provide that kind of support. Home Energy Scotland provides an important service, but it is difficult to see how it will be able to meet future demand, particularly for more tailored advice. There is also a need for an updated public engagement strategy that will cover how consumers will be informed about what they can do, why they should be doing it, and where they can go for help and financial support.

Local authorities are key to the delivery of the climate change plan. It is clear that they recognise the urgency. When they came to committee, it was clear that they are ready to act, but they told the committee that they need a route map for how to do that. They told the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee the same thing in 2023, and that resulted in a recommendation to the Scottish Government to do just that. However, the draft CCP has not taken that on board.

We therefore recommend that the final version of the plan gives local authorities clarity by setting out their role in delivering each policy and proposal contained in it. It is difficult to see how local

authorities will be able to identify sufficient resources to deliver the ambitions in the plan. The committee therefore also calls on the Scottish Government to explore what additional resource and long-term certainty it can provide through multiyear funding.

We hope that the Scottish Government takes account of the committee's recommendations and that the final version of the climate change plan will provide the clarity and leadership that are needed. Otherwise, I fear that Scotland's important net zero ambitions might be at risk.

15:12

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee to set out the findings of our scrutiny of the agriculture and land use chapters of the draft climate change plan.

The committee began its scrutiny of the plan by taking evidence at meetings in early January. We heard from a range of stakeholders, including academics and non-governmental organisations with experience and expertise in agriculture, peatlands and forestry, as well as representatives of the agriculture and forestry sectors. To conclude our evidence taking, we heard from the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy and her officials later that month.

On behalf of the committee, I take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributed to our scrutiny of the draft CCP and the clerks who were involved in the preparation of our report.

I turn first to our findings on the agriculture chapter. The Scottish Government has set out in the draft CCP that it intends to achieve most of its reductions in agricultural emissions through its reforms to support payments. Many stakeholders agreed that changes to requirements for agricultural subsidies would help to incentivise farmers to transition to more sustainable and climate-friendly practices. However, the committee also heard concerns from the industry that there was still a lack of clarity around the Scottish Government's reform programme, which it believed was holding back efforts to decarbonise the sector in the short term.

The sector was particularly concerned about delays to the first rural support plan, which will set out the Scottish Government's policy priorities for agriculture support over the next five years.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the member for raising that issue, which I, too, have raised. If the agriculture sector is to be able to make the transition that is needed, does it not need long-term assistance schemes that will help to fund innovative farming and change farming

practices to give it the support that it needs now, as our climate begins to change?

Finlay Carson: I could not agree more. Sadly, however, very little policy has come before the Parliament other than legislation that ensures continuity of the common agricultural policy. We believe that that creates a huge amount of uncertainty around how the farming sector will deliver the plan's aims.

The delay to the support plan has hampered the committee's ability to scrutinise the draft CCP, which meant that we could not come to a view on the emissions reduction pathway proposed in the agriculture chapter of the draft plan, because we simply did not have all the information that we needed. The only option open to us was to recommend that our successor committee in the next session of Parliament should examine the linkages between the rural support plan, the final CCP and the wider agricultural reform programme to ensure that they show sufficient leadership and ambition for the agriculture sector.

The committee also considered the Scottish Government's decision not to reduce livestock numbers in order to reduce agricultural emissions, and we heard a range of views on that. Those who were in support pointed to the economic cost of a declining livestock sector in Scotland and to the potential for that to lead to the offshoring of livestock emissions to other countries to meet domestic demand. However, given that almost half of Scotland's agricultural emissions come from livestock production, some stakeholders questioned whether the Scottish Government could deliver its climate ambitions without dealing with the sector's highest emitter. Having weighed up both arguments, the committee believes that it is important to ensure that any shortfalls in emissions reductions caused by not reducing livestock numbers are being compensated for through deeper reductions in other sectors. We tasked the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee with exploring that as part of its wider consideration of the draft plan.

I turn to the land use chapter of the draft CCP. The Scottish Government's main policy commitment was to reduce emissions by introducing new targets to restore more than 400,000 hectares of degraded peatland by 2040 and to increase annual tree planting to 18,000 hectares by 2030. The committee heard strong support for those new targets on the ground that they demonstrate a clear commitment by the Government to develop those sectors in the long term. Although some stakeholders questioned whether those targets are achievable, those involved in delivering peatland restoration and forest projects made it clear that they are ready to scale up their operations to meet the ambitions set

out in the draft CCP. However, they also told us that the Government must play its part in providing certainty about public funding to give businesses the confidence to invest in the workforce and equipment that will be needed to ramp up capacity.

The committee believes that the final CCP will provide an opportunity for the Scottish Government to set out clearly how it will finance tree planting and peatland restoration in the longer term, thereby giving the private sector much-needed clarity. The committee also recommended that the final CCP should include details of how peatland restoration and tree-planting activities will be prioritised. That follows evidence that we heard from academics, who emphasised that the Scottish Government must ensure that both of those prioritised aspects take account of the individual characteristics of sites, and so ensure that the right tree goes in the right place and that the most highly degraded peatlands are tackled, as opposed to activities being focused on less-degraded or more easily restored sites.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that the draft climate change plan has left the committee with more questions than answers. We expect to see the Scottish Government make improvements to both chapters in the final CCP to provide further clarity about how emissions reduction pathways for agriculture and land use will be delivered in practice. I therefore hope that the Scottish Government will engage constructively with the findings of the report, which seeks to identify some of the gaps so that they can be addressed.

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

15:18

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): As part of our pre-budget scrutiny for 2026-27, the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee considered the role of the culture sector in addressing climate change and reaching net zero. Our findings and recommendations were set out in our pre-budget report and in our letter to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, the latter of which has been included in the report on the draft climate change plan.

Committee members and I attended the museums and galleries strategy symposium this week—albeit for a parliamentary hustings—where it was noted that some of the issues that the culture sector faces are caused by a lack of funding or capital investment and by the rising costs of fuel and energy. Those will only be exacerbated by current global events, which will put further pressure on the sector.

I thank the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee for its work on the draft climate change plan, and I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate.

During our evidence taking, we heard that organisations across the culture sector are implementing a wide range of measures to reduce emissions and contribute to net zero ambitions. The measures that were highlighted include energy efficiency upgrades, circular economy initiatives and carbon budgeting and reporting, to name just a few.

We also heard that the culture and heritage sectors play a significant role in shaping public attitudes. For example, the “Waters Rising” exhibition at Perth Museum was highlighted for its work in engaging audiences with climate themes and we heard that projects such as the Royal Scottish National Orchestra’s “Sounds of the Deep” schools initiative are demonstrating how the sector can help to foster climate literacy and dialogues in our country. In addition, Culture for Climate Scotland told us that

“Cultural organisations ... reach the hard-to-reach groups”
and facilitate

“creative, accessible and restorative ways of having conversations about climate change”.—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 18 September 2025; c 4.]

The committee recognises the role of the culture sector in shaping understanding of climate change, and we recommend that that role be recognised in the Scottish Government’s climate change plan. Perhaps further initiatives could be given some support by the Government.

However, Culture for Climate Scotland also highlighted concerns that funds that are being mobilised in the culture sector to address climate change might not currently be used to their full advantage. We recommend that consideration be given to how funding to support net zero ambitions could be used to further the impact of the culture sector on public attitudes.

We heard that achieving net zero will require substantial capital investment in the culture and heritage sectors. As I said, this is only going to get more challenging in the coming years. Stakeholders told us that retrofitting buildings, upgrading heating systems and improving energy infrastructure are costly and complex pieces of work, particularly for listed or heritage properties. National Museums Scotland highlighted challenges in sourcing alternative carbon-free heating for sites that are currently heated by gas boilers. It explained that that is not only technologically challenging but expensive and beyond the annual operating budgets of most museums and heritage bodies. It said that making

the required changes will be possible only through partnership working and major external funds. As such, we ask that the Scottish Government outlines how it will address the substantial capital investment that will be required if the culture and heritage sectors are to meet the climate change and net zero ambitions.

We heard that audience travel to and from events and venues represents the largest source of emissions associated with the culture sector. Stakeholders suggested that it may therefore be useful to focus on that area in order to maximise the impact of spend on reducing the sector’s climate impact. We heard that the reliance on international visitors to, for example, the Edinburgh festivals raises difficult questions for the sector about the impact of international travel, if that is not mitigated in some way.

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture told us that the Scottish Government is focusing efforts on increasing public transport use. He stated that the culture sector should be

“properly served with the ability for people to travel with the least environmental impact possible.”—[*Official Report, Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*, 25 September 2025; c 42.]

The committee welcomes the confirmation that efforts are being focused on public transport use. However, we ask that the Scottish Government outlines how it is addressing the aviation emissions that are associated with audience travel and festivals.

I look forward to hearing the remaining contributions to today’s debate.

15:24

The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy (Gillian Martin): I am pleased to speak in this important debate on the Scottish Government’s draft climate change plan, the policies and proposals that it includes, the opportunities that it brings for the people of Scotland and the vision for our country’s future that it embodies.

I thank members and all the committees for their contributions to the draft plan. I have met members from across the Parliament during the past few months, and I appreciate the pace at which the committees acted in scrutinising the draft plan.

I put on record my thanks to my policy team and the policy teams of my Cabinet colleagues—particularly those in transport, housing and rural affairs—who have so much to add to the draft climate change plan, and who are working hard to respond to all of the committee reports and their recommendations.

I also put on record my thanks to everyone who has responded to the public consultation and who has taken part in public engagement events across the country. Almost 2,000 people have taken part in more than 100 events. I am particularly grateful to our partner organisations—trusted voices in their communities—which have delivered those events.

Although that engagement took place across the country, it focused on the north-east, the Forth Valley and Grangemouth and the greater Glasgow and Clyde area. Those are all areas with historical connections to fossil fuel industries. The Government is determined to ensure that our communities do not suffer the same fate as former industrial communities did as a result of Thatcher's unjust transition in the 1980s.

I remind colleagues that the first job of Scotland's climate change plan is to set out a credible pathway that will deliver on each of our first three carbon budgets and support net zero by 2045.

The Committee for Climate Change said that we are on an "achievable" pathway. Important to me is the Just Transition Commission's description of the plan as a "real step forward". We have tried very hard to weave just transition throughout every element of the plan.

I am confident that Scotland is on a credible, ambitious and achievable pathway to meet our carbon budgets and, at the same time, grow our economy and capture the benefits of climate action. It is estimated that the direct financial benefits of the plan will amount to £42.3 billion between 2026 and 2040.

The plan will proactively increase the nation's climate resilience and reduce our dependence on international markets, which is as important now as it ever has been. The plan will also be reactive and agile to technological changes, new UK Governments, international policy moves and market shifts.

The Scottish Government believes deeply in a positive vision of the future and, at its heart, the draft plan sets out a future in which we are less exposed to fluctuations, particularly in imported fossil fuel prices, and instead benefit from more efficient green technologies, which bring with them many opportunities for skilled, low-carbon jobs across the country and a healthier environment for our people to live in.

Those jobs are not just speculative. Study after study shows that there is already an impact in Scotland and that it is growing. The PwC green jobs barometer shows that the number of green jobs continues to grow at a faster rate in Scotland than anywhere else in the UK.

An Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit report shows that Scotland's net zero economy has grown by more than 21 per cent since 2022—again, that is faster than in any other part of the United Kingdom. That is a source of great encouragement, and it should be a source of great encouragement to everyone who is involved in the climate change plan and who cares about the positive benefits that are included in it with regard to economic growth.

Data that was recently published by the Office for National Statistics shows that Scotland had the largest percentage increase in turnover across our low-carbon and renewable energy sectors compared with anywhere else in the UK.

The economic opportunities of the transition to a green economy are already here for us to see, and their number is growing. However, the climate action that is set out in our draft plan also, crucially, brings substantial wider benefits for individuals and our communities.

