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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 8 June 2021

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

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good afternoon. I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the Holyrood campus. I ask members to take care to observe the measures, including when entering and exiting the chamber. Please use only the aisles and walkways to access your seats and when moving around the chamber.

The first item of business is time for reflection. Our leader today is the Rev Anna Rodwell, who is the minister for Kelso North and Ednam parish church in the Scottish Borders.

The Rev Anna Rodwell (Kelso North and Ednam Parish Church): I will start us off in your new session with a little poetry.

"Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,
From wandering on a foreign strand!"

Who wrote that? It was our other national bard—Sir Walter Scott. I am a Borderer, so what do you expect?

I am deeply honoured and excited to be given the chance to facilitate a time for reflection—four minutes during which we can raise our thoughts above what we can see, touch and smell. It is a moment in which to contemplate the numinous.

As a Christian, I have to stand ready to account for the hope that is within me, so when I was asked to address this esteemed Parliament, I thought, "What can I say that would be useful to the men and women who hold the fate of this glorious country in their hands?" That is when the words of Sir Walter Scott came to me. The passion that is present in Scott's words is held by so many Scots for this, their land of birth or their adopted homeland, and it tells of a sense of belonging and security.

However, now, at this time, we almost feel a sense of missing peace or piece—it can be spelled either way. There is an angst, a loneliness and a sense of being at sea.

What can we do to help? The church is an organisation that exists to help people outwith its membership. It exists to foster community, to show God's love in words and action, and to get

alongside people and let them know that they are not alone. If we are created to live in a relationship with God and in fellowship with one another, there will always be something missing until we enter into that relationship and fellowship.

I ask you to speak to the faith communities in your constituencies. You will be welcomed, and I believe that you will find a group of people who are willing to respond to human need with loving service. You will find a group of people who are passionate about creation, the earth and how to sustain and nurture life on this planet. You will find a group of people who realise that we are only as great as the least of us, and that while any suffer, we all suffer.

"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

I wish you all the best for your new session. Thank you.

Point of Order

14:04

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your help in a matter that should concern every one of us as parliamentarians. Last Friday, the First Minister made yet another televised Covid statement and went on to take questions from journalists. That happened even though the Parliament sat last Thursday. That was only the latest occasion on which the First Minister has chosen to speak to TV cameras rather than to come to the chamber to make a statement and to take questions from the members of this Parliament. Parliament is where statements should be made first—we are elected to hear statements first. The First Minister should give the Parliament the respect that it deserves.

Presiding Officer, I wish to ask you three things. First, will you confirm that it is in order for the First Minister to come to the chamber to make Government statements, and that it is not in order for her to ignore the Parliament and instead to make statements in front of TV cameras and journalists?

Secondly, if the First Minister was not in a position to make her statement on Thursday, which is an excuse that she might try to offer for the apparent disrespect to the Parliament, would it have been in order for the First Minister to ask her party's business manager to seek a sitting of Parliament last Friday?

Finally, Presiding Officer, I ask you to make further representations to the Scottish Government and, in particular, to the First Minister to the effect that Government statements should first be made in Parliament in order to allow for proper scrutiny and to show respect for our Parliament.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I thank Stephen Kerr for advance notice of his point of order. I note that those matters were discussed by the Parliamentary Bureau today. As I outlined at its meeting, it is my expectation that all substantial announcements in relation to Covid-19 will be made to the Parliament. Issues relating to timetabling of business are, in the first instance, for discussion at the bureau's meetings and are, ultimately, for the Parliament to decide. Any concerns that members have about timetabling of business can be raised through their business manager or directly with me.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I wish to make a further point of order on the matter. These are extraordinary times and Governments around the world are taking extraordinary measures, which

make accountability and parliamentary scrutiny more important than ever.

Paragraph 3.5 of the ministerial code states:

"When the Parliament is meeting, Ministers should ensure that important announcements of Government policy are made, in the first instance, to the Parliament".

The Scottish Parliament's standing orders provide flexibility to ensure that ministers can meet their obligations under the code. When a minister wishes to make a statement "of an urgent nature", rule 13.2 allows them to request time for a parliamentary statement that day. Rule 5.5.4 makes clear that if

"emergency business arises, the Presiding Officer may allow that business to be taken"

and will

"make any necessary alteration to the daily business list."

Parliament can also agree to meet outwith our usual sitting days, if necessary. We recently met for four hours on a Friday to elect our Deputy Presiding Officers. We could, if it was required, easily meet on a Friday to consider urgent matters that are of national importance, such as the levels of tiered coronavirus restrictions that apply to our constituents.

When critical announcements and statements are made by the First Minister to a press conference instead of to the Parliament, members are denied the opportunity to question the First Minister and the Scottish Government about their decisions as a situation develops. There is no reason why the Parliament should be denied the opportunity to fulfil its role in holding the Government to account, and to do so in good time.

I would be grateful if the Presiding Officer would confirm that there is no barrier to the Parliament meeting on Fridays, or to the Scottish Government requesting parliamentary time for urgent or emergency business concerning its response to the pandemic, as we all seek to support the country through this crisis.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Neil Bibby for his point of order. As I said previously, it is my expectation that all substantial announcements in relation to Covid-19 or any other issues will be made to the Parliament. I am certain that we will return to discussing the issue at our next Parliamentary Bureau meeting.

As I have also said previously, issues relating to timetabling are a matter for the bureau and, ultimately, Parliament to decide.

Topical Question Time

14:09

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is topical question time. As ever, in order to get in as many people as possible, I would prefer succinct questions and answers.

Secure Accommodation (Unlawful Detention of At-risk Children)

1. **Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recent report by the Scottish Children and Young People's Commissioner, which suggests that some at-risk children might have been detained unlawfully in secure accommodation. (S6T-00043)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey): Secure care is one of the most intensive and restrictive forms of alternative care in Scotland. Depriving a child of their liberty in secure units, even when that is essential for their safety and welfare, has a profound effect on them and such decisions should always be legally justifiable, rights proofed and transparent. Following the examination of 119 cases of children who were placed in secure accommodation across 27 local authorities during 2018 and 2019, the commissioner's report highlights significant procedural and notification issues for local authorities and chief social work officers.

The report also highlights good practice in some areas and points to encouraging remedial activities since the fieldwork took place. I am concerned, however, that every child's statutory rights may not have been protected during that time, so I wrote to chief social work officers yesterday both to offer support and to seek reassurance that they have, if necessary, amended procedures to comply fully with all regulations. I am also looking to meet the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities at the earliest opportunity to discuss the matter further.

Rachael Hamilton: That is simply not good enough. As the minister highlighted, the investigator examined the cases of 118 children between August 2018 and 2019 and found that a significant number had been held unlawfully for at least part of that detention. Some children had been held for 570 days. Critically, the report found that children's human rights were breached.

A litany of failures has taken place, including a severe lack of consultation with the child after their hearing, with little communication to help them understand why they had been detained and how they could have appealed the decision that was

made about them. Not only have children been let down, their rights have been infringed, which is totally unacceptable and morally wrong. Will the minister make a public apology today to those children who the Government has so badly let down?

Clare Haughey: I am sure that the member is aware that it is for local authorities to ensure that they comply with the law and that chief social work officers fulfil their duties. The commissioner's report highlights inconsistencies in the recording of the engagement with children and young people, but I did not detect concerns from it about the necessity or appropriateness of placement decisions. However, timely notifications and record keeping are important aspects of the process.

Rachael Hamilton: So—no apology from the minister.

The investigation concluded that there is

"a scrutiny gap in relation to compliance with ... legal duties"

and the commissioner found it

"challenging in many cases to piece together the"

key

"events and decisions".

The report points to short-term and longer-term actions that must take place to improve that situation, which cannot happen again to any child. We need to see change and the full implementation of the report's recommendations. The Government must act quickly to resolve that situation and prevent further unlawful detentions.

We on these benches echo calls from the children's commissioner for an urgent review of practices of local authorities. Will the minister commit to that process in earnest to ensure that both inspection and scrutiny mechanisms are fit for purpose, so that they comply fully with the relevant legal duties and human rights obligations?

Clare Haughey: The report asks that the Scottish Government work with partners to consider whether the existing law is compatible with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and make any necessary amendments to strengthen legal protections of children's rights. It is important that we get it right for every child, regardless of his or her circumstances. We will work closely with COSLA and other partners to ensure that robust scrutiny and accountability mechanisms are in place through individual organisations, multiagency partnerships and national inspection arrangements.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am pleased to hear that the minister will

write to all chief social work officers across Scotland to seek assurance that they have, where necessary, amended their procedure to comply with regulations. Is the minister aware of any local authorities and chief social work officers that have already taken steps to review or amend their policies?

Clare Haughey: I understand from the report that, during the investigation, 17 local authorities had already taken steps to review their policy and practice, which is welcome. However, all local authorities must ensure that they have undertaken a similar process.

Euro 2020 (Preparations and Fan Zone)

2. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its preparations for Euro 2020, including the fan zone. (S6T-00055)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): We are working closely with the Scottish Football Association, Glasgow City Council, Police Scotland and other partners on preparations for Euro 2020, including the four matches at Hampden park and the Glasgow Green fan zone. The situation with the virus will be continually reviewed in the run-up to and during the tournament, with account being taken of the latest scientific and clinical advice and the local information that we get on the ground.

I understand the concerns that some people have expressed about the fan zone, in light of the hard sacrifices that everyone has made. The proposal for a fan zone is not about prioritising football over other issues; it is about seeking to cater in as safe a way as possible for fans who want to watch the matches. I give an assurance that decisions in that regard are taken carefully, with full account taken of clinical advice. The fan zone will provide an outdoor, highly regulated space in which fans may watch the matches. Although up to 3,000 people per session will attend, they will be in a large outdoor space that has a normal capacity of up to 80,000 people. Necessary physical distancing and hygiene measures will of course be in place.

We are encouraging everyone to make regular use of lateral flow tests. We are discussing with Glasgow City Council how to reinforce that message for everyone in attendance, including the fans.

I make clear that the situation with the virus, the application of necessary mitigations and the experience of the event will be monitored on an on-going basis and that any change that is considered necessary will be made, up to and including withdrawing permission should significant concerns arise.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: We are just days away from Scotland's men's team appearing at its first tournament for 23 years—and at Hampden, of all places. That should kick-start a summer of great sport and activity, from grass-roots to elite level. After 15 months of being locked out of events, people are excited by the prospect, but they expect things to be done in the safest way possible.

Asymptomatic testing has been an integral part of trial events across the United Kingdom, including entry to the FA cup final last month. Euro 2020 events are being advertised as taking place in a Covid-secure environment, but there is no way on earth of verifying that without knowing the Covid status of every participant. Why has the Government decided that mandatory testing is not necessary for attendance at the fan zone or the games at Hampden?

The Presiding Officer: I would appreciate short questions and answers, please.

Humza Yousaf: We will continue the discussions with Glasgow City Council in that regard. However, there are issues to do with mandatory testing that cannot be ignored. For example, some people cannot take a test, perhaps because of a medical condition or disability. In addition, there are ethical considerations, which the member's party has raised in relation to Covid vaccination certificates. Some of the same concerns apply when it comes to making tests mandatory. There are equality issues.

There are also issues to do with digital exclusion. If people have to present a text or email that confirms a negative test, that will affect people who are digitally excluded.

We have to work through such issues. With Glasgow City Council, we will reinforce the message about testing before arrival—indeed, I spoke to the council this morning. The council will email every ticket holder via the ticketing company not only to encourage individuals to test before arrival but to provide a link so that they can order lateral flow devices. I encourage every person who has a ticket to any session in the fan zone to test before arrival, please. People can order lateral flow devices to be delivered to their homes or they can pick them up from multiple sites across the country.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: With respect, all the human rights and inclusion issues have been successfully resolved south of the border.

Hospitality businesses in Scotland, especially in Glasgow, have had a punishing time. They have invested thousands of pounds in safety measures only to be shut for months. The rules remain tight and businesses are not even allowed to advertise the fact that they are showing the tournament. The

last thing that they want is for the progress that we have made to be undone by a third wave. The cabinet secretary can understand their concern about a temporary event on their doorstep that is able to accommodate thousands of people for 31 days straight. What reassurance will the Government give to those businesses? What additional measures will it take to mitigate the impact on them if a third wave hits Glasgow as a result of the existence of the fan zone?

Humza Yousaf: Of course I recognise the concerns that have been raised by hospitality businesses in Glasgow. A range of mitigations is in place. Again, I emphasise that, although there will be 3,000 people per session, the space is large enough to accommodate 80,000. Do not think of the space as a traditional fan zone, which might have been seen during the champions league final a couple of weeks ago, for example. It is a family event. There will be areas in which families can participate. Football pitches and tennis courts will be available, for example, and there will be a picnic area in which people can sit in their family bubbles.

There is a lot of mitigation. I know that there are concerns about the serving of alcohol, but there will be table service only, for example. No queueing at bars will be allowed, and no spirits will be served on a match day. As members would imagine, all spectators will have to complete test and protect information. The clinical advice that I have received is that, with all those mitigations in place—I am happy to write to Alex Cole-Hamilton with further details of all the mitigations that are in place—the event should be a low-risk one.

I go back to my original answer. We will monitor on an on-going basis, and we will introduce even further mitigation if that is necessary. Of course, if we have serious concerns, we reserve the right to withdraw permission for the fan zone.

Online Child Sex Abuse

3. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to increase Police Scotland's capacity to tackle online crime, in light of reports of a 6 per cent year-on-year increase in online child sex abuse crimes. (S6T-00044)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Keith Brown): We continue to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation by building on the work that has been delivered over the past four years through the "National Action Plan to Prevent and Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation".

Additional funding was made available to Police Scotland for enhanced enforcement activity in direct response to the increase in reporting of online child sexual abuse during the Covid-19

pandemic. The Scottish Government continues to support Police Scotland's response, ensuring that hundreds of children have been safeguarded by police enforcement.

We are also collaborating with third sector and operational partners to engage the public and raise awareness about the dangers of online abuse, including running successful communications campaigns earlier this year that connected with hundreds of thousands of Scots.

Pauline McNeill will know that the regulation of the internet and online service providers remains a reserved matter, but we continue to work closely with the United Kingdom Government and Ofcom in developing proposals to introduce better safety measures online. That includes close liaison with the UK Government on the forthcoming online safety legislation.

Finally, Pauline McNeill will know that operational decisions in relation to specific offences are for the chief constable.

Pauline McNeill: A total of 1,966 online child sex abuse crimes were logged by Police Scotland. That is 25 per cent greater than the five-year average, which is concerning. Police officers have warned that parents should be particularly vigilant when it comes to apps such as TikTok. BuzzFeed recently reported:

"One of the most popular kinds of videos from TikTok's users, who are mostly young and female, are lip-synch videos, where they dance and sing along with their favorite songs. These performances are sometimes sexualized by older men who lurk on the app, sending the young creators explicit messages".

What is the Government doing to increase awareness among parents and children of online grooming on sites such as TikTok to ensure that children develop online safety skills? It is clear that the figures are not coming down.

Keith Brown: I have already mentioned the communications campaigns that Police Scotland have run, and they will continue to run.

To address some of the points that Pauline McNeill has raised, she may be aware of some of the proposed provisions in the UK Government's draft Online Safety Bill that will seek to address some of those issues. There are sanctions of 10 per cent of turnover, and there is the blocking of sites for firms that fail to protect users. The UK will reserve the power for senior managers to be held liable. There are also new regulations that apply to any company in the world that hosts user-generated content online that is accessible by people in the UK or enables them to privately or publicly interact with others online. That goes back to the point that Pauline McNeill made.

We are very supportive of that approach. The NSPCC, which may have prompted Pauline McNeill's question through an article in *The Herald*, has also raised the issue and is very clear that the UK Government should proceed with the bill and deliver on its promise. We will encourage it to do just that.

Pauline McNeill: I thank the cabinet secretary for answering what would have been my supplementary question.

The cabinet secretary will be aware that the chairman of Amber Alert Europe, Frank Hoen, said:

"Often the signs remain unnoticed until it's too late. We want to make sure children are aware of the fact that online not everything is what it seems".

I welcome the fact that, finally, the UK has introduced the bill. Will the cabinet secretary commit to updating the Parliament on the progress of that bill and to ensuring that the Scottish Government is fully satisfied that it deals with those points?

Keith Brown: I am more than happy to give that commitment to Pauline McNeill. In the meantime, as I have said, we will continue to ensure that the police have the resources that they want to support their independence in relation to the issue, increase the communications campaign about the danger to young people, which Pauline McNeill and I have mentioned, and encourage the UK Government to progress the Online Safety Bill, which it has committed to providing.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical questions. The next item of business—

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Topical questions are on topics that are current and require urgent answers. I appreciate that, at the start of topical questions, there were a couple of points of order that had to be dealt with, but there has to be flexibility in the programme to allow us to ask the questions that our constituents have asked us to ask the Government. It cannot be right that topical question time is cut by as much as it has been.

The Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Whittle for his point of order, and I appreciate his frustration. We had a couple of points of order that did indeed bite into the time for topical questions and I will give his comments full consideration.

Covid-19

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a statement by Nicola Sturgeon on a Covid-19 update. The First Minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:25

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): At the outset of the statement, I confirm that there will be no immediate changes to the Covid levels of protection that currently apply to different parts of Scotland. I will provide a general update on the state of the pandemic and I will, of course, address any questions that members have.

First, I will report on today's statistics. The total number of positive cases reported yesterday was 695, which is 5 per cent of the total number of tests, and the number of confirmed cases in Scotland is now 241,864. There are currently 121 people in hospital with Covid-19, which is one fewer than was announced yesterday, and 12 people are in intensive care, which is the same number as was announced yesterday. I am pleased to report that no deaths were reported yesterday, which means that the total number of deaths registered under the daily definition remains 7,677. Once again, I send my deepest condolences to all those who have lost a loved one.

I turn now to the vaccination programme. It is exactly six months since the first Covid vaccine was administered in Scotland, and progress since then has been remarkable. As of 7.30 this morning, 3,403,866 people in Scotland had received their first dose of the vaccine. That is an increase of 17,545 since yesterday's announcement and, most important, it means that almost exactly three quarters of Scotland's adult population has now received a first dose.

In addition, 30,944 people received a second dose yesterday, which brings the total number of second doses administered to 2,282,203. That means that more than half of the adult population is now fully vaccinated with two doses. Those are significant and heartening milestones, and, as ever, I want to thank everyone involved in delivering the vaccination programme across the country.

Last week, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for use among 12 to 15-year-olds. That is good news, as it indicates that that particular vaccine is safe for use in children of that age. The Scottish Government is now awaiting advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation on the vaccination of children in

that age group. I am sure that everybody agrees that it is vital that we continue to rely on expert advice in all our vaccination decisions. Vaccination may well be an important way of giving children greater protection, minimising any further disruption to schooling and further reducing community transmission of Covid. So, I confirm that, if the JCVI recommends the use of the vaccine for children aged 12 and over, we will move as quickly as is practicably possible to implement its advice.

However, for the moment, we continue to focus on vaccinating all adults as quickly as possible. That remains crucial in the race that we are in between the virus and the vaccine. As today's figures show, case numbers in Scotland continue to rise. In the past week, in fact, they have increased by approximately 50 per cent. Over the past seven days, there has been a net increase of 5,475 new cases, which is a rise from 3,728 over the seven days prior to that.

That will partly be a consequence of restrictions easing—it is always the case, as we have always made clear, that, as we start interacting more, the virus has more opportunities to spread—but the recent rise is also being driven by the more transmissible delta variant, which now accounts for the majority of all new reported cases. Although case numbers are rising, the key question is the extent to which vaccination is weakening the link between an increase in new cases and an increase in serious health harms. We continue to assess that data closely, and, at this stage, it is important to be clear that we remain optimistic that vaccination will allow us to move progressively to a less restrictive way of dealing with Covid.

We have evidence that having two doses of vaccine gives protection against serious illness, even with the new delta variant. As I confirmed earlier, more than half of the adult population in Scotland has had two doses, including more than 90 per cent of people aged over 60 and more than 80 per cent of those who are over 50. They are the age groups in which people are most at risk of falling seriously ill if they get the virus.

As I said last week, vaccination appears to be reducing the proportion of people who require hospital treatment as a result of Covid. At the start of the year, about 10 per cent of new Covid cases were admitted to hospital; in May, that figure was 5 per cent. However, it is important that we continue to monitor the data so that the full impact of the delta variant can be properly assessed.

There is also encouraging evidence that the time that people spend in hospital is reducing. When we take all of that into account, as we all hoped, vaccination might well be giving us more scope to ease restrictions and therefore reduce

the social, economic and wider health harms that the response to the virus so far has caused.

All those signs are positive, but continued caution is needed—especially while a significant proportion of the population has not yet had both doses and so remains more vulnerable to becoming ill and needing hospital treatment. The number of people in hospital might not be rising as quickly as the number of new cases, but, even so, it has roughly doubled in the past month. If case numbers continue to rise, that trend will continue.

On average, people might be spending less time in hospital, but it is still the case that, if someone ends up in hospital because of Covid, the virus has made them seriously unwell. Some people, such as those who suffer from long Covid, can be seriously ill without ever having to go to hospital.

In summary, our position is still fragile. Case numbers are higher than we would like. The virus still causes serious health harm, and it still has the potential to put pressure on our health service. That is why we must continue to assess the data carefully as we make decisions about whether and when to ease restrictions further.

On the upside—I stress that it is a significant upside—the vaccines appear to be doing their job, which should give us all firm grounds for optimism. That is why our top priority, and a key consideration in our future decisions, remains the speed at which we can vaccinate people, so that as many as possible get the added protection against serious illness as quickly as possible.