The convener of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee helpfully explained some of the health benefits that are associated with climate action. We have an opportunity to widen out what is in the final plan to explain more of them.

Increased physical activity from the move to active travel will obviously benefit people's health and wellbeing, as will cleaner air from the switch to electric vehicles and more attractive sustainable public transport.

That is supported by the removal of peak fares on ScotRail, the freeze on rail fares and our £2 bus fare cap pilot, which has now been launched in Shetland and the Western Isles. Those changes mean better air quality, with positive impacts on preventing or stopping the exacerbation of lung health conditions. Those will all support reduced pressure on the health service and saving for public finances. That is an area of work that we are doing in Government, with academic partners, to better identify some of the co-benefits associated with health and what that could mean for future health spend and savings. That is all evidence that, in Scotland, emissions reductions, economic and social benefits and economic growth go hand in hand.

Despite those advances, we must recognise that our Parliament does not possess all the powers necessary to deliver the action that we need. We are, regrettably, still relying on Westminster in some critical areas. When taking evidence on the draft plan, committees have heard repeatedly about the most important issue that the UK Government must act on, which is reducing the price of electricity. That has come through in most of the evidence. There are not many things in this area of work that are a silver bullet, but if there is

one, it would be bringing down the cost of electricity. For heat pumps to make our homes warmer, for fuel poverty to disappear and for our transport systems to work for everyone, we need cheaper electricity.

Sarah Boyack: I will mention solar power in my speech, but will the cabinet secretary have a solar plan that fits into the final climate change plan?

Gillian Martin: The solar vision has been worked on in Scotland, and we will see what energy mix is available. We are looking at all the generators of electricity. A couple of things have to work to make it attractive for people to change their heating systems. More projects need to be able to get on to the national grid. The critical build-out and improvement of the grid system is mentioned by industry time and again. The other issue is bringing down the cost for households. At the moment, electricity is about five times the cost of gas, which is a significant factor in people not decarbonising, particularly in a cost of living crisis.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Gillian Martin: I am over time, so I will go to the end of my speech.

We have consistently raised the issue that we are already getting on with delivery. That is why the Scottish budget allocated record funding of more than £5 billion for activities that have a positive impact on Scotland's climate change goals. The budget also included new measures to reduce carbon emissions and ensure that the polluter pays, including through a new tax on private jet use. That demonstrates our commitment to delivering a just transition.

It is not just about the associated costs. It is not even just about the cost benefits. I end with the words of Graeme Roy, the chair of the Scottish Fiscal Commission, who said:

"not responding to the challenge of climate change ... will be far more expensive and damaging to the public finances than investing in net zero ... it is simply not an option."

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I advise members that there is a bit of time in hand, so if you take interventions, you will get the time back, and possibly a bit more. Douglas Lumsden is next and has a generous six minutes.

15:33

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I speak with a lot of disappointment, to be honest. What should have been a landmark report for this Parliament is instead a catalogue of errors from this out-of-time, out-of-touch Scottish National Party devolved Government. I have been

an MSP for nearly five years, and this is one of the most damning reports that I have seen from a committee or have been involved in.

The report describes the draft climate action plan in these terms: "clear gaps", "falls short", "insufficient detail" and "areas of risk". The plan was "rushed", leading to a lack of confidence from the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee that our concerns will be taken seriously. "Rushed" is quite a statement, given that we were promised the plan more than a year ago; now, so close to the dissolution of Parliament, it finally appears.

It is quite simply a disgrace that the cabinet secretary has come here today to defend what is, in essence, a plan without detail and without targets, and one that will fail to deliver its main point, which is a reduction in emissions that will contribute to our net zero climate goals. Any climate change plan should have one aim: to reduce emissions and help us to reach our 2045 climate goals.

This plan should be about delivery. It should include timelines and targets for how we will get there. However, the plan that the committee was asked to scrutinise does none of that. It has let down our committee, the Parliament and the people of Scotland.

Gillian Martin: What action that is not in the climate change plan would Douglas Lumsden, who holds the shadow portfolio for his party, include in it?

Douglas Lumsden: I will come on to some of the targets that should be in the plan.

The plan sets out aspirations, which have their place. It is right that the Government establishes where it wants to go and what the vision is, but what we have in front of us today is a vision document. I do not feel that it is an actual plan.

Time and again, the committee asked simple questions. What exactly will be done? By whom? By when? With what funding? However, too often, no answer was provided.

The milestones are particularly weak. They are framed in broad trajectories rather than measurable delivery points. For example—the cabinet secretary asked for examples—on the decarbonisation of heat in buildings, the plan sets out long-term outcomes for emissions reduction but does not set clear annual targets for the number of homes to be converted, the workforce that will be required or the funding profile that will be needed year by year. Without those practical milestones, there is no way for Parliament to track whether delivery is on course or falling behind.

Gillian Martin: On heat in buildings, what plans would the member who is the shadow for this

portfolio put in a plan that he would devise? How would he decarbonise homes?

Douglas Lumsden: Any plan should have real and proper targets that can be measured. This plan does not have any of that. We cannot wish our way to net zero. If the Government really wants to get to net zero, it should put forward a plan. However, just as it does not have an energy strategy, it does not have a climate change plan that we can look at.

If we do not know how many heat pumps are to be installed each year, how many skilled workers must be trained or how much capital funding is required at each stage, then we do not have a delivery plan; all we have is an ambition.

Stephen Kerr: If the Government were serious about a plan with detail in it, it would not be cutting college funding in the way that it has done over the past five years, during which time there has been a 20 per cent cut in real terms. That reduces the availability of skilled workers.

Does Douglas Lumsden think that it is quite remarkable that the cabinet secretary alighted on the idea that we need to have cheaper electricity but did not mention the magic word “nuclear”? The country in Europe that has the most nuclear power stations has the cheapest electricity.

Douglas Lumsden: I completely agree. Once again, the SNP cannot wish its way to cheaper electricity. The same applies to the SNP’s claims that it would reduce people’s bills by a third if we were independent. That is absolute nonsense, and it has nothing to back it up whatsoever.

The plan matters because Scotland has missed climate targets before. A plan that is light on detail and vague on milestones risks repeating that pattern. If the Government wants to get to net zero by 2045, it needs to be honest with people about how much it will all cost. What will it mean for air travel? What will it mean for car travel? What will it mean for people when they are trying to heat their homes? The SNP Government is not being honest.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Mr Lumsden has highlighted the issue of cheaper electricity. In order to reach net zero, we need cheaper electricity, but we also need more electricity. That does not need to come from nuclear; it can come from renewables. However, we need a grid to deal with that increased amount of electricity. Does Mr Lumsden support increasing the capacity of the grid?

Douglas Lumsden: If only we had an energy strategy, we could maybe look at what we need. We should have a proper energy mix with nuclear, oil and gas and renewables. This Government seems to be putting all its eggs into the one basket

of renewables. What we need is cheap electricity, not the much more expensive electricity from the renewables that are proposed.

That comes back to the point that the SNP Government is not being honest.

Kevin Stewart: You are not being honest.

Douglas Lumsden: It is not telling people what the push for net zero by 2045 will mean for households. It is not telling people who live in a flat why they will have to pay up to 10 times more to charge an electric vehicle than people who have their own driveway. It is not telling our oil and gas workers that it does not support projects such as Rosebank, which are vital for jobs in the north-east. It is not being honest for the simple fact that there is an election in 63 days.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Douglas Lumsden: I will give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I call Mr Kerr, I note that there is plenty of time in hand and there are plenty of opportunities to make interventions, although the decision on whether to take them is for the person who is on their feet. Could we please have a little less shouting across the chamber? Members should make interventions instead.

Stephen Kerr: I am grateful to Douglas Lumsden for giving way. It is important to note that, last night on “Debate Night”, the deputy leader of the SNP was explicit that he did not support new oil and gas exploration and extraction licences in the North Sea, and he specifically mentioned Rosebank. The SNP is against it.

Douglas Lumsden: Keith Brown let the cat out of the bag on “Debate Night”. We all know that the SNP has a presumption against oil and gas, which he made clear last night.

The SNP is not being honest, and it is also not being honest with community groups across Scotland that are angry about the scale of energy infrastructure projects that are sweeping the countryside.

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): You now have the opportunity, on behalf of Stephen Kerr, who is supporting you in this, to answer the question that I asked last night. Will you support the removal of the energy profits levy, which your party introduced and which is now supported by the Labour Party? It is quite an important issue. All the industry leaders say that that is what is losing the most jobs in the energy sector.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members should always speak through the chair.

Douglas Lumsden: I agree 100 per cent. We have been calling for the energy profits levy to be scrapped for a long time, because there is no windfall. At least we know where the SNP stands on oil and gas.

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee heard directly from community groups across Scotland. They are made up of local residents, community councils and volunteers who are trying to engage in good faith with the planning process and the energy transition. It was deeply concerning that the cabinet secretary dismissed concerns that were raised about energy infrastructure as narratives that were linked to the far right. That kind of language is not only wrong; it is damaging and it undermines trust. It polarises the debate and risks shutting down legitimate participation in the planning process.

I invite the cabinet secretary to take the opportunity to apologise to those individuals and groups that she has labelled as far right. Those groups and communities care about where they live. She refuses to meet them and she denigrates them in the press and badmouths them to the public. How can she claim to represent her constituency when she shows such disregard for its residents? She should be ashamed. Presiding Officer, I am sorry if my language is less than parliamentary, but you will understand my disgust at the phrase that was used by the cabinet secretary in describing my neighbours and friends as far right.

A just transition requires partnership with communities, not rhetoric that is directed at them. For the cabinet secretary to direct that language at those communities just shows what a disgusting organisation the SNP is. It is trying to discredit communities that dare to speak up and then brand them as far right in the hope of shutting them up. Those communities will not be silenced—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden, please resume your seat.

Clare Haughey: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I respectfully ask for your ruling on some of the language that Mr Lumsden has used which, personally, I find offensive. It is not becoming of a member of the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I accept your point of order. I remind members of the requirement for courtesy and respect. I suggest that the temperature of the debate has gone up a few notches in the past 10 to 15 minutes. I invite Mr Lumsden to bring his remarks to a close and to moderate his language.

Douglas Lumsden: I am not sure what language some people took offence at.

Those communities will not be silenced, because they are doing something that the SNP is failing to do, which is to stand up for rural Scotland. Only the Scottish Conservatives are working with communities, listening to them and providing them with a commonsense plan to tackle climate change. Net zero will be achieved only with the support of the people of Scotland. Their support cannot be commanded; it must be earned. Right now, the SNP is failing on all counts.

15:43

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): How will I follow that?

I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour as we discuss the draft climate change plan. When the plan is finalised, it will shape Scotland's environmental, economic and social future for decades to come. The plan has to get it right, because the risks are high for our constituents, our land, and our economy.

In recent months, I have been involved in scrutinising the plan in the Economy and Fair Work Committee and the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. I have also been involved in meetings with the climate change plan team and the advisory group. I have attempted to engage constructively with the cabinet secretary by sharing concerns and giving her lots of suggestions about how we can improve the plan, because it has to work.

I thank all those across the Parliament, particularly the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, who have been involved in the consultation exercises that have been carried out to engage people on the issue.

A document cannot do this—we all have to do it together. The challenge is that, although there are areas of ambition in the plan, there are also areas from which ambition is entirely missing. As priorities have been chosen, some key elements have been left behind.

It has been excellent in the debate to hear from a raft of parliamentary committees, including the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee; the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee; the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee; and the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee. The plan will affect all our committees, and it will require action across the Government. That is absolutely critical. We need investment and action right across the Government and a plan for the future.