The vaccines offer us hope for the future, but it remains the case that we all have a role to play in getting us back to normal, so I will finish by reiterating the three key requests that are being made of all of us. First, please get tested regularly. Free lateral flow tests are available through the NHS Inform website so that you can take a test twice a week, which I strongly encourage everyone to do. Taking a test tells us whether we might have the virus, even if we do not have the symptoms. If you test positive, please self-isolate and get the lateral flow result confirmed through a polymerase chain reaction test—that is vital. The more we all do tests, the more cases we will find and the more we will break chains of transmission.

Secondly, get vaccinated when you are invited to do so, and please attend for both doses. If you need to rearrange an appointment, if you think that you should have had an invitation by now and want to check that, or if you are aged 18 to 29 and have not yet registered for your appointment to make sure that all your details are up to date, please go to the vaccinations section of the NHS Inform website.

Getting vaccinated is in our own best interests—whatever age we are, vaccination makes it less

likely that we will become seriously ill from Covid. Getting vaccinated also helps us to protect one another. It is likely to be the single most important thing that most of us will do this year to protect our family, friends and neighbours, so please, when it is your turn, roll up your sleeve and get the jags.

Finally, please continue to stick to the rules where you live and follow all the public health advice. I know that that becomes more and more difficult as time goes on and that, as restrictions ease—bit by bit—and we try to get back to normal, any apparent anomalies in the rules and advice can be frustrating. We are trying to strike the best and most appropriate balance overall, but I readily concede that it is not perfect.

However, there are some principles that we can and should all follow. People should meet outdoors as much as possible. No environment is ever entirely risk free in any sense, but, in relation to Covid, meeting people outdoors poses less risk than meeting indoors. If you are meeting others indoors, please stick to the limits and make sure the room is as well ventilated as possible. Please continue to follow advice on physical distancing, hand washing and face coverings. We all long to see the back of those mitigations, but, for now, basic measures to prevent transmission are really important and effective against all variants of the virus.

In summary, please get tested regularly, get vaccinated when you are asked to do so and continue to follow the public health guidance. If we all do that, we will help to keep the virus under control while the vaccination programme continues to do its work. That will help to keep us and others safe, and it will maximise the opportunity for a summer of fewer restrictions and much greater freedom.

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 40 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. Members who wish to ask a question should press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Today is exactly six months since the first person in Scotland and others across the United Kingdom were vaccinated against Covid-19. This is a moment for us all to pause and reflect on the huge success of the vaccination programme, and to express our thanks to the NHS, the volunteers and the members of the British armed forces who have ensured that 75 per cent of adults in Scotland are protected with the first dose and 50 per cent are protected with both doses of the vaccine.

It is also encouraging that younger people may soon be able to get the Covid vaccine safely, too.

The vaccination scheme is our route out of both the restrictions and the pandemic. Once the JCVI makes its recommendations on the safety of the use of the vaccine for 12 to 15-year-olds, I hope that we will be able to make swift progress so that young people's education will not be disrupted any further.

Just last week in her statement to Parliament, the First Minister announced that many areas of Scotland would remain in level 2, rather than moving to level 1 as they had expected. She said:

“we could still see a significant burden of illness and death, and severe pressure on our national health service.”—[*Official Report*, 1 June 2021; c 4.]

However, a week on, we have heard nothing from the First Minister or her Government to back up that claim.

We are at a difficult point in the pandemic: we need the public onside in relation to the restrictions that we continue to live with and yet we are not hearing evidence from the Government to support such strong statements as there being

“a significant burden of illness and death, and severe pressure”

on the NHS.

As a whole, that statement is telling for what it misses out and whom it ignores. There was nothing in the statement about the people who are currently protesting outside the Parliament about the restrictions on soft play centres. There was nothing for venues that are confused that the numbers for christenings are more limited than those for comedy shows, and nothing for couples who are frustrated that their wedding numbers had to be limited to just 50 at the last minute. There was nothing for parents who want to be there in person with their young children as they graduate from nursery to primary school. The First Minister referenced apparent anomalies in the rules, but did not say anything about what—if anything—she will do about those anomalies.

Will the First Minister explain to people and businesses, which have been left wondering, why 6,000 people can attend a fanzone without mandatory testing while the limits on weddings, christenings and hospitality in general remain so strict? Will she re-examine the limits on weddings and funerals in areas in level 2? What are the specific reasons for the on-going restrictions on soft play centres? Owners of soft play centres are currently protesting outside and they will be listening closely to her answer. Finally, will she agree to find a solution so that parents can see their young children graduate from nursery to primary school?

The First Minister: I will do my best to address all those points. In an overarching sense, none of

this is easy. Such decisions require good-quality clinical advice, but they also require judgment. Sometimes we need to make decisions that people do not want to hear, because this is really difficult, and to navigate our way through the pandemic in a way that shows as much leadership as possible. That is what I will continue to do. I will continue to be accountable and to do my best to explain decisions to people across the country.

We are already doing the planning to extend the vaccination programme to children over 12, should the JCVI recommend that. It is the MHRA that opines on the safety, on balance, of vaccination. The JCVI has to look at the clinical implications of vaccination and the priorities in terms of the order in which the population is vaccinated versus supply and other such matters. All four nations of the UK follow the JCVI advice, and it is right and proper that we do so.

In anticipation of the JCVI giving the go-ahead to vaccination of over-12s, we have already started that planning. As I said in my statement, we will implement any such advice as quickly as possible. It is important that we continue to follow clinical prioritisation. That is why we started with the frailest, oldest people and have worked our way down the age cohorts, while ensuring that people of whatever age with underlying health conditions get vaccinated as quickly as possible.

I have to say that I struggle to understand Douglas Ross's second point, but I will do my best to address it. As I said last week—I do not think that there is a leader of a Government anywhere in the UK or the rest of the world who would say anything different from this—while we are still learning about the efficacy of vaccination, rising case numbers, particularly when a significant proportion of the population is not fully vaccinated, could lead to a significant burden of illness, hospitalisation and death. The operative word is “could”. Clearly, I do not ever want to be standing here, that statement having been borne out—I really hope that that does not happen.

Douglas Ross said that he has not heard anything from the Government since I made my statement last week. That is factually wrong. Every day, we publish the number of people who are in hospital, the number who are in intensive care and the number who are losing their life to the virus, so people can see what is happening daily in terms of the burden of hospitalisation, the number of people needing intensive care and the number of people who are dying from this illness.

In my view, one person losing their life is one too many, but we can see, at this early stage, a weakening of the link between rising case numbers and the burden of illness. We need to be cautious, because it is too early to be definitive that the new variant will not change that dynamic.

Even if that link continues to break, for as long as a proportion of the population is not fully vaccinated, a proportion of those people ending up in hospital would place a significant burden on our health service.

We have to look at the situation carefully. All the evidence so far is positive, but it would be utterly irresponsible to deny the reality that the current rise in case numbers could cause that increased burden. We monitor the situation and publish data daily. If Douglas Ross wants to listen to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's clinical advisers south of the border—I suspect that he is more likely to listen to them than he is to me—he will hear that pretty much the same calculations and considerations are under way, as they have to make a decision next week on whether to go ahead with the next round of easing in England, which is planned for 21 June. We are all grappling with the situation. Doing that to the best of our ability requires that recognition and an attempt to show people strong and clear leadership. That is incumbent on all leaders, not just those of us in government.

The Government's clinical advice is that the indoor environment of soft play centres—there is a big difference between indoor and outdoor environments—coupled with their particular characteristics, means that soft play centres continue to pose a risk. Of course, soft play centres in level 1 areas can reopen, and we hope that more parts of the country will go to level 1 over the next few weeks. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy set out our intention to continue to provide financial support in the meantime.

I wish that everywhere could open immediately, but I have a duty to open up in a way that keeps people as safe as possible, which means continuing to consider things in the round. There will always be apparent anomalies—I wish that there were not—but we try to avoid them. As we try, bit by bit and step by step, to get the country back to normal, we have to ensure that we strike the right overall balance. I am afraid that that is not easy, but it is necessary, and it is the job that I am determined to continue to do.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Six months on from the first vaccine, I thank our vaccinators and volunteers for giving our country hope.

Although there are definite signs of progress, the rise in cases and the increase in hospitalisations shows that we cannot be complacent and that we must accelerate our response. Does the First Minister still intend to review the next stage of the easing of restrictions on 28 July? If so, will she commit to an ambitious target of double dosing everyone aged over 40 and of providing at least one dose for everyone

aged over 18 by that date? Our target was 400,000 vaccinations a week. I want us to hit that target and go beyond it to make that a reality. In areas where there is a high turnover of residents and a low rate of attendance for vaccination, can we ramp up the opening of walk-in vaccination centres so that people can access vaccinations without requiring an invitation letter? That would mean we could continue to go forwards, not backwards.

It is important that we maintain public trust in the response to the pandemic. We can do that by maintaining strong communication and by being consistent in decision making. Does the First Minister recognise why the soft play industry believes that there is an inconsistency in decision making, given what has happened south of the border and what is happening in Scotland? Will she agree to meet and work with those in that industry so that they can safely re-open premises in level 2 areas, as is happening in other parts of the UK, and we can save jobs, protect Scotland's economy and get our country's mental health and wellbeing back on track?

The First Minister: I will address most of those points.

I make this point sincerely. At First Minister's questions last week Anas Sarwar—as he is entitled to—posed a series of questions in which he criticised me for a characterisation that I would not necessarily accept: he said that I was simply following what had happened south of the border during an earlier stage of the pandemic. Now he asks why I am not doing exactly the same as is happening south of the border.

We must take the decisions that we think are right, based on our own clinical advice. I recognise that people see perceived inconsistencies. Sometimes they will be right. We have amended things in the past, particularly where there seemed to be genuine inconsistencies for some premises. Sometimes the inconsistency will be perceived—for example, there is a good reason why soft play cannot open in level 2 areas while other things can. I absolutely accept that there is a need to communicate such things as clearly as possible but I also understand that running a business that has to remain closed will always be very difficult to accept. I appreciate that, but it is important that we try to navigate our way through this as safely as possible.

It has been the case at every stage that if we had simply opened everything up we would have overwhelmed our ability to cope. We sometimes have to limit what we do, recognising that we must work with people and compensate them, as Anas Sarwar said. I accept that, and we will continue to do it.

We are vaccinating people as quickly as our supplies allow. I would love us to do more, but supply is the constraining factor. The latest seven-day rolling total number of new first and second doses is 343,548. We will get above that number if supplies allow. Supply is what limits the speed of vaccination, but that speed is fast. If we look at first doses, we can see that people aged over 60 are pretty much 100 per cent done; those aged 50 to 54 are 93 per cent done; those aged 40 to 49 are at 86 per cent; and those who are 30 to 39 are at 58 per cent. Even in the 18 to 29-year-old group, 27 per cent have had their first dose. Among the over-50s, 50 per cent have had a second dose and are fully vaccinated. In the younger age groups, 29 per cent of those aged 40 to 49 have already had a second dose, as have 20 per cent of 30 to 39-year-olds and 14 per cent of 18 to 29-year-olds. We will speed that up as quickly as supplies allow us to.

The next review of easing will be on 28 June. I know that Anas Sarwar simply made a slip but, to be clear, the date is 28 June. On 21 June, I will set out in Parliament our expectations in relation to going ahead or not, or the extent to which we will go ahead. That will be informed by the latest data. Between now and then, as far and as quickly as supplies allow, we will get as many people as possible vaccinated, with not just one but two doses.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The First Minister referred again, as she has done in the past, to the race between the vaccine and the virus. It should be clear to us all by now that a global pandemic is the kind of race that we win only when everybody wins—we are safe only when everybody is safe.

Does the First Minister therefore support the open letter written by UNICEF and supporters to the leaders of the G7 about the global vaccination programme for developing countries? The letter points out that the Covid-19 vaccines global access—COVAX—initiative is 190 million doses short of where it needs to be and that developing countries with a more limited health infrastructure are getting a large number of vaccine doses late. That will not lead to mass vaccination; it will lead to mass wastage.

What response does the First Minister hope will come from the G7 leaders to that call for earlier, larger-scale and more predictable donations of vaccine from rich countries to developing countries? How can Scotland's voice be added to the call for greater ambition on the global aspects of the pandemic?

The First Minister: Yes, I broadly support the terms of the UNICEF letter and I hope to see coming out of the G7 an agreement that there is a responsibility on the part of the G7 to help speed

up vaccination, not just in the G7 countries but globally. I will continue to add Scotland's voice to that as loudly as I can.

In summary, we need to seek to do two things. First, we need to make sure that the supplies of the vaccine that are available in the world are distributed as equitably as possible. We have to avoid the risk of false choices being put before us. The supplies, through the very good procurement that the UK has done, mean that we should not see this as a choice between, for example, vaccinating children and playing our part in helping global vaccination. The second thing that we need to do is support efforts to ramp up production of vaccines in as many parts of the world as possible.

It is absolutely the case that, although we are of course really focused on vaccinating our own population as quickly as possible—because that is our first contribution to ending the global pandemic—we will not end the pandemic until the whole world manages to exit from it. The best chance that we have of exiting from it is through mass vaccination. We therefore all have a part to play in that, and the richest countries in the world have a real moral obligation to lead that effort.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): It is carers week, but 72 per cent of unpaid carers have not had a break since the pandemic began. Last week, I asked the First Minister to reopen day services for adults with special needs. In response, the relevant minister issued a new letter today, but with a link to the old guidance, so nothing has really changed in the past week. It makes no difference what level someone lives in—the barriers to reopening are just the same. People are getting desperate, so will the Government issue new guidance to give local authorities the clarity that they need to get those services open again?

The First Minister: I understand the desire for that; I share the desire for it. I would simply ask Willie Rennie to accept, as I have done on previous occasions, that there is no minister in the Government who is somehow standing in the way of that for any reason other than that the clinical position is still that we need to be cautious and take precautions. Yes, we will get to a position of issuing new and more permissive guidance as quickly as possible. I have said very clearly—and I repeat it today—that we need to prioritise things like that.

Nobody is trying to hold up moves like that for any reason other than trying to keep the most vulnerable in our society as safe as possible. However, I will make sure that the health ministers look again at the issue, given that it has been raised again, to see whether it is possible to speed up that process—to go more quickly and to have

more distinction between the different levels of protection that apply.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Of all the jobs created in the UK last year through foreign direct investment, 16.1 per cent—some 4,500—were generated in Scotland. That is remarkable in a pandemic year. Given that, across the 12 nations and regions of the UK, Scotland has attracted the second-highest number of overseas-backed investments after London in every year since 2014, does the First Minister agree that it is time for unionist politicians to dispense with the scare stories about this Government's commitment to independence deterring investment, desist from talking down Scotland and back the outward-looking creative and innovative nation that Scotland is as we recover from Covid-19? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: I suggest that the member is perhaps straying beyond the bounds of the statement. If the First Minister has a relevant answer in line with the statement that may help Mr Gibson, she may respond.

The First Minister: I think that the EY Scotland attractiveness survey 2021, which was published yesterday, should be welcomed by all parties in the chamber. We should bring ourselves to come together to welcome it because it shows that, in the face of a global pandemic, Scotland has remained the top UK inward investment destination outside London, as has been the case in eight of the past 10 years. We have also managed to grow our inward investment at a time when it has shrunk across the UK as a whole. Whatever our different political viewpoints and ambitions for the country, surely, in the face of this really tough time, we can all come together to welcome some thoroughly good news for the Scottish economy.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): Recent figures show that fewer than one in 20 pupils in secondary 3 to 6 have taken part in the Covid-19 testing programme and that uptake was just 6.3 per cent for younger secondary school pupils. Worryingly, despite being in the grip of an outbreak, rates of asymptomatic testing in schools in Glasgow are the lowest in the country. Given recent warnings from public health experts that school children are driving the epidemic in Scotland, what action will the First Minister take to ensure that there is an adequate testing regime in place?

The First Minister: An adequate testing regime is in place. All senior pupils can access tests, and many do. Although we cannot mandate and force young people to take a test, all of us—I include all members of Parliament—can, in our own constituencies or regions, encourage young people to do that.

Like many members, I have family members in the age cohort that Annie Wells mentioned. I know that taking a lateral flow test is not something that we—young people or anyone else—really want to do, but it is important because it helps to determine whether someone might have the virus even if they are not showing any symptoms, and all the other protections can flow in behind that.

As is the case in much of this situation, I do not have a magic wand. I cannot make 100 per cent of young people take the tests, but I will encourage them to do so. The tests are easily available and it really matters that people take them. I ask that Annie Wells and other members echo and add their voices to that so that we can get uptake as high as we possibly can.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I pay tribute to the work of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and partners for the delivery of the vaccine programme in Glasgow. In recent days, I have been contacted by a small number of constituents who are about to approach or pass the 12-week period for their second vaccination. I appreciate that there will always be occasions when a small number of appointments do not run smoothly during any mass vaccination campaign, but I ask that the First Minister works with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to ensure that that does not become a particular issue in the city that I represent and that such instances are resolved quickly. Further, what information is available as to the efficacy of a second vaccination administered beyond 12 weeks?

The First Minister: That is a really important issue and I give an assurance that we work closely with health boards on it. In line with the JCVI's latest advice, where vaccine supplies allow, health boards are bringing forward the second dose of vaccine from 12 to eight weeks, and many of us will know people who have had their vaccine accelerated to within that timescale.

However, Bob Doris is right to say that, with a programme of this scale, there will always be small numbers of people who do not get what we want them to get or what we think that they should have got. We are aware that a small percentage of the overall vaccinated population has had to wait longer than 12 weeks for their second dose. For those whose dose of the second vaccine runs beyond the 12-week point, we encourage them to contact their local health board or to attend one of the drop-in clinics that a number of local authorities are running.

There will be a variety of reasons why that small number of people have not had their second dose within 12 weeks. Such people should get in touch with their local health board and check through the NHS Inform website so that the issue can be rectified.

On the final part of Bob Doris's question, although we want people to be vaccinated within 12 weeks—and now, as far as supplies allow, within the eight-week timescale—it is important to note that receiving a second dose beyond 12 weeks does not pose any clinical risk and that, therefore, if somebody goes beyond the 12 weeks, there is no need to recommence the whole vaccination cycle.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the news that the Pfizer vaccine has been approved for use in children aged 12 to 15. The First Minister will know of the case of Katie Steel, a young girl with cerebral palsy. Katie missed all of her second year at school and has barely been in school during the current academic year, and she is not alone. Katie's life and her family members' lives would be transformed if she got the vaccine. Therefore, subject to the JCVI decision, will the First Minister commit to vaccinating all children in the 12 to 15 age group before schools return in August and, specifically, to prioritising vulnerable young people such as Katie?

The First Minister: I would absolutely love to stand here and give that commitment. I know of Katie and I know how important it is to her and her family, and the families of young people like her, to get vaccinated as quickly as possible. I also know that people would agree that it should not be for me, as someone with no clinical qualifications, to decide who gets vaccinated when. That is why expert advice is really important.

There are a couple of issues. First, we have to wait for the JCVI advice. It will advise on whether, in what order and to what extent we should commence the vaccination of children over the age of 12. The other issue that means that I cannot give a commitment right now about vaccinating before the return of schools is that the speed at which we will do it will be dependent on the supply of the vaccine. I hope that that changes towards the upside, but at this stage the MHRA advice relates only to the Pfizer vaccine. Therefore, only that one manufacturer's vaccine would be available, and supplies are not limitless. We do not yet know exactly what the supplies would be, so we cannot set out exactly how long it would take to vaccinate that section of the population.

It may be—I do not know, because I have to wait and see the advice—that, just as with the adult population, the JCVI recommends an order of priority for children over the age of 12, and that might take account of underlying health conditions and other factors. As soon as we have that advice and we have a clear line of sight about supplies, we will inform Parliament of our expectations and what the timescale for any such extension is likely to be.

The Presiding Officer: Before I bring in the next member, I want to say that there is a lot of interest in the statement and desire to ask questions from across the chamber, so I would be grateful for shorter questions and responses.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I will certainly try to comply, Presiding Officer.

Will there be a review of the vaccination status scheme? I have constituents who were awaiting their second vaccination appointments but did not receive those, and then logged on to check their vaccination status only to find that it had been erroneously recorded that they had been vaccinated a second time. They then had to go through the helpline and all that. Will there be an assessment of the whole vaccination programme and, if so, can that issue be taken into account? Although it affects only a minority of people, it matters.

The First Minister: Of course it matters. It will be a small minority, but every individual cares deeply about their vaccination. NHS staff work to absolutely minimise any errors in recording and to rectify issues when they are identified. We are aware that a small number of users have faced challenges with the service, such as when the first dose has been recorded twice in error. Where such cases are identified, the NHS works to resolve them as quickly as possible. We understand that, even in cases where an individual's first dose has been marked on their record twice, that should not prevent an appointment for a second dose being generated.

Wider work is under way to ensure that records are accurate and are amended in ways that are auditable and have clinical oversight. Our focus right now is on vaccinating people but, in due course, we will want to have a review of this first Covid vaccination programme, because I suspect that it will be a regular vaccination programme in the years ahead.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Many cultural venues and festival organisers are understandably frustrated by the perceived inconsistency in physical distancing rules. In hospitality venues, people can sit 1m from others without a face covering, but in cultural venues people must keep 2m apart and wear a face covering. Will the First Minister commit to reviewing that discrepancy urgently, especially in light of the fact that various summer festivals are about to occur across Scotland?

The First Minister: As, I am sure, Donald Cameron is aware—because I am pretty sure that I said it during last week's statement—we are currently undertaking a general review of physical

distancing and will set out the conclusions of it as soon as possible.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): With Covid cases rising more steeply in some areas, including in parts of Tayside, what lessons have been learned from areas such as Glasgow and Moray that have recent experience of dealing with rising case numbers? Are similar public health measures being considered and implemented in my constituency in Dundee and neighbouring areas to tackle our concerning rise in case numbers?