I am very conscious that the Government's climate change plan team is analysing the consultation feedback that it has received and that the final report will be published at the end of the

month. The challenge is that, by the end of the month, the Parliament will have dissolved. Ensuring that there is a focus on the climate change plan will be a challenge and an opportunity for the next Parliament, because delivery will be critical. The Climate Change Committee's report makes it clear that there are gaps in delivery, gaps in understanding and gaps in the practical steps that are needed to meet legally binding targets. The Climate Change Committee's warning on the second and third Scottish carbon budgets is particularly stark.

Edward Mountain: I echo many of Sarah Boyack's words about the challenges that the next Parliament faces. However, one of the biggest challenges is for the next Parliament to ensure that it does not discuss the climate change plan at the fag end of the session. It must do so much earlier on, so that people can be involved in it and see the plan when it is properly laid.

Sarah Boyack: The opportunity for the next Parliament is that there will be a final plan that it can scrutinise and focus on. Given the huge turnover of parliamentarians, it is critical that the next Parliament prioritises discussion on the issue across the Government and across parties as soon as members are returned.

Many things need to be addressed, including electrification, which several colleagues have talked about.

One of the most concerning omissions from the plan is solar power; there is an absence of any real consideration of it. It is one of the cheapest and quickest-to-deploy renewable technologies available, yet it is hardly present in the plan.

Solar Energy UK has been clear in its evidence that the absence of solar and battery storage is a major strategic failure that risks undermining our wider energy ambitions. The Scottish Government should maintain the ambition of 4GW to 6GW solar capacity by 2030, and it should go further to commit to a 9GW target for 2035. That commitment could include rooftop solar and ground-mounted solar farms, which are now compatible with agriculture, and should involve thinking about where battery storage fits in. We need a joined-up plan. Solar Energy UK has called for a sector deal for solar to recognise that the tech can make a real contribution.

I want to focus on the issue of housing.

Stephen Kerr: Will Sarah Boyack add nuclear energy to the portfolio of sources of energy that we need in order to sustain our economy?

Sarah Boyack: I have done so on many occasions. Torness is next door to my constituency, and there are hundreds of skilled and knowledgeable people working there. It is not

about building nuclear plants everywhere. It is about using the tech that is available now where we can use it, so that we do not have to import nuclear-powered electricity from down south.

I come back to my point about solar. The Climate Change Committee has made the point that we are not meeting our heat pump targets fast enough; in fact, doing so has been kicked into the second or third Scottish carbon budgets. We need to ensure that there are proper opportunities for all our homes in that regard. The withdrawal of grants for solar panels was a step backwards, because it stopped many people who were about to install a heat pump, knowing that, if they put on solar panels, that would reduce their energy costs. However, that is not happening now. There are also huge missed opportunities for supply chains.

I particularly want to focus on the fact that 25 per cent of homes in Scotland are tenements. There will be a bit of heavy lifting for the final plan there. How will we do it? We are allowed to have joint work in tenements, with people coming together to repair and maintain tenements, so why do we not have such an option for solar heat and heat networks?

We need to think about the practicalities of how this will work, because after years of waiting for the energy strategy, we need action now. From what I have heard at the conferences that I have been to, heat networks are a practical solution for both urban areas and rural areas. All the authorities have a plan, but they need investment and support to implement it.

Transport has also been mentioned by several colleagues. We need a more realistic approach to that. Yes, we need electric vehicles and charging infrastructure, and there has been progress with those, but we need to focus in particular on affordable solutions. Not everyone will be able to afford an EV, and as was raised at the disability conference that we had a couple of weeks ago, not everyone is able to drive, so we need affordable public transport. The bus passes are brilliant, but we need the buses to use them on. We need buses particularly in our rural areas, to enable people to get to work.

Agriculture and land use require a lot more work, and the comments of the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee convener on that were important. Farmers and crofters are willing to be part of the transition, but they need clarity, support and fair funding. We need to have a public conversation about the environmental impacts of imported food, the water footprint of global supply chains and the emissions associated with different types of products. We need to support our domestic producers so that the transition is fair for them and so that it is viable.

We also need to look at forestry targets, which are off track. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee has spent a lot of time talking about peatland restoration. There is a huge amount of work to be done on peatlands, and we are leading on it, but there are barriers to delivery. Those two areas are central to our meeting our carbon budgets but also to protecting our natural environment. Let us remember that it is a climate and a nature crisis, so we need joined-up solutions.

We also need action on industrial emissions. The energy issue is key to that, but there is also the issue of support. If we have a clear plan and confident supply chains, industry will make investments. If we partner with Great British Energy and use the national wealth fund, we can get investment that will deliver the energy infrastructure that we need.

The Climate Change Committee has also highlighted the need for credible monitoring and evaluation. We will not have annual targets, but we will need annual pathways for sectoral emissions and clear indicators of progress. That way, if progress is not being made, we do not wait five years to have a catch-up, but get on track and do the work now. Accountability must be built into the system, not added on as an afterthought. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee also recommends that we have a comprehensive mix of performance indicators across the breadth of the plan.

I think that one of the best ideas is having a dashboard that is accessible to the public, so that they can see what they can contribute and what progress is being made. That would enable us to see where we have made progress and where we need to catch up. Bringing people with us will be critical. People need support, but they also need to understand the benefits of tackling the climate emergency.

We know that more than 400,000 homes and buildings in Scotland are now at risk of flooding in the next decade. That is a real issue, not a theoretical one. We need to tackle the risks of flooding and sea level rise, because there are now vulnerable coastal areas in constituencies across the country. Homes and businesses will be at risk, and the insurance sector is already lobbying us about that. That is why we need a credible climate change plan.

I will come to my conclusion. Long-term action is not where we need to be. We have to be planning now so that for each of the first five, the second five and the third five years, we have a plan for industry, home owners and every sector of our economy. That plan needs to include resilience,

adaptation and preparedness, and that will need cross-Government thinking.

I hope that the cabinet secretary takes away the point that all the committees that have been engaged in the discussion have called for more action and more clarity and for getting on with it. We cannot wait. We are almost at the end of this parliamentary session and we are debating the draft plan. The next Parliament needs to debate the final plan and to get on with the action.

15:54

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): It has been seven years since Nicola Sturgeon's Government declared a climate emergency. That declaration was important. It was a moment of leadership; it was about leadership across Government to accelerate climate action. It was also about the opportunities to drive investment, to create new jobs that have a long-term future, to improve the health of our communities, to make it easier to travel and to live in a comfortable home and to make our economy much more resource efficient. It was never about Scotland going it alone. It was about tried and tested solutions that have been proven around the world. It was about selling the important benefits of transition and leading delivery and change across our society.

When the Scottish Greens formed part of the Government, we worked hard to put that emergency at the heart of the Government's programme. Our former ministers would acknowledge that that was, at times, not easy, but we secured significant progress. The cabinet secretary has already talked about free bus travel for under-22s and the cap on bus fares, which were delivered by the Greens. There were many more areas of progress but, since we left government, the SNP has gone into retreat on climate action. It has not just lost the narrative on the climate but wilfully given it away.

A form of paralysis has crept in. With powerful lobby groups on one side and the limits of devolution on the other, the Government refuses to move forward. The energy strategy has been buried, the heat in buildings programme has been dropped and the traffic reduction targets have been abandoned. I know that there is disquiet among some on the SNP back benches about that direction of travel.

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): The member knows full well, because it has been relayed and is in reports, that we continue to have a car use reduction target. We are looking at emissions reduction in line with the Climate Change Committee's proposal to reduce car use. Mark Ruskell might not agree with or like

what the Climate Change Committee says, but it is wrong to say that we do not have a car use reduction target or have somehow abandoned it, because that is not the case.

Mark Ruskell: I was at a hustings last night at which an SNP MSP said that the abandonment of the 20 per cent target was a retrograde step. I agree with that wing of the SNP.

It is easy to set targets, including traffic reduction targets. The hard work is having an action plan that local authorities can pick up on and that we can advance nationally to incentivise people to leave the car at home. That has to be a mixture of measures. It has to be a balance of carrot and stick, including financial incentives and improved public transport. I say to the Cabinet Secretary for Transport that that is what I have been waiting to see over the past three years since we have been out of government and I have not seen it. All that I have seen is a reduction in the target.

Of course, there is always the Westminster Government to blame. Greens are never shy of taking a genuine opportunity to blame Westminster, just like the SNP, but we must build the case for the Parliament to have more powers by acting like we want them and pushing up to the limit of the powers that we have now. The reality is that more than half of the policy levers and programmes in the climate plan are devolved, but the Government is unwilling to commit to using them to benefit people and the climate.

The climate plan should be an ambitious blueprint for a healthier, fairer, greener Scotland, but it is once again being rushed through with days to spare before dissolution. It is farcical to think that this Government—in fact, any Government—would make meaningful changes to a plan as a result of scrutiny from the Parliament at this late stage.

It is clear that the die has been cast for the next five years in the climate plan. In too many areas, I see policies being kicked down the road for the next five years. The danger is that the Parliament will end up in exactly the same position as here and now at the end of session 7. By that point, the target of being net zero by 2045 could be in grave danger because the policies that we all know are needed are still locked in the too-difficult-to-do box.

That said, in the plan, the Government is prepared to gamble on measures such as carbon capture and storage technology, even though it has never been delivered at an effective scale anywhere in the world and is dependent on Westminster action. It is a 12 megatonne gamble, doubling the UK Climate Change Committee's recommendation on what is possible.

With Grangemouth refinery and now Mossmorran out of the cluster, the Acorn project is in trouble. It is reckless to gamble so much of Scotland's climate plan on a single project, which investors are walking away from. The UK Climate Change Committee wants to see a contingency plan in case the Acorn project does not go ahead—it has been calling for that for years. The cabinet secretary said last week that it is up to the CCC to advise on a contingency plan. I do not care who comes up with it, but we need the plan. What is absolutely clear is that the Acorn project is a massive gamble.

It is even more absurd that a new gas-fired power station at Peterhead is being baked into a climate plan. If we could do one thing to increase energy bills, worsen climate pollution and make ourselves more dependent on a fossil fuel that is running out, it would be to make a dash for new gas-fired power stations. It is clear that the Government sees a new Peterhead power station as a price to pay to keep the Acorn business plan on life support, but running two gas power stations decades after Scotland is meant to be net zero flies in the face of climate reality.

If the Acorn project does not deliver, the too-difficult-to-do box will need to be opened. A credible pathway for aviation, with demand reduction at its core, a heat in buildings plan that is scaled up fast and fairly, action to help farmers get off the production subsidy treadmill, and a transformation in public transport and traffic reduction must be delivered in the next carbon budget.

The plan features two extremes on heat in buildings. First, there is to be zero ambition and no scale-up in the next five years, with a meagre 30,000 installations, no real incentives for industry to invest and no pathway to expand skills and capacity to deliver. Then, there is to be a vast increase in delivery in the 2030s, which will apparently come out of nowhere. Nesta pointed out in its briefing that a back-loaded plan risks a skills cliff edge with no expanded workforce.

It is as if the Scottish Government wants to make Scotland dependent on gas boilers—and on gas for electricity generation—for as long as possible. If the Government is searching for a social licence for action on climate change, it needs to stop worrying about the *Daily Mail* and knock on the doors of unions, communities and sectors that are ready and willing to step up. The solutions to the climate emergency are well understood, are tested and are being delivered at scale globally, but the plan before us today does not deliver for people and planet. It must be revised and reconsidered by a new Government if we are to have any chance of playing our role in tackling the climate

emergency and delivering the benefits that the plan could deliver to the people of Scotland.

16:02

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I will first highlight the hugely beneficial way in which the Parliament's committees have worked independently but coherently on how their remits interact with the draft climate change plan. The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee has been the lead committee, but seven other committees of the Parliament carried out their own inquiries and investigations, including those on which I sit—the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee and the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. That collaboration and holistic approach, working across policy areas, is a model for similar work in the next session of Parliament, not just in five years' time, when the climate change plan is updated.

I am proud that Scotland has a Government and a Parliament that recognise both that there is a need to address climate change and biodiversity loss, and that making the needed changes across society is crucial not only for our country and our planet but for driving innovation, prosperity and a healthier future.

That latter point has been key to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's work on the plan. We heard from experts who were open and generous with their time and knowledge. The ongoing work around the good food nation plan dovetails with the need to tackle climate change. Utilising, as far as possible, local food producers and agribusinesses in the public and private sectors helps to reduce emissions, means generally healthier food and keeps more money in local economies, helping to boost demand in the community. Unlocking that economic potential by taking action to support local production is a key example of how measures that are enacted to help the environment can also have a significant multiplier effect on our economy and our health.

I hope that we see an increased emphasis on the importance of food production chains and their impact on the environment when the final climate change plan is published. Although we heard a range of evidence on the impact of ultra-high-processed foods on health and the environment, to my mind it is clear that the increased energy costs and the growing complexity of the food system that are related to UHP foods have a noticeable impact on the route to net zero. Both collectively and as individuals, we can do something to change that narrative.

I have spoken about reducing emissions by producing and buying locally, and I note the key role that agriculture has to play in our climate

journey. Yesterday, I was chuffed to be invited to provide a keynote speech at the Anaerobic Digestion and Bioresources Association Scottish conference at Dynamic Earth. The Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, Gillian Martin, was also there, and was warmly welcomed by the association.

Anaerobic digestion is now ready to be more mainstreamed, with small, medium and large plants available. The innovation that we are now seeing in research and development, the processing of on-farm waste and other organic matters and the delivery of renewable energy and decentralised energy networks in our rural communities cannot be overstated. We know that AD, as well as solar—as Sarah Boyack mentioned—can be part of the mix of energy generation that leads to our energy security. I also spoke about that yesterday, and it is especially important given what is happening in the middle east right now. I know that AD isnae gonnae fix the whole problem, but it would be worth considering as we move forward.

When I addressed the association, I highlighted the fact that although Galloway alone has just over 20 AD plants out of Scotland's 90 or so, we have more than 500 dairy farms. That potential is being unleashed by facilities such as Crofthead Biogas near Crocketford, which is processing up to 100,000 tonnes of organic farm waste and turning it into the equivalent of 8MWh. Innovators such as the Carbon Removers are not just behind the technology but are leading the way on CO₂ sequestration.

Net zero innovation is being supported right now through South of Scotland Enterprise—an agency that was delivered by the Scottish National Party Government and which is making a difference to the south's economy. The Scottish Government and its agencies are investing in the innovation and jobs that will sustain our rural communities for years to come.

I have touched on only a fraction of how the south is a hotbed of research, innovation and practical application of how we will hit net zero in the future. Yesterday, I highlighted the fact that the south-west of Scotland had the first offshore wind and the first onshore wind, and we have a 90-year-old hydroelectric scheme and solar arrays. The south-west of Scotland could be the renewables capital of Scotland.

That is only part of what we investigated in both committee inquiries. As a former operating theatre nurse, I was interested in the evidence that Professor Sir Gregor Smith presented about the progress of the green theatre programme. There have been changes in the gas that is used to

deliver anaesthesia, as the gas was not good for our climate.

I thank the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee clerks for their forbearance with my research on the emerging evidence around ultra-high-processed food and climate change and the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee clerks for all their work supporting committee members. I also thank everybody who gave evidence to both committees.

The plan is a substantial piece of work. As members go our separate ways in just a few weeks, we should all take heart that the demands of the 21st century in repairing the mistakes of the 20th century are at the top of the agenda for this Parliament and our Government, and I commend the plan to the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stephen Kerr—you have around six minutes.

16:08

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Thank you for allowing me around six minutes, Presiding Officer.

I know that we get slightly overexcited on this side of the chamber on certain subjects, but nothing quite triggers Conservative MSPs like listening to SNP members wax lyrical, with great virtue oozing from their pores, about the energy profits levy. SNP members must think that we have no memory. We remember—in fact, it is recorded in the *Official Report*—that they were clamouring for an excess profits levy on the energy companies. They were clamouring for it. In fact, not only did they want an excess profit levy on the energy companies, they wanted such levies on a bunch of other companies in other sectors as well, such as their desire to tax the capitalist organisations that were making money. Kevin Stewart was among them, and he often gets up to say, “Oh, the EPL is a terrible thing.” They were the ones who wanted it, and they were the ones who wanted to extend it, but we are the ones who have been clear for a very long time that we want it ended.

Kevin Stewart: I remind the member that it was a Conservative Government that introduced the energy profits levy, at a time when energy profits were extremely high because of the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine. Times have changed dramatically. That was supposed to be for the short term, but that short term is now long term. The EPL needs to go. The Conservatives should have ended it; they did not. Now, Labour must end it to save jobs in Aberdeen, the north-east and beyond.

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

Stephen Kerr: The Conservatives had a plan to end it, and the Scottish Conservatives had a plan to end it for very much longer—something that, at the time, we made very clear through our then leader and our collective voice.

I am sorry for Kevin Stewart—I know where his constituency interests lie and I could see the pain that he felt when I brought up what Keith Brown, the deputy leader of the SNP, said on “Debate Night” last night about being against exploration licences and extracting the energy resources that are right there within British territorial waters—the same energy resources that Norway is successfully making the best of.

I could also sense that members were upset because my friend Douglas Lumsden called the SNP a “disgusting” party. He comes from a position of angst about the state of what is happening in the north-east’s economy.

Keith Brown: Will the member give way?

Stephen Kerr: I will come to Keith Brown in a moment.

Actually, Douglas Lumsden was only quoting the words of John Swinney, who used that very term in First Minister’s questions. We thought that that was slightly at the edge of things; we have not forgotten it and nor shall we.

I give way to Keith Brown.

Keith Brown: It is interesting that we have a new floor for parliamentary language and that, once again, that floor has been set by the Conservatives.

I go back to the point that Stephen Kerr made. I did not realise that he was my number 1 fan and was following my media appearances, but I thank him for that. Since he was watching “Debate Night” last night, he will know that I asked whether the Conservative Party still—or again—believes in climate change and the need to address it.

Stephen Kerr: We have never disguised the fact that—it is in the name of the party, actually—we believe in conserving our natural environment. Of course we do. However, we are saying that we need to wake up and look at the arbitrary targets that we set and what they are doing to our economy. That is what I want to get on to—that is the thrust of what this debate should be about.

The debate is about the draft climate change plan that we have been reviewing. I have in my hand the Economy and Fair Work Committee’s submission, which is an excellent piece of work by all the committee members, including those from other parties. I think that the only party that is not

represented is the Liberal Democrats—everyone else is represented. What does it say in here? Let me tell members what my conclusion from the document is—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, I will give you a little latitude, but would you stop waving your props around?

Stephen Kerr: I am not allowed to use props. Underneath this lectern, then, I have in my hand a letter that contains the report of the committee.

We were told that the climate change plan is a serious blueprint for delivering net zero by 2045. However, after the evidence that we heard in the Economy and Fair Work Committee, I cannot accept that description. What we have is not a credible climate change plan; it is an emissions reduction wish list. It is light on detail, heavy on assumption and dangerously detached from economic reality.

One of the memorable pieces of evidence to our committee was given by Professor Paul de Leeuw, who I think summed it up rather well when he said that, when he was reading the plan, he had

“a little Ikea moment. I know what the starting point is, which is a flat pack, and I know what the end point looks like, which is net zero, but what I am missing is the instructions and the plan in the middle.”

That was a very succinct and to-the-point comment that summarises all the evidence that we received as a committee in relation to the plan.

By the way, David Thomson of the Food and Drink Federation Scotland said that his members

“would probably struggle to see ... a link between the plan and the actions, whether financial support, policy support or legislative support”.—[*Official Report, Economy and Fair Work Committee*, 7 January 2026; c 11, 20.]

They are not joined up. The targets may well be clear, but the pathway is not.

Let us be honest about how Scotland—this goes for the UK, too—has reduced its industrial emissions. Since 1990, emissions from industry have fallen sharply, but not because we have cracked the code of industrial decarbonisation. The primary reason for that is that, all too often, plants such as steelworks and paper mills have been closed. Now, refineries and chemical facilities are shutting. Emissions have been cut by shutting down industry. Members should ask the workers at Grangemouth or Mossmorran, or those in the oil and gas sector in the north-east, whether that feels like a just transition. They see their jobs disappearing faster than any serious alternative is being created.

That is what Professor de Leeuw said in his letter to our committee. I hope that I may share what he said with the chamber; I have been told

that I am not supposed to have a prop. He said that Scotland was losing more of its supply chain and workforce capacity than was being replaced by offshore wind and carbon capture and storage. He argued that strategic investment at scale, ahead of final approval of projects, was now required. He observed that, between now and the early 2030s, the majority of wind activities would not be in Scotland but in the rest of the world.

I am happy to give way to my fellow committee member Sarah Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: I absolutely agree that we need more investment in industrial capacity. Does the member agree that we need to have the ability to produce components for wind farms in Scotland? There were huge opportunities to build turbines. We had one plant, which closed. We need more such plants, because we must create more joined-up economic opportunities if we are to build the country that we need.

Stephen Kerr: Sarah Boyack is right. We keep saying that the opportunity will lie in the onshore supply chain, but it is not there. We keep saying that we need to have an onshore supply chain, but we do not take the public policy decisions that are necessary to drive, invite and attract such investment into our country.

The reality is that we are deindustrialising our economy while we are industrialising our countryside. We see turbines, pylons and substations spreading across rural Scotland, yet we import the steel, the turbines and the workers to install them. That is not green prosperity—we are exporting value and importing dependency.

Other members have mentioned the cost of electricity—indeed, I mentioned it in an intervention on Douglas Lumsden. I wanted to intervene on the cabinet secretary, too. She was not wrong in what she said about the cost of electricity. We have the most expensive electricity in the western developed world. How is our business base—our industrial base—expected to prosper? [*Interruption.*] I am being a bit loud, but if we cannot get excited about what is happening to our economy because of the arbitrary targets that have been set, what can we get excited about? The whole basis of our country—our economy, our society and our public services—depends on our willingness to ensure that our economy is well founded and that it grows.

I am well over time. Am I being told that I must close?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should begin to wind up.

Stephen Kerr: I will—[*Interruption.*] That is a separate matter.

I will finish by saying that the Scottish Conservatives are not in climate denial, as Keith Brown suggested. We are calling for responsible government. Scotland accounts for a tiny fraction of global emissions. We will not change the global climate by hollowing out our industrial base, but we will make ourselves poorer, more dependent and less secure. Energy policy is not simply an environmental issue. It is about national resilience, economic strength and security of supply, and we need a reset.

16:18

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): How do I follow that?

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in today's debate on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's report on "Scotland's Draft Climate Change Plan: 2026-2040". I thank the committee and its clerks. We are in a defining decade in our fight against climate change, and the report serves as a critical friend as we engage in that fight.

I think that we are also in a defining period politically. In a few months, we could have a Parliament in which there are 15 to 20 Reform MSPs—that is what the polls are showing us—and I have been at hustings with Reform candidates who flatly deny climate change. Kemi Badenoch has not been particularly supportive of the challenge against net zero. The Tories and Reform are hand in hand.

Scotland has set an ambitious target for net zero emissions by 2045. We have all heard that the draft climate change plan outlines policies across sectors such as transport, energy, waste, agriculture and buildings to meet our carbon budgets over the next 15 years. However, ambition alone is not enough; we need delivery. That is important, and I will come on to talk about that.

As we all know, the Scottish Parliament undertook a 120-day review, with our Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee leading the charge. It examined the plan's governance, monitoring and fiscal aspects, which are important, and we have heard from other committees today. What emerged and what is important is a clear consensus that Scotland needs to regain momentum in our net zero journey. I will touch on the impact of that and why we have not progressed as quickly as we should.