The First Minister: The incident management team is actively managing the situation in Tayside. I am grateful for its hard work. That work includes deployment of a mobile testing unit, targeted engagement through schools and community outreach and, of course, the continued vaccination drive.

As I said last week, there is a massive opportunity to share learning. To support that, the Scottish Government has developed for local authorities and other partners an outbreak management toolkit that was shared last week. The toolkit includes practical material on enhanced testing and accelerated vaccination, and a communications toolkit to support local messaging. It draws on practical material that has been shared by colleagues in Glasgow.

Public Health Scotland continues to support lessons-learned activity, and the national incident management team provides regular opportunities for all 14 health boards to share experiences, too.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Given that Edinburgh's incidence of Covid in terms of numbers per 100,000 has, over the past seven days, overtaken Glasgow's, when will walk-in clinics be available for people who are over 18 to access vaccines urgently? What monitoring and testing are now being carried out across Edinburgh in public and private sector workplaces and in our schools so that, when Covid transmission is identified, urgent action can be taken to reduce its rapid spread throughout our city?

The First Minister: The toolkit that I spoke about in my previous answer is available to NHS Lothian and to local authorities across the NHS Lothian area. They have plans in preparation for walk-in vaccination clinics and are using testing as appropriate. At the height of the Glasgow outbreak, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde communicated very effectively with local MSPs—of whom, of course, I am one. I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to ensure that NHS Lothian does likewise with local members so that there is understanding of all the

outbreak measures that are being taken to bring transmission back under control.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): As a result of the fact that no food or beverages will be sold at Hampden for the upcoming Euro 2020 matches, some fans will have to wait for up to five hours between eating or drinking, which might cause an issue, especially for people with underlying health issues. Although it is understandable that the decision was taken, will fans be allowed for health reasons to take food or beverages into Hampden for the four upcoming Euro 2020 matches?

The First Minister: Concession stands will not be in operation for the Euro 2020 matches at Hampden because of all the mitigations that have had to be put in place. That is to ensure that physical distancing is possible on concourses when people move to and from their seats on entry and exit, and when they go to the toilet.

However, spectators will be able to bring food with them into the stadium. Discussions are ongoing between the Scottish Football Association and UEFA to reach agreement on what will be in place with regard to drinks. UEFA will confirm the situation with all ticket holders, and I will make sure that Stuart McMillan is updated when that has happened.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I have written to Kate Forbes to ask for extra help for the travel industry, especially travel agents, and I hope that the First Minister will agree to look at that. However, I want to ask about another issue that is concerning the industry.

If someone travels to a green-list country from an English airport, they can book a testing package, through multiple providers, for £60. The Scottish Government says that if that traveller flies from a Scottish airport, they can use only one provider—CTM—and the same package costs £195. The situation is similar for countries that are on the amber list. What can the First Minister do to bring down the cost and stop Scots being ripped off?

The First Minister: I am not sure whether it was Graham Simpson who asked that question a couple of weeks ago, but my answer today is the same. We continue to look at the matter, but we want to make sure that we have assurance—and can give assurance—on the quality of the testing that is in place.

Why is there a difference? In many respects, the UK Government—this is entirely up to it—chooses to outsource more outside the NHS than we in Scotland have decided we will do. We keep such things under review, but making sure that we have assurances around quality is really important. I

hope that most people understand and accept that.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Over the past year, we have at different times looked at different numbers—the reproduction number, intensive care unit capacity, hospital capacity and, sadly, the number of deaths. Can the First Minister say what figures we will focus on in the next few weeks and months?

The First Minister: We have always relied on a range of indicators and criteria, and we combine that information with clinical advice, local intelligence about the state of the epidemic and, of course, judgment, in order that we can construct a full, reliable and robust picture of the threat that Covid is posing across all four harms. We continue to monitor cases, obviously, but we also monitor numbers of hospital admissions, lengths of stay and deaths.

As and when we become increasingly confident, as I hope will be the case, that vaccinations are breaking the link between case numbers and serious illness, we will, although we will not ignore case numbers, be able to change the balance of factors that we take into account, and our response will perhaps, as I have said before, be driven less purely by case numbers—or, rather, it will be less driven by case numbers, because it is not driven purely by them.

However, we have to do that carefully; we have to allow the data to emerge so that we can properly assess it, and we have to not act prematurely in a way that would cause a significant burden of ill health and pressure on the NHS.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Given that there cannot be a commitment to vaccinate in schools by the end of the summer holidays, when can schools and education authorities expect amended Covid advice on safety in schools, wearing of masks, bubbles, distancing and especially school transport, given the rising infection rates that are linked to schools?

The First Minister: The advisory group on education, which is a sub-group of the overall Scottish Government Covid-19 advisory group, looks at those issues on an on-going basis. It is important that it does so and that it gives ministers its views. Ministers, through the education recovery group, have reached positions on the mitigations that are required.

We all want mitigations such as face coverings to be no longer necessary; I think that that is particularly true when we are talking about young people in schools. However, right now, they are an important added mitigation. We will continue to review that, as the situation overall and our

understanding of the new variant and the wider impact of vaccines develop.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The Scottish Government is rightly committed to ensuring that cancer screening and diagnostic services are prioritised as we continue to remobilise the Scottish NHS as we recover from Covid. Cervical cancer self-tests are being trialled by some health boards, including NHS Dumfries and Galloway. They have the potential to be an effective way for women to screen for human papillomavirus. Self-tests have also—given that 6,000 women in the NHS Dumfries and Galloway area have missed appointments—been proved to reduce the number of women who default on their appointments.

Can the First Minister outline how cancer diagnostic services will be prioritised? In particular, can she provide an update on the cervical cancer self-test roll-out?

The First Minister: Self-sampling has significant potential to increase take-up of screening and to make it easier for people—there are many—who find the current process difficult. That said, the United Kingdom National Screening Committee is gathering evidence on the matter, but has not yet recommended that self-sampling be incorporated into the national cervical screening programme.

We have convened a working group to explore the feasibility and requirements of different self-sampling models, which will contribute to the evidence base. The group brings together clinical and public health expertise, including representatives from the Dumfries and Galloway study. Introducing self-sampling to the national cervical screening programme would be a not insignificant undertaking, but we are working hard to ensure that Scotland is well placed to implement the National Screening Committee's recommendations when we have them.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I am sure that the First Minister is aware that there is a significant backlog for people waiting to sit their practical and theory driving tests. In my constituency, poor or non-existent public transport makes it imperative that young people obtain their driving licence quickly, to allow them to get to work. There are also genuine concerns for businesses this summer, particularly those in hospitality and agriculture that are struggling to find employees.

I have contacted the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, which states that the capacity at most theory sites in Scotland is still at 50 per cent as a result of the Scottish Government's 2m physical distancing restriction, despite the exam conditions. Will the First Minister look to relax that

rule in order that the DVSA can increase testing capacity and ease the plight of many learner drivers? Will she do what she can to address long delays in sitting theory and practical driving tests?

The First Minister: I know how important the matter is and I know how frustrating delays are. There is obviously an economic imperative to have people able sit driving tests, but they are also one of the rites of passage for young people that have been disrupted over the past year or more. Obviously, it is really important for them that we get things back on track.

Unfortunately, all these issues are complex and rarely straightforward. In certain environments, 2m physical distancing remains an important mitigation. However, the issue is important and we will continue to look at the situation to see how quickly we can increase capacity and get the backlogs down. I absolutely understand the importance of the issue and I will make sure that the transport minister keeps members updated.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): The pandemic has had a significant impact on young people, particularly on their chances of employment. The First Minister has appointed a minister who is specifically tasked with supporting youth employment. Can the First Minister provide any further information about the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to support young people to access employment and training?

The First Minister: The young persons guarantee is obviously central to those efforts and will be increasingly important as we go through the next few years and, we hope, through recovery from Covid. We will also continue to work closely with local authorities and schools to minimise any on-going disruption to children's education and their ability to go from school to further and higher education or into training and employment.

One of the key things that we are doing right now is working to get people vaccinated, including the younger groups in the population, and that is going extremely well. As we come out of the pandemic, there is no doubt that, as part of the overall recovery, we need to prioritise recovery for young people. The previous question related to driving tests, which are only one aspect, but an important aspect of this. Young people have borne so much of the brunt of what we have all gone through over the past year.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Hundreds of thousands of my constituents are living under level 2 restrictions, with no indication of when they will move to level 1. The councils currently in level 1 know that they may move to level 0, provisionally on 28 June. When will the Scottish Government set out precise revised

planning for when the 14 councils affected will move to levels 1 and 0?

The First Minister: If Stephen Kerr took a bit more time to understand the situation, he would know that what he just said was not really accurate at all. The next review of all levels of protection happens on 21 June. Of course, there may be circumstances that require us to move more quickly than that, but I hope not. On 21 June, I will set out for every area of the country what we expect the level of protection to be from 28 June. That will cover those in level 1, which we hope will be able to go to level 0, and those in level 2, which we hope will go to level 1, but we need to assess the data nearer the time. That is the three-weekly review cycle that we have committed to, and that is what we will continue.

I wish that I could wave a magic wand and get every area of the country not just into level 0 but beyond level 0, but we have to do this carefully and in a way that protects our process and, of course, allows us to get as many people as possible vaccinated.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): In the light of the recent news that Portugal has been placed on the amber list, taking effect today, it is clear that international travel for holiday purposes remains risky and subject to sudden change. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to support our local tourism industry, particularly as many people are seeking to holiday at home this year?

The First Minister: Before I address the question, I will make a point about international travel. We often talk about it in the context of holidays, and people who have family overseas—and for whom international travel is about family connection—often feel frustrated at that. I recognise that, for many people, the restrictions on international travel are keeping them away from their loved ones, which is why we want to get back to normal there, as in every other aspect of life, as quickly as possible.

For non-essential travel such as holidays, my advice to people continues to be that they should not go overseas if they can avoid doing so. Right now, it is safer for us not to go overseas, as it helps to mitigate against the importation of the virus. If someone is in the position of being able to go on a holiday this year, I ask that they support the local tourism industry. We discuss such matters regularly—I have reasonably regular discussions with the Scottish Tourism Alliance about how we can better support the tourism industry in the immediate term, and also as it recovers in the medium to long term.

A message that we could all helpfully convey to our constituents is that they should support their

local tourism industry, the Scottish tourism industry and local businesses generally as much as they are able to.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Finally, after weeks of asking, NHS Lothian announced an hour ago that, from next week, walk-in vaccination clinics will be available to those over 40, which is very welcome. Last week, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care told me that Edinburgh is now the new Glasgow in terms of infection rates. If that is the case, why do we still not have access to the door-to-door surge testing that has been available for weeks in areas such as G41? Why are Edinburgh residents not as deserving of Covid protections as Glasgow residents?

The First Minister: If I may say so, that is just complete nonsense. By all means, people should rigorously hold me and my Government to account—that is absolutely essential—but I urge everybody to avoid saying that Edinburgh is the new Glasgow, or that Edinburgh is not as deserving of measures as Glasgow. Such attempts to divide and set people against one another, or to suggest that we are not taking the pandemic seriously in every part of the country, do not help anybody.

The local director of public health in Lothian, along with the local incident management team, will be working to decide what measures are appropriate, based on the nature of the outbreak across Lothian. If they consider it necessary and essential, surge testing will be a part of that, as well as door-to-door testing and walk-in vaccination clinics. It might surprise people to hear that I do not mandate to local public health directors exactly what they do in local outbreaks, because it would be wrong for me to do so. They are the ones who understand the nature of outbreaks and, from the range of tools that they have available, what works best in local circumstances.

I ask all members to engage, as I am sure that they already do, with their local health board and director of public health, in order to understand the local measures that are being put in place, which will be bespoke to the particular challenges that are being faced. I ask that we all avoid suggesting that one part of the country is being done down in favour of another part of the country. That is not true. We are all in this together, and we are trying to get through it together.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I have been asked to raise a specific issue about the European under-20 and under-23 athletics championships, which take place this year. The trials for the Great Britain team take place on 19 and 20 June in Bedford. Under the current Scottish legislation, it is illegal for Scottish athletes

to travel to Bedford, which means that there will be no Scottish representation at the championships. Will the First Minister look into the matter with a degree of urgency, given that each athlete has to provide a negative test prior to competing in the trials?

The First Minister: I would like to have the opportunity to look into the matter before trying to answer the question in detail. I will come back to Brian Whittle as quickly as possible. When there are travel restrictions in place, there are exemptions for essential travel. I will need to check whether such travel by athletes would fall into the category of permissible travel. If that is not the case, I am happy to ask for the issue to be looked at, to ensure that the athletes can do what is required to compete, as everybody would want them to do.

Tackling Poverty and Building a Fairer Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I remind members that social distancing measures are in place in the chamber and across the Holyrood campus. I ask members to take care to observe the measures, including when entering and exiting the chamber. Please only use the aisles and walkways to access your seats and when moving around the chamber.

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-00263, in the name of Shona Robison, on tackling poverty and building a fairer country. I invite all members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now.

15:26

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): I am pleased to open this debate on the urgent need for us to tackle poverty and build a fairer, more equal country. We have to seize the opportunity, build on our strong efforts to date and use every lever at our disposal to bring about the change that is needed to tackle the problem. I extend an invitation to work across the chamber and Scotland as a whole to build a team Scotland approach to tackling poverty and, in particular, child poverty. I look forward to the first round of meetings that I have set up with Opposition spokespeople. I will consider any constructive suggestions that are made.

We already invest around £2 billion each year in support of people on low incomes, including more than £672 million that is targeted at children. We have a strong focus on people who are at greatest disadvantage, including people with disabilities, and we are supporting innovative action with our £50 million tackling child poverty fund. However, we must do more, which is why we have committed to a wide range of ambitious action to be delivered in the first 100 days of the parliamentary session, maintaining the tremendous pace of change throughout the Covid pandemic.

Tackling poverty is a priority across all ministerial portfolios, as no one action will bring about the change that is needed. All parts of Government and broader society must work together to impact the drivers of poverty reduction—increasing household incomes from work, reducing costs on essentials and maximising incomes from social security. Eradicating poverty and building a fairer, more equal country must be a national mission for the Government, our Parliament and society. We must try, where

possible, to unite and work together to create a fairer Scotland.

Backed by £1 billion of additional funding, our response to the pandemic shows that we can make change happen at the pace and scale that is required to support people and improve their lives. We want to build on that can-do approach.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I support the cabinet secretary's aspiration of moving as fast as we can to alleviate poverty in Scotland, but does she recognise that, as her Government has taken only 2.8 per cent of the welfare provisions that are available to it and which the Department for Work and Pensions has said that it is ready to hand over, she is not moving at the pace that the Scottish people would like?

Shona Robison: As Alex Cole-Hamilton knows, social security is a priority for us. That is proved by the fact that we have introduced 10 Scottish benefits, seven of which are brand new and unique in the United Kingdom, including the Scottish child payment, which has been described as a "game changer". From its announcement in late June 2019 to being started in February this year, the new payment has been achieved at great speed, which is an unmatched feat in the UK. Let us focus on the positives, instead of talking down our social security agency, which is doing a very good job.

We delivered free school meal support during all the school holidays and periods of remote learning for children from low-income families, which helped to tackle food insecurity during the pandemic. We will continue that support and expand it to all primary pupils in the first 100 days of this session of Parliament.

In our first 100 days, we will also complete the roll-out of the 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare. I have set out the next stage of our ambition to expand childcare further and develop a wraparound childcare system, which will provide care before and after school all year round. That system will make an important contribution to children's development and will unlock the potential of parents in the labour market.

We will also deliver our £20 million summer programme for pupils, which will help children socialise, play and reconnect; £7.5 million from our tackling child poverty fund will back that essential investment to support the wellbeing of all children and young people.

Through two pandemic support payments of £100 to low-income families with children, we put money directly into the pocket of those who need it most. Building on that approach, we will in effect pay the Scottish child payment for families who are not yet eligible for it, through the introduction

of a bridging payment of £520, £100 of which will be paid to families this summer. We will also reach around 500,000 households as we provide £130 to every household that received council tax reduction in April.

I am pleased to be able to make two further announcements. First, building on the practical support that we offered during the pandemic, we will provide the British Red Cross with a further £250,000 to continue its cash first crisis support to those most at risk of destitution. That includes help to those whom the UK Government's hostile policies, which exclude them from most mainstream support, including the Scottish welfare fund, have impacted.

Secondly, in recognition of the importance of listening to families who are affected by poverty, we will trial family wellbeing budgets, which will be delivered in partnership with the Hunter Foundation, to put families firmly in control of the support that they need and to help improve people's wellbeing and capabilities.

Where we have the powers, we are making a difference to people's lives. Nowhere is that more evident than in our approach to housing, through which Scotland has led the way in the UK. Almost 100,000 affordable homes have been delivered since 2007—more than 68,000 of which have been for social rent—which is making a significant difference to people across the country, particularly families with children.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): In the previous session of Parliament, I had a bill on fair rents ready and waiting for the Government to adopt, but the Government did not support the idea of rent controls. Renters need protection now more than ever. Can the cabinet secretary confirm that the Parliament will at long last recognise that rent controls will be required to achieve that protection?

Shona Robison: The member will be aware that we are introducing a new rental strategy and, of course, affordability of rents is part of what we have to consider. I am happy to meet with her about that issue, as I want to work with the chamber on all these things.

We want to deliver a further 100,000 affordable homes by 2032, and our aim is that at least 70 per cent of those homes will be for social rent to help tackle child poverty and homelessness.

To tackle poverty effectively, however, we must deliver a fair work future for Scotland. We are working hard to do that now, but we are constrained in the powers that are available to us. We cannot accept a future in which two thirds of children who live in poverty come from working households and people are forced to rely on benefits to top up their earnings. We have to

transform workplaces to tackle poverty and long-standing labour market inequalities, such as the disability employment gap and the barriers to employment that people from minority ethnic backgrounds face.

With full powers over employment, we could as a minimum ensure that all employees receive the real living wage and that their wages represent the true cost of living; outlaw unfair fire-and-hire tactics to prohibit employers from dismissing employees and subsequently re-employing them on diminished terms and conditions; and ban inappropriate and exploitative use of zero-hour contracts to give people certainty about their working hours and to ensure that they can plan their lives and incomes. That is why I have asked all party leaders to support our request to the UK Government for the full devolution to this Parliament of employment powers, so that we can make the changes that are needed if we are to tackle poverty.

Social security, too, is an important tool in tackling poverty. Again, the powers in that regard do not all lie in our hands. Some 85 per cent of spending remains at Westminster, alongside income replacement benefits such as universal credit and employment and support allowance.

The pandemic provided further evidence—if evidence was needed—that the UK welfare system is not fit for purpose and risks undermining hard-won progress. It is the system on which people in Scotland have to rely, and we should not have to mitigate the effect of policies with which we disagree. For example, last year we spent £80 million on discretionary housing payments, to mitigate in full the bedroom tax and support people with their housing. We could be investing that money in other measures. We need to move beyond mitigation, and if we had the powers here, we would be able to do so.

The removal of the £20 uplift to universal credit will be a callous act, which will push 60,000 families in Scotland, including 20,000 children, into poverty. It will result in families who are unable to work receiving, on average, £1,600 less per year than they would have received in 2011—a decade ago. That is a massive threat to the progress that we can make here. We could double the Scottish child payment, on one hand, only to see, on the other, the money removed by Westminster welfare policies. Surely no one in this Parliament thinks that that is in any way a good idea or a fair system. We need to make significant investment, putting money into the pockets of the people who need it most. That is why the Scottish child payment is so important; it does just that.

We have urged the UK Government to make the changes that are needed and to scrap harmful policies such as the two-child cap, the rape

clause, the benefit cap and the five-week wait for universal credit. It is unfortunate that our calls, as well as those of many charities and organisations and even the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, have been ignored.

It is time for full powers to come to this Parliament, so that we can make a difference. We have shown what a difference we can make, with a public service that is based on human rights, has respect and dignity at its heart and is viewed as an investment in the people of Scotland—we enshrined those principles in law. We are using our powers to tackle poverty head on. The Scottish child payment is currently £40 every four weeks for every eligible child under six, and we are committed to doubling the payment to £80 so that it has an even greater impact. That, alongside our best start grant and best start food cards, means that we provide more than £5,300 of direct financial support to a family by the time their first child turns six—and there is further support for subsequent children, because we do not put a cap on the number of eligible children.

Those payments are making a difference to low-income families and helping them to access the essentials that they need. The support is unmatched anywhere else in the UK.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, will you bring your remarks to a conclusion, please?

Shona Robison: Yes.

Our next steps will build on the strong foundation that we have set. We will take changes forward at pace. No member of the Parliament, whatever their political beliefs, should underestimate the scale of the challenge that we face. I want to take things forward, and I will be pleased to work with any member who wants to join me in doing so.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that tackling child poverty and building a fairer, more equal country should be a national mission for the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and society; acknowledges that action is required across all the drivers of poverty reduction, including delivering fair flexible work, affordable, accessible childcare, sustainable transport options, affordable housing, and reductions in the costs of living; commits to tackling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty and inequality; recognises the impact of UK Government welfare cuts and policies that exacerbate poverty, including the two-child cap, which could remove £500 million from the incomes of families in Scotland; recognises the positive action of the Scottish Child Payment and notes the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland's assessment that removal of the £20 uplift to universal credit will effectively "knock out the benefits that the Scottish Child Payment brings into families", undermining the work and mission of the Scottish Parliament to eradicate child poverty; urges the UK Government to devolve all

employment and social security powers to the Scottish Parliament, in order that it may take the further steps needed to make workplaces fairer, including through payment of the real Living Wage, and to establish a Minimum Income Guarantee, so that everyone has enough income to live a dignified life, and calls on the UK Government to match the ambition of the Scottish Parliament to eradicate child poverty.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Miles Briggs to speak to and move amendment S6M-00263.1.