At its core, the report talks about how the final climate change plan will have to prioritise delivery. Concrete policies must be backed by clear targets, timelines, assigned leadership and, where possible, costings. This is not just about Government policies. As we have heard, local authorities and communities have a role, and I will

touch on that later in my speech. A robust monitoring system is essential to track progress and flag risks early. We cannot get to two or three years down the line and realise where we are. We must be able to do that monitoring on an annual basis.

The draft plan talks about electrification across the economy, but that brings challenges such as ensuring affordable electricity through collaboration with the UK Government. A number of months ago, I brought the National Energy System Operator to the Parliament, and a number of MSPs went along and spoke at that event. Grid capacity is essential, but we need close collaboration with the UK Government. I come from down in East Lothian, where the eastern green link is being built to export energy down to England. There must be closer collaboration with the UK Government on grid capacity, and I know that the cabinet secretary has been talking about that.

Dependencies on external actors, from Westminster to private industry, heighten risks, as do ambitious assumptions around rapid electric vehicle adoption, which we have had debates about. Ariane Burgess spoke about home heat decarbonisation and emissions technologies.

I turn to other key sectors that are under our remit. In energy supply, the Government's plan for renewables and grid upgrades is positive, but we all need to do more to scale up. That comes back to how serious the UK Government is about that point, and I know that the cabinet secretary has been dealing with that. The UK Government was behind the curve for a number of years and is now catching up, but that has had an impact on our ability to grow the renewables sector. The UK Government needs to pick up the pace and move more quickly on that.

We need clearer pathways to decarbonise energy from waste. I have an energy from waste plant in my constituency and I met representatives of Viridor to discuss that point. Emissions projections in that area are key as we move forward.

Stephen Kerr: I do not doubt Paul McLennan's commitment to green and clean energy sources, but why does he not accept what the European Union now accepts, which is that nuclear is a clean energy source and that we should be investing in it for our energy and national security?

Paul McLennan: As the member knows, I have a nuclear power station in my constituency. When it comes down to it, there are a number of reasons why we are going forward with renewables. The strike price is considerably cheaper. We might continue to disagree and debate that, but it is cheaper to deliver renewables.

Gillian Martin: I have the strike prices here. Hinkley Point's strike price is £92.50 per megawatt hour. For onshore wind, the figure is £64 and for solar power it is £61. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before I ask Paul McLennan to resume, could members resist the temptation to shout out rather than asking for an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I thank the cabinet secretary for that important point. It is all about how much cheaper prices are for consumers. One third of people in Scotland are in fuel poverty, so how we tackle climate change is incredibly important.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Paul McLennan: I want to move on from that, Mr Kerr.

Transport is a major emitter. The draft plan talks about modal shifts and encourages walking, cycling, the use of public transport and a reduction in dependency on cars. We have spoken about incentives such as free bus travel for under-22s and investment in active travel infrastructure.

Walking is key. Members will know that I have done lots of walking since I had my little health scare and have seen the benefits of that. We heard from Walking Scotland about the ambition for a £50 million path fund. That is being discussed and it is something that I support and that I encourage the Government to look at. We must encourage walking and cycling for health, leisure and work and we must support active travel hubs.

We have spoken about the issue of car mileage and use, which is something that we need to look at. The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Fiona Hyslop, spoke about that. Bus passenger numbers have dropped since the Covid pandemic, and the Scottish Government has looked at incentives to get people back on to buses, such as free bus travel for the under-22s and a cap on bus fares.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I am conscious of the time.

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

Sarah Boyack: It is difficult for young and older people to use their bus passes, because we have lost hundreds of bus routes. East Lothian, West Lothian, Midlothian and Edinburgh have Lothian Buses, but other parts of the country have no bus services, which is a real challenge. Does the member agree that the final plan should include support for new bus services?

Paul McLennan: That is really important. I know that East Lothian Council gives about £1 million a year to support bus routes. There is a bus route

development grant, and the Government has worked with local and national bus companies. It is really important to encourage that.

Freight decarbonisation is key, and 80 per cent of operators are small businesses, so the way that we work with them is really important.

There must be more measures to deter car use, including demand management, multiyear funding and integrated ticketing. I come back to what was said about rural access to public transport, which is important.

On waste, the draft circular economy strategy is important. We need tighter timelines for reductions in emissions from landfills and incineration. Again, I speak from a local perspective on that.

I have spoken previously about the work of the East Lothian Climate Hub. Climate and environmental change impact us all. The issues of increasing flooding, food availability, the livelihoods of farmers and access to green spaces affect everyone in East Lothian. The East Lothian Climate Hub has done fantastic work with local communities. I remember talking to the cabinet secretary about the fact that embedding the plan means embedding it in our local communities, and the climate hub has done amazing work in that regard. I spent time with it last Friday restoring hedgerows in Tranent, believe it or not. I found that very therapeutic, and it had an important impact.

Edward Mountain put it well when he said:

"The Plan must be focused on delivery, with credible proposals and clear lines of accountability".

Everyone agrees with that. He said that getting it right means listening to industry, NGOs, experts and Parliament, and other committees said the same.

Electricity pricing reform is vital as we move forward. That is one of the issues that we have spoken about. Scotland does not have the powers to take that forward. Prices are set in the UK Parliament, but we need those powers here in Scotland.

The report is not a critique; it is a road map to success. We must all seize the moment to rebuild momentum, foster collaboration and secure a sustainable future for Scotland. Net zero is not optional; it is our legacy, and we can deliver it together.

16:28

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I welcome the draft climate change plan. However, what has not been said enough today is that, if we are to deliver the change that is required, we must have complete and utter co-operation from the UK Government, because that cannot be done with

the powers of this Parliament or this Government alone.

I welcome the fact that this Parliament has set world-leading emissions targets, but targets are not results. We must move from what we would like to see happen to how we are going to make that happen, and that “how” is fundamentally economic. Rules, regulations and well-meaning soundbites are pointless unless the people of Scotland see a positive change in their lives and, most important, positivity in their pooches and their purses. To put it bluntly, what we need to do to ensure that we meet our climate change targets in Scotland is entirely dependent on lowering electricity bills, in my opinion. If we want people to switch to heat pumps and electric vehicles, the numbers must work for the person in the street.

Currently, the numbers are not working. Scots are seeing their bills go up rather than down, and the central reason for that is that the energy market is fundamentally flawed. We have the absurd situation where the cost of clean, green electricity that is generated right here in Scotland is based on the price of imported international gas. That marginal pricing system is a relic of the past. We need to remove the tie to natural gas prices. The previous Conservative Government failed to do that, and the current Labour Government seems unwilling to do it. However, it is nonsense to ask Scottish families to decarbonise their lives while charging them a premium that is dictated by the volatility of global fossil fuel markets. We just have to look at yet another American war in the middle east to see the folly of that.

However, we also need to be honest about the role of hydrocarbons in our future electricity generation.

Stephen Kerr: I would like to read something to Kevin Stewart very quickly:

“Evidence repeatedly pointed to electricity prices that are materially higher than those faced by overseas competitors, driven in large part by policy, regulatory and system costs, rather than generation costs alone.”

Does he agree with that? Does it not indicate that we are more responsible than the market for the direction of electricity prices?

Kevin Stewart: The UK Government is responsible. One of the main difficulties, and one of the reasons why we have the highest electricity prices in Europe, is the flawed situation where we tie electricity costs to the price of international gas. It is absolutely daft. The Tories should have got rid of that system, and the Labour Party should get rid of it. For us to get this right and make it right for Scots, who are being overcharged to a huge degree for electricity, that tie needs to be cut once and for all.

As I was saying, there is a role for hydrocarbons in our future electricity generation. It is a simple fact that the sun does not always shine and the wind does not always blow. Because of that, our electricity network must have the capacity to power our homes without renewables for up to 10 days at a time. Battery storage will be part of that solution and I hope that hydrogen will be part of it, too. However, there has to be a sense of reality here. We need back-up, so natural gas will remain vital for many decades to come.

Emma Harper: Will the member take an intervention?

Kevin Stewart: Not just now, thank you.

That does not mean that we cannot reduce the climate impact of using that natural gas. I give members project Acorn. We need to invest in that, no matter what some of the sceptics in the Parliament say. It is environmental barbarism to halt our production only to import gas from the war-torn middle east or Trump’s America. The carbon dioxide footprint of shipping liquefied natural gas across the Atlantic is obscene. We should also use locally-sourced hydrocarbons to reduce emissions from our energy production.

However, unit marginal pricing is not the only problem. Transmission charges and regional pricing also need to change, because we have the equally absurd situation where the price of clean, green electricity that is generated right here in Scotland is based on the cost of sending that energy to London. The current transmission charging system charges people in Scotland more and people in London less to encourage energy production near the energy demand in London.

Douglas Lumsden: I agree that we should be using our own hydrocarbons rather than relying on imported oil and gas. Does Kevin Stewart disagree with his party’s stance against Rosebank and Jackdaw oilfields, which would provide hydrocarbons that we can use in this country?

Kevin Stewart: It is not up to the Scottish National Party, the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament to give the go-ahead for Rosebank, Cambo or anywhere else; that is a matter for the UK Government. We have said that the impact on the environment and on energy security has to be considered, and we are not the only ones who have said that. The UK courts have said that the UK Government has to do that, too. I suggest that the UK Government—because, unfortunately, it is in charge at the moment—needs to put together environmental impact assessments and energy security strategies to get that right. I am not against new fields, but we need to consider the reasoning. If those works were carried out, they would show whether there is a need for future development. Anyway, forget about

new fields—we should be drilling in existing areas, as the Norwegians are doing. That is another thing that the UK Government is failing to do.

I was speaking about transmission charges. They must be changed to reflect the cost of local production alongside regional pricing, which would allow the free market to bring energy-intensive industries back to Scotland. Not only would that revitalise the Scottish economy and lower bills, but it would eliminate the vast carbon dioxide footprint of transporting electricity from Scotland to England.

Finally, we must address the elephant in the room: our housing stock. Tenements make up only 2 per cent of the UK's housing, but in Scotland they represent 25 per cent. In the centre of Aberdeen, which is in my constituency, well over half of the homes are tenements. Whitehall and the Climate Change Committee think that tenements are the last 2 per cent to be solved, but in Scotland, tenements must be one of the first problems that we solve. If we cannot decarbonise the tenements in our cities, we will not meet our targets—it is as simple as that. We simply cannot wait for a one-size-fits-all UK solution that ignores the reality of Scottish cities. Lower electricity prices will help us to do that decarbonisation.

Again, I welcome the fact that the Parliament has set world-leading climate emissions targets, but targets are not results. Results will be seen only if we can reduce electricity prices dramatically, which I think we can do and would do if we were an independent nation.

16:38

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): The draft climate change plan was developed around the principle of decarbonising our society and economy to meet Scotland's net zero goals. Although the plan is a welcome and crucial step to decarbonising our economy, there remains a real risk that Government and business will continue to take decisions in the name of climate action without the inclusion of workers and their unions.

So far, ordinary Scots have been disempowered from taking ownership of Scotland's energy transition, and they have been paying the price through job losses and the knock-on effects on our high streets, family life and mental health.

Like many communities across the country, Dundee, where I live, bears the scars of Thatcher's deindustrialisation of Scotland. Further north in my region, Aberdeen runs the risk of bearing the same social and economic issues that resulted from Thatcher's legacy should we continue to fail to get the energy transition right. Any transition that fails

to reckon with the concentrated hoarding of wealth, land and resources cannot ever be just.

The choice before us is business as usual or seizing the opportunity of clean energy.

The Just Transition Commission's final report is clear about the necessity of an accelerated timescale in the delivery of climate action. It is clear that a just transition can be achieved only through our workplaces, organised labour and trade unions. If we do not treat the climate crisis with the urgency that it demands, we run the risk of falling prey to the whims of the market, which can only benefit big business and its shareholders. We must therefore address the issues raised by the Just Transition Commission to enable a clear understanding of where climate action laid out in the draft climate change plan should be taking us.

The Just Transition Commission's report—*[Interruption.]*—makes a number of recommendations for the Scottish Government. It highlights the need for proactive, forward-thinking, place-based planning for workplaces and communities that are heavily entwined with high-polluting sectors, namely energy, transport, industry and agriculture.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Mercedes Villalba: That will require innovative redistributive plans for how we decarbonise and transition, along with transformative workforce planning, which means that workers and families will benefit from the just transition. We must be steadfast in our opposition to decarbonisation by deindustrialisation, which would have just as disastrous an effect as the status quo.

I echo the recommendation in the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's report that the Scottish Government's climate change plan should include clear timelines, targets and costings, and be clear about who is responsible for delivery. In particular, no Government should shy away from the report's point that the inclusion of data and workings is crucial for scrutiny. However, given how soon the plan is to be finalised after the publication of the committee's report on the draft, I agree with the committee's scepticism about the likelihood that its recommendations will be reflected on by the Government and incorporated into the final climate change plan.

I want to take a moment to respond to an issue that Kevin Stewart, in particular, has raised repeatedly. He does his constituents a great injustice and disservice by propagating the myth put around by international oil conglomerates that seek to blame fair taxation of eye-watering profits for what is in fact their own mismanagement of the industry: an industry that should never have been allowed to fall into private hands, because energy

is an issue—[*Interruption.*]—of national security that is fundamental to our economy. I agree with Mr Stewart that we must stop our reliance on importing gas. However, the solution is not endless drilling, because what is there is not actually what we need, and it is gone—[*Interruption.*]. The real solution—the only solution—is to pivot to a mix of renewable options, and that includes the untapped potential of geothermal, among other renewable options that members have raised. Sarah Boyack spoke passionately about solar, and we already have the option of wind and tidal.

Over the course of this parliamentary session, decisions about the energy transition have, too often, been taken at great distance—[*Interruption.*]—from the workers and communities at the heart of it, particularly those in the North East Scotland region that I represent. We cannot allow a just transition to remain an academic term used to greenwash industrial vandalism by an irresponsible state that is content to let the market decide our future. Instead, a just transition must represent something tangible in workers' lives, through the jobs that it brings, the regeneration of our environment that we will see and the gains in our health and quality of life that we will feel. That will be the job of the next Parliament and the next Government, but it is also the job of all of us in Scotland to hold that Parliament and that Government to account.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Just a reminder that it is up to the member whether they take an intervention. That is not an invitation for the intervention to be shouted from a sedentary position.

16:44

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): It has been quite an afternoon, hasn't it?

Irrespective of people's views, the draft climate change plan reflects a substantial piece of work by the Scottish Government and its officials, and I thank them for that. I also thank my colleagues, of all parties, on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee for their thoughtful scrutiny. I thought that we did that very well. Of course, I also give thanks to all those who supported our work, including clerks, advisers, witnesses and other committees in this place.

In our consideration of the plan, we must seek to offer constructive scrutiny and—believe it or not—take a collegiate approach to working together on a strategic document that aims to make long-term progress and secure delivery on the ground. Members might be forgiven for thinking that that ambition was not in evidence this afternoon.

This is Scotland's climate change plan, not the Scottish Government's. It requires buy-in and strategic partnership at all levels of government as well as from our business community, our private, public and third sectors and our communities right across Scotland. After watching the debate this afternoon, I think that some people have opted out of engaging with the debate. We need people—including me—to opt in and make the lifestyle changes that we all need to see. We will have to bear that in mind when we discuss the issue in the future.

If ever there was an issue on which we should see non-tribal work between the Scottish and UK Governments, this is it. Without successful delivery of Scotland's climate change plan, the UK plan has no chance of success. It is fair to say that the cabinet secretary indicated that relations between the UK Government and the Scottish Government have improved in recent times, but, in appropriately diplomatic language, she has hinted that there is perhaps still a wee bit of room for improvement—let us just say that there is still work to be done more generally. I apportion no blame in that regard. I say to Stephen Kerr that I will not do so during this debate, at least. However, that partnership has to be as close to rock solid as it ever can be between two Governments from two different parties in two different places. That is vital.

The switch to electric vehicles is a good example of why that has to be so. The draft plan includes phasing out new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030 and ensuring that all road vehicles produce zero emissions by 2040. The success of that approach in Scotland will be dependent on having a stable UK policy landscape, including zero-emission vehicle mandates that dictate the percentage of cars and vans that are zero-emission vehicles between now and 2035. It will also depend on the UK's vehicle emissions trading scheme for manufacturers being successful.

Investment from the Scottish Government, our local authorities, the private sector and households will be required in order to ensure that the charging infrastructure is in place. The Scottish Government has already invested £30 million to support the expansion of public electric vehicle charging networks, which should deliver 24,000 additional charging points by 2030. Thankfully, the up-front costs of new electric cars continue to fall, and I hope that they will reach parity over the next few years. Importantly, the resale market is increasingly strong, and price parity is likely to be approached much sooner than that.

Regarding electric vehicles, the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee stated that there are still challenges around up-front affordability, the cost of charging and the significant inequalities

that exist in that regard. We asked that the final plan set out how the Scottish Government intends to work with the UK Government and relevant stakeholders to overcome those barriers. For me, that means partnership working between both Governments to ensure that capital budgets for this place can continue to be used to expand the public network and to help to fund households and communities that, due to their house types, cannot simply have an EV charging point in their driveway. On-street solutions for tenement and other properties will be required. Price capping of commercial EV charging regimes may also need to be considered. It would be unfair if any households, but low-income households in particular, had to pay a premium to charge their vehicles because the fact that they did not have a driveway meant that they had to pay a commercial rate. That would not be acceptable, but that policy intervention will have to take place at a UK level.

I agree with Kevin Stewart's comments about the challenges of decarbonising tenement properties in a fair way. In my constituency, many low-income households will struggle to play their part as householders. They will need support and investment, and all levels of government will have to contribute to that.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): What about the bill you just scrapped?

Bob Doris: Would the member like to make an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: All that I was going to say is that what those people need is the bill that the Scottish Government has just scrapped.

Bob Doris: My constituents need the draft bill that has been published to be delivered in the next session of the Parliament. It needs buy-in from all parties, including the Green Party, rather than members making a churlish intervention like that.

I note that the Scottish Government has changed the target for reducing car mileage to 4 per cent by 2030, as opposed to the previous 20 per cent target. Clearly, that gives an added focus to the need to move to electric vehicles as speedily as possible. The change in the target also recognises the on-going need for cars, particularly in our rural areas. I say that as an urban MSP.

As an urban MSP, I would look to bus franchising to achieve the modal switch, which is not a cost-free option. The Strathclyde Partnership for Transport continues to bring forward a business model for it. There are also challenges with bus franchising. To achieve our net zero ambitions, do we need to get those who are using cars in urban areas out of their cars and on to buses, or will we need to prioritise low-income areas that have no bus services and no cars so that they can be better

connected? There can be a conflict in that. We have to be clear about the policy intent of bus franchising, but it will need to be appropriately financially supported.

By the nature of their geography, our rural areas will make a crucial contribution to net zero, whether that is through reforestation or peatland restoration. The Scottish Government has chosen an alternative balanced pathway to net zero from that of the Climate Change Committee and it has chosen not to reduce livestock numbers, as was suggested by the committee. That seems to be for good reason. However, that means that peatland restoration and reforestation must do more heavy lifting if we are to secure net zero. The plan does that in a fashion, because reforestation and peatland restoration do not scale up under the Scottish Government's plan. New modelling work and new research show that the contribution that tree planting and peatland restoration make is far more significant than was previously thought. In that respect, I reference the industry standard for carbon sequestration in forestry, as well as the latest research from the James Hutton Institute on peatland restoration.

I mention that because it is the latest modelling and research work, but the modelling and research sometimes change. The Climate Change Committee asked clearly what plan B and the alternatives would be if those things changed and our ambitions were not fully realised.

Do I have another minute or so, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No, you do not.

Bob Doris: My goodness. Mr Kerr gets a lot of airtime, doesn't he, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As do other colleagues, Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: More generally, by definition, all climate change plans are out of date almost as soon as they are written, because the policy landscape changes and public budgets, technologies and modelling all change. The climate change plan has to be iterative, but it also has to be delivered through the budget. In the next session of the Parliament, if I am lucky enough to be returned, I will want to see a much clearer link between the strategy and the budget that is delivered. I will also want to see more collegiate working to get the budget agreed on a cross-party basis in the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. I advise the chamber that we have a little time in hand, but resources of generosity have been vastly depleted at this stage.

16:53

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I start by acknowledging that there has been a failure of process. As a result of the timescale that the Scottish Government decided on, not enough time has been left for committee scrutiny to be done to the standard that committees would wish. The UK's Climate Change Committee was not willing or able to appear before committees to give evidence. As it stands, we have the committee's report and the CCC's report in the final days of the parliamentary term and there is very little time for the Government to change the draft climate change plan in response to the debate.

Part of the failure of process is entirely within the Parliament's control. The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2024 says that the Government must respond to resolutions, as well as to reports, by the Parliament within three months. Indeed, the only resolution that we have allowed ourselves to vote on is a completely standard "take note" motion at decision time. There is no substance and there is no message for the Government within the resolution. It is a failure of the Parliament's process as well as the Government's process. We also have to acknowledge that there has been a failure of progress, and there are other past failures that we need to reflect on.

When I think back to the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, I remember all the self-congratulation about target setting and the emphasis on consensus and how important that was. However, even as we debated the issues back in 2008 and 2009, I expressed the concern that we had consensus on the destination only and not on the route. We had consensus on the targets but not on the actions that would be needed—and so it proved. There was a failure to take the bold action that was necessary to cut emissions across many sectors. That is the reason why the 2030 target slipped out of reach. That is where we stand now as we approach the halfway point.

Next year marks the halfway point between the first climate act, in 2009, and the net zero target of 2045. In the first half of that journey, there has been only one solid success story: the growth of renewable electricity, which has been welcomed by most and opposed by a few—and that is still the case. Across the other sectors of the economy—transport, land use, buildings and more—emissions have flatlined or worse. That is the reason why Scotland is now years behind where we should be in tackling the climate emergency. My concern now is that, with the draft plan as it stands, the second half of the journey could fail just as the first half did.

Looking at the draft plan, it seems that we are setting Scotland up for future failure. The

overreliance on negative emissions technology, which Mark Ruskell highlighted, is perhaps the biggest risk factor in the plan. It was always a risk, but, with the very obvious and all-too-predictable failures in the development of the technology, the risk is turning into a 12-megatonne hole in the Scottish Government's plans. As Mark Ruskell argued, it is a massive gamble, and it is accompanied by a proposal for a new fossil fuel power plant, which is an absurdity when we are years behind schedule on cutting emissions.

On transport, there is a narrow emphasis on EVs. They have a role to play, of course, but replacing a fossil fuel car-dominated transport system with an electric car-dominated transport system will be both a failure and a missed opportunity to create a safer, healthier and fairer Scotland, which can be achieved through demand reduction and a shift to cheap, reliable public transport and safe active travel. The levels of road traffic reduction that are now being proposed are far lower than the ambition that previously existed, but, without a proper plan for modal shift and demand management, even those very low targets might be missed.

Fiona Hyslop: Will Patrick Harvie give way?

Patrick Harvie: I am afraid that I cannot, given the time that I have.

I can understand why the Government chose to reject the advice on agriculture in the face of opportunistic opposition by those who were determined to misrepresent the issues. However, in truth, it was another missed opportunity—a missed opportunity to invest in a new and better food system and a new and better sustainable future for rural communities.