15:38

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I take this opportunity to welcome you to your new role in the Parliament. I also welcome Shona Robison back into the Government, and I welcome all the Opposition spokespeople to their roles in this new session of the Parliament.

I also pay tribute to Aileen Campbell and Jeane Freeman—I am sure that the cabinet secretary just forgot to do that—for the work that they did in the previous session. I thank them for the constructive work that they undertook across the parties. We might not agree on everything, but I know that we all come to this Parliament with a determination to make a difference.

I thank all the charities and organisations that provided useful briefings ahead of today's debate, and I thank them for what they have done during the pandemic, too. I very much look forward to working with them during this parliamentary session.

This debate is being held as we start to emerge from the global pandemic and as the impacts of the lockdown restrictions are starting to be truly realised. The negative impact that the pandemic and the lockdown restrictions have had on people's health and on their mental wellbeing specifically is obvious, but the long-term impact that they will have on the economy and people's life opportunities is still to be fully understood. As with any economic shock, the most vulnerable people in our society will be the most negatively impacted.

As Crisis said in its briefing for the debate, there is deep concern that the economic impact of the lockdown could push more people into homelessness. Even before the pandemic, more than 5,000 adults were sleeping rough at least once a year, and the number of children living in temporary accommodation in Scotland had reached its highest level since records began. It is therefore clear that we need to see action and a renewed collective mission to end homelessness in Scotland.

I very much welcome the steps that have been taken during the pandemic to provide emergency accommodation, but local authorities throughout Scotland, especially in our cities, face critical housing pressures and there are growing concerns that people will find themselves back out on the streets after the lockdown restrictions are lifted and the emergency funding for councils ends. We must take action on that now, which is why our amendment specifically calls on the Scottish Government

“to establish a national Housing First programme across all local authorities”.

The charities and organisations that work across the sector have put forward a comprehensive ask to help to prevent homelessness. I want to see a renewed focus brought to that by the Government's response, including a new approach to preventative homeless policies, with rapid rehousing and the recommendations of the homelessness prevention review group fully implemented. I hope that the cabinet secretary will agree to my request, which I made when I wrote to her, for a cross-party round table as soon as possible to look towards that mission.

Shona Robison: I am happy to agree to that.

Miles Briggs is quite right that it was remiss of me not to thank Aileen Campbell and Jeane Freeman. I put those thanks on the record.

Will Miles Briggs acknowledge that the five-week wait for universal credit pushes many households into financial difficulties and can exacerbate homelessness, as the analysis conducted by Crisis found?

Miles Briggs: That is where discussions with the Treasury and cross-party discussions are very important. Throughout the pandemic, universal credit has been a vital safety net, and we need to ensure that those talks continue.

There is welcome cross-party support for a number of policy interventions to tackle child poverty. Conservative members want to see that work speeded up and the Government delivering on that. In particular, the Scottish Conservatives support the doubling of the Scottish child payment as soon as possible. I would welcome the cabinet secretary's confirmation, in her closing speech, of when that is likely to take place. Many people in the sector still want to find out whether there will be that doubling in this financial year.

The Scottish Conservatives also support the extension of free school meals to all primary school pupils. Douglas Ross and my party have led calls for that.

We all know from our families and constituents about the heartbreak and impact of losing a loved

one during the pandemic. [*Interruption.*] I am sorry, but I am very tight for time.

We know about the impact that bereavement has had on loved ones, families and constituents, from their not being able to arrange a proper send-off for a loved one to their working from home and often grieving alone. I would like to see the Government make progress on bereavement and look towards what can be done. That is why our amendment calls on ministers

“to improve the support available to individuals and families in Scotland who have lost loved ones”

and for longer-term change. The amendment calls on the Government

“to reform Carer’s Allowance and extend payments for up to six months”

for bereaved individuals in Scotland.

As we start the new parliamentary session, I want to see, above all, a real change in approach from ministers that will deliver better cross-portfolio working to tackle poverty and inequality. A key issue for me, which I hope we can see early action on, is the reform of access to healthcare services for people who are homeless or living with addictions. I have already had constructive meetings on that issue with the Minister for Drugs Policy, Angela Constance. Indeed, I raised the issue throughout the previous parliamentary session—in fact, I raised it with the cabinet secretary during her time as the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport. I am disappointed that we have seen very little progress in the provision of and access to healthcare services for people who face those issues. All those powers lie with us, in the Scottish Parliament.

Last week, I received an email from a constituent who is living in temporary accommodation. They said:

“Homeless people are treated as 2nd class citizens. We are not even allowed to register at normal GP surgeries. We are only allowed to attend the one Homeless Practice! It only opens twice a day and if you need medical attention then you have to queue up outside and only the first 10 people in the queue can be seen.”

That is a real health inequality in our country and an example of what has to change. I hope that it and many other issues will get the full attention of the Scottish Government and the Parliament and that we will genuinely work across the parties to achieve that.

The next five years must focus on the social and economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. For many of the most vulnerable people in our society, we need to make sure that the Government and the Parliament focus on working across the parties to respond to the challenging and changing circumstances that we will face.

I move amendment S6M-00263.1, to leave out from “recognises the impact of” to end and insert:

“notes that the Scottish Ministers have been responsible for introducing the 11 new benefit payments devolved by the UK Government through the Scotland Act 2016; further notes that the Scottish Ministers promised to set up those benefits by 2021 but have failed to deliver on this promise; recognises the concerns that the economic impact of lockdown could push more people in Scotland into homelessness, with over 5,000 adults sleeping rough at least once per year and the number of children living in temporary accommodation in Scotland reaching its highest level since records began; calls on the Scottish Government to act now to establish a national Housing First programme across all local authorities, to get people into safe and stable housing as quickly as possible, and further calls on the Ministers to improve the support available to individuals and families in Scotland who have lost loved ones and for them to reform Carer’s Allowance and extend payments for up to six months after bereavement.”

15:45

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): It is a great privilege to open the debate for Scottish Labour. I welcome the cabinet secretary to her new role and look forward to working with her and the Government.

In Scotland today, 1 million people live in poverty. We are set to miss the child poverty targets that we set ourselves in law; half of families living in poverty have a disabled person in them; precarious work is all too common; 400,000 people still earn below the living wage; 83,000 people are on zero-hours contracts; more than 200,000 people use food banks; and the pandemic threatens to bring even further precariousness to people’s lives. However, when we need it the most, our social security system fails us. One Government is implementing welfare reforms each of which is worse than the last and the other is failing to use the powers that it has and is taking too long to deliver the change that people in Scotland need.

We cannot go on like this. We have to go hard and fast on poverty and inequality, but neither the UK Government nor the Scottish Government is doing nearly enough. While the UK Government continues to impose the two-child limit, cuts the incomes of people on legacy benefits and ends the universal credit uplift, it cannot claim to be serious about human rights or ending poverty. That is why, when I meet the shadow DWP team every week and add the voices of the people of Scotland to those of the millions of people elsewhere who need those policies to end, we discuss all the ways that are open to us in the UK Parliament to end those rules as soon as possible.

However, members should not fall into the trap of believing there is nothing we can do here, in Scotland. In my experience, when people say that

we cannot act, it is because they have not seen the potential to do so—and we have so much potential in Scotland. That is why the amendment that we have lodged, which I have spent the past few days developing with colleagues across the chamber, focuses on action that we can take right here, right now, starting with social security.

The Scottish Government can and should use all the powers that it has to establish a minimum income guarantee in Scotland. That would include using all the levers available to it to increase income from work, to reduce housing and transport costs, to support people who cannot work and to make payments to protect the people who are furthest from economic equality, such as lone parents, disabled people, carers and students. If the Government does that, we will support it.

Doubling the Scottish child payment and adding a £5 supplement for families with a disabled person in them would help to protect those groups from poverty, too, and it would bring their income up to the level that they need to flourish. That is why we believe that the Scottish Government should do that immediately—not in five years' time.

All that we are doing right now with the powers that we have over disability benefits is improving their administration. I concede that that needs to be improved, but our ambitions must be bigger than administering disability benefits a little bit better than the Tories did. Several years after getting further powers in the area, we are still using the rotten old DWP rule book and it is still the people whom the DWP says deserve the support who get it.

We did not set up the Scottish Parliament to be the DWP lite—I think that we all agree on that. We are here to transform lives, which is why, ahead of the debate, we asked all the parties across the chamber to seize the moment and do things differently. Our amendment asks the Government to move swiftly on disability assistance, to open eligibility for it so that people with fluctuating and mental health conditions can access it, and to pay it at a rate that meets the extra costs of being a disabled person. Disabled people cannot wait; we need to work with them to achieve that now.

There are an estimated 788,000 unpaid carers in Scotland, and they need us to go hard and fast in tackling the poverty that they face, too. That is why our amendment asks the Government to let carers earn more from part-time work and to end the full-time study rule.

Our social security system must be easy to use, simple to access and automated when that is possible. It should protect people who are in precarious work, such as creative and hospitality

workers; it should be there for those who cannot work; and it should provide payments to people when times are tough.

However, tackling poverty is not just the social security system's job; it is a mission that needs all of the Government to be focused on it. As the Government's motion says, it should be "a national mission". If the Scottish Government was serious about that—if it made a minimum income an organising principle for work across the Government, as has been suggested by the Institute for Public Policy Research, and if it took action now—it could help everyone in Scotland to get there. The Government could bring down housing costs by capping rent rises, and it could reduce transport costs by providing free bus travel for under-25s. It could ensure that work pays by enforcing the living wage and collective bargaining through procurement and business support, and it could create more good, fair and unionised jobs. If the Government did all those things, it would lift thousands of people out of poverty and up to a level where they had enough money to live on.

That is how we can ensure that the people of Scotland have a minimum income to live on right now. We do not have to wait, as the Government's motion and the Greens' amendment say. The cabinet secretary knows from my reply to her letter that I and Scottish Labour would welcome the transfer of employment law responsibility to the Scottish Parliament in order to provide vital protections—protections that workers won—for people's lives and livelihoods. We believe in and would welcome working with trade unions to shape the request and develop a UK floor across employment rights so that we have a race to the top and not the bottom. We will work with the Scottish Government on that.

The cabinet secretary also knows that I feel strongly that the Scottish Government must use to full effect the powers that it already has. I was not elected to the Parliament to talk about what we cannot do. We sit in the chamber with significant powers to reduce poverty and inequality—powers over social security, procurement, housing and transport—but I hear a lot about what we cannot do yet.

If I had given up every time I was told that I could not do something, I would not have gone to a mainstream school, I would not have the care that I have now, I would not have the master's degree that I have now, and I would not have the job that I have now. I ask everyone who is here today not to give up on the people of Scotland. If we want to change lives and do something, we can find a way to do it. Where there is a will, there is always a way. We can change lives with the powers of this place, and we should do so now.

I move amendment S6M-00263.3, to leave out from the second “the impact of” to end and insert:

“that it is the responsibility of both the Scottish and UK governments to work for the eradication of poverty in Scotland and to implement social security policies that support this goal; believes that further steps are required to make workplaces fairer, including through payment of the Scottish Living Wage; commits to using all the powers available in Scotland to reform carers benefits, move from the ‘safe and secure transition’ of disability benefits to addressing their eligibility and adequacy as soon as possible, to increase incomes and lift people in Scotland out of poverty, and calls on the Scottish Government to double the Scottish Child Payment to £20 a week at the earliest opportunity and introduce a supplement for families with a disabled person in them”.

15:52

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I, too, welcome the cabinet secretary to her role; I look forward to working with her in the coming months and years.

At the heart of our collective wellbeing must be social security—not as a system or an idea but as a fundamental right. The societies that guarantee their citizens’ social security are those that perform best—they have the longest life expectancy, the lowest levels of crime and the highest levels of innovation and economic performance. We know that poverty has a lifelong scarring effect—the damage of child poverty is felt for decades—and we as a society pay for it, as people die younger, lose the opportunity to fulfil their potential and suffer the consequences of life chances denied.

We tackle poverty because it is the right thing to do, but we also tackle it because the social and financial costs are too great not to. Austerity, which we have seen Westminster implement, is immoral, but it is also a gigantic false economy, as we have seen in the pandemic in the past few months. That is why we must find a way to end the benefit cap and with it the degrading two-child limit and the rape clause.

This Parliament has already shown itself willing to break away from a punitive benefits system, when we found a way to mitigate the impacts of the underoccupation penalty—the hated bedroom tax. We need to explore options to do exactly the same thing for the benefit cap, which costs some of our poorest families up to £2,200 a year.

The societies that have performed best during Covid are more equal. Not for them the fate of the thousands who were sacrificed to a delayed lockdown and bungled Government response. It is clear that we should have increased our statutory sick pay provision but, instead, Westminster wasted billions on the disastrous eat out to help out scheme, which did much to create the second wave of Covid last autumn. That was a clear case of putting the Westminster priority of punishing

workers ahead of the health needs and even the economy of the nation.

The Scottish Greens welcome the pandemic relief payment scheme, which will supply essential additional income for families this year—right now. That is particularly important at a time when financial uncertainty has caused so much anxiety. We also call on the Scottish Government to introduce a permanent doubling of the Scottish child payment at the earliest possible opportunity. That measure would lift 50,000 children out of poverty.

Those are important fixes to a broken system, but we are actually here to fix the system, rather than to patch its flaws. We are here to make hope possible, and that requires us to be radical. Now is the time for a universal basic income: a basic commitment that could, at a stroke, eliminate poverty, and which would have helped so many through the Covid-19 pandemic. It would be a regular payment to all, to ensure human dignity, and a universal measure that would create the basis for social security, social solidarity and the care ethic on which we must base our society. That is why we call on the UK and Scottish Governments to work together to bring forward pilots and to take action at the earliest possible opportunity to introduce a universal basic income, which would end child poverty and go a very long way towards creating a society that has social security as a fundamental right.

I move amendment S6M-00263.4, to insert after “eradicate child poverty;”:

“welcomes the pandemic relief payment scheme, which will provide an essential additional income for families this year; calls on the Scottish Government to introduce a permanent doubling of the Scottish Child Payment at the earliest possible opportunity; notes that a Universal Basic Income would have helped many through the COVID-19 pandemic and calls on the UK and Scottish governments to work together to bring forward pilots at the earliest possible opportunity; commits to exploring funding options to end the benefit cap;”

15:56

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I will speak to my amendment and offer support to both the Labour and Green Party amendments.

I welcome Shona Robison to her post. Shona is an excellent politician and it is great to see her back in the Cabinet, in front-line politics. I worked very well with her when she was health secretary and I hope to do so with her again in her current brief, which is a very important one.

About three years ago, a story emerged about a little boy in Glasgow whose teacher had noticed him taking tomato sauce sachets from the canteen. He was taking the sachets home,

squeezing the ketchup out of them and adding boiling water to make soup. He was doing that because there was literally nothing else for him to eat in the house. Thankfully, that was spotted and there was an intervention and a referral to a food bank, where parcels would include tins with ring-pulls on them so that the little boy could open them himself. He was starving in 21st century Scotland.

There are countless reasons why families find themselves in such situations, such as delays built into universal credit, insecure work and no recourse to public funds. We could debate any one of those catalysts for poverty for hours and I hope that, over time, we will give each of them that attention. However, that particular boy was facing such hardship as a direct result of his parents' mental ill health. The Liberal Democrats and I have been talking about the links between mental ill health and poverty for many years. That is one of the reasons why transformational investment in mental health is so important to us.

The case that I have just described is symptomatic of one of the biggest, yet often overlooked, contributors to poverty in our country, which is Scotland's mental health crisis. That is one of the reasons why, in February, the Liberal Democrats succeeded in asking the Scottish Parliament to declare a national mental health emergency. Everyone deserves the opportunity to work hard and to build a good life for themselves, their family and their community. Mental ill health is one of the biggest barriers to that—it disrupts people's education, training, and entry into and progression within work. It does that to their families and those caring for them, too.

Although mental ill health does not discriminate as such, in that it is classless, it undoubtedly walks hand in hand with poverty. Suicide rates in Scotland increase with increasing deprivation. The rates in the most deprived areas are double those of the Scottish average. It is one of the most devastating health inequalities in the country and it is directly and inexorably linked to poverty.

My amendment also covers education as a route out of poverty. Over the past year, much of the discussion surrounding education has been focused on university students and exam-level school pupils—rightly so, because they have been severely let down by the Government. That matters because education provides a ladder to social mobility. Education could be a leveller and should offer opportunity, but far too often a broken society means that it serves only to widen the gap between our richest and poorest young people. At the age of five, children in families in the highest 20 per cent of earners are around 13 months ahead in their vocabulary compared with children in families in the bottom 20 per cent of earners.

We know that that situation has worsened in the pandemic.

The only route to stable mental health and life-changing education is through appropriate and decent housing—it is the rock on which everything else is built. If someone's home is making them sick, keeping them up at night or collapsing around them, none of the routes out of poverty will be available to them.

My amendment acknowledges that three of the five evils that Beveridge first identified more than 70 years ago still hold sway in our society. Want of education, want of decent housing and want of sound health—particularly mental health—are destroying lives and perpetuating poverty. Getting those issues right could be the antidote that we all seek, but only if the Government takes action and uses the powers that it already has. As such, the Scottish Government cannot blame the full extent of the poverty that exists in this country on a Government that operates from another city. It cannot do that when it has been empowered for years to address poverty but still elects not to.

I move amendment S6M-00263.2, to leave out from “urges the UK Government” to end and insert:

“notes the risk that Scotland's 2024 interim child poverty reduction target, unanimously agreed by the Parliament, could be missed and agrees therefore that families cannot afford for any delay on the part of either the Scottish or UK governments for additional action, backed by stronger fair work principles and a social security system that operates on a human rights basis; believes that poor mental health, the poverty-related attainment gap, and insecure and substandard housing are among the factors that prevent people from achieving their potential and getting on in life, and calls for urgent interventions to therefore include an immediate end to the scandal of thousands of children and adults waiting over a year for mental health treatment as the first step towards meeting the 18-week targets for the first time ever, the extension of funded early learning and childcare, Pupil Equity Funding and in-class support for children and young people, and the building of at least 40,000 new homes for social rent during the current parliamentary session as part of a plan to end homelessness and raise the standard of housing in Scotland.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind all members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. I am not naming names at this point.

We move to the open debate. I call Natalie Don, who is making her first speech to our Parliament.

16:00

Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): I welcome you to your new role, Presiding Officer. I also welcome the cabinet secretary to her new role.

I am proud to be standing here in our Parliament to give my first speech on a matter that is extremely close to my heart. Before I go on, I give a heartfelt thanks to the people who made that possible: my family, my fantastic campaign team and all the voters. I am honoured to represent the constituency in which I have lived my whole life and that I love so much.

Renfrewshire North and West is a beautiful constituency. It is rich in history, from Erskine, on the banks of the Clyde, to the historic town of Renfrew, and it contains many beautiful villages, from Kilmacolm to Bishopton. However, it is the people of Renfrewshire North and West who make it such a wonderful place.

In relation to today's debate, poverty stretches right across my constituency. People are impacted deeply by poverty, whether they are in Gallowhill or Bridge of Weir. I am pleased to see the huge steps that the Scottish Government is taking to eradicate poverty, with real targets and policies that benefit people's lives. There is certainly more to do, but introducing the Scottish child payment, free school meals and best start payments, widening access to childcare, removing financial barriers to education and empowering and enabling women to take up employment are just some of the ways that we are raising the bar. I am thrilled that the Scottish National Party won an election standing on bold policies such as introducing a citizens basic income and a minimum citizens wage guarantee. Such policies will genuinely make our country fairer and make a real difference to people's lives.

However, while we give to families through the Scottish child payment, Westminster takes money away from the same families through the removal of the £20 uplift to universal credit, which is set to plunge even more children in this country into poverty.

I believe that we all want to raise attainment, tackle drug and alcohol abuse, protect jobs, improve mental health and create a greener environment. Those progressive moves will become more achievable not if but when we eradicate poverty, and we can do that only with full powers over welfare, employment, drug policy, defence and many other matters. When someone is living meal to meal, day to day, with no money, life is a struggle. Planning every penny really takes it out of someone, and too often that impacts on other parts of life. Living in poverty is tiring. What should be simple things in life, such as weekly shops and buying clothes for the kids, become hard, laborious and, at times, impossible tasks. It is no wonder that poverty can lead to addiction, mental health problems and even suicide.

We can take our climate emergency, which is the most pressing issue on our planet right now,

as an example. For someone who has just been sanctioned for being late to the job centre, or who is fighting addiction after years of neglect or mental health problems, I am sure that recycling is not always a top priority.

We must also consider the children who are living in poverty. How many members know how hard it is to keep your mind on your schoolwork when you are worrying about where your dinner is coming from that night, or what state your parents will be in when you get home from school? How fast does that make a child have to grow up?

Poverty is not a choice, and it is certainly not inevitable. It is a lifestyle that is inflicted on people. No child should grow up hungry in Scotland. We have food banks and homeless people while the United Kingdom spends billions of pounds on palaces, boats and nuclear missiles. That is 21st century Great Britain for you.

Tony Blair did not end child poverty, David Cameron and Nick Clegg normalised it and now Boris Johnson encourages it. We will never see an end to child poverty while we are tied to the UK Government.

The Scottish Government can make bold move after bold move, but we cannot mitigate everything. That is why it must be our mission in our Scottish Parliament to give the people what they voted for—an independence referendum—so that we can get those vital powers away from out-of-touch politicians in London and into the hands of the people of Scotland.

I will finish by saying this to anyone who has experienced or is experiencing poverty, anyone going to food banks, anyone from a bad background, any child who does not understand why this is happening to them and who questions why they were born into this life, and anyone who thinks that the system is against them: please do not give up. I am living proof that you can make it out the other side of the UK Government's complete neglect of Scotland's working class and its underclass. I will not abstain on you. Until we see an end to child poverty in an independent Scotland, I promise that I have your back and I am fighting for you.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I allowed some latitude to a member making her first speech, but I remind members who have been here for a while that they should stick to four minutes, please.

16:06

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I welcome the Presiding Officer and others to their new posts, and I congratulate Natalie Don on her maiden speech, which was delivered with passion. I suspect that we will disagree on a lot, but her

passion was clear, so I wish her well in the next five years.

It is slightly disappointing that the minister who is responsible for social security is not even in the chamber. That might say something about the level of urgency with which the Government has treated that responsibility in recent years. With the cabinet secretary and Ben Macpherson, who is not here today, I had the privilege of being on the previous session's Social Security Committee and of taking through the Social Security (Scotland) Bill.

Shona Robison: Will the member take an intervention?

Jeremy Balfour: So soon? Yes.

Shona Robison: Let me make it clear that Ben Macpherson and I have joint responsibility for social security. I have attended more meetings with social security officials than with anyone else. The member should be assured that it is a joint responsibility because we take it so seriously and know that it is so important.

Jeremy Balfour: That is duly noted. I look forward to working with the cabinet secretary and with Mr Macpherson in the coming months and years.

In the previous session of Parliament, we saw lack of urgency from the Government in delivering the social security powers that have been devolved to this Parliament. We could spend a lot of time talking about universal credit and about the powers that we do not have, but we need to spend more time talking about the powers that we do have and the delays that have taken place.

I know that we will probably be told during the summing up that the delays are all because of the pandemic and that all the powers would have been delivered had it not been for the pandemic. That is not the case. We have heard statement after statement from cabinet secretaries and ministers who have told us that the benefits would not be delivered on time and that there was always going to be a delay. That has held back what we could and should have been able to deliver.

There is a total lack of ambition within the Scottish Government. I hope that with the new cabinet secretary we can look at what will be delivered. Just before Parliament rose at the end of the previous session, a consultation was sent out about disability living allowance and personal independence payments for adults. It copied, almost comma for comma, the regulations and legislation from Westminster. We had discussions at committee and in the chamber about people who have conditions that do not easily fit in a box and who therefore miss out on PIP. The

consultation was an opportunity to address that. It was also an opportunity to address whether the 20m rule is fair on people who have mobility problems. In all the hustings that I attended during the election campaign, people from all parties said that that must change, but we see that the Government has followed exactly the same rules in its consultation.

I hope that the cabinet secretary will look at what the amendments to the motion suggest and produce radical change in that regard, because otherwise I and—I hope—other MSPs will vote against the motion.

We have power: the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 gave us power to create new benefits. If we see gaps in the system, we should use the powers that we have, rather than talk about what we cannot do.

16:10

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome you to your position, Presiding Officer.

I also welcome the cabinet secretary making an attack on child poverty her top priority. She informs us that many of the appropriate levers are not at her disposal, but she knows that many of them are. From bad housing to poor schooling, from regressive taxation to environmental injustice and from the yawning gap in life expectancy to hardship in old age, it is the working poor who suffer most. The cabinet secretary knows that the Scottish Parliament and Government have the power to do something about that.

Shona Robison: Will Mr Leonard give way?

Richard Leonard: If I can first make some progress, I will come back to the cabinet secretary.

As I have listened, as I have attentively, to some very powerful first speeches in the Parliament over the past two weeks, including this afternoon, it has been self-evident that rank, wealth, status, privilege and—yes—class still bedevil this society. If anyone believes that Scotland is not class-ridden, they should go and look at patterns of land ownership, they should go and look at who controls the economy, the corporations and the banks and they should go and look at who owns the media because, I tell members, ownership is power and property, capital and power are increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

The SNP talks in its motion about the transfer of powers, but instead of limiting its horizons to the transfer of powers from one Parliament to another, why does it not use the levers that it has to bring about a bit more self-government of our land, to bring about a bit more self-government of our economy and to bring about a bit more self-

government in our local government? We know that poverty does not simply stop at a shortfall in wealth; it is, as well, a basic lack of power. That powerlessness is most corrosive, is cumulative and breeds acquiescence, which leads in turn to self-reinforcing hopelessness. That poverty, that inequality and that lack of power do not diminish just those who live with them; they diminish all of us.

When we debate poverty, as we are doing this afternoon, we must therefore not simply debate its amelioration, and we must not simply limit ourselves to piecemeal reforms. Rather, we must understand that nothing less than a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power will do.

I will therefore finish with some advice from the excellent Child Poverty Action Group. Alison Garnham says in her foreword to the important report “Let’s talk about tax”:

“If we can’t talk about tax, how can we campaign successfully for an end to child poverty?”

Furthermore, David Eiser, of the Fraser of Allander institute, writes in the report that

“The Scottish Government has been somewhat conservative in its policy on property taxation and local tax reform more generally.”

He calls for a bold review of new taxes,

“for example, options for introducing Scotland-specific taxes on wealth or inheritance”.

I hope that the report is something that the Scottish Government and this new Parliament will take a serious look at, and that the Government will open the books for a transparent public debate.

Because poverty and inequality is not fixed. It is not the natural order of things, it is man-made. So it is up to us to bring about change, to extend democracy, to hold in check powers that are unaccountable at the moment and to demand economic equality as well as political democracy. My determination—my will—to pursue the causes of labour, of democracy, of justice and of socialism is stronger now than it has ever been. That is how I will dedicate my next five years in the Parliament.

16:14

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):

Welcome to your new role, Presiding Officer. I welcome the new cabinet secretary to her role, too, and I thank her—or, I assume that I will thank her—in that regard.

It is clearly impressed on MSPs that it is our collective duty to use every means at our disposal to address poverty inequalities. With renewed ambition, I believe that the Scottish Government will tackle that pervasive and contracted issue

head-on. It is within the capacity of all parties, building on the work of the past five years, to reduce poverty over this parliamentary session to bring more children out of poverty. The effect of that will be to break cycles of poverty that have gone on for generations.

I welcome the report, “Poverty in Scotland 2021: towards a 2030 without poverty”. I am grateful to the Child Poverty Action Group, the Scottish poverty and inequality research unit, I-SPHERE—the Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Equalities Research—and the Poverty Alliance for their tremendous efforts in leading on and pulling together that extensive work. The report provides direction for policy makers. I will draw attention to a couple of areas: fair work and housing.

Fair work is a core aspect of tackling poverty head-on and building a prosperous and productive nation. Fundamentally, it consists of dignity in work. That means that we do not support business models that exploit loopholes and which have in place abusive power dynamics. The excessive power dynamic of business above employee needs to be tackled in Scotland. For example, the rise in zero-hours contracts, as highlighted by the “Fair Work in Scotland” report, is worrying.

Helen Martin also highlighted that in her contribution to the “Poverty in Scotland 2021” report, and she explains how the Covid pandemic has laid bare the unfairness in our economy, with low earners, young workers, and black and ethnic minority workers being impacted on to a disproportionate extent. Often, those groups are exploited in unfair work dynamics—for example, by being made to sign waivers so that they work over the maximum working hours, with no recourse to speak against that because of the fear of job loss. That leads to exploitative conditions and hours, without fair pay or fair compensation.

Obviously, fair wages must allow workers to maintain a decent quality of life. That needs to, and must, apply both to single people and to people with families to support. I back the call in the “Poverty in Scotland 2021” report that employers, trade unions and Government collaboratively establish fair work structures in the Scottish economy.

I also welcome the finding that the proportion of people who are earning below the living wage has decreased. However, wages should never have been at that level, so much more still needs to be done to address the issue.

Housing is another core aspect of reducing poverty. Another contributor to the “Poverty in Scotland 2021” report, Tony Cain, impressed on us the importance of understanding housing primarily as a human right and not as a welfare activity. A combined approach of building more

good-quality affordable housing and capping foreign investment that purposely drives up costs in the rental sector or superficially inflates house prices would be welcome. Analysis suggests that poverty is lower in Scotland than it is in the rest of the UK because of lower housing costs. Housing must be protected and improved as a means of reducing poverty.

I take this opportunity to thank some of the incredible organisations in my Glasgow Anniesland constituency that are working head-on to break cycles of poverty. They include Whiteinch Transformation, Hope Connections, DRC Generations, Drumchapel food bank, 3D Drumchapel, Christians Against Poverty Whiteinch and LINKES. Those organisations have made an incredible impact and have brought hope and practical support to the Anniesland area.

I look forward to working with colleagues of all parties with the intention of accelerating poverty reduction during this parliamentary session.

16:19

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I, too, welcome Ms Robison to her new role. I welcome the chance to speak in this debate because poverty is a huge problem across my region and I am eager to have the chance to address it. Today, I will focus on child poverty and homelessness.

In my region, child poverty figures make for quite shocking reading, with almost a quarter of children in West Lothian now living in poverty. According to new research that has been published by the End Child Poverty coalition, the number of poverty-stricken youngsters in West Lothian has gone up from 7,499 in 2014-15 to 8,740. The research shows that, since 2015, child poverty has risen in every Scottish local authority area, which is appalling. As I said in my maiden speech last week, we need to support our young people and prioritise their future before it is too late.

Child poverty is a serious concern in the Lothian region, but it is not the only concern. Homelessness is a huge issue, and it is getting worse under the SNP. Last year in Scotland, someone was made homeless every 17 minutes, and figures show that the number of people who are assessed as homeless is the highest that it has been for six years. *[Interruption.]* I will not give way yet, as I am still learning the ropes.

The number of deaths of people who are homeless has also gone up by nearly a third in two years. The SNP's focus on a second independence referendum has led it to presiding over rising poverty across Scotland.

I was recently contacted by a constituent who shared their experience of the treatment of homeless people in Edinburgh. I was deeply concerned to hear how the City of Edinburgh Council had handled their case. My constituent and their partner have been homeless for 15 months. They were initially put into a single room guest house, which had no facilities to wash clothes or cook meals. They are carers, so it is imperative that they remain clean and healthy to care for the vulnerable. They were then moved into serviced apartments, which thankfully were more suitable to their needs. However, after a year of having no contact from the City of Edinburgh Council, they were told that they were to leave that place but were given no information as to where they might go next. They were unable to contact anyone in the council housing department and, as a result of the months of uncertainty, have suffered from poor mental health and experienced suicidal thoughts.

Thankfully, my constituent and their partner were recently contacted by the council housing department, but it was to inform them that the council had made a mistake. They were not offered an apology or any reassurance that the issue will not happen again. Ultimately, they were informed that it could take up to three years of living in emergency temporary accommodation for them to receive a council house. My constituent said:

"This is truly outrageous. We don't feel safe in temporary accommodation when situations like this loom over our heads every single day. I just don't know if I have the willpower nor the mental health capacity to wait so long for our own home, this has been a truly torturous 15 months." *[Interruption.]*

I will not give way because, as I said, I am still learning the ropes.

The Conservatives have bold and ambitious plans to tackle those issues. We would deliver the biggest social house-building programme since devolution. We have pledged to build 60,000 new affordable homes, including 40,000 in the social rented sector over the next five years. Such measures are urgently required. It is heartbreaking to hear of people suffering in those circumstances, and that constituent of mine is not the only one in such a situation. We have all received emails on that this week. People need homes and not hotels or serviced apartments, as in the case of my constituent.

We want to build a Scotland that not only supports those who are in financial crisis but helps to lift people out of the poverty cycle by tackling the root causes. We will push the SNP Government to do more to tackle the causes of poverty and ensure that everyone in Scotland is given the opportunity to succeed.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I call Marie McNair. This is Ms McNair's first speech in the chamber.

16:23

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer, and best wishes to you in your new role. I congratulate the cabinet secretary on her return to government, and I wish her well in her new post.

It is an immense honour to make my first speech in our Parliament. I thank the people of Clydebank and Milngavie and Bearsden North for putting their trust in me. It is truly humbling to become the MSP for the area where I was raised and still live, and it is a real motivation for me in trying to secure the best for my constituents. As this is my first speech, I take the opportunity to thank my campaign team for their considerable efforts and to thank my amazing partner, family and friends for their tremendous support. I know that they are aware of how much their backing means to me. I also put on record my respect for my predecessor, Gil Paterson, and thank him for everything that he achieved for my constituents.

It is a proud moment for me to become the first woman MSP for Clydebank and Milngavie and one who comes from a working-class background. We are going in the right direction to ensure that our Parliament starts to look like the Scotland that we are here to represent. My community rightly expects me, in going about my business here, to take a grown-up and co-operative approach to politics that will secure a better deal for those in greatest need, that recognises that many have been left behind and that puts securing a better way forward first.

To that approach, I bring real-life experience. Only last week, I was doing my last shift as a health and social care worker in the heart of my constituency—or, as my service users describe it, “living in the real world”. We must put that real-world experience at the heart of our efforts and must not be tempted to cut bits of it out because it does not support a particular political narrative.

Therefore, I say this: when I believe that the Scottish Government should be doing more to tackle poverty and injustice, I will say so; equally, if I think that our Parliament requires more powers to make real change, I will say so. To do anything else would be to let down our country and to fail to fully address the issues that are fuelling poverty and injustice.

In the real world, the biggest driver for child poverty is the inadequate levels of universal credit, the £20 uplift in which is to be removed, with the choice between a five-week wait and immediately going into debt with an advance payment; the two-

child poverty policy and the need for the rape clause; and the benefit cap that denies families with children the basics, forcing them to use food banks and into poverty. I saw that in my work as a councillor and a volunteer at my local food bank. When you deliver food parcels, you see the real world that the war on welfare has helped to create; you see the poverty, the empty kitchen cupboards, the despair and misery in people's eyes and children being held back by unavoidable poverty.

It is a crime that people are in that situation and we must have an honest ambition to bring it to an end, so let us get real about that. We cannot fully design a modern, compassionate system of social security when it is heavily shaped by a firefighting approach to UK Tory welfare cuts. We need the powers to end that approach and to design, instead, a system that is there for people when they need it, and which gives the respect and dignity that are essential if we are to tackle injustice and stigma.

Equally, the proposal to devolve employment policy to Scotland is significant, and it is backed by the Scottish Trades Union Congress in “The People's Recovery: a Different Track for Scotland's Economy”. Would it not be great if we in Scotland had the powers to end exploitative zero-hours contracts and fire-and-hire practices? As a Parliament, we cannot recognise that there are 83,000 people on zero-hours contracts one week, but not want the powers to do something about it the next. These are not the visions of the past; they are essential if we are to make such draconian policies a thing of the past.

As a new SNP MSP, I call on everyone here to put tribal politics aside and focus on the scale of what is needed now to end injustice and the misery that it is inflicting.

16:27

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I congratulate Marie McNair on an excellent speech; I congratulate Natalie Don, too.

I formally welcome Shona Robison to her post. I know that she is committed to tackling poverty, which I think is a crucial job.

Presiding Officer, I have already welcomed you to your new role; every time I am about to welcome Annabelle Ewing to her new role, there is a shift change. I will get to do that eventually, but perhaps you could pass on my good wishes to her.

Scottish Labour made a significant contribution to the creation of a framework for social security that—unlike the DWP—treats people with dignity and respects their rights. In the past, I have paid tribute to Jeane Freeman, who was the minister

who presided over that work. However, it is important to recognise the work of, for example, Mark Griffin, who pushed for the annual uprating of benefits and a ban on the use of the private sector for assessments in the social security system. On the wider application of benefits, I lodged amendments to Scottish Government legislation to ensure that there is an automatic check of what other benefits people are entitled to and a much simpler appeal system. While she was a member of the previous Social Security Committee, our Presiding Officer, Alison Johnstone, made an extremely significant contribution to the rights of people who apply for social security benefits. I wanted to record—and I hope that this is accepted—that that is what we can achieve as a Parliament when we work together.

I whole-heartedly support the amendment in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, which sets out how we can make an even bigger difference to the social security framework through small changes that can make a real difference to carers. We must make those changes so that we can show that we will be ambitious over the next five years. Pam Duncan-Glancy talked about the need for a minimum income guarantee, which has a great deal of support.

I recently asked the First Minister whether the Government would do an analysis of the groups that have been most affected by the financial losses and hardship caused by the pandemic.

I did that because it is vital not to make any assumptions about who is living in poverty if we are to adopt the right support measures. Many people have been plunged into poverty by the Covid pandemic because they have lost their jobs or have had to manage on significantly reduced hours. Those people were often only just coping before the pandemic, and now they are really struggling. I am pleased to say that the First Minister agreed that it was important to do that analysis.

The final report of the Social Security Committee in the previous session of Parliament, which was published on 17 March, refers to serious gaps in support for people who are impacted by Covid. For example, it points out that the discretionary housing payment scheme is restricted to tenants. We called on the UK Government to help those who cannot meet their mortgage payments if they lose their income because of the pandemic, because there was previously such provision. We made it clear that we believed that that was the UK Government's responsibility. We must recognise that people who have mortgages will need some help, too.

The Trussell Trust has highlighted

“an immediate and sustained surge in need across its food banks”,

while Aberlour and One Parent Families Scotland have seen increased demand for their hardship funds. The increase in food bank use has demonstrated how big the crisis is going to be.

Time goes very quickly when we have only four minutes for speeches. I will cut to the summary of what I wanted to say. I asked the cabinet secretary whether there would be a focus in the current session of Parliament on protecting renters, because, now more than ever, they need protection. More poverty is found in families who live in the private rented sector than in those who live in any other sector. It is time to be bold on behalf of renters, and I look forward to reading the Government's bill when it is published.

Natalie Don, in an excellent speech, talked about UK politicians who have failed, but I hope that members recognise that Gordon Brown brought in the most far-reaching measures when he was Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer. Child tax credits and working families tax credits lifted tens of thousands of children out of poverty. It is important to recognise the good work that was done. However, those child tax credits are under threat as people are forced to migrate. Let those of us who believe that they make a difference to poverty stick together on this.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the closing speeches. I call Alex Cole-Hamilton to wind up for the Liberal Democrats.

16:32

Alex Cole-Hamilton: Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer—sorry, I mean Presiding Officer. You do change around a bit.

I pay tribute to my colleagues across the chamber. They have spoken with real passion and eloquence, and very movingly so. I pay special tribute to those who have made their first speeches today. Marie McNair and Natalie Don made significant contributions to the debate and I welcome them both to their places.

Scotland has a poverty problem that is growing in menace. The Scottish Association for Mental Health recently published a report that states that 29 per cent of people in Scotland are unable to afford three or more of the 22 basic necessities that have been identified as essential and which no one should go without. Being forced to decide between heating and eating is not a choice; it is a blatant violation of human rights.

The SNP fought the election on the basis that it would not seek to hold another referendum until Covid has passed, but even if this Government meets its target of reducing child poverty to below

18 per cent, which is by no means a given, that will still leave us with up to 40,000 children living in poverty. The Government needs to address that issue before we turn to matters of the constitution.

Although it was not entirely a surprise, my colleagues and I were disappointed that the minister felt the need to hijack the debate and turn it into yet another excuse to squabble with Westminster before the motion had even been lodged. The Government will boast proudly of its achievements in reducing poverty in Scotland, but that is not enough. It is simply not doing everything that it could do, and that is why I intervened on the cabinet secretary.

Far from doing down our social security system, I want to empower it. I want to give it the reach that was imagined for it by the signatories of the Smith commission in 2014—all of them. They recognised that the Scottish social security system under full sail would have command over £4 billion-worth of spending. Imagine what we could do to level the playing field and address poverty and social inequality in this country with that kind of reach. Instead, we have taken the levers of just 3 per cent of that opportunity.

The Government will also boast proudly of a range of achievements, but when food bank usage in this country is at a record high, it cannot lay everything at the feet or the door of Westminster. When a household is made homeless every 19 minutes and those in the most deprived parts of the country are more than twice as likely to fail than to get a higher at level A, every second spent bickering about Westminster in order to push forward the constitutional debate is a second not spent assisting those in Scotland who need the Government the most. The Liberal Democrats will always hold Westminster to account, but only when it is relevant to the progress of our society, and we will never try to push forward that constitutional agenda.

I welcome Miles Briggs back to his place, and I look forward to working with him on a cross-party basis. I thought that Pam Duncan-Glancy, with typical passion, brought to the debate a compelling argument about how our two Governments will committee together have to carry some of the responsibility for this issue, and they will have to work together on some aspects. I thought that that was very eloquently put. Maggie Chapman rightly pointed out the instantaneous impact that doubling the child payment and introducing a universal basic income would have on the poverty problem in our country—it would be transformational overnight. It is within our grasp in lots of ways and we just need to reach for it. As I said, Natalie Don's speech was passionate and I think that that passion will mark many contributions to come. It was also great to hear

from Richard Leonard. To listen to him speak about poverty is inspiring; he sets a challenge and a high bar, for which we should all reach.

The Liberal Democrat amendment calls for

“urgent interventions to ... include an immediate end to the scandal of thousands of children and adults waiting over a year for”

first-time

“mental health treatment”.

That wait is keeping so many people from fulfilling their potential—and not just those people, but those who care for them and live around them.

The Presiding Officer: Could the member close, please.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I will do.

Prevention is always better than cure, and if we are to eradicate poverty in Scotland, which I believe we can, we need to work together and put aside constitutional differences.

16:36

Maggie Chapman: Poverty is a political choice—there is nothing inevitable about it—and it is a scourge on our society. It is our duty, therefore, to do whatever we can to eliminate it, and to change the systems that cause it. That is why the Scottish Greens want the devolution of full powers over employment and social security. For that reason, I am sorry to say that we cannot support the other Opposition amendments.