The Government has been commended for its previous heat in buildings programme, but that has been filleted. The proposed heat in buildings bill that was produced has been delayed until the next parliamentary session, with the contents stripped out of it. The Government has not only delayed and weakened the bill but allowed the number of homes supported by Scottish Government-funded programmes to absolutely fall off a cliff in the past couple of years.

There is simply no route to net zero without an ambitious programme to get Scotland off fossil fuels. If we did not understand the wider benefits of doing that before, the current spike in oil and gas prices caused by yet another illegal war should make it abundantly clear.

Many people talk about a high electricity price as an excuse. A high electricity price is a political choice, and it would be made much worse with the wildly expensive option of nuclear energy. Renewable electricity is the cheapest to generate,

and it is only the increasingly perverse UK Government regulation of energy prices that fails to pass on that low price to bill payers.

Those who are concerned about the cost rarely acknowledge the cost of inaction. In the past weeks, we have finally seen the UK Government's national security assessment of ecosystem collapse and biodiversity loss. Never mind the long-term catastrophic risks; the assessment shows that, even in the short term, ecosystem collapse and biodiversity loss could cost 12 per cent of gross domestic product as soon as 2030.

Even the previous partial consensus has now broken down, and, although most of the public still want climate action, the parties on the right have given up on any credible climate policy and are talking of repealing the legislation. They have spent half their time in today's debate demanding more fossil fuels. That is supported even by some in the SNP who are apparently unaware that the approval of Rosebank was already thrown out of court because its emissions would have been dramatically higher than was previously acknowledged.

The Government must significantly strengthen the draft climate change plan and it must be put under consistent pressure in the next parliamentary session to act with ambition. The political right cannot be trusted to bring that pressure—it will do the opposite. If the Government feels that it is under pressure only from those who want to drop climate action and water down policy, it will continue to drift. That is why it must be under pressure from a strong voice in Parliament calling for climate action and showing how it can build a fairer, more equal and healthier Scotland. The Scottish Greens will be that voice.

17:00

Sarah Boyack: As we close the debate, it is clear that the climate change plan must contain ambition, but that it also needs to be delivered. I got that message across our committees: where we can find agreement across the parties, it is agreement that we need action.

The fact that we are debating the plan at the end of the session is a great pity, because a lot of the people who have debated it are leaving Parliament. There urgently needs to be a recommendation for the next Parliament to debate the final plan and talk about how it can be implemented.

Nine out of our 13 annual targets were missed. That is not just a failure of targets—it is a warning that we need to do better. Lessons need to be learned, because as 2030 approaches, the window for action is narrowing. We have to start

moving at speed and take full accountability for missed targets and delayed policies.

The Scottish Government needs to be held to account for delivery. For example—I am surprised that nobody has mentioned this yet, but maybe it will be in Douglas Lumsden's final speech—

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): It will be me this time.

Sarah Boyack: Sorry—it will not be from that member, then.

The draft energy strategy was published in January 2023, and we are still waiting for the final version. Just last month, the Just Transition Commission published its report, "No Time to Lose". It tells us that we need to be working together and to be making the maximum use of the powers that the Scottish Government has. Mark Ruskell made that point, and I totally agree with it.

The report also says that we need a place-based approach for every community. That means that communities and local authorities must have the capacity and the support to deliver in practice. We also need clarity so that sectors can invest, businesses can plan and workers can prepare for the future.

The financial aspects of the climate change plan reveal one of the most concerning gaps. Committees are always told that financial space is very tight, but we need to ensure that there are actual plans and incentives and that every policy has a fully costed financial plan behind it. We need to see that in the final plan.

We also need better monitoring and evaluation. The Climate Change Committee has been explicit that the final plan must include a complete monitoring and evaluation framework with annual sectoral pathways and indicators of progress. That needs to be monitored not just by one committee of this Parliament but by a range of committees, because one committee will never be responsible for everything that is in the climate change plan—everyone must be involved in it.

We also need joined-up thinking and action. When it comes to transport, there are huge opportunities for electrifying rail, cars, buses and other vehicles. We also have opportunities around heat. We need to think through the local supply chains. That need for joined-up action has been referred to in different ways.

We need to think about how we can better use our power near to where it is produced. That is a huge opportunity. It was interesting to hear Paul McLennan's speech, as a big discussion is happening in the Lothians about the potential for the Berwick Bank wind farm to bring in lots of new electricity. Why do we not use that where it is

produced? Why do we not establish heat networks both to use that electricity and as a storage process? We need joined-up thinking.

I mentioned solar energy in my opening comments. I declare an interest in that I am a member of the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative. I have seen the impact that it has had on buildings that are owned by the City of Edinburgh Council but into which the council has not had to put any investment, because that was done by the co-operative, and it has made money. We should be doing that everywhere, but on a local basis.

I also used to work with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations—again, I declare an interest—where I saw the benefits of solar heat and solar power. We always talk about solar power, but the technology can be used to heat water in our homes. We need a joined-up approach.

We have done a lot with new housing. Patrick Harvie referred to the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Following negotiation with the then Deputy First Minister, I sneaked into that act an amendment that all new homes had to have some form of renewables. That has happened and there was constructive work with the building sector. A lot of it is solar but it is not exclusively so.

However, we are not seeing work to decarbonise existing homes and buildings. Kevin Stewart and Bob Doris made points about this. Tenements are critical. In the next session of the Parliament, we need more than a nice-to-have on tenements. We need to think about how we improve the quality of tenements and consider the opportunities for affordable heating—that means heating that people can afford to have on. We did not talk about it, but there are social justice and health issues with heating: an older person needs to have their home at 19°C at least and, if a person has a disability, that is something that they urgently need to be addressed.

There is a lot of work that can be done. I talk about the local issue. Members should think of the local jobs and supply chains if we have a programme and a plan to heat our homes effectively and affordably. We have the warm homes plan in the UK, so let us learn from that.

I will wind up my speech. We need to make the plan an opportunity. We need joined-up thinking across Government and we need to ensure that, in the next session, the climate change plan is not just a job for one of the Cabinet members but a job for every member of the Government. If we do not take that approach, it will mean massive missed opportunities and social challenges in tackling the impact of the climate emergency on Scotland. Let

us get on with it and have a proper discussion early doors.

I hope that the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy has been listening not just today but for the past however many weeks and months, because there are big opportunities and we need to seize them together.

17:06

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): The debate has exposed a fundamental divide in the Parliament: on one side sits the left-wing Holyrood consensus that is determined to push ahead with arbitrary 2045 net zero targets regardless of the cost to families, businesses and Scotland's vital oil and gas sector; and, on the other side, sit most of the Scottish Conservatives, who are clear that climate action must be credible, affordable and deliverable.

Let us start with the facts. The Scottish Government's independent climate advisers, the Climate Change Committee, have been explicit about what meeting the 2045 target entails. By 2030, 35,000 heat pumps have to be installed every year and, by 2035, 60 per cent of cars and vans have to be electric. There also needs to be a reduction of 2 million in the number of cattle and sheep, a cut of a fifth in meat consumption—I think that I might have a ribeye tonight—and a nearly tenfold increase in land use for woodland. Those are not marginal adjustments. They are profound changes to how people heat their homes, travel to work, run their farms and feed their families.

However, the Government refuses to level with the public about the scale of the disruption that is involved or the bill that will come with it. The CCC estimates the net cost of reaching net zero at £750 million per year between 2025 and 2050, with costs peaking before benefits are realised. The Government's draft climate change plan admits that the Scottish economy will be £6.1 billion worse off by 2030 and £4.8 billion down by 2040, even after projected savings. Those are massive numbers. Businesses alone face £8.5 billion in costs by 2040. Who will pay?

Gillian Martin: Does Sue Webber not agree with the Office for Budget Responsibility report that estimates that unchecked climate change could cost up to 8 per cent of UK GDP?

Sue Webber: Consumers at home do not care much about 8 per cent of GDP when they face bills that will cripple their household incomes.

The cabinet secretary has still not answered the question that I asked: who will pay? Officials have admitted that they cannot predict whether the burden will fall on taxpayers, households or

industry. That is not a plan. The Government is gambling with other people's money.

Even Audit Scotland has warned that the costs lack transparency and that there is no clear breakdown of who pays, when they pay or how their investment will be funded. The Parliament has been asked to sign off a strategy without knowing the price tag—we have all seen that before. The Government's previous target to cut emissions by 70 per cent by 2030 was abandoned after it became clear that that was not credible.

Now, we have been told to have confidence again. Confidence in what? In a plan that was published late? In proposals that are not fully costed? In a strategy that places almost twice the reliance on negative emissions technologies as the CCC's balanced pathway—technologies that even the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee has described as largely "untested at scale" and a "significant delivery risk"? Should we have confidence in electric vehicle uptake doing the heavy lifting, despite the serious concerns that we have heard about affordability, charging infrastructure and grid capacity? I can attest to all those concerns being real. It is all wishful thinking.

The human cost of that approach is already being felt. Scotland has lost three oil and gas jobs for every clean job that has been created over the past decade, and more than 13,000 jobs have disappeared in a single year.

Bob Doris: I have been listening intently to Sue Webber. Could she please tell me something that she likes about the plan?

Sue Webber: We will see whether I will come to that in the two minutes that I have left. I will leave Bob Doris eagerly anticipating from his sedentary position whether I will do so, but I thank him for asking.

Communities in the north-east are being hollowed out while ministers talk about a just transition. The industry body Offshore Energies UK has been clear that oil and gas still have a vital role to play alongside renewables in delivering energy security and net zero. Instead of backing the sector, the Government has presided over industrial decline.

Let me be clear: despite what Mr Doris might have heard—he should listen to this—the Scottish Conservatives believe in protecting our environment. Mr Kerr said so earlier. We support a transition to cleaner energy, and we recognise the need to reduce emissions—not just those from politicians. However, we will not sign up to targets that cannot be delivered without hammering households and sacrificing jobs, and we will not endorse a plan that puts billions of pounds of costs

into businesses while offering little clarity and less honesty.

Mercedes Villalba: Will the member take an intervention?

Sue Webber: I will not.

Scotland's emissions are already down by 50 per cent compared with the 1990 baseline. Progress has been made. The Scottish Conservatives would scrap the arbitrary 2045 target and replace it with a credible and affordable pathway that would protect oil and gas jobs, safeguard energy security, support technological innovation and keep bills as low as possible for consumers. We want to focus on the delivery of a transition that carries the public with it, rather than imposing severe lifestyle restrictions without consent.

If climate policy loses public support, it will fail. If it undermines our economy, it will backfire. If it is built on shaky assumptions and opaque costings, it will certainly not endure. The Scottish Conservatives choose practical progress. We will stand up for Scottish workers, we will stand up for Scottish businesses, and we will stand up for a climate policy that is honest, affordable and fair.

17:12

Gillian Martin: With some exceptions, this has been a very constructive debate with some very good contributions. I want to pick out where people have been constructive.

This might be the last climate change debate in which Sarah Boyack takes part, so, if I can be allowed the time, I want to wish her all the best for what comes next and say how much I have enjoyed working with her on this subject. We disagree on a few things, such as how we should do some things, but we both feel similarly about our portfolios and the importance of them.

Sarah Boyack mentioned heat networks, which will be a big project for the next Parliament. I have been trying to discuss taking away constraint payments and incentivising private wire arrangements for heat networks with her colleagues in London—watch this space.

Mark Ruskell was critical, but he always had solutions and suggestions, which I very much appreciate. I also want to mention Paul McLennan's very considerate contribution, in which he mentioned that climate hubs are critical in getting buy-in from communities. I appreciate the work that those hubs do, the correspondence that I had with them and the time that I spent with them talking about the climate change plan.

I want to make special mention of Bob Doris's contribution. He was one of the few members who

mentioned the importance of peatlands and woodland creation, how that methodology is changing, how previous assumptions are changing and how the climate change plan must be agile and adaptive as technology and methodology improve and things happen in a global context.