However, I thank Pam Duncan-Glancy for her approach when drafting the Labour amendment. She sought cross-party consensus and was willing to give up some ground to get that consensus. There is little disagreement here about the substance of her amendment, but unfortunately we cannot support it, not because of what is there but because of what is not there. It removes the vital call for the full devolution of all employment and social security powers. We need those powers to be able to create genuine social security as a fundamental right, rather than just tinker around the edges of a system that we know to be broken. I hope that in the future we can continue to work together on a collaborative basis, and perhaps even get in place a better process that avoids the frantic scrabble that we had yesterday afternoon.

I would also like to thank all the organisations that work to alleviate poverty across Scotland for their work, and for the information that they have provided to us in advance of the debate. I look forward to constructive discussion with them all over the coming months.

I return to the topic of the debate. In many ways, a couple of hours on a Tuesday afternoon does not do justice to the profound impacts that poverty has on too many people's lives. We have, rightly, focused on social security this afternoon, but we need to look at the wider range of public services and human rights that contribute to our collective wellbeing. As is so often the case with structural inequalities and systemic crises, we need to take a holistic approach to understand how best to create a different system that does not have inequalities built into it.

Although we have seen progress in some areas—the fair work agenda, investment in childcare, free bus travel for young people, energy efficiency, the Scottish child payment, some limited improvements to tenants' rights—we need bolder action, because one in five people and one in four children in Scotland still live in poverty. Many of the families affected are working families, and those statistics are a damning indictment of a system that has seen the wealth of the 10 richest people in Scotland balloon by more than £2.7 billion in just the last year.

We can—we must—do so much better. I and my Scottish Green colleagues look forward to working with all members of the Scottish Government, and members of other Opposition parties, on housing, community engagement and empowerment, education, the economy, mental health support and so much more, to tackle poverty. Only when we take a holistic, mission-based approach to something that affects all of our lives will we see the transformation that we need to see.

16:40

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests.

It is not unreasonable to say that tackling poverty and striving to make Scotland fairer has always been a mission for the Parliament. We might not have previously declared it a national mission, but it is fairly clear to anyone who has been watching proceedings since the establishment of the Parliament that we agree on that.

It appears that there is enough agreement on policy solutions that there has been real and genuine debate about how those solutions might be implemented. The cabinet secretary, my Labour colleagues and others have spoken about the need to retain the £20 uplift. They also spoke about the ambition to double the child payment to £20 per week, although Pam Duncan-Glancy underlined the importance of doing so immediately.

Miles Briggs talked about supporting those, particularly carers, who are recently bereaved. We fully support a change to the carers allowance entitlement to give people the space to grieve and think about how to go forward with their lives after the sad loss of someone they cared for. As did almost every other party speaker who took part in the hustings during the election, I agree with Jeremy Balfour that we should look at the 20-metre rule. We should also look at how we deal with the regulations that will come before the successor to the Social Security Committee and at how we adapt the system to fit the needs of the people of Scotland—we must not just lift and shift the system that is already in place and that discriminates against so many.

What Richard Leonard said should ring true in any debate, but particularly in this one. How can we talk about poverty reduction and eradication without talking about taxation and redistribution of wealth? We cannot talk about such matters in a vacuum.

Pauline McNeill outlined some of the positive changes that we agreed during the progress of the bill that became the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018; however, the changes have not been implemented because the Parliament still does not have full control over those powers, many of which still lie with the DWP.

Much of the build-up to the debate focused on the powers that we do not have, as opposed to the people who face daily battles to pay the rent, put food on the table and get through the pandemic. It is no secret that the Labour Party supports the devolution of employment law. I believe that employment law will be devolved to this Parliament, but such powers will not, of themselves, help anyone overnight. However, a minimum income guarantee, a doubled child payment and a mandatory real living wage in our procurement contracts would help.

As a member of the Social Security Committee for the whole of the previous parliamentary session, and like Jeremy Balfour and others, I am disappointed that so long after we reached consensus across the chamber on how to set up the new system, social security benefits are still not fully administered here in Scotland, such that we could adapt them to the needs of the people who live here.

In the previous session, the Social Security Committee also secured landmark, stretching child poverty targets with which many of us here today agreed. However, we also agreed that we might struggle to hit them. We have powers that we could use to hit those targets—we have powers that would give us a role in employment, which the Government could use to immediately reset its relationship with workers and employers.

I have proposed that we put workers and trade union members who have experience of workplace disease and injury in the driving seat to design a policy process for the replacement of the industrial injuries benefit, which is a key benefit for those who are disabled at work. I hope that the cabinet secretary agrees that that is an example of how we could use the powers that we have now to make the system fairer, particularly for people who are living with long Covid. We should look at the gender gap and note that payments of that benefit are made overwhelmingly to men and those who work in male-dominated industries.

The interventions made by the UK and Scottish Governments, which have been implemented by a formidable army of key workers in local government, have been nothing short of astonishing. There have been problems, but the measures have been powerful nonetheless. Furlough, business rates holidays, year-round free school meals, and the £20 uplift in payments for carers and low-income families were all designed to protect livelihoods while lockdown sought to save lives. Measures were implemented quickly using the powers that we have, because there was the political will to do so. They might have been delivered under emergency powers, but there is nothing stopping us using emergency powers again to tackle the emergency that is poverty.

Last spring, we banned evictions and took people off the streets and into warmth and safety. Will we risk another homelessness epidemic when the pandemic is over or as we ease our way out of restrictions? The manifesto of every party represented in the chamber said that every family in Scotland should have access to a warm, safe home. As the Shelter briefing says, the pandemic did not cause the housing emergency but it has exposed it as never before. I ask the cabinet secretary and her ministers to consider extending the ban on evictions. We have called for an extension to the furlough and the £20 uplift; we should also call for and agree an extension to the evictions ban.

The debate should be about what we can do to support families and people who need help now; it should not be about further constitutional arguments. I ask members to support our amendment and reject those that kick things into the long grass. Let us get to work now to change Scotland.

16:47

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): Presiding Officer, I congratulate you on your appointment to your new role. I take the opportunity to welcome the new members who gave their maiden speeches today, Natalie Don and Marie McNair. I look forward to working with

all members in the chamber over the next five years. I also congratulate the cabinet secretary on her appointment.

It has been a privilege for me to serve the region of Mid Scotland and Fife. This is my first opportunity to speak in the chamber since being returned as an MSP—I am delighted to be given the chance to serve for a second parliamentary session. It has been a privilege to represent areas such as Clackmannanshire, Stirling, Perthshire, Kinross-shire and Fife, and I very much look forward to representing them again over the next five years.

I am particularly pleased to participate and sum up in the debate on tackling poverty and building a fairer country, in my new role as my party's shadow minister for equalities and older people. I have always been passionate about promoting equalities, including during my eighteen years as a councillor, as well as in the previous parliamentary session, when I had the opportunity to sit on the Equalities and Human Rights Committee. During that time, I worked with local charities, the third sector and other organisations, and, in the past, I worked for Ark Housing, which looks after individuals with learning difficulties in their community. I look forward to engaging with the public, private and third sectors to ensure that we tackle the issues that they bring to our attention.

I am slightly disappointed by the tone of the SNP motion, which focuses on attacking the UK Government rather than addressing the issues that the motion covers. However, given the record of the Scottish Government, it is no surprise that the SNP aims to deflect from its failings during its tenure in office. The motion demands the devolution of

“all employment and social security powers to the Scottish Parliament”,

yet the SNP has failed to deliver any of the benefits that were devolved by the Scotland Act 2016. The SNP promised that a new Scottish welfare system would be fully in place by the 2021 election. *[Interruption.]* I cannot take an intervention—I have lots to cover and time is limited.

Even before the pandemic, in 2019, the social security minister declared that responsibility for the severe disablement allowance would be handed back to the Department for Work and Pensions so that there was no “unnecessary disruption”. Now, the Scottish Government has said that it wants to take full responsibility, but not until at least 2025. How can it be possible that we should take nearly a decade to secure such a system? Let us not forget that this is the same party that assured voters that Scotland could become fully independent from the UK in the space of 18

months—yet it has the gall to demand that further social security powers be devolved now. The SNP needs to sort out the mess that it has created so far before it takes on the responsibilities of new devolved powers.

Despite the First Minister's protestations that education was her number 1 priority, the attainment gap has remained stubbornly wide. Between 2017-18 and 2018-19, the gap between the percentages of the most deprived and the least deprived P1 to P3 pupils who achieved the expected numeracy standards did not reduce at all. Between 2016-17 and 2018-19, the attainment gap for the proportion of S3 pupils who achieved the literacy standard grew from only 13.6 per cent to 13.8 per cent. Audit Scotland has challenged the SNP's tackling of the issues, and has said that the Scottish attainment challenge funding does not go far enough and is limited in its scope. However, education has been fully devolved since the recommencement of the Parliament.

The Scottish Conservatives have a positive plan to tackle poverty, and it is welcome to see that other parties have already adopted some of our initiatives. We were, for example, the first party to announce proposals to offer free school meals to all primary school pupils. We want to go further and give five extra hours of wraparound childcare for schoolchildren in P1 to P3, which would help remove the barrier that prevents too many parents, particularly mothers, from returning to the workplace.

We have also pledged to deliver the biggest social housing programme since devolution, with 60,000 new affordable homes which, together with an accelerated housing first scheme, would ensure that the scandal of rough sleeping is removed by 2026.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way on that specific point?

Alexander Stewart: No, I only have a minute or two to go.

We would enshrine in law that the Scottish Government should deliver a ring-fenced percentage of its annual budget to local councils, which need the money. That process would restore budgets to the levels at which they were in 2007, before the SNP decided that it would cut budgets.

Our job over the next five years is to shine a light on the current Government's failings and to ensure that there is a positive vision for the future.

I will highlight the contributions of my colleagues who spoke in the debate. Miles Briggs talked about recognising the long-term impact of homelessness and about the need for a national housing first programme. Jeremy Balfour spoke

with passion, as he always does, about social security and the Government's lack of ambition. Our new member, Sue Webber, spoke about child poverty and homelessness, and gave harrowing examples of what is happening on the ground in the communities that she represents.

In conclusion, the Scottish Conservatives are determined to seek action on tackling poverty and building a fairer country. The SNP might talk a good game on those issues, but when we scratch beneath the surface, we see that it is failing to secure information and support for so many. During its time in government, poverty levels have remained far too high; the attainment gap between the richest and poorest pupils has remained stubbornly wide and homelessness has increased. There are many other examples, because the SNP continues to prioritise its obsession with independence over anything else.

If the SNP is truly serious about tackling poverty and building a fairer country, it needs to end the division, stop blaming Westminster, use the vast array of powers for welfare that it already has and start to promote and secure funding for local councils. Until that happens, the Government will continue to fail more Scots.

16:54

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid Recovery (John Swinney):

The problem—or one of the many problems—with the speech that Alexander Stewart just made is that it rather ignored the outcome of the election. All of what Mr Stewart said in his contribution to the debate was peddled daily by the Conservative Party in the run-up to the election, but the Conservative Party made not a scrap of progress in the election and the SNP Government was returned with more seats than it had when we went into the election. That, I am afraid, is the blunt, hard reality that the Conservative Party must face and from which it must move on. It just got beaten in the election, and the debate has moved on.

On that note, I welcome Miles Briggs's speech, because Mr Briggs talked about some of the important areas in which we can work together across the political spectrum. I am all for that. I am all for working together on free school meals and on the Scottish child payment, which are important reforms. However, ultimately, such reforms have to be paid for; so, when budget day comes, I will remind Miles Briggs and the Conservative Party of what has been said. I will test them on whether they have engaged substantively in a real discussion about putting in place the money to afford such reforms or whether they have simply treated us to an afternoon of posturing today. That will be the test.

Miles Briggs: In that spirit, will the cabinet secretary acknowledge that both of Scotland's Governments have acted and that the UK Government has provided the Scottish Government with record amounts of money throughout the pandemic, which shows how the Governments can work together and make the changes that we all want to see?

John Swinney: Anyone who has listened to any media interview or exchange in the Parliament in which I have been involved will have heard me say all of that. My point is that, when it comes to agreeing the budget that this Parliament has to put in place to fund our public services, and when it comes to voting for the provisions to be put in place, the Conservatives are posted missing. Miles Briggs is shaking his head, but I am factually correct here. When I was the finance minister, I managed to nudge the Conservatives into voting for our budgets, but they have not done that in recent years because of the posturing that goes on.

Pauline McNeill can perhaps bring some beneficial good will to the process, because she rightly talked about what can be achieved when we work together across the political spectrum with a common purpose. She paid tribute to the work of Mr Griffin, Jeane Freeman and Aileen Campbell, and she talked about engagement with the cabinet secretary. I make it crystal clear on the Government's behalf that, despite my rather blunt remarks to the Conservative Party this afternoon, we are committed to working across the political spectrum to make advances on the issues that we are talking about.

One such issue is the minimum income guarantee, on which we want to establish cross-party dialogue, with expert representation to assist us in the process. The cabinet secretary has secured the participation of Bill Scott, the chair of Scotland's Poverty and Inequality Commission, who has confirmed that the commission will be happy to be a member of the discussion forum, to ensure that its insights are incorporated into that important and ambitious work. All parties will, of course, be invited to be part of that process.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will third sector and civil society organisations be invited to join that group?

John Swinney: That will be the case. I said that the group will have expert representation, and many of the organisations to which Pam Duncan-Glancy is referring are experts in the field. It is vital that we hear their voices and truly learn from all their input. In that atmosphere of cross-party co-operation, the Government will be an active and willing player.

Nevertheless, some hard truths lie at the heart of the debate about poverty, which the Parliament

cannot escape if we are genuinely to address a subject of such seriousness. The Parliament was assisted in its consideration of the issue by the excellent first speeches of my colleagues Natalie Don and Marie McNair. Natalie Don's speech was spirited, graceful and forceful in equal measure, and she brought out the hard truth that what we give out in the child payment Westminster takes away in cuts to universal credit. That is a hard and inescapable truth. The Parliament's widely supported measures to tackle child poverty are being undermined by the steps that the Westminster Government is taking. Natalie Don made a powerful point that the Parliament cannot escape.

I hope that this institution does not feel far away from the real world, but I know from Marie McNair's contribution that she will bring us back to the real world at all times. She made the point that on-going firefighting on these questions is not acceptable. That is why the constitutional debate is relevant and why we must not find ourselves in a position in which we take measures to tackle child poverty but the situation only gets worse because of the actions of the Westminster Government, as Natalie Don said. That is a dichotomy that Scotland has to address, which is why the constitutional issue is relevant to the debate.

The Government welcomes many aspects of the Labour Party's amendment, which was lodged by Pam Duncan-Glancy. However, like Maggie Chapman's amendment, the Labour Party amendment's removal of issues would give us difficulty. There is a welcome development in the Labour Party's position, which was in its manifesto, in that it now recognises the importance of the devolution of employment responsibilities to the Scottish Parliament. Obviously, that is a reform that we, in the Government, have long supported—I argued unsuccessfully for it in the Smith commission—because it is important that the Parliament is able to tackle the issue of fair work, the question of in-work poverty and the effects of working practices that contribute to in-work poverty for individuals. The devolution of that responsibility is vital to enabling the Parliament to fully exercise its responsibilities and to make a positive impact on the lives of individuals in our society. For those reasons, we cannot support Labour's amendment, but we welcome many of its terms and, as the cabinet secretary has made clear, we look forward to engaging in dialogue with all parties, including the Labour Party, on these questions.

Maggie Chapman made a point about the importance of the agenda for tackling poverty being a bold one, and she called for early steps on the doubling of the child payment. I assure members that the Government is looking to

undertake that development as early as we possibly can during this parliamentary session. I thought that Mr Griffin's charge of issues being kicked into the long grass was uncharacteristically uncharitable of him, because we are seized of the need to tackle those issues.

One of the things that characterised the public sector's response to Covid in 2020 was the speed at which public bodies moved to address the human need and the suffering of individuals. It should not take a pandemic to activate all of us to take the necessary steps to solve rough sleeping on our streets in literally a matter of days—let us not forget that that happened in March 2020. The challenge is to identify the ways in which we can emulate that and ensure that swift action is taken to protect the lives and wellbeing of individuals and to tackle poverty in our society.

Business Motion

17:03

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-00287, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a revised business programme for this week.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following revision to the programme of business on Wednesday 9 June 2021—

after

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Seventh Report on the Coronavirus Acts

delete

5.00 pm Decision Time

and insert

5.30 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of consideration of the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 8) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/179), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 19) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/180), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel etc.) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/181), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 20) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/186), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 9) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/191), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 21) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/193), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 22) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/202), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 10) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/204), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel etc.) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/208), and the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 23) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/209), rules 10.1.3(a) and 10.3.3 of Standing Orders be suspended; and

(c) that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 8) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/179), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 19) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/180), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel etc.) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/181), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 20) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/186), the

Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment 9) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/191), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 21) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/193), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 22) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/202), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 10) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/204), the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel etc.) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/208), and the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Restrictions and Requirements) (Local Levels) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 23) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/209) be considered by the Parliament.—
[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs is agreed to, the other amendments will fall. If the amendment in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Maggie Chapman and Alex Cole-Hamilton will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-00263.1, in the name of Miles Briggs, which seeks to amend motion S6M-00263, in the name of Shona Robison, on tackling poverty and building a fairer country, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:05

Meeting suspended.

17:12

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: Members should cast their votes now.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)

Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-00263.1, in the name of Miles Briggs, on tackling poverty and building a fairer country, is: For 28, Against 71, Abstentions 22.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy is agreed to, the amendments in the names of Maggie Chapman and Alex Cole-Hamilton will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-00263.3, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, which seeks to amend motion S6M-00263, in the name of Shona Robison, on tackling poverty and building a fairer country, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)

Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 54, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-00263.4, in the name of Maggie Chapman, which seeks to amend motion S6M-00263, in the name of Shona Robison, on tackling poverty and building a fairer country, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)

Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)

Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 70, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-00263.2, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-00263, in the name of Shona Robison, on tackling poverty and building a fairer country, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Unfortunately, my system crashed. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Balfour. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Carol Mochan wishes to make a point of order online.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am having some

technical problems. I could not vote, but I would have voted yes.

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

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, 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)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)

Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Macro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (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)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-00263.2, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, on tackling poverty and building a fairer country, is: For 26, Against 94, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-00263, in the name of Shona Robison, on tackling poverty and building a fairer country, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer, I could not vote. I had technical issues. I would have voted no.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)

McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysoyl (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)

Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 68, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that tackling child poverty and building a fairer, more equal country should be a national mission for the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and society; acknowledges that action is required across all the drivers of poverty reduction, including delivering fair flexible work, affordable, accessible childcare, sustainable transport options, affordable housing, and reductions in the costs of living; commits to tackling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty and inequality; recognises the impact of UK Government welfare cuts and policies that exacerbate poverty, including the two-child cap, which could remove £500 million from the incomes of families in Scotland; recognises the positive action of the Scottish Child Payment and notes the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland's assessment that removal of the £20 uplift to universal credit will effectively "knock out the benefits that the Scottish Child Payment brings into families", undermining the work and mission of the Scottish Parliament to eradicate child poverty; welcomes the pandemic relief payment scheme, which will provide an essential additional income for families this year; calls on the Scottish Government to introduce a permanent doubling of the Scottish Child Payment at the earliest possible opportunity; notes that a Universal Basic Income would have helped many through the COVID-19 pandemic and calls on the UK and Scottish governments to work together to bring forward pilots at the earliest possible opportunity; commits to exploring funding options to end the benefit cap; urges the UK Government to devolve all employment and social security powers to the Scottish Parliament, in order that it may take the further steps needed to make workplaces fairer, including through payment of the real Living Wage, and to establish a Minimum Income Guarantee, so that everyone has enough income to live a dignified life, and calls on the UK Government to match the ambition of the Scottish Parliament to eradicate child poverty.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Tariff-free Trade Deals

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-00058, in the name of Jim Fairlie, on the impact on Scottish agriculture of tariff-free trade deals. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that agriculture is a vital part of Scotland's economy, including in the Perthshire South and Kinross-shire constituency; believes that it underpins the food and drink sector and has a huge role to play in achieving the country's climate change targets; considers that there might be potential for hugely-damaging consequences to the most remote rural communities from any tariff-free trade with major agricultural producer nations, and notes the view that, in its pursuit of trade deals, the UK Government must take due cognisance of the vulnerability of Scotland's agriculture sectors.

17:30

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer. I finally get the chance to welcome you officially to your new role.

Last week, I met, at its invitation, NFU Scotland to discuss its concerns about the proposed tariff and quota-free deal that is being negotiated between the United Kingdom and Australian Governments. Its briefing paper says that it endorses the commitment that UK farmers should not be undercut by unfair competition and believes that trade deals that include the complete elimination of tariffs across agricultural sectors would seriously impact the farming and the rural communities that it supports.

As the UK Government enters into negotiations on new trade deals with our trading partners around the world, it is important that sensitive sectors are considered. The cumulative impact of complete market liberalisation in future trade deals could be devastating to rural economies that rely on the industry and the jobs that it brings, and once the precedent has been set, it will be difficult to avoid it in any future trade deal.

I have subsequently spoken with representatives of other trade industry bodies including the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association, the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland, the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers, the Scottish Crofting Federation, Scottish Craft Butchers, the Scottish Beef Association, the Blackface Sheep Breeders Association and the National Sheep Association Scotland, as well as numerous farmers in my constituency and across the country. Their excitement at the opportunities of this deal and future deals to be negotiated is palpable—said

absolutely no one who understands or cares about the sector.

In the very late 1800s and early 1900s, farming in this country was almost decimated as America opened up and transport became quicker, easier and cheaper. Grain and meat prices collapsed as the UK Government opted for the liberalisation of markets, and that collapse led to many tenants simply packing up their carts and heading for the towns to try to find work. With the Government insisting that cheap food was the priority, land abandonment and degradation and rural depopulation were commonplace.

The farming sector did not recover until during and after the second world war, when the Government realised that German U-boat attacks on merchant ships would starve Britain into submission. The infrastructure that was needed for an entire industry had been decimated through years of inactivity and loss of skill set, and in order to feed itself, the country had to reinvent its agricultural ability. Thankfully, the farmers and the land girls, facing up to the challenge, did exactly that. A support system has been in place ever since, and as a result of revolutionary technological advances, agriculture has resumed its place as the engine room of Scotland's rural economy and the bedrock of our fastest-growing sector—food and drink.

Despite Liz Truss's protestations in *The Herald*, the industry's very survival is being jeopardised by the proposed trade deal with Australia in exactly the same way as happened with the American and Canadian liberalisation deals almost 100 years ago. The spuriousness of her argument that we in the Scottish National Party are holding back the industry is laughable.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Can the member perhaps indicate when his SNP Government will come forward with an outline of plans for future rural support?

Jim Fairlie: The SNP Government will come forward with a plan for future rural support when it has taken all the information and looked at all the reports that it will get from the five working groups that have been set up to tackle our climate emergency.

As I have said, the spuriousness of Liz Truss's argument that we in the SNP are holding back the industry is laughable. We have heard about the benefits to the whisky industry and how it will be helped by a deal, but how many family farms will benefit from a 5 per cent reduction in tariffs on whisky to Australia? I would hazard to say very few, if any.

It is clear that the Tories are trying to make this debate out to be one of SNP grievance mongering and anti-Westminster rhetoric. In reality, though, it

is not just the SNP that is raising these issues. Indeed, I thank Labour and Green Party members who have signed my motion.

Nor is concern limited to the trade bodies that I have already mentioned. I have been contacted by the WWF, which is gravely worried about the deal's implications and the UK Government's determination to offshore its environmental obligations. The WWF has said:

"In a crucial year for climate and nature, a substandard deal with Australia would make a mockery of the UK government's world-leading plans to support sustainable farming and green global supply chains."

I could go on, but its document is really damning.

Last week, Kate Forbes challenged Murdo Fraser about the devastation that this deal and future trade deals would have on the sector. His response spoke volumes. He cited South Ayrshire Council requiring public procurement bodies to reduce meat consumption by 75 per cent. If that is the best the Tories have got, I am afraid that they really do not understand what is going on with the industry.

To pick up on his point, the real threat is that, if the deal goes through, and if it is followed by all the other shoddily prepared deals, we should recommend that no meat products go on to the menus for our children if they have been imported from any of the hormone-injecting, intensive feed lot system countries that Westminster is currently falling over itself to do deals with.

The total value of sales into the public procurement sector is £150 million. It is a substantial amount of money—I get that—and I will work with the Scottish Government to improve that.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The problem that the SNP has is that it is fundamentally a party that is opposed to free trade. Tell me one example of the SNP voting for a free trade deal with anybody in any Parliament. Give me one example.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give you a wee bit of extra time for the two interventions that you have taken, Mr Fairlie.

Jim Fairlie: Thank you.

The EU. Let me just point out to Mr Kerr—

Stephen Kerr: No! They voted against joining—

Jim Fairlie: Mr Kerr has had his moment—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me. Can we have less chat across the chamber, please?

Jim Fairlie: I am sorry, Presiding Officer, but I could not hear myself for the riot to the side there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I appreciate that, Mr Fairlie. Carry on.

Jim Fairlie: I am referring back to Murdo Fraser's response last week. As I said, the total value of sales into the public procurement sector is £150 million. That is a substantial amount of money, and I will work with the Scottish Government to improve that and see how much more we can get into the public sector—I take that on board. However, that figure is completely dwarfed by our total grocery sales figure of £12 billion in annual spend in Scotland. There is therefore no way that public procurement sales will salve the pain of destroying our domestic market with foreign imports now that the Tories have destroyed our relationship with the biggest single market in the world.

Let us take that a step further. Liz Truss wants to talk about the great trading opportunity that we have been given as a result of their Brexit. Scotland's red meat sales to the EU in 2019, pre-Brexit, were £87 million. In the same year, red meat sales to Australia were £142,000. In other words, we would need to do more than 600 Australia-sized deals just to match what we previously had. To describe that as a major opportunity is utterly laughable.

Scotland's farming community can thrive and meet its climate change targets with the support that the SNP Government is offering. The ambition 2030 strategy is not only hugely ambitious but achievable because of the fantastic co-operative nature that has been built into the sector since 2007, when Richard Lochhead introduced the first national food policy for Scotland—the first one in Europe. I also know that our hospitality sector will have a fantastic future if we continue to build on the reputation that has taken decades to grow.

We will continue to improve the health of our nation and our children by ensuring that they are fed the very best that we can grow and deliver. I point out that 90 per cent of red meat that is currently served in schools is Scotch.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fairlie, could you please bring your remarks to a close?

Jim Fairlie: All of this can, however, be destroyed by the stroke of Boris Johnson's pen, signing trade deals that will take us back to the early 1900s. The Parliament, and everyone in the chamber, including Stephen Kerr, should do everything in our power to see that he does not get the opportunity to destroy what we have worked so hard to build.

17:38

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I welcome you to your new post, Presiding

Officer. It is a bit like wishing people a happy new year—I do not know how long, traditionally, we go on welcoming people, but I certainly welcome you. I also welcome the minister to her new post and the debate.

I thank Jim Fairlie for bringing such an important and topical debate to Parliament. I declare an interest as a member of the NFUS and as someone who has been involved in the farming industry for most of his life.

Agriculture undoubtedly has a critical role in Scotland's economic and environmental wellbeing, employing more than 67,000 people in rural communities such as my Galloway and West Dumfries constituency. Scottish farmers are responsible for delivering the highest-quality food for the Scottish market and the wider United Kingdom market, and their reputation for producing the finest beef and dairy products continues to grow worldwide. Agriculture currently generates £1.3 billion for the Scottish economy. That demonstrates how critical the sector is to all of us.

I welcome the opportunity to recognise Scottish farmers' commitment to tackling climate change while protecting habitats and wildlife through sustainable innovation, management and careful stewardship, which they have championed for many generations.

Naturally, talk of an Australian free trade agreement has sparked fears in our farming businesses. Much of that has again been fuelled by the scaremongering of the SNP. [*Interruption.*] I would like to make some progress.

It seems that, while the NFUS and others engage in discussions on that issue with the UK Government, once again the SNP prefers to make political points rather than to work with all partners to get the best deal for Scottish farmers. What hypocrisy there is—this has been picked up on—when an SNP-controlled council suggests that we reduce meat consumption by 75 per cent. Such misguided messages will have more impact on Scottish farming than any trade deal.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): On collaboration, has the UK Government fulfilled its promise to have a commission that will engage with farmers before it signs any trade deals?

Finlay Carson: I am quite surprised that Gillian Martin does not recognise that the Trade Bill and Agriculture Bill process comes between negotiation of the trade deal and its going through Parliament. That is absolutely there, and it will be part of the process.

It is a fact that none of the trade deals that we are signing around the world will undercut farmers here or, more important, compromise our high

standards. The UK Government has already made it abundantly clear that hormone beef from Australia is banned and will remain so under any trade agreement. It is not the case that a free trade deal will override our standards—far from it, in fact. Those are principally about tariffs and quotas, not chlorinated chicken. I was waiting for that to come up, and it might still do so. That will not be shipped in from America. That is a complete non-starter, because our imports have to meet our existing world-leading quality and standards.

It is unlikely that Australian products will threaten farmers here, especially as there is currently unused lamb quota. Australia could sell us more right now, but it is not doing so. In many cases, the costs of producing lamb are higher in Australia.

Consumers also have a strong belief in the buy Scottish, buy British approach. Eighty-one per cent of beef that is sold in supermarkets such as Aldi, the Co-op and Morrisons is 100 per cent British beef. Just 0.15 per cent of Australian beef exports are currently UK bound. That compares with 75 per cent that finds its way into the Asia-Pacific markets. The prospects of such exports flooding our markets are therefore slim.

Given Quality Meat Scotland's fantastic track record, it is increasingly likely that premium cuts of Scottish meat and lamb will find their way on to Australian plates. Exporters here will have the opportunity to expand into the growing new markets in Asia and the Pacific.

No deal has yet been inked with Australia. Instead of striking unnecessary fear among Scottish farmers, perhaps it would be better if the SNP Government concentrated its efforts on helping farmers.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Can Finlay Carson clarify what he means by others striking fear into the hearts of Scottish farmers when it is Scottish farmers who are expressing fears through the NFUS?

Finlay Carson: Typically, Alasdair Allan is jumping the gun. I am unaware of any trade deal that will be detrimental to our farmers. We are already reinforcing the opinion that the SNP is the party of no deal.

Alongside my colleagues in the Scottish Government and the UK Government, I will continue to consult closely with the farming industry to address its concerns and ensure that it benefits from greater opportunities. It is vital that we protect our iconic Scottish produce. Along with others, I will scrutinise any potential agreement and the trade deal that is yet to be signed. I am confident and have been reassured that the Trade and Agriculture Commission will ensure that

appropriate safeguards are in place in any UK free trade deals. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Finlay Carson is about to conclude.

Finlay Carson: I am sorry that I do not have any time to take an intervention.

The NFU supports the UK's broad objective of promoting free trade and shares my belief and that of the UK Government that free trade deals can open up significant new exporting opportunities for the farming community.

I echo the words of the Secretary of State for International Trade in relation to the potential Australia deal. She welcomed an agreement that

“will strengthen ties between two great friends and democracies bound by a shared belief in free enterprise, fair play and high standards.”

17:45

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Jim Fairlie for moving the motion and I welcome him to the chamber and to his first members' business debate. His motion rightly recognises the importance of Scotland's agriculture sector and therefore the importance of any trade negotiations. Scottish agriculture is the heart of our world-class food and drink industry and, beyond its economic value, is central to the viability of our rural communities. The needs of the sector must therefore be an integral part of any trade deals, and those deals should meet the future ambitions of the sector.

At a time when we must continue to drive up standards, cut emissions, use land more sustainably and improve animal welfare, those ambitions cannot be undermined by trade deals.

When the its Agriculture Bill was passing through Westminster, the UK Government claimed that there was no risk to standards. The sector's fears were dismissed. Legal protections that had been added to the bill by Labour were removed. The proposed trade deal with Australia will be the first test of whether the UK Government's warm words about supporting the agriculture sector were only that.

The rumoured deal with Australia, which would have no quotas, tariffs or real safeguards, will have a devastating impact on the agriculture sector if it is agreed. More than that, it would signify a willingness to sell out agriculture, not only here in Scotland but across the UK, setting an expectation for future trade deals.

No wonder the sector has been united in its condemnation. Scott Walker, the chief executive of NFU Scotland, said:

“To be crystal clear, an Australian free trade agreement, with no tariffs or quotas on sensitive products, will put some Scottish farmers and crofters out of business and set a precedent that all other countries looking for free access to the UK market in the future will be desperate to replicate.”

Stephen Kerr: If there is any truth to the fears that are being talked up by the SNP, and by the member in his speech, why does Australia not currently take up its whole quota for tariff-free trade in lamb? If we are about to experience a tsunami of Australian lamb, why is Australia not taking up its current tariff-free quota? The arguments that are being made against free trade do not add up.

Colin Smyth: It is disappointing that Mr Kerr dismisses the comment that I have just quoted from the NFUS. Donald MacKinnon, chair of the Scottish Crofting Federation, said that unbridled access to our markets would be

“catastrophic for crofting and hill production.”

Perhaps Mr Kerr dismisses that too, along with the words of the UK farming round table, which called for the UK Government to

“stand up for UK farmers in all of its negotiations”

and said that

“demands for a binding, unconditional commitment to fully liberalise tariff lines in these sensitive sectors should be resisted, as should demands for excessive quota concessions which would have the same effect.”

The sector has been clear and unanimous about the damage that such a deal would do to Scottish agriculture, which deserves better than being used as a bargaining chip and sold out at every step of the Brexit process. The UK Government must listen to warnings from the sector and deliver a deal with the necessary safeguards to protect local producers and protect our world-class standards. The trade negotiations are hugely important to Scottish agriculture and our rural communities.

This is not the only post-Brexit challenge that the sector faces. Although it is a hugely important subject, it is a little disappointing that the first debate on agriculture in this session is a members’ business debate on a reserved issue. Many of the issues facing the sector are the responsibility of this Parliament and of the Scottish Government, but we will not have the opportunity to debate those any time soon.

There is a lack of clarity about the changes that the Scottish Government will make to agricultural support during the transition period, which is already under way, and about its long-term plans to replace the common agricultural policy. The report by the farming and food production future policy group seems to be lying on a shelf gathering dust, a full year after it was supposed to be published. We do not know when, how or even if the recommendations of the farmer-led groups

will be taken forward and it is unclear whether the crofting bill, abandoned during the previous session of Parliament, will go ahead in this one.

The clock is ticking towards the end of the transition period and the sector needs answers. I hope that the Scottish Government will make it a priority in this new session to give Parliament and Scotland’s farmers and crofters those overdue answers soon and I hope that, in providing those answers, it will ensure that Scotland’s agriculture sector is an integral part of a post-Brexit, post-CAP, post-pandemic green recovery that delivers a sustainable future for our rural communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Liam McArthur, who is joining us remotely.

17:50

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I know that this evening’s debate is heavily subscribed, so I will keep my remarks brief. However, given the fundamental importance of agriculture to the Orkney community that I have had the privilege of representing for over 14 years, I could not let the opportunity pass without offering a few thoughts from an island perspective.

I offer my congratulations to Jim Fairlie for securing the first members’ business debate of the new parliamentary session. I thank him for choosing to focus on a key issue facing our crofting and farming sectors at the moment. I warmly congratulate my friend Mairi Gougeon on her well-deserved promotion to cabinet secretary. I wish her all the very best and look forward to working with her across a range of issues.

There can be few communities as heavily reliant on agriculture as Orkney, which remains economically and culturally shaped by the sector. It is a major employer and a source of income for the islands but also a huge success story. Orkney’s farmers have earned a reputation for high-quality local produce—beef, lamb and cheese—that is part of a genuinely world-class food and drink sector. That reputation is founded on high standards of animal welfare and environmental impact, which involves a willingness to innovate and constantly look at how things might be done better.

However, such commitment comes at a cost. It should not—and cannot—be done on the cheap. That commitment should be matched by those seeking to compete with UK producers in the UK market. Sadly, as NFU Scotland points out, the risk is that UK farmers could be undercut by unfair competition resulting from trade deals struck by the UK Conservative Government, which include the complete elimination of tariffs across the agriculture sector. That has implications for our efforts to tackle climate change, improve habitats

and protect wildlife, given the farming sector's management and stewardship responsibilities. There are also implications for the prosperity, and even viability, of many rural and island communities across Scotland, which are so dependent on farming.

Understandably, the focus has been on the trade deal struck between the UK and Australia, but the concern is also about the cumulative impact that a succession of such deals might have on jobs and incomes in the sector. Once the precedent has been set, it will be difficult to avoid such tariff-free access in future trade deals. However, by the same token, were we to make clear the need for those exporting to the UK to meet the same stringent welfare and environmental standards that we demand of our own producers, it could help to set a more positive precedent and would certainly reduce the risk of our farmers and crofters being undercut. Meanwhile, as the NFUS has explained, recent deals with Japan and Canada include tariff-relief quotas, which trigger safeguard clauses above certain thresholds. That is particularly relevant in sensitive sectors of primary production. There are options available.

On the theme of meeting high animal welfare standards, I ask Mairi Gougeon to update Parliament today, or before the summer recess, on the latest situation with regard to future plans on regulating live animal transport. The proposals that were issued for consultation by both the UK and Scottish Governments earlier this year caused concern among the farming communities of Orkney and Shetland. To put it bluntly, as framed, the proposed restrictions would close down the livestock industry in the northern isles. That would happen on the basis of no credible evidence that the highest animal welfare standards are not already being met.

Once again, I thank Jim Fairlie for giving Parliament the opportunity to debate such an important subject. I look forward to hearing the speeches of other colleagues, as well as the response of the cabinet secretary.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Liam McArthur for keeping to his time—I make no further comment on that.

Given the number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Jim Fairlie to move the motion.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

17:54

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): As with lunch, free trade is never free. It can bring benefits, but we must not be blind to the costs, complexity, and potential threats. In principle, I support free trade, given that it can drive economic efficiency and productivity, and reduce the likelihood of wars by creating economic interdependence. It can even reduce political corruption, as powerful interest groups have less scope for manipulating trade policies to serve their own ends.

However, there are many potential hazards with the proposed Australia trade deal, many of which have been powerfully stated by my colleague Jim Fairlie. I also anticipate that my other colleagues will deftly deal with the issues, be they around the environment, our ambitions for climate change, food security and standards, animal welfare concerns, the specific nature of Scottish farming, the paltry contribution that the deal brings to UK GDP—at 0.2 per cent—the lack of consultation or the impact on rural economies.

I will focus on the fact that the financial environment in which our farming businesses operate could be changed significantly as a consequence of both Brexit and subsequent new trading arrangements, whether based on free trade or not.

I want to talk to Scottish farm businesses with loans or overdrafts. Commercial lending for business is vastly different from lending for ordinary consumers. For a start, it is not regulated. That means that commercial contracts with banks are treated in law as a contract among equals. In addition to that, most people, including many businesspeople, are of the mistaken view that the servicing of the debt in the form of regular repayments is sufficient. However, most banks reserve the right to call in a debt at any time of their choosing, regardless of whether the debt is being serviced or the business is profitable. Any change in circumstances—and fundamental changes to the marketplace through a trade deal are certainly such a change—can therefore be used by banks to call in loans, which could have a catastrophic consequence for business.

We know from recent experience that banks in the UK have a blemished record of serving small and medium-sized enterprises. Post-2008, many small businesses had their bank loans called in; owners were sequestered, and they lost their livelihoods. Worse is that the UK Treasury and the Tory-Lib Dem Government at that time worked with what was the Royal Bank of Scotland to identify businesses that could be pushed into financial distress and then asset stripped. Other banks had similar approaches and justified their actions based on changed business

circumstances such as changed valuations. I beg to suggest that trade deals also change circumstances and valuations. I therefore simply ask whether any consideration has been given to the possible attitude of banks to the farming community sector. Given the current high lending to agriculture, has the UK Government carried out any form of due diligence to assess the exposure of SME farming businesses to the actions of the banks? I doubt it.

My final point is that few people understand what it means to be a farmer in your community. We have farming in my husband's family, and it is about your standing, your family history, and your fundamental identity. Scottish farmers could be looking down the barrel of huge changes, brought in by a Government that Scotland did not vote for, which is implementing a Brexit policy that Scotland did not vote for—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Thomson is in her last minute.

Michelle Thomson: —and which is pushing for a trade deal without protections, and without consultation, which could do untold damage.

I finish my speech as I started it by saying that free trade is never free. Precisely because of that, we must ensure that Scotland's farming businesses are not unwittingly sacrificed on the altar of Tory Government incompetence.

17:59

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Ractopamine, cloxacillin, and butylated hydroxyanisole—BHA—are just a few of the chemicals that I am concerned about with regard to any trade deal. Those chemicals have been banned across the EU since 1981 on health grounds, with restrictions also placed on imports of hormone-treated beef from third countries.

Ractopamine is a growth hormone used to make cattle, turkeys and pigs leaner before slaughter, and the US dairy industry uses it to increase milk production. Cloxacillin is a veterinary antibiotic growth promoter, which is used in Australia but banned for use in the EU, and butylated hydroxyanisole is a toluene-based antioxidant, which is used in the USA in many products, from crisps to sausages. It is known to be a carcinogen and is banned for use in the EU.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in this vital debate and I congratulate my colleague Jim Fairlie on securing it. I am concerned about the impact of trade deals on Scottish agriculture. I am also concerned about the drugs that are used on animals.

Finlay Carson: Will the member say where exactly food health and safety requirements are

included in a trade deal? Is it not the case that those and other issues are embedded in United Kingdom legislation and form no part of a trade deal?

Emma Harper: Wow—I cannae believe that the member even asks me about that. The trade deals that are being negotiated need to take stock of the production processes for the produce that will be shipped to this country. It is—[*Interruption.*] I am hearing yitterin from the sidelines, but I want to talk about the growth hormones and antibiotics that are used in the production of American, Brazilian and Australian meat, which Food Standards Scotland deems unsuitable for use here in Scotland.

Finlay Carson: Will the member give way?

Emma Harper: I will give way only if Finlay Carson can give me a 100 per cent guarantee that no food produce that contains growth hormones and antibiotics will come into this country as a result of the trade deal from his Government in Westminster.

Finlay Carson: I ask the member again: where in any trade deal do chlorinated chicken and hormone-treated beef come up? Such things are dealt with in an altogether separate manner and form no part of a trade deal. Will the member point me to any trade deal in which conditions such as she is talking about are applied?

Emma Harper: I am concerned that any conditions that are applied in the trade deal will open the door to future trade deals that present risks for our food supply chain. I know about antimicrobial resistance; I know about damage to people's kidneys because we are on the last line of antibiotics. If we do not need to be concerned about the products that I am talking about, maybe we should ask ourselves why they have been banned in the EU since 1981.

The issue is vital to the future prosperity of our industry and the health and security of our nation, and my view is shared by NFU Scotland.

Jim Fairlie: Does the member agree that the problem with the trade deal is that it will set a precedent for future trade deals and that the Americans have already said that there will be no such things as labelling, country of origin and differentiation in the trade deal that they will bring forward—[*Interruption.*]

Stephen Kerr: Well, we will not get one, then.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, Mr Kerr. We must have only one speaker when a member is on their feet. Is that you finished with your question, Mr Fairlie?

Jim Fairlie: I was asking whether the member agreed with me. I was interested to hear Mr Kerr

telling us that there will be no trade deal. We will hold the Conservatives to that.

Emma Harper: I am interested in what Jim Fairlie is saying. It is also interesting that the Food and Drug Administration in America has a handbook of acceptable levels of defects—the “Food Defect Levels Handbook”—which allows for a maximum level of, for example, rat poo in produce. There is no equivalent in Europe. Conservative members are rolling their eyes at all this, but why does the FDA have a book that sets acceptable levels of mites, dust, insect parts and mammalian excreta in food? That is what we can expect if we move towards the trade deals that the Conservatives envisage.

There are animal welfare issues, too. I am really concerned about how we move forward. I want to stand up for our Scottish farmers and for the safety of the food that we eat. We need to protect our farmers in Scotland; the Government in Westminster is not doing so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Beatrice Wishart is joining us remotely.

18:04

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate. Members will not be surprised that I will focus my initial comments on my constituency, Shetland.

Crofting and fishing are the traditional economic and cultural backbones of Shetland. Agricultural businesses in the islands are often small, low impact and high quality. We should thank and support local food businesses for the high quality food that they continue to produce throughout the pandemic.

The increase in the trade of sheep and cattle from the northern isles to the mainland indicates that the quality of the produce and the industry’s high welfare standards are trusted. Supporting rural local businesses is vital—especially post Covid—because they are often disproportionately hammered by Government regulation and the general additional higher costs of island living. The recent consultations on live animal transport are a case in point and could have a devastating effect on the islands—in fact, some in Shetland express the view that the proposals could kill off crofting completely. The agriculture industry has high animal welfare standards, and we want to keep it that way.

Crofters and farmers are committed to sustainable innovation, management and stewardship. Shetland wool week is one such innovation. It celebrates Britain’s most northerly native sheep, Shetland’s textile industry and the rural farming community in the islands. Shetland

wool—from fleece to textile products—has a reputation for quality, strength and excellence. In the past decade or so, Shetland wool week has grown into an internationally acclaimed event of exhibitions, demonstrations and classes; it draws hundreds of visitors to Shetland from all over the world for one week in the autumn. It is a phenomenal success for the whole community.

The NFUS briefing shows that the agriculture sector employs more than 67,000 people, resulting in £1.3 billion for the Scottish economy. Not only does sustainable food production have a positive impact on rural communities; it impacts the whole country’s supply chain. We cannot allow our crofters and farmers to be undercut by unfair competition and tariffs, and imports must uphold high standards of welfare.

My input to the debate may have been brief, but I hope that that does not lessen the points that I have made about the significant contribution and value to Scotland of the agriculture sector and the people who work in it. We must protect it.

18:07

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I thank Jim Fairlie for bringing a debate to Parliament about this important subject so early on in his time as an MSP.

Crofters in the agriculturally least-favoured parts of Scotland, such as my island constituency, are very aware of the words of the former UK Tory Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Andrea Leadsom, who said:

“It would make so much more sense if those with the big fields do the sheep and those with the hill farms do the butterflies.”

The UK Government seems to be convinced that ad hoc trade deals with individual countries are an adequate answer to that and an adequate replacement for the European single market, which, as Mr Fairlie rightly pointed out, is a vast free trade area from which the UK chose to remove itself.

Stephen Kerr: Does the member refer to an earlier intervention that I made on Jim Fairlie? I asked him the same question that I will ask you: when we were members of the European Union, which trade deal with the European—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, please address your comments through the chair.

Stephen Kerr: I beg your pardon. Which trade deal that the EU struck when the UK was a member of it did the SNP support in the past 20 years? Can the member give one example of a free trade deal that the SNP has supported?

Alasdair Allan: I hate to be unoriginal, but Mr Fairlie's example is the best one of all: the European Union and the European single market, which I just mentioned, were supported by us and inexplicably rejected by Stephen Kerr's party.

In those circumstances, we want to pursue good trading relationships with other countries, but it is significant that some of the countries that we are talking about pursuing those trade deals with would enjoy tariff-free access when many of the countries with which we were most closely associated in the past would enjoy no such relationship in the future.

Crofters and farmers are entitled to ask what that means for them. What safeguards—if any—will the deals include for domestic agriculture? Concerns have been expressed about the country's market being swamped by cheap food imports.

On another point, why has the proposed trade and agriculture commission for examining such deals not yet been set up—as I understand it? Are we really saying that countries in Europe that have broadly similar standards on animal welfare, the use of hormones and environmental impacts—to mention a minimum wage for farm workers, although I am not sure whether the Conservatives are entirely signed up to that—should pay tariffs? Why should those countries pay tariffs while countries that may be unconstrained by any of those factors have tariff-free access to our supermarkets?

The point that I think that the Conservatives have missed in this debate is how agriculture in Scotland could compete in the long term on price in a situation of that kind without severely changing or compromising standards. We might begin with Australia, but what do we do if such a deal is then reached with major food producers such as Brazil, whose environmental and other standards are so unlike our own as to raise even bigger concerns? *[Interruption.]*

If I may, I will make some progress. We have heard in the debate from the Conservatives that somehow others are planting fears in the minds of farmers. The NFUS put it this way:

“As it stands, this trade deal will cause serious issues to the future of Scottish farming and set a precedent for other trade deals, which would further undermine the sector.”

However, if the Conservatives think that that is bad, they might wish to look at what the Scottish Crofting Federation said:

“We have a very high quality product that simply cannot compete in a market flooded with lower-price meat. That the UK government is even giving consideration to a completely unacceptable deal is despicable.”

I will finish with those words from the Scottish Crofting Federation, given that it has grasped the

situation much more clearly and expressed it more eloquently than—I regret to say—our Conservative colleagues have this evening.

18:12

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank Jim Fairlie for bringing the debate to the chamber.

My constituency of East Lothian is often referred to as the breadbasket of Scotland. It includes high-yield and high-quality land that employs many people in the county. Farming is the heartbeat of our rural community. East Lothian has more than 180 farms, with a mix of arable farms, dairy farms, pig farms, upland farms, soft-fruit farms and vegetable farms. Thousands of people are employed in the sector, which supports direct farm work. There are also many suppliers of feed, agricultural equipment and support services.

In the past two years, farmers have had to deal with the disaster that is Brexit, which of course Scotland voted against and discussions on which our ministers were unable even to attend. The meat and dairy sectors reported a dramatic fall in EU exports in the first quarter, with falls of 59 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively. As Scotland Food & Drink's James Withers said:

“There's no sugar-coating these statistics, they are grim.”

The EU settlement scheme was another disaster waiting to happen for the farming industry. George Jamieson, the NFUS education and skills policy manager, said:

“Keeping good workers makes good business sense for farmers.”

Their knowledge, experience and skills are long-term investments that are hard to replace and are essential for modern farming.

Then, along came the news of the proposed tariff-free trade deal with Australia, and of discussions being under way with New Zealand. We have heard a few members in the debate quote the NFUS. The NFUS president, Martin Kennedy, said:

“Scotland's beef, dairy, sheep and grain sectors are particularly”

at risk, and that the NFUS believes that the deal could risk

“the future viability of the farming sector.”

He said that the trade deal, as it stands, will cause serious issues for the future of Scottish farming.

Finlay Carson: Does Mr McLennan support the Trade and Agriculture Commission, as the NFUS does, which sets out to ensure that farmers do not face unfair competition and that our high animal welfare and food standards will not be undermined?

Paul McLennan: The NFUS has said that there was no consultation whatsoever with it on the trade deal, so it is hypocrisy to talk about it as Mr Carson has. There was no consultation with the NFUS at all on that deal.

NFU Scotland has called for four points—which I think have been mentioned before—to be considered in discussions. The first is recognition of the sensitivities of primary production sectors. We have seen deals being made with Japan and Canada that include tariff-relief quotas, which trigger safeguard clauses above certain thresholds. They should be adopted in future deals in order to secure the future of those sectors.

Secondly, negotiations should not put the farming sector at risk. Continued sustainable food production and its positive impacts on communities should be secured.

Thirdly, high standards of production should be upheld. Imports must meet our high standards of production, and trade policy and domestic policy should work to underpin those standards.

The final point is important. It is that positive precedents that support Scottish farmers should be established. Commitments in areas including animal welfare and climate change will make it far easier in the future to secure similar commitments with other parties. Likewise, total market liberalisation will be hard to avoid in future deals if it is awarded in the first UK free trade agreement that is negotiated.

Consumers in Scotland already enjoy some of the most affordable food in the world, which is produced to the highest standards. Scotland's voice is once again being ignored by a UK Tory Government that, frankly, does not care.

We cannot sacrifice rural employment. The prosperity of rural areas in East Lothian and across Scotland, and our high standards, should not be jeopardised for the sake of a face-saving deal. I pledge to farmers in East Lothian that I will not sit back and watch Tories damage the farming businesses and our rural economy in the county. It is time that the Scottish Conservatives broke their silence and stood up for jobs in East Lothian and across Scotland.

18:16

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I welcome Màiri McAllan to her role.

Farmers in Argyll and Bute are very concerned about the precedent that the hastily negotiated tariff-free trade deal between the UK and Australia sets. It was agreed even before the Trade and Agriculture Commission had been set up to scrutinise the economic impact of such deals.

The deal places consumers above producers. Farmers across my constituency work hard to produce top-quality cattle and sheep, and they are central to the communities in which they live. However, as Duncan Macalister, who is chair of NFU Scotland's Argyll and the Islands region, said to me yesterday, farmers

"are price takers, not price makers."

Michelle Thomson: Does Jenni Minto agree with the statement by Dr Morita-Jaeger, who is a senior research fellow at the University of Sussex, in which she points out that there is a wider issue that is not just about the producers? Dr Morita-Jaeger said:

"What is worrying on a much broader point is that the UK Government is pushing ahead with a trade deal without any public discussion about what trade policy, what kind of economy and what kind of national food production they are pursuing, if there is any strategy at all."

Jenni Minto: Yes, I agree with that. Farming is about more than simply food production—it is also about what it does for the community, including children going to schools and supporting health services and local shops.

Living on Islay, I am surrounded by land that is carefully cultivated and stewarded by farmers. That cultivation has been going on for centuries. The 1799 *Statistical Account* records that

"The rearing of cattle is a principal object with the gentlemen of Islay, who have the merit of having brought the Islay cattle to vie with the best of their neighbours at market ... they are carried by drovers to Dumbarton and Falkirk, and even to England".

Islay cattle continue to be of very high quality, with yearlings being sold to the mainland for finishing. A sale at Bridgend mart can yield up to £1 million. Highland cattle are established on the less favourable moorland and produce meat that contains more protein and iron and less fat. They are managed by farmers and their families who are integral to the island's economy and community, as they are the length and breadth of Argyll and Bute.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Jenni Minto: No, I would like to continue.

In Argyll and Bute, there are 1,944 farms, which employ more than 2,600 people. However, with one quick signature, as Jim Fairlie's motion says, the tariff-free trade deal could lead to "hugely-damaging consequences" for Scotland's most remote and rural communities.

On Sunday, I met Scott Mclellan, whose family have farmed at Kilchiaran on Islay for generations. His farm is possibly as remote and rural as it is possible to be. The farm is situated atop cliffs on the rugged west coast of Islay, where Scott farms a mix of sheep and cattle. The farm has a

distinctive almost 200-year-old round steading. As Jim Fairlie said, farming has history, and it flourishes through continuity. If broken, that continuity of effort and success might be impossible to repair. *[Interruption.]*

I am sorry—I will not take an intervention.

Scott Mclellan told me that the Australian farmers have a couple of advantages over Scottish hill farmers: scale and breadth of market. The Asian market will buy every cut of the Australian farmer's beast, while Scottish farmers make their profit on the prime cuts, because there is little or no market for offal. He accepts that it might take time for the Australian agriculture sector to shift to increase its sales to the UK market, but his real concern is about the much closer and bigger markets of the United States, Brazil and Argentina.

That worry was repeated by Duncan Macalister. He told me:

"We don't know what the future will hold, but cheaper produce will arrive in our supermarkets, and sadly, though people want to shop local, they shop with money and not their hearts".

Jim Fairlie's motion ends by asking that the UK Government take notice of the vulnerability of Scotland's agriculture sectors. That request is whole-heartedly supported by the farmers of Argyll and Bute.

I will finish by quoting a Scot who emigrated to the United States. The Rev John Witherspoon, speaking in 1776 about American independence, said in his heavy Scots burr:

"Sir, in my judgement the country is not only ripe for the measure but is in danger of rotting for the want of it".

I suggest that, 245 years later, that is the situation in the country of his birth.

18:21

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): I congratulate Jim Fairlie on being the first MSP to secure a members' debate in this session. It is on such an important subject—not just for the economy of rural Scotland, but for the public health and wellbeing of the people who live across Scotland in rural and urban areas. This is about the food that we eat; it is about what our bairns put in their bellies as much as it is about the livelihoods of their parents and the communities in which they live.

The debate is also about the environment of the country that they live in—as Mr Fairlie's constituency predecessor Roseanna Cunningham knew all too well from her role as Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform. For years after the Brexit vote, she argued vociferously that if the food that we eat is

not grown here, we not only offshore our carbon emissions, but have no control over the welfare of the animals involved. The land management of Scotland, which is key to our becoming a net-zero nation, becomes a real and pressing issue. Members should make no mistake: not only are our Scottish farmers the people behind the quality of our food, they are the custodians of the land and are key to the health of that land, to our livestock welfare and to our net-zero ambition.

Straight after the Brexit vote—*[Interruption.]* I will not take an intervention; I need to make progress.

Straight after the Brexit vote I was at the Turriff show, meeting NFUS colleagues at a round table with politicians, as we did every summer before the pandemic. Tariff-free deals with places including New Zealand, Australia, the US and South America was the hot topic then. We had just had a snap general election in which Tory MPs had been voted in across my area, with promises of a land of plenty for agriculture. The farmers of the north-east were already very nervous, because promises were being diluted even then.

Michael Gove was there; I remember one particular farmer warning him that the north-east farming community might have lent the Tories their votes this time, but woe betide them if they let farmers down. Characteristically, Mr Gove spoke lots of nice-sounding words by way of response, much like he did on Channel 4 News when he promised that Brexit would benefit farmers, but his assurances were demonstrably untrue. The zero-tariff trade deal with the meat producers of Australia will, if it goes ahead, rip the guts out of the livestock industry in the north-east, much as it will make farmers uncompetitive, as Alasdair Allan mentioned.

Farmers are angry, and rightly so. The agricultural lobby group Save British Farming has relaunched itself in response to concerns about the impact of the Australia deal. Its chairperson said that the deal is an

"existential threat to British farming".

Martin Kennedy of the NFUS, who has already been quoted in the debate, has pointed to another worry that has been raised today: the lack of consultation with the sector.

Finlay Carson: Gillian Martin talks about how we need to have confidence in farmers and the importance of food and climate change. However, she will know from her time as convener of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee that Chris Stark raised concerns months ago about the Scottish Government's lack of progress. The farming and food production future policy group's document was supposed to have been published last June. Is it good or bad

for farming communities and rural communities that the Scottish Government is still dithering over the future of rural payments?

Gillian Martin: The term “whatabootery” comes to mind. I must commend Finlay Carson, who has been given his instructions to defend the trade deal with Australia. I know that he is finding it really difficult to do so—but my goodness, he is putting in a right good shift today. Well done.

However, I am not going to move on to another topic altogether. I will continue to quote Martin Kennedy, who said:

“While some additional market access and tariff liberalisation is expected in this post-Brexit era, all deals must be properly scrutinised and ratified to avoid any risks to the future viability of the farming sector.

Rushing through a trade deal without the promised statutory Trade and Agriculture Commission in place prior to the deal being concluded ... sets a damaging precedent”.

Mr Carson seems to think that the commission is in place, but it is not. The deal also came as a surprise to Minette Batters, who said:

“it is wholly irresponsible for the government to sign a trade deal with no tariffs or quotas on sensitive products and which therefore undermines our own domestic economy and food production industry.”

It appears that the answer to my farming constituent who warned Mr Gove a couple of years ago is now much clearer: we cannot trust the Tories with Scottish agriculture.

Jim Fairlie was quite right to bring the issue to the chamber for debate. I will stand with him, my colleagues and Scottish farmers to demand that this vital part of our economy, and of the health of our food and land, is protected.

Jim Fairlie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I omitted to say at the start of my speech that I am still a member of the NFUS, despite the fact that I no longer farm.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Fairlie—that is now on the record.

I call Màiri McAllan to wind up the debate. I advise the chamber that this is Màiri McAllan’s first speech to our Parliament.

18:26

The Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): Thank you very much, Presiding Officer.

As others have done, I congratulate Jim Fairlie on securing this important members’ business debate. Well done to him for consulting so widely with Scotland’s agricultural stakeholders, which has been sadly missing from the UK Government’s approach. I thank all the members who have stayed to contribute to the debate.

Members from all corners of Scotland and all parties—except the Tory members—have voiced their concerns.

I declare an interest as someone who lives on a beef and sheep hill farm and whose partner’s family has lived and worked there for more than 100 years.

If the Presiding Officer will allow me, as this is my first speech in the chamber as a newly elected MSP, I would like to briefly mention my constituency. I believe that Clydesdale, from Elvanfoot in the south to East Kilbride in the north, is the most beautiful constituency in Scotland. One of the things that make it so is its natural environment and the ample agricultural land, which, as my colleagues Jenni Minto and Gillian Martin have pointed out, is so dutifully tended by our farmers. We know that that is a key part of our tourism offer, but, of course, we principally value Scotland’s farmers and crofters because of the work that they do in producing healthy, delicious food that has an international reputation for high animal welfare and environmental standards, and which is increasingly produced via sustainable methods.

Before I move on to trade, it is important that I reiterate the context that we are working in here and the extent to which Scotland, which rejected Brexit, is suffering because of it. Scotland’s farmers cannot export seed potatoes to the EU, there are restrictions on importing honey bees, there are problems with exporting meat, and the historical trade of goats and sheep between Scotland and Northern Ireland has ended without notice. I am afraid that, as my colleague Paul McLennan pointed out, that is evidence enough that the UK Government does not support Scotland’s farmers.

It seems that, just as the UK Government was content to let down Scotland’s fishing industry on trade, it is preparing to do the same on agriculture, because—make no mistake—any tariff-free trade deal will have a devastating effect on Scotland’s farmers and producers. I make it clear that the Scottish Government deeply regrets that we have been taken out of the EU against our will, and it is our intention that we should rejoin as an independent nation.

Despite that, we accept the need to develop free trade agreements in the meantime. The Government wants Scotland’s trade—including with Australia—to increase. Australia is our 14th-largest export market, which, in 2018, was valued at £680 million. We are keen to go further, and we have committed to increasing Scotland’s trade to 25 per cent of GDP by 2019. However, those gains must never come at the expense of our farmers, our food producers and our precious

natural environment and world-leading climate ambition.

As Michelle Thomson pointed out, the UK Government's own scoping assessment concluded that a UK-Australia FTA would benefit UK GDP by a mere 0.02 per cent, while Brexit will lead to a 4.9 per cent contraction in UK GDP over the same 15-year period. It is therefore no wonder that we are questioning why the UK Government is pursuing the deal and are calling for it to explain how it will protect sensitive sectors and the jobs and livelihoods connected to them.

We are not alone. This is not, as some Conservative members suggest, SNP scaremongering. The Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland Executive have also voiced concerns, as have Scotland's farmers and environmental groups. Like Liam McArthur, I am concerned about the precedent that this would set for future agreements.

It is greatly concerning that the Scottish Government has been denied any involvement in crucial negotiations. We have consistently made the case for a guaranteed role for this Government and this Parliament in all stages of the development of trade agreements. UK ministers have repeatedly refused to accept that we have a legitimate interest in these matters. Our engagement is limited to what the UK Government chooses to share with us and does not include detail about tariff and market access offers or of what is on, or off, the table. We have had no information about safeguards for the industries that will be affected by the proposals.

Decisions on agricultural tariffs and quotas cut across all areas of devolved competence and have direct implications for our economy, as members from all parties have eloquently pointed out. It is unacceptable that we are not fully involved and that the United Kingdom Internal Market Act, 2020 which this Parliament rejected, could prevent us from upholding the high standards for food and animal welfare for which Scotland is renowned.

The Scottish Government and the farming community believe that there are, as yet, no meaningful safeguards in place to prevent our farmers from being undercut by cheaper and lower-standard products. Finlay Carson made a point to Emma Harper about the role of standards in trade deals. I am sure that he knows that it is possible to include equivalence mechanisms in those deals. However, either that is not being done or we do not know if it is being done. As Colin Smyth pointed out, the Conservative Party disagreed to Labour Party amendments that would have enshrined the protection of standards in trade deals. The Conservatives refuse to accept that.

The Scottish Government has been consistently clear. All imports of Australian agrifood must be produced to standards that are equivalent to those in Scotland. Any increase in imports must be managed by tariff rate quotas. Our farmers, and our world-leading climate action, demand that and it must be a priority. Any deal must not be agreed simply for political reasons—we know that that would not be financially viable. We will continue liaising with the devolved Administrations and the farming sector and will press for an urgent change in position.

I make a call again to the UK Government. First, I ask it to respond to a letter sent by my colleague, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, three weeks ago, to which we have had no response. I call for a rethink that will protect farmers across the UK and prioritise our natural environment and I call on it to engage with us, so that the Scottish Government and members from across the chamber can do what we were elected to do: represent the people of our country and build a future for Scotland that is based on our values and priorities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:33.

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