I will cover some of the committees' recommendations—after all, this is a committee debate. The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee called for more of the health benefits of climate action to be visible in the final plan. That is music to my ears. I remember, when I was the convener of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee in the previous session of Parliament, making that point to the then convener of the Health and Sport Committee, who challenged me by saying, "That is my job," but no, it is not—it is all our jobs.

It has been made clear by many contributors to the debate that this is not just a whole-Government or whole-portfolio approach as it is. I am sitting here with the cabinet secretary for the area that will do most of the work in the climate change plan, which is transport, but the plan also cuts across housing, land use, health and, indeed, the economy. We have worked with the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute to describe and quantify the health benefits and the co-benefits much better.

The Rural Affairs and Islands Committee called for greater monitoring and evaluation, as quite a few committees did. Understanding our progress in delivering the climate change plan is a priority for me, and much of that work is already under way. Indeed, Mairi Gougeon is working on the agricultural reform programme. Of course, she is another person who will not be here in the next parliamentary session. Should I retain this position, I will be speaking to her successor about that critical work.

The rural committee also called for regional land use partnerships to be placed on a firmer footing, and we agree on that. We are currently working on a support framework for partnerships to help our communities—including farmers, crofters and land managers—to agree and deliver their priorities for land use, including tree planting and peatland restoration.

The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee asked us to work closely with the UK Government on reserved areas such as vehicle licensing, public EV charging and electricity market reform. We are, we have been and we will continue to do so. It also asked for the plan to signal investment opportunities to the private sector. That is a priority not just for me but for other cabinet secretaries. Indeed, the Deputy First Minister has been doing

a great deal of work on that and on making sure that the investment portal includes climate opportunities.

Edward Mountain: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Gillian Martin: Do I have any time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is not an awful lot of time.

Gillian Martin: Okay. I will keep going—I am sorry, convener.

The committee also asked for more effective links from the plan to other Government actions, including the Scottish budget. I agree that the Scottish budget provided record funding of more than £5 billion for activities to support our climate goals, and we have the climate taxonomy that is associated with the budget. Indeed, the budget included new climate initiatives such as the levy on private jet use in Scotland.

It is clear that there are many points of agreement that will strengthen the delivery of the plan, which brings me back to why we are here. I am crystal clear that the draft climate change plan must deliver a pathway for the Scottish Government to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions—not just for the Scottish Government but for Scotland—in a way that fairly and justly delivers on our aspirations to improve wellbeing and economic opportunities for the people of Scotland.

When I met community leaders from our climate action hub network in January, they were clear that, to maintain support for climate action, we must proudly describe the benefits that it offers. The majority of members in the chamber described those benefits in the debate, but I will rail against those who want to weaponise negative approaches to the need for climate action. That includes people who use negative scaremongering on renewables.

People want us to work together to come up with solutions that will make our lives better and to get behind action that will create jobs, make our environment better and make our households and communities more resilient. People do not like hysterics, shouting and personal attacks that are bereft of ideas—that achieves nothing.

Douglas Lumsden did that to me today, as he always does in the chamber. He took a newspaper headline and twisted it into an untrue personal attack. I clarify on the record that, when I talked about those who weaponise anti-renewables rhetoric, I was talking about Reform, but I was also talking about those who ape Reform. I was talking about people like Douglas Lumsden.

People want us to work together. This is far too important for personal attacks.

Douglas Lumsden: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I ask for clarification. At the end of the cabinet secretary's contribution, she seemed to call me somebody from the far right. Will you clarify whether that is acceptable language for the cabinet secretary to be using against another member of the Parliament?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Mr Lumsden knows that I am very keen that all members treat one another with courtesy and respect at all times. I will intervene when I feel that that is required.

Cabinet secretary, please continue.

Gillian Martin: Thank you, Presiding Officer. I have concluded.

The Presiding Officer: I call Michael Matheson to wind up the debate on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

17:20

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): To begin, I apologise for being slightly late for the start of the debate.

I will seek to draw the debate together in a consensual fashion, given the importance of the issue. I put on record my thanks to all those members who have contributed to the debate and, in particular, to the committees that have taken time to scrutinise the draft climate change plan. On reflection, it feels as though the wider committee engagement on this particular plan has been greater than we have experienced on previous occasions. That is to be welcomed.

Ownership of the draft climate change plan and of the final plan is critical to its success: not only ownership in the Government—I will come to that point—but ownership in the Parliament as well. In order to tackle the issues that we need to tackle in our healthcare system—whether that is through green theatres, pharmacology or other measures that can be taken for energy efficiency in our health service—it is important that, in the next session of the Parliament, the health committee is alive to those issues and pursues them with vigour. The same must be true of the local government committee, the rural affairs committee and the committee on constitution and culture. It will be essential that there is collective responsibility in the Parliament to pursue and consider the draft climate change plan.

Broadly, there were three buckets to the evidence that the committee received when we were considering the plan. One bucket was that of those who thought that the plan may go too far in

some areas and that it is too ambitious in what it is trying to achieve. I see by the looks on their faces that some may feel as though there were not many of those—I am afraid, Mr Harvie, that there were. Secondly, there were those who thought that the plan has not gone far enough and, thirdly, there were those who thought that it reaches the right point at this juncture. Wherever you are on this journey—whether you think that the plan goes too far or not far enough, or is about right—it is clear from the debate this afternoon that the main issue is about delivery.

A lot of the committee's recommendations focus on the importance of delivery. Any plan and its ownership are only as good as how the plan will be implemented and delivered. The committee highlighted a number of concerns around delivery and the shortage of detail in the draft plan on how key aspects will be delivered. Whether it is aspects of agriculture—Finlay Carson raised the importance of both policy and finance measures to support that sector's transition—heat in buildings, local government support or our healthcare system, the delivery of policy will be critical in all those areas.

I suspect that part of the challenge is that several key parts of delivering in those areas do not rest with the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy or the Cabinet Secretary for Transport: they rest with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and others. That is why it will be important that there is a proper structure across portfolios within the Government to identify how that delivery can be achieved, and that there is a clear line of responsibility and of action in each individual portfolio.

That brings me on to another important recommendation that the committee made, which relates to an issue that many members have mentioned—the need for early warning indicators and the means by which those can be made visible to the public and to Parliament.

We should not have early warning indicators just for the sake of it. As we move from a system of annual targets to a system of five-yearly carbon budgets over the course of the next decade and a half, if we start to lose momentum in key areas, we need to be able to identify that at an early stage. The danger is that the burden falls on other policy areas, which then have to make up the difference. We know from previous experience that that is very difficult to achieve and that such an approach is not effective.

A system of early warning indicators is helpful not only in supporting the Government to develop policy, to ensure that that policy is on track and to identify where there might be early challenges, but

in aiding parliamentarians and committees to scrutinise how the Government deals with some of those issues. I hope that the final iteration of the climate change plan recognises the importance of the transparency and accountability that are provided through a system of early warning indicators that can identify gaps as and when they arise.

That brings me on to a further point about specific policy areas. If we look at how the CCP seeks to address energy issues, we can see that it relies to a significant extent on decarbonisation through electrification of our society, whether at domestic or industrial level. Alongside that, it places a greater dependence on negative emission technologies, some of which we know are still in their infancy and still carry significant risk. Therefore, we need to ensure that we build sufficient contingency into how we plan for those things, should they not be able to achieve the level of uplift that the plan expects.

In reflecting on this afternoon's debate, it has at times felt as though we have been debating a committee report on an energy strategy rather than a committee report on a draft climate change plan. The debate has highlighted the fact that, in dealing with new technology, there is a risk that it might not be able to meet the level of ambition that we are looking for and that, therefore, we must ensure that there is sufficient contingency in the system to deal with that.

Sarah Boyack: I think that there is also a risk in not applying new technologies. Sustainable aviation fuel, which our planes will use very soon and into the future, and green hydrogen offer significant opportunities, but there are also risks if we do not provide joined-up support to deliver those new technologies.

Michael Matheson: I very much agree. It is not a question of not deploying new technologies; it is a question of recognising that some of them carry different levels of risk. As well as being mindful of that, we must ensure that the final plan is drafted in such a way that it has enough contingency built into it to address those issues. That links in with my point about the importance of having early warning indicators so that, when things go off track, we can take early action to address those issues.

I am not sure how I am doing time-wise, Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer: You have another minute.

Michael Matheson: I will briefly touch on a couple of other areas, one of which is transport. Several members have raised the challenges that we face with electrification. Significant progress

has been made on that, but there is a significant challenge, especially in the heavy goods vehicle sector, that needs to be addressed.

In closing my remarks, I want to emphasise the committee's point that the climate change plan gives us an opportunity to reset Scotland's net zero ambitions.

The draft plan sets ambitions across sectors, but the evidence that was heard by the committee also identified some key areas of risk, including the switch over to electrical vehicles, the decarbonisation of our homes, the decarbonisation of freight transport and the use of negative emissions technologies, as well as the importance of making sure that we deliver on woodland creation and peatland restoration targets. Those areas have significant emission reductions associated with them in terms of tonnage, but we and the committee have highlighted challenges that will need to be overcome if we are to deliver on those ambitions.

I very much hope that the Scottish Government will consider what has been set out in our report and in the other committees' reports and work to address those issues at pace as it looks to finalise its plan.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the draft climate change plan, on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

Environmental Standards Scotland (Appointment)

17:30

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-20981, in the name of Gillian Martin, on the appointment of a board member to Environmental Standards Scotland.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament notes the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's consideration of the appointment to Environmental Standards Scotland at its meeting on 17 February 2026; welcomes the Committee's recommendation that the Parliament approves the appointment of Laura Young as a board member, in accordance with the provisions of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021, and approves the appointment as required by schedule 1, paragraph 2(2) of the Act.—[*Gillian Martin*]

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

Freedom of Information Reform (Scotland) Bill: Financial Resolution

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of motion S6M-20935, in the name of Shona Robison, on a financial resolution for the Freedom of Information Reform (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Freedom of Information Reform (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.—[*Shona Robison*]

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

Decision Time

17:31

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that motion S6M-20944, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill at stage 3, be agreed to. As this is a motion to pass a bill, the question must be decided by division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:31

Meeting suspended.

17:34

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the division on motion S6M-20944, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill at stage 3. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Ind)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Ind)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Ind)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (Ind)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)

Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (LD)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Ind)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Russell, Davy (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Reform)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Witham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
 (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-20944, in the name of Richard Lochhead, on the Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill at stage 3, is: For 114, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill be passed.

The Presiding Officer: The Digital Assets (Scotland) Bill is passed. [*Applause.*]

The next question is, that motion S6M-20964, in the name of Edward Mountain, on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, on the draft climate change plan, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the findings and recommendations in the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's 10th Report, 2026 (Session 6), *Report on the Draft Climate Change Plan* (SP Paper 1031), and the reports and letters from other committees, as referenced in the report.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-20981, in the name of Gillian Martin, on the appointment of a board member to Environmental Standards Scotland, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament notes the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee's consideration of the appointment to Environmental Standards Scotland at its meeting on 17 February 2026; welcomes the Committee's recommendation that the Parliament approves the appointment of Laura Young as a board member, in accordance with the provisions of the UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021, and approves the appointment as required by schedule 1, paragraph 2(2) of the Act.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-20935, in the name of Shona Robison, on a financial resolution for the Freedom of Information Reform (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Freedom of Information Reform (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: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:36.

This is a draft *Official Report* and is subject to correction between publication and archiving, which will take place no later than 35 working days after the date of the meeting. The most up-to-date version is available here:
<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report>

Members and other meeting participants who wish to suggest corrections to their contributions should contact the Official Report.

Official Report
Room T2.20
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Email: official.report@parliament.scot
Telephone: 0131 348 5447

The deadline for corrections to this edition is 20 working days after the date of publication.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba