



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Thursday 16 September 2021

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

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

Thursday 16 September 2021

CONTENTS

	Col.
GENERAL QUESTION TIME	1
Ambulance Cover (Mid Scotland and Fife).....	1
ScotRail (Proposed Timetable Changes).....	3
Air Passenger Numbers.....	4
Publicly Owned Energy Company.....	5
Managed Quarantine (Costs).....	6
National Health Service Dentistry (Backlog).....	7
FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTION TIME	9
Scottish Ambulance Service (Waiting Times).....	9
Scottish Ambulance Service (Waiting Times).....	14
Brexit (Food and Farming Import Checks).....	17
Older People (Impact of Pandemic).....	18
University of Dundee (Industrial Action).....	19
Scottish Qualifications Authority (Appeals).....	19
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Orkney).....	20
Ferguson Marine.....	20
Scottish Ambulance Service (Waiting Times).....	21
Hospitals (Suspension of Treatments and Elective Surgery).....	22
Single-crewed Ambulances.....	23
26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties.....	23
Cyberattacks (Public Bodies).....	24
Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (Targets).....	25
COMMUNITY JOBS SCOTLAND	28
<i>Motion debated—[Miles Briggs].</i>	
Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con).....	28
Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP).....	31
Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con).....	32
Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab).....	34
Foysol Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab).....	35
The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead).....	37
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	40
EDUCATION AND SKILLS	40
Education Agencies (Recruitment).....	40
Climate Change (Information and Resources for Schools).....	42
Skills and Labour Shortages (Brexit).....	43
School Leavers (Impact of Pandemic).....	44
Outdoor Education.....	45
Upper-secondary Education Student Assessment.....	46
Children with Additional Support Needs (Support for Schools).....	48
Mental Health in Schools Working Group.....	50
FAIRER AND MORE EQUAL SOCIETY	52
<i>Motion moved—[Shona Robison].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Miles Briggs].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Pam Duncan—Glancy].</i>	
The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison).....	52
Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con).....	58
Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab).....	63
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD).....	67
Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP).....	70
Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con).....	72
Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP).....	75
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab).....	77
Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP).....	79
Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	81

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP)	83
Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green)	86
Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)	88
Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con)	90
Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)	93
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)	95
Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP).....	97
Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab).....	100
Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con)	103
The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville).....	105
SOCIAL SECURITY (UP-RATING OF BENEFITS) BILL	110
<i>Motion moved—[Ben Macpherson].</i>	
DECISION TIME	111

Scottish Parliament

Thursday 16 September 2021

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:41]

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good morning. I remind members that Covid-related measures are in place and that face coverings should be worn when members are moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

The first item of business is general question time.

Ambulance Cover (Mid Scotland and Fife)

1. **Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the level of ambulance cover across Mid Scotland and Fife. (S6O-00157)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Cover across Fife from today until month end is an average of 92.44 per cent. Additional resources are planned and added as required; for example, there will be two additional shifts in Fife tomorrow and similar resources will be added across the weekend. That will be further supplemented with overtime, as uptake will continue to grow throughout the month. Recently, cover has been 94.2 per cent, and in Fife specifically it has been more than 92.6 per cent.

Through £20 million of investment, we have supported the Scottish Ambulance Service to recruit an additional 296 front-line staff. In Fife, that will equate to an additional 442 double crewed ambulance hours every week. Nationally, the Scottish Ambulance Service, as we all know, is experiencing extraordinary demand, and the national health service faces significant challenge as a result.

Despite the pressure that coronavirus has brought on our Ambulance Service, which serves some of the most rural areas in the United Kingdom, in 2020-21, crews responded to more than 70 per cent of the highest priority calls in under 10 minutes, and to more than 99 per cent in under 30 minutes.

Murdo Fraser: Constituents were raising concerns with me about the level of ambulance cover, particularly in rural areas, even before the Covid pandemic, and it is clear that the situation is now much more serious, despite the efforts of all ambulance staff. This morning's newspaper

headlines make grim reading, with people now dying as a result of ambulance delays. It has become a national crisis. When will the cabinet secretary get a grip on the issue before more lives are needlessly lost?

Humza Yousaf: I agree with Murdo Fraser not just about the scale of the challenge but about the fact that the newspapers—and not just today—make grim reading, as do a number of cases that members have raised. He will not get a defence from me of some of those unacceptable waiting times, and the Ambulance Service is also aware of that situation. However, I assure Murdo Fraser that no one is sitting on their hands, and that is why we have invested that additional £20 million. Ambulance staff, such as paramedics and technicians, have been recruited, including in the north and east regions, and more staff will come on board during the winter months.

With Parliament's approval, I plan to come forward on Tuesday with a further parliamentary statement that will give details of the other actions that we are looking to bring forward to help the Ambulance Service in remote and rural areas and right across the country. Of course, any member can send me the details of specific cases that they would like me to look at as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Staff morale is at rock bottom now. Staff are feeling inordinate pressure and, to be frank, this investment comes far too late. Murdo Fraser is right—the problems were evident before the pandemic. I need to understand from the cabinet secretary why those decisions about investment and staff recruitment were not made years ago when they should have been.

Humza Yousaf: I am happy to provide Willie Rennie with further detail. That investment is from years ago; it started 18 months ago, at the very beginning of the pandemic. He seems to be shaking his head, but I am happy to provide him with that detail. We are now beginning to see that recruitment come through the pipeline, because that investment was made a while back.

Willie Rennie is absolutely right to continue to raise the issue of morale. That is why we have the staff wellbeing hub. I know that Unite the union has raised some issues about morale, and I am more than happy to speak to it, and to take ideas wherever they come from about what more can be done to help morale in the Ambulance Service. Staff morale will continue to be important and we will continue to invest in the Ambulance Service. I hope that on Tuesday, with Parliament's approval, I can give further details on some of the other actions that we are looking to bring forward during this challenging phase.

ScotRail (Proposed Timetable Changes)

2. Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what its position is on the proposed timetable changes set out by ScotRail in its fit for the future consultation. (S6O-00158)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): As Mark Ruskell points out, ScotRail is conducting a public consultation on the proposed May 2022 timetable, which closes on 1 October. I encourage everyone with an interest to make their views known.

The proposed timetable would operate 100 services more than the current pandemic timetable, which responded to changed travel patterns. ScotRail is of the view that the vast majority of customers will find either that there is no change to their current service or that their service improves, with a more regular interval between services, and so more trains being set. However, I recognise that there are some localised concerns about the proposed timetable. I encourage the public and members of Parliament to make their views known through the consultation.

Mark Ruskell: ScotRail's proposed new timetable will result in some unacceptable cuts in services and extensions to journey times that will impact people particularly in Stirling, Dunblane, Perth and Kirkcaldy. I have been actively encouraging residents to share their views with ScotRail as part of the consultation. Later this month, I will host a meeting with constituents to better understand how those changes will impact them. Does the minister agree that any significant changes in rail services must be made only after real and meaningful consultation with rail users? Does he agree that ScotRail should accept my invitation to meet rail users, to ensure that their voices are heard?

Graeme Dey: I very much commend Mark Ruskell for the approach that he is taking to the matter and, yes, I would encourage ScotRail to engage. As I think that I have said before, I have never seen draft proposals contained in a consultation that are flawless or could not be improved on. However, I would say gently to Mark Ruskell that timetables are complex creatures. When you revisit them, it is not as simple as restoring or tweaking component parts. He has concerns, as he has noted, about the impacts on, for example, Perth and Kirkcaldy. However, Invergowrie and Gleneagles in his region benefit greatly from the proposed changes. Unpicking some of the planned alterations could undermine those gains.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):

Does the minister plan to keep the timetable cuts when ScotRail is nationalised?

Graeme Dey: As I have pointed out, this is a gain of 100 services over the present timetable. Timetables evolve, as Mr Simpson knows. The whole point of this is to gradually build back and, in doing so, to recognise the emerging travel patterns that we will see as people's return-to-work arrangements and leisure activities become more apparent. This is a baseline from which we can build and align the services with the needs of the travelling public.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): Will the minister provide information on any benefits that would arise from the draft proposals that are being considered under the proposed timetable changes that are set out in ScotRail's fit for the future consultation?

Graeme Dey: I have already touched on Invergowrie and Gleneagles as examples of places that would benefit from the proposals, and Dumfries is another, but I also recognise that there are areas that feel aggrieved about the proposals. That is why it is important that everyone engages in the consultation.

Air Passenger Numbers

3. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported decline in air passengers travelling through Scottish airports. (S6O-00159)

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): In common with airports around the world, Scotland's airports have seen a collapse in demand throughout the pandemic. The restrictions on travel both at home and abroad were necessary to protect public health. Before the pandemic, Scotland was better connected with the rest of the world than ever before and we are actively seeking to recover traffic and secure new routes, while also ensuring safe travel for passengers and airport staff. Of course, in doing that, we have to attempt to do it in a way that reduces carbon emissions from the aviation sector.

Liam Kerr: Aberdeen airport recently reported passenger numbers collapsing by two thirds during 2020, leading to its owner posting pre-tax losses of £131 million. That has had a major impact on the connectivity that the minister referenced, which the north-east—already battered by huge business rates, retail closures and poor transport links—can ill afford. Other Governments have recognised the strategic importance of aviation by putting support packages in place. Will this one?

Graeme Dey: The problem is affecting airports across the United Kingdom. In fact, Aberdeen is

faring better than some of our other domestic airports. Working with a multitude of airlines and with airports, the Transport Scotland aviation team is putting in considerable effort to restore connectivity.

Recognising that you have a lot of questions to get through, Presiding Officer, I will leave it at that, but I offer Mr Kerr the opportunity to meet and go through some of that in detail, if he would find that useful.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): Will the minister set out some of the detail on the work that is being done on route recovery in the air travel sector in Scotland?

Graeme Dey: That work is extensive. It has primarily focused, in the short term, on reconnecting with North America—Canada, in particular—but the aviation team is working actively in other areas for wider route recovery. Again, if Siobhian Brown has a particular interest in the matter I am more than happy to meet and talk her through the detail.

Publicly Owned Energy Company

4. Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its proposals to establish a publicly owned energy company that will generate and supply energy. (S6O-00160)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): As set out in our manifesto earlier this year and in my written response in June, we will focus Government efforts on a dedicated national public energy agency to adapt to the scale and nature of decarbonising 1 million homes and 50,000 non-domestic buildings by 2030. That will provide the co-ordination required to accelerate delivery of transformative change in which almost every building in Scotland will switch to zero-carbon heating. It will lead on educating the public on required changes and provide financial and non-financial support and expert advice to national and local government to deliver that unprecedented project.

Dean Lockhart: We have gone from having an energy company that would actually generate and supply energy at lower cost to having a virtual agency with no additional budget, staff or resource, as confirmed by the cabinet secretary to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee earlier this week. The cabinet secretary tells us that that virtual agency, which is probably a website, with no additional staff or resources is a better answer and a better way to address the challenges of climate change and fuel poverty. Does the cabinet secretary agree with stakeholders that the failure to establish a publicly

owned energy company has been a complete policy failure?

Michael Matheson: The challenges that we face have changed very significantly over the past couple of years. With the publication of our updated climate change plan and the significant statutory targets that we now face in meeting our climate change commitments, we require to decarbonise domestic and non-domestic heating systems at a considerable rate over the next eight to nine years. The key to achieving that objective, and to doing so effectively, is to co-ordinate the action that will be necessary, which is exactly what a public agency will be able to do.

Alongside that, we are also exploring the provision of heat as a service. We consulted on that earlier in the year and we are considering how that service could be delivered through a public energy company, which could support us in taking co-ordinated action and tackling issues such as climate change and fuel poverty.

Managed Quarantine (Costs)

5. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what support it can provide to people undertaking managed quarantine at Scottish airports who are unable to afford the costs but not in receipt of any welfare benefits. (S6O-00161)

The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport (Michael Matheson): International travellers who do not receive qualifying welfare benefits can contact Corporate Travel Management, the United Kingdom Government's travel agent, to access a deferred payment plan. That plan is available only to UK residents and students with visas to study in the UK, and needs to be paid back in 12 monthly instalments. The Scottish Government has additional hardship measures in place beyond those of the UK Government. If a person who resides in Scotland meets appropriate criteria and is unable to repay the debt, the Scottish Government will fully cover the cost of hotel quarantine and cancel the repayment plan.

Emma Roddick: Given the inadequacies of the universal credit application and award systems, will an expansion of existing eligibility for Scottish Government support to those who are not on universal credit but who are struggling to pay the costs be considered?

Michael Matheson: I confirm that we already have an extended list, and that universal credit is only one of the benefits that we take into consideration. If someone has difficulty meeting the cost of managed quarantine and is on benefits such as child tax credit, working tax credit,

housing benefit, income support, pension credit, income-based jobseekers allowance or any income-related benefit, we will take their benefits into account when considering whether we should cancel their repayment plan.

National Health Service Dentistry (Backlog)

6. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it will address the backlog in national health service dentistry. (S6O-00162)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): We are moving forward rapidly with NHS dental recovery and are supporting the sector to build back to a pre-pandemic level of activity. We have invested additional funding of £5 million to improve ventilation in dental premises and a further £7.5 million for the purchase of speed-adjusting handpieces. Those particular instruments can be used in a wide range of clinical procedures where standard non-aerosol precautions might be applied.

Those measures, alongside a 50 per cent increase in the amount of free enhanced personal protective equipment available, will make it possible for NHS dental teams to see substantially more patients while operating under the current infection prevention and control measures that are required for the safe operation of dental treatment.

Sarah Boyack: I previously received a response that said that a record number of people are registered with an NHS dentist, but constituents are writing to me with their concern that they are still unable to find an NHS dentist with whom they can register, and that delays in appointments are not getting shorter. I am also aware of NHS dentists who have gone private. Is the minister not concerned about that state of affairs, and what action is the Scottish Government taking to fix it?

Maree Todd: I am concerned about that state of affairs. The challenge for dentistry is that aerosol-producing procedures and the infection prevention and control measures constrain the level of activity that dental practices can undertake. As we emerge from the pandemic, we expect the situation to improve. Dental practices will be able to register and see new patients. At present, it is more difficult for dental practices to see new patients because of the restrictions.

As the arrangements for dental registration are made through the local health board, a patient who has difficulty finding NHS dental care should contact the health board first in order to access appropriate care.

For patients to be offered private care instead of NHS care is completely wrong and unacceptable.

An NHS-registered patient should not be offered private dental care if the same treatment is available on the NHS, and instances of that behaviour should be reported to the NHS board. If the member has examples of those instances, I am happy for her to write to my office and my officials will pass that information to the relevant board.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general questions.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We come to First Minister's question time. I intend to take constituency and general supplementary questions after question 2, so please press your buttons during question 2 if you want to ask such a supplementary. I will take supplementaries to questions 3 to 6 as they arise, so please press your buttons during the relevant question. If we have any time in hand after question 6, I will take outstanding questions.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Waiting Times)

1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands (Con): Last week, I raised the crisis in the Scottish Ambulance Service. I said that the scandalous waiting times could cost people's lives. This morning, we all read in shock and horror about 65-year-old Gerard Brown, who died after a 40-hour wait for an ambulance. When the paramedics reached him, all they could do was pronounce him dead. His body was still warm. His son, Dylan, said that the hardest part to accept was that his father's general practitioner had told him that if the paramedics had got to him, his dad would still be here. Let us just think about being told, "If they had got to him, your dad would still be here."

What does the First Minister have to say to ambulance crews who turn up to save people's lives only to have to pronounce them dead? What does the First Minister have to say to Gerard Brown's general practitioner, who said:

"This is third world medicine"?

What does the First Minister have to say to Dylan Brown, who is grieving the death of his father who should still be alive?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, my condolences go to Mr Brown. The individual cases that are reported in the media this morning obviously require to be fully and properly investigated. It would not be right for me to pre-empt those investigations, but what has been reported is unacceptable. I am in no doubt about that.

As I said last week, the Ambulance Service is working under acute pressure right now, largely because of Covid. I take this opportunity to thank our paramedics and technicians for the work that they are doing in such difficult circumstances. Although crews are responding heroically to the challenges, I recognise that some people are not getting the standard of service that they should be getting, or indeed the standard of service that the Scottish Ambulance Service wants to deliver. That

is not acceptable, so I apologise unreservedly to anyone who has suffered or who is suffering unacceptably long waits.

A range of actions have already been taken to address the challenges. For example, additional funding has been given to support new recruitment. A number of additional actions are also under active consideration. I will be happy to summarise those in later exchanges, but I confirm now that they include consideration of seeking targeted military assistance to deal with short-term pressure points. Such military assistance is already being provided to ambulance services in England. Of course, we have had military assistance in other aspects of the pandemic during the past 18 months.

I will meet representatives of the Scottish Ambulance Service to assess its progress on all the actions that are being considered, and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care will make an update statement to Parliament next week.

The service is under acute pressure. I think that people understand the reasons for that pressure, but the obligation is on Government to work with the service to ensure that it can meet that pressure in the interests of patients across the country.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister says that the cases will be "fully and properly investigated", but this should not be happening in Scotland in 2021. Last week, my raising concerns about people dying while waiting for ambulances was met with groans from Scottish National Party members, and the First Minister did not answer me. Every day since then, we have heard about tragic life-threatening waits for ambulances. An 86-year-old woman lay in agony on a hard kitchen floor for eight hours with a broken hip. Just this morning, Evelyn from Kilwinning called a phone-in to talk about a 23-hour wait for an ambulance for her husband. She thinks that, eventually—these are her words—

"Their luck is just going to run out."

Last week, the First Minister would not accept that the Ambulance Service is in crisis. Surely the past seven days must have changed her mind. Will she now accept that the Ambulance Service is in crisis?

The First Minister: I do not challenge in any way, shape or form the extent of the pressure on our Ambulance Service and all parts of our national health service. It is incumbent on me, as First Minister, and with all my colleagues across the Government, to support the service as it faces up to the current challenges.

Those challenges have, largely, been caused by Covid pressure, which is increasing the overall pressure that our health services are under. Obviously, it is my responsibility to deal with those challenges in Scotland, but such challenges are mirrored in health services across the United Kingdom and in many parts of the world, because of the realities of Covid.

The fact that anyone in our country has to wait an unacceptable period of time for an ambulance when they need urgent care is not acceptable to me or to anyone. That is why we will work closely and intensively with the service to support it to meet the challenges, which I expect will continue for a period as Covid pressure continues and we go into the winter months.

Last week, I set out some of the actions that we have already taken. We have provided significant additional funding to support significant extra recruitment of paramedics and technicians to the Ambulance Service. With the service, we are considering a range of additional actions, including provision of more support for rural ambulance stations; alternative transport arrangements for lower-risk patients, to make sure that the Ambulance Service resource is there for higher-risk patients; deployment of more hospital-ambulance liaison officers to help with transfer from ambulance to hospital and discharge from hospital; and temporary admission wards to ease the bottleneck that exists at the moment between ambulances and our hospitals. In addition, as I said earlier, we will consider seeking targeted military assistance.

I do not in any way underestimate the extent of the challenge that faces the service and, by extension, people across Scotland. It is the latest in a number of significant challenges that have been posed for us as a result of the pandemic. Our responsibility is to take the action to support the service to meet the challenges. That is what I, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the entire Government are focused on.

Douglas Ross: I listened to the First Minister really carefully, and it seems that she deliberately did not accept that there is a crisis. This is the second week in a row that I have asked that question. It is important that we recognise that there is a crisis. Admitting it matters, so I hope that the First Minister will admit it. That would mean that the Government could start to look for help in tackling the problem.

The First Minister mentioned that the Government is considering seeking targeted military assistance. The Unite union has called for that. It has also asked the Ambulance Service to declare “major incident” status. We support those calls.

What about the Scottish Government? Humza Yousaf’s response was to tell people to think twice before they call an ambulance. Telling people to think twice before they call an ambulance is dangerous and reckless. Will the First Minister apologise, withdraw those remarks on behalf of the Scottish Government and tell people that they should never think twice about calling an ambulance in an emergency?

The First Minister: I think that what people are looking to me and the Government for is action to deal with the situation that we face. That is more important than what we choose to call it. I am not in any way trying to evade the reality that we and our front-line health workers are currently experiencing. It is probably the most challenging combination—or, at least, one of the most challenging combinations—of circumstances that our health service has faced since its establishment. There is no sense in which I am seeking to underplay that.

Douglas Ross said that the Scottish Ambulance Service should declare a major incident. The service operates at various levels of escalation; it is currently operating at level 4 of its escalation plan—the highest level. Again, terminology should not be allowed to mask reality. The service is operating at its highest level of escalation, and as part of that it is, for example, deploying a national command and control centre in order to utilise resources better across the country. We will continue to consider all ways in which we can utilise and deploy additional resources. I have already set out some of what we are considering with the service.

Finally, I turn to the health secretary’s comments. The health secretary was saying something that health secretaries have said many times—I remember saying it myself when I was health secretary—and I have seen comments from ambulance services in every part of the United Kingdom over the past few days saying exactly the same thing, which is that when people require an intervention from the health service that would better come from parts of the service other than the Ambulance Service, we should encourage them to seek that. When people consider that they need an ambulance, they should never hesitate to call one, if that is the intervention that they think is required.

As First Minister, I make it very clear that the Scottish Ambulance Service exists to provide emergency assistance to those who need it. It is facing the most intense challenges and some people are not getting the service that they should get. The answer is for Government and the service to work to ensure that it is meeting the challenges, so that no one who needs an ambulance hesitates to call for one and—which is just as important—so

that they get the ambulance timeously, as they have a right to expect.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister said—I wrote it down—that she is not trying to “evade the reality”. Why, in that case, does she not accept that the Scottish Ambulance Service is in crisis? We are hearing that day in, day out from people across Scotland. We are hearing it from the front line—from the paramedics and technicians—and we are hearing it from Unite the union and others.

I am sorry, but I cannot sit here and listen to the First Minister say that the comments from the Scottish Government’s health secretary are the same as those that we are hearing elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I have heard no one else in the United Kingdom telling people to think twice before they call an ambulance. The way to tackle the extreme pressure is not to tell sick people to stay away, but to give ambulance crews the resources that they need to reach every patient while they are still breathing.

The health secretary should be providing solutions; instead, Humza Yousaf is the problem. This summer, he used misleading figures about children with Covid. He wasted months on a flimsy national health service recovery plan that is not cutting it. Yesterday was a new low: we have a health secretary who told people, in effect, “Don’t look after your own health.” He actually said that they should think twice before calling an ambulance. With Scotland’s NHS in crisis, is not it the case that it is Humza Yousaf who needs to think twice before he speaks?

The First Minister: People who are watching this will draw their own conclusions from the tone and tenor of the remarks that are being made. I will stay on the substance of the issues, because they are important for people across the country and have my full attention, as they have the health secretary’s full attention.

Douglas Ross continues to question me about terminology, so let us be clear. The pandemic has created—not just in Scotland, but across the UK and much of the world—crisis conditions for our health services. That includes the Ambulance Service, which is at the front line of the response of our health service for so many patients who need it. The point that I am making is that whatever someone like me chooses to call it is less important than what we do to support our service in meeting the challenges. I think that people who are listening today will have recognised that we are already taking a range of actions. *[Interruption.]* There are almost 300 additional paramedics and technicians—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: I appreciate that this is a very important and emotive issue and that

people are rightly passionate, but could we please hear the First Minister?

The First Minister: A range of actions have already been taken. As I was saying, almost 300 additional paramedics and technicians are being recruited to help to meet the challenge. We are supporting the service in a wide range of ways.

In saying that, I in no way seek to underplay how unacceptable long waits are for anybody who experiences them. The majority of people who phone for an ambulance get an excellent service from the paramedics and technicians who provide it. We are considering a range of additional actions; I have set out some of them. The health secretary will make a statement next week to update Parliament on those actions. *[Interruption.]*

Somebody is shouting at me, “Why next week?” That is because that will be the next parliamentary opportunity to make a statement. I am—*[Interruption.]*

Douglas Ross is saying, “Do it now.” I am standing here right now, setting out what we are doing. The health secretary and I will be dealing with the matter over the course of today, tomorrow, the weekend and into next week, for as long as it takes.

Those are the steps that we are taking. We will continue to take those steps. Governments across the UK will be doing similar things to support their services. We are in the most challenging set of circumstances that our health service has faced. My job is to make sure that we support the Scottish Ambulance Service to rise to the challenges. That is what I will focus on each and every minute of each and every day.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Waiting Times)

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** The First Minister has evaded this issue for weeks. She tries to hide behind the pandemic, but let us look at the statistics before the pandemic. There were almost 1,000 cases where ambulances waited for over two hours outside a hospital to transfer patients. There were more than 15,000 times when an ambulance took over two hours to arrive with a patient. A staff survey found that 63 per cent of staff felt that the Ambulance Service was short staffed before the pandemic. I say to the First Minister: please do not use the pandemic as a cover for your Government’s failures.

The truth is that this is an avoidable human tragedy on a heartbreaking scale. Lilian Briggs broke her hip and had to wait for eight hours on the floor for an ambulance. Gerard Brown collapsed at home and died after waiting for 40 hours for emergency services. Pandemic or no pandemic, there is a simple truth: no one should

be left to die on the floor while waiting for 40 hours—40 hours—for an ambulance.

Lilian's and Gerard's families have been courageous enough to go to the newspapers, but there are hundreds of families who have not gone to the media but are suffering in silence. How many hours will it take for the First Minister to fix this?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I accept that there were pressures on the Ambulance Service, as there were pressures on the entirety of our health service, before the pandemic, but I think that for anybody to suggest that the pandemic is not a significant contributory factor to what our health service is dealing with right now is simply stretching credibility. The pandemic has created what are probably the most challenging conditions for our national health service since it was created. That is being felt acutely in Scotland and in countries across the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. Our responsibility is to help the service to meet those challenges.

I am very clear in my mind that it is not acceptable for one person, let alone more than that, to wait anything like the times that some people are experiencing right now. That is why we are taking the actions that we are taking. There are, right now, over 1,000 people in our hospitals with Covid. That puts an additional pressure on our hospitals, and that feeds through into longer turnaround times for ambulances. Of course, the Ambulance Service is often the front-line response for those who need hospital care for Covid or for anything else. That is the reason for what we are experiencing right now, but my job is to provide the solutions, and that is what we are seeking to do with the Ambulance Service.

Anas Sarwar specifically asked how many hours it will take. Because of the pandemic and all that it creates, we are facing probably the most challenging winter for the health service and for society in any of our lifetimes. I could stand here and say that, in a number of hours, we will do X, Y or Z, but it is going to be a responsibility of Government right through this winter to support our Ambulance Service, our accident and emergency departments and our wider health and social care services. Every day over this winter period, that will occupy my time and the health secretary's time and it will be the focus of the entire Government.

Anas Sarwar: I think that the First Minister misses a key point. We are going to have extra pressure added by winter, but if we cannot even handle the pressure pre-winter, imagine how hard it is going to be when winter arrives. That is the hard truth that the First Minister is trying to ignore.

Let us be clear about this. Our NHS staff, paramedics and call handlers are being failed, too. They are the ones who are having to answer those heartbreaking calls and tell patients that there will not be an ambulance coming any time soon. They are the ones who are having to turn up to distressing scenes in homes and who are expected to explain the First Minister's Government's failures.

Let us listen to the staff. They are telling us that there are not enough ambulances, not enough staff in the Ambulance Service or at A and E and not enough beds in our hospitals. Patients are not just having to wait for hours for an ambulance: they are also having to wait for hours outside hospital in ambulances. Things are so bad that the British Red Cross has been drafted in to deliver humanitarian assistance at Glasgow's flagship hospital.

I note what the First Minister has said about the role of the British Army. Will she listen to calls from ambulance staff and Unite the union for a major incident to be declared, for pop-up wards in emergency departments and for the British Army to be drafted in. When will that happen?

The First Minister: As I think that I said in my first answer to Douglas Ross, we are actively considering the detail of the request for targeted military assistance. It is important that we make that request in detail so that we know exactly what we are requesting from the military. That request is currently being prepared.

On the call for a major incident to be declared, as I said to Douglas Ross, we are getting lost in terminology. The Ambulance Service is operating at its highest level of escalation. The fact that we do not call that a major incident—it is escalation level 4—does not change the reality of the situation. It is more important to focus on the substance of what we are doing than to have manufactured disagreements about terminology.

Mr Sarwar asked about pop-up wards. I will be corrected if I am wrong, but I think that I referred earlier to the consideration that is under way on temporary admission wards. Pop-up wards may not be appropriate because we are going into a winter period. They might not provide the best conditions for patients. We are looking at an equivalent, which would be to have temporary admission wards.

We are already taking forward all the things that I have been asked about today. This is an incredibly challenging situation, more so for those on the front line. I stated earlier, and I repeat, my deep gratitude to those who are working on the front line of our national health service. We will continue taking steps and providing solutions. We all know what the problem is. We may disagree

about the cause of that problem. It is my job, working with others, to find solutions. I will focus on that for as long as it takes.

Anas Sarwar: The First Minister does not understand the urgency. She wants to wait for a week before making a statement about actions that will follow that. She wants to consider options about the role of the British Army. How many more Lillian Briggs must happen in the next week before we take urgent action? How many more Gerard Browns must happen in the next week before we take urgent action? Urgent action must happen today, tomorrow, the day after and the next day. We cannot wait a week for this Government to wake up.

The First Minister says that she is taking action, but she and her health secretary have been in denial for months. Things are getting worse. People cannot afford to wait.

These problems have been years in the making. There are 600,000 people on waiting lists for treatment. We have record-breaking A and E waiting times. Tragically, people are dying as they wait for ambulances. The First Minister likes to remind us that the buck stops with her—it does. How many more families will have to suffer? How much more stress will our workers have to endure? How much more time does she expect people to give her and her health secretary to fix this mess?

The First Minister: The buck always stops with me. Whether people agree or disagree with me, I have never tried to shy away from that, nor will I ever.

With the greatest of respect, I say to Anas Sarwar that the Government does not operate only when Parliament is sitting. I will go back to my office after First Minister's questions to finalise the details of the request for military assistance so that that can be submitted as soon as possible. We will also finalise the other additional actions that we are taking, and which are in addition to those that we have already taken. Government is a 24-hour-a-day responsibility. We will continue dealing with these things in that manner.

I do not at all shy away from how difficult this is. I am not the only Government leader who is dealing with these issues. Health ministers and Governments all over the world are dealing with these challenges. Our job is not just to describe the problem; our job is to provide solutions. My Government is absolutely focused on doing that.

Brexit (Food and Farming Import Checks)

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The United Kingdom Government has confirmed that it again intends to delay post-Brexit food and farming import checks. Once again, Scotland's

vital food and farming sectors find themselves paying a price for the Tories' extreme Brexit plans. Does the First Minister share my concern that that last-minute delay highlights that the Tory Government has no real solution to the Brexit issues that it has created and is just kicking the can down the road once again?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, that is absolutely correct. We have been warning for months and months about the implications not just of Brexit but of a hard Brexit. Just this week, as the member rightly says, we have seen a further delay to the necessary, though deeply regrettable, infrastructure that needs to be in place to support some of this. It is our food and drink and agriculture sectors that are paying the price. I very much hope to see solutions put in place to alleviate the situation as quickly as possible. However, I do not think that anybody should be in any doubt that those sectors will face the inescapable consequences of Brexit for some time to come. That is, of course, the responsibility of the Tory Government at Westminster.

Older People (Impact of Pandemic)

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Many people across my region participated in Age Scotland's big survey of older people, which revealed that more than half of older people had reported that the pandemic had made them lonely. One third felt that their mental health had deteriorated, one third felt that they were seen as a burden to society, and a staggering 71 per cent reported having been targeted by phone scammers. Those figures make for grim reading and are a reminder of how marginalised older people feel in our society. What further action will the Scottish Government take to make sure that those trends are reversed?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The impact of the pandemic on older people, and on loneliness and isolation, is well understood, and there is a range of ways in which we need to seek to tackle and address that. As was narrated in the Audit Scotland report this week about Covid spending, we have spent disproportionately in comparison to other parts of the United Kingdom on support for the charity sector, because many charitable and third sector organisations provide a lot of front-line support. We will continue to provide as much support there as possible.

All of us, as individuals, have a role to play in ensuring that we look out for and look after some of the most vulnerable people in our own lives, whether that is family members, friends or neighbours. Critically, therefore, as we go into the winter months, it is incumbent on all of us, as citizens, to think about what we are doing to try to

alleviate the loneliness and isolation that older people in particular will be feeling.

University of Dundee (Industrial Action)

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): In the past 24 hours, Unison members at the University of Dundee informed management that they will take five days of strike action, starting in the first week of teaching of the new term. Proposed changes to the university pension scheme will hurt only the lowest paid of staff—disproportionately female workers—and could result in workers losing up to 40 per cent of their pension.

Will the First Minister personally intervene to bring parties back to the table to stop those workers being thrown into pensioner poverty and avoid disruption to the education of a generation of young people who have already lost so much?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Those are obviously matters for universities, which are substantially Government funded but independent institutions. However, I would strongly encourage the universities to get round the table with unions and workers in order not only to find solutions that do not penalise staff in the ways that have been set out but to ensure that there is no disruption to education. I will unequivocally call on our universities and trade unions to get round the table and find solutions.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (Appeals)

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The Scottish Qualifications Authority yesterday published an update on the arrangements for next year's qualifications and assessments. It appears that some kind of provision for direct appeals will be maintained, which is welcome. Does the First Minister agree that any appeals provision must be free, and that we cannot return to the previous system, whereby the SQA charged a fee for appeals, which resulted in them being used disproportionately to the advantage of pupils at private schools, versus those in the public sector?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): No decisions have yet been taken for the longer term around the appeals system. Those issues will be considered in line with some of the broader issues that are being considered around assessment in exams. However, I agree in principle that it is important that we have an appeals system that is accessible for young people. This may be one area—there are many such areas—where changes that have been necessitated by the pandemic are good changes, which we should look to keep and build on. I am sure that all of those things will be taken into account as decisions are taken for the longer term.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Orkney)

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): NHS Orkney has written to those engaged with child and adolescent mental health services in my constituency warning that a lack of capacity will lead to delays and to people not being seen over the coming months. Young people are being directed towards local third sector organisations, but there is understandable anxiety about the impact that that will have on the mental health of many young people in Orkney. NHS Orkney is in the process of recruiting additional staff, but I urge the First Minister to engage with it to ensure that gaps are filled in the interim, so that young people in Orkney get the support that they desperately need.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I am happy to undertake that we will engage with NHS Orkney to provide whatever support we can. Liam McArthur is right to point to the fact that there are already record numbers of people working in our mental health services, and recruitment is under way across the country and in NHS Orkney, as he says. However, it is important that we provide support to fill any interim gaps, and I will therefore undertake to ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to have that conversation and to write to the member once he has had the opportunity to do so.

Ferguson Marine

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Back in 2016, Nicola Sturgeon declared that her Government's intervention at Ferguson Marine in Port Glasgow was going to be an incredible triumph. She said at the time that it was

“living proof of how the SNP stands up for ... Scottish jobs”.

In 2019, the yard was forcibly nationalised despite much protest and warnings that it would be a complete disaster. Which bit of welding together Scotland's future ferry fleet in Romania is standing up for Scottish jobs?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Due to this Government's interventions at Ferguson's, there are hundreds of people working at Ferguson's today who would not be working at Ferguson's, because it would not still be operational had we not intervened in that way. Ferguson's is on a journey to recovery. It has a way to go in that journey, as I think is self-evident. Its priority is to complete the two ferries that are currently under construction and, of course, continuing the work to ensure that it is in shape to compete successfully for contracts, both domestically and further afield, in future. We will continue to support the yard in that vital work.

Let us be in no doubt that, but for the actions that the Government has taken, Ferguson's doors would be closed right now, and those hundreds of workers who are there would not have a job.

Scottish Ambulance Service (Waiting Times)

3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government will support the Scottish Ambulance Service in coping with reports of unprecedented pressure that is resulting in significant increases to waiting times. (S6F-00255)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I have already covered much of this in previous answers. The Ambulance Service, like other areas of the national health service, is under considerable pressure as a result of the unprecedented demand, which is caused largely by the impact of the pandemic. Our Ambulance Service staff are doing a heroic job delivering emergency healthcare to the people of Scotland. However, some people—as I have already reflected on—are waiting far too long for ambulance services.

We are in constant dialogue and engagement with the Ambulance Service. We have provided additional funding, and we have already taken a number of actions. As I set out previously today, a number of additional actions are currently under consideration.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am very grateful for that reply. We have heard the stories of Lilian Briggs and Gerard Brown, but they are not alone. I have mentioned Catherine Whyte before. She is a retired nurse of 40 years, and she has given her life to the care of others, but she waited 15 hours for an ambulance last month. She fell again last week. She suffered fractured feet, a fractured pelvis and delirium, yet she waited another eight hours for help. Only when my constituent told operators, "My mum is dying," did the ambulance come—after yet another hour. The Scottish Ambulance Service has been failed by the Government, just like Lilian and Catherine. It is not just the pandemic; the service simply does not have the resource to prioritise such cases.

Calling in the Army is evidence of a Government that has done too little too late. What discussions has the First Minister had with the service about the integration of the armed forces, and when does she expect them to be deployed?

The First Minister: Those discussions are under way. As I said, we will be finalising the request for military assistance shortly. That is one of many actions that we are taking. We are providing additional resource, and I think that resource funding to the Ambulance Service is at record levels, with staffing at higher levels than it

has been in previous years. There is further recruitment under way.

The problems that the Ambulance Service faces are to some extent caused by pressures elsewhere in the national health service, not least in our accident and emergency departments. A lot of work is being done to try to alleviate those pressures. We will continue to take the actions necessary to support those who work in the Ambulance Service to provide the level of service that patients demand and have a right to expect.

I have already said today that I do not think it is acceptable for anyone to have to wait for the kinds of periods that are being reported at the moment. That is not acceptable even during pandemic conditions. That is why we are focused on finding solutions to allow the Ambulance Service to provide the level of response that it wants to offer and that people have a right to expect.

Hospitals (Suspension of Treatments and Elective Surgery)

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): It is clear that the pandemic has exposed the weaknesses that were there before. We have heard concerning reports from NHS staff that the Golden Jubilee hospital, Stobhill hospital and the Royal hospital for children are seriously understaffed and are struggling to cope with the volume of patients and that treatment at each hospital site is now severely limited. Can the First Minister confirm whether any departments have been closed to new patients and whether elective surgery has been stopped in any of those hospitals?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): A number of health boards are taking decisions to pause temporarily elective surgery to enable them to deal with emergency services. That is not happening only in Scotland—we are seeing that in parts of the health service across the UK because of the pressure of Covid. We will continue to support the health boards to take the decisions that they consider are appropriate in order to provide care to people who need it.

However, the member should be in no doubt that our objective is to get the health service operating again in such a way that it can deal with the pressures of Covid without that having an impact on non-Covid and elective services. That is the focus of the recovery plan and we will continue to support the health service to do that.

At the heart of that is the imperative to get Covid cases down so that as that pressure reduces, the health service can get more back to normal. That brings me back to the central messages to everyone about all the mitigation measures that we all have to follow to keep Covid cases on a downward track.

Single-crewed Ambulances

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Between 2016-17 and 2019-20, more than 11,000 ambulances were sent out with a single crew member, which is an increase of nearly 39 per cent. When the First Minister was health secretary, she said that she would take action to eliminate rostered single manning and that ambulances

“should be double crewed, with at least one crew member being a paramedic unless in exceptional circumstances”.— [Written Answers, 27 July 2007; S3W-2125.]

In the midst of the crisis in our Ambulance Service, will the First Minister tell Parliament how many ambulances have been single crewed since the start of the pandemic and why her Government has failed to eliminate the practice as she pledged to do 13 years ago?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I do not have that information in front of me, but I undertake to provide it. We effectively eliminated single crewing. When I became health secretary, it was at unacceptably high levels. It is the case that ambulances are single crewed only in exceptional circumstances. During a global pandemic we face exceptional circumstances on a daily basis. The routine rostered single crewing, which was endemic under previous Administrations, was dealt with by the SNP Government and we will continue to make that a priority as we come out of and recover from the pandemic.

26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties

4. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether she will provide an update on the preparations for COP26. (S6F-00261)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We are working closely with a range of partners to deliver a safe and successful COP26. Reviews of Police Scotland’s preparations, including a recent report from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, offer a high degree of assurance around the ability to balance business-as-usual policing with COP26 operations. The transport demand strategy is in place and the Covid adaptation plan developed by chief medical officers from the Scottish and United Kingdom Governments will be published shortly.

I had a meeting yesterday with the United Nations executive director on climate change to consider some of the broader issues around the COP26 negotiations.

Bill Kidd: The conference of youth has always been funded by the Government of the UN member state that is hosting the COP. What discussions has the First Minister had with the UK Government on its decision not to fund the

conference of youth? I thank the Scottish Government for stepping in to ensure that the voices of young people, who have been so important in pushing for change, are not lost.

The First Minister: I do not know why the UK Government has decided not to fund the conference of youth. I understand that it is the first time that the host nation has not done so. However, I am not particularly interested in the UK Government’s reasons for that. It is important that the voice of youth is heard. I was therefore pleased to confirm that the Scottish Government will fund the conference of youth, which brings together young people from 140 countries, I think, in the days leading up to the COP to formulate and then present their demands to world leaders. There will be a good opportunity for young people throughout Scotland to take part in that, and it will ensure that the voice of children and young people is heard loudly and clearly during the COP discussions.

Cyberattacks (Public Bodies)

5. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to prevent cyberattacks on public bodies. (S6F-00250)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We work closely with public sector bodies to raise the baseline standard of cybersecurity in line with guidance from the United Kingdom National Cyber Security Centre. A dedicated policy team together with a range of partners are delivering the strategic framework for a cyber-resilient Scotland across the public, private and third sectors to further build our cybersecurity and resilience capabilities.

The Government shares cyber threat intelligence, including during real-time incidents, as part of its early warning process; provides regular training, advice and support to the public sector; and encourages regular exercising and cyber incident response planning.

Tess White: Audit Scotland has warned that cybercrime is a

“serious risk to Scotland’s public sector”.

Twenty-seven separate attacks have been recorded since 2017. Given the considerable cost to the public purse of the ransomware attack on the Scottish Environment Protection Agency in December 2020 as well as the on-going impact on its operations, is the Scottish Government satisfied that public bodies have achieved the standards that are set out in the Scottish public sector cyber-resilience framework?

The First Minister: I thank Audit Scotland for the work that it has done on the issue. However,

with the greatest respect to Audit Scotland, I do not think that any Government is under any illusion about the threat of cyberattacks in our countries to the public sector, the private sector and, indeed, Governments themselves. We take the risk extremely seriously.

There have been significant cyberattacks on public sector organisations in Scotland—obviously, SEPA is a case in point—and the question whether we are satisfied that public sector organisations are taking all the appropriate steps is a reasonable one. We are working with them to ensure that that is the case. I would hesitate to sound as if I am complacent about the matter—indeed, every Government should hesitate to do that—because there is a real, present, ever-changing and evolving risk. We must ensure that, on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis, we provide the protections and support the public sector to do likewise. We will continue to do that.

The Presiding Officer: I call Christine Grahame.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I am sorry, Presiding Officer. I thought that we were going to finish that question.

A fair work joint statement on Covid, which was agreed by the Scottish Government and organisations such as the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Institute of Directors, states—

The Presiding Officer: I am sorry, Ms Grahame, but I think that there has been a slight misunderstanding. I am taking supplementaries on specific questions as we go along. There may be an opportunity for you later.

Christine Grahame: My question is not on that issue. I thought that we were on to general questions.

The Presiding Officer: In that case, we move on to question 6.

Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (Targets)

6. **Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to analysis by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland suggesting that the Crown Office is masking the time taken to decide on criminal prosecutions. (S6F-00256)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The report from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland is an inspection of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service's management of criminal allegations against the

police. The report rightly recognises that the public should be reassured by the robust scrutiny that is applied by prosecutors to on-duty criminal allegations against the police.

The report notes a historical practice of freezing targets while further information was awaited from an investigating agency. That practice ceased in April this year, which means that it will not have an impact on target performance in this reporting year. It was an administrative exercise that had no impact on the investigation or outcome of any cases.

The Lord Advocate—this is, of course, entirely a matter for the Lord Advocate—is carefully considering all the recommendations in the report and will make changes where appropriate to implement them.

Pauline McNeill: The First Minister acknowledged that the practice ended only in April 2021. The analysis from the watchdog—HM Inspectorate of Prosecution in Scotland—revealed significant concerns that the Crown Office's criminal investigations of a police division had been set in cases to show that it was meeting targets for investigation and prosecution by freezing cases and ignoring the time taken when they were frozen.

Another analysis by the watchdog last year concluded that the resetting of key target dates had led to "unacceptable delays" in progressing sexual crime cases, and had served to

"mask the true journey time of these cases".

That practice is seriously concerning. It looks as if the Crown Office was trying to make its performance look better than it actually was, which is a serious matter.

Does the First Minister agree that there must be no return to such a practice, and that transparency is vital in our Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service in order to ensure public confidence?

The First Minister: I agree with that, and I am sure that the Lord Advocate, were she here, would fully agree with it as well.

As I said in my original answer, it was an administrative practice, and I am assured that it had no impact on the investigation or outcome of cases. Often, in such cases, and in cases more generally, the Crown Office will require information from other investigating agencies—that might be the Health and Safety Executive, for example—and that has an impact on its ability to pursue cases.

Pauline McNeill is right in what she said about transparency. These matters are for the Lord Advocate; I know that she will consider the report carefully, and I am certainly willing to ask her to

write to Pauline McNeill in due course with more detail on the action that she intends to take in the light of the HMIPS report.

Community Jobs Scotland

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-00768, in the name of Miles Briggs, on the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations creating its 10,000th community jobs Scotland job in Scotland's voluntary sector. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises and celebrates what it sees as the continued success of the SCVO-run Community Jobs Scotland (CJS) employability programme as it creates its 10,000th job; understands that CJS provides paid jobs for young people, with targeted efforts to help those who are disadvantaged and vulnerable; believes that its model and approach has been incredibly effective in ensuring that young people who face particular challenges, such as having caring responsibilities, being care-experienced, holding criminal convictions, leaving the armed forces early or living with disability, are given the opportunity to take their first steps into employment; notes that CJS was established in 2011, when levels of youth unemployment were high; acknowledges that, over this time, phases 1 to 11 of the programme have created paid jobs for 10,049 young people, with an average of 54% being retained by their employer after their initial job had ended, and 64% recording positive outcomes into jobs, volunteering or education; welcomes CJS's adoption of a competitive application and interview process before a young person is offered a job and considers that this, alongside compliance with employer policies and procedures, is extremely important in terms of instilling a sense of belonging in a real work environment; understands that phase 11, which is currently underway, will support up to up to a further 560 opportunities for vulnerable young unemployed people aged up to 29 through a range of voluntary sector organisations across all 32 local authority areas; welcomes the recent announcement of the 10,000th CJS job, which will see a young person take on the role of Creative Assistant with Impact Arts (Projects) Limited for 40 weeks, and looks forward to further opportunities opening up with CJS, to help support vulnerable young people in the Edinburgh region and across Scotland who face significant barriers, but who deserve to play their full role in society.

12:48

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I apologise for the length of the title of my motion, Presiding Officer. I am grateful to members for supporting it, and to those who have remained in the chamber to take part in the debate.

Across Scotland, there are young people who face barriers to employment, which are often multiple and complex. One of the key barriers is caring responsibilities, but learning disabilities or health issues can also make it hard for someone to get or maintain a job. Now, more than ever, those who are furthest away from the labour market face multiple disadvantages, which are compounded by the impact of the pandemic.

However, it is my pleasure to be able to offer some good news—and don't we just need that? Today, we celebrate the 10,000th person to find a job through the community jobs Scotland programme. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations set up community jobs Scotland 10 years ago, in 2011, and employers and young people in every part of Scotland have benefited from the programme. It was originally set up to reduce youth unemployment, but it has now become more specialised, and it supports the most disadvantaged young people in Scotland. That includes people who are care experienced or are carers themselves; armed forces early service leavers; people with criminal convictions; and people who have disabilities or health or mental health issues. The jobs are real jobs, with a fair wage.

There are many examples of the positive outcomes that the programme has delivered over the years, and I will share one with members today. Isabelle was employed as a youth worker and community centre assistant at Centre 81 in Garelochhead. She said:

“At the beginning of my placement, I lacked confidence, I was very shy, I had really low stamina and this really worried me in relation to whether I could maintain my placement. Over the months, I have been really supported by my colleagues and my confidence has grown. I can now talk to people much better and my stamina has definitely increased, and I feel much stronger and able to move on to the next part of my life. I have gained knowledge and experience and my communication with others has also dramatically developed. I have also gained skills such as patience, reliability, motivation, dependability and flexibility. As well as having my goal of further education, I feel I have greatly improved my future employability prospects through this placement.”

Community jobs Scotland is also good for employers, one of whom said:

“Through Community Jobs Scotland placements, we support, develop and grow young people's confidence on placements. We are a youth project. While utilising their skills to further develop youth work and outreach work, there recently has developed social enterprise growth and development within their organisations.”

In having the debate, we are recognising the positive impact that community jobs Scotland has had on the lives of over 10,000 young people across Scotland. The programme has provided young people with much-needed security while they have built up their skills to get meaningful and valuable paid experience with real responsibilities. CJS provides flexibility and personalised support and has given young people hope for their future and set them on the road to success.

Those third-sector jobs have also benefited every local community across Scotland, which means that charities, social enterprises and community organisations can build their capacity and increase and enhance the vital services that

they deliver. We have all seen how important it has been over the past 18 months to have the support of the third sector especially. The 10,000th job has been created in Impact Arts, which is a great charity here in Edinburgh—and in Glasgow, Ayrshire and beyond—working in community art projects across Scotland. Over the years, Impact Arts has employed 155 young people through community jobs Scotland, from furniture restorers to graphic designers. Not only have so many young people been supported to develop their skills and get the secure, paid fair work that they need, but Impact Arts has also hugely benefited.

In my area in Edinburgh and the Lothians, there are countless examples of interesting and conscientious businesses, such as HomeAid West Lothian and its sister programme the Midlothian Advice & Resource Centre—MARC—which has taken on and employed numerous young people since the start of the programme 11 years ago; or the Cyrenians community hospital gardens and many more. This year, the community jobs Scotland programme is expected to support up to 560 young people, involving 176 employers across the country, which could be large household names, charities or small community groups.

Like Isabelle, most of the young people who come through community jobs Scotland go on to successful outcomes. Indeed, community jobs Scotland produces better outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged young people in the country than any other employability initiative in Scotland. We are here tonight—this afternoon, even—to acknowledge the success of community jobs Scotland. *[Interruption.]* It has been a long day, Presiding Officer.

We also need to recognise that we need to do everything that we can right now to make sure that this generation of young Scots get the support that they need and that they do not become a lost generation when it comes to employment. The SCVO's recent submission to the Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee called on the Scottish Government to extend and fund programmes such as the community jobs Scotland programme for another year at least, until local employment partnerships are ready to deliver more employability programmes, and to ensure that the voluntary sector is included in a comprehensive and inclusive whole-system response to the pandemic. I hope that, in closing the debate, the minister can outline whether that will be taken forward by the Scottish Government to ensure that we have additional funding available.

I thank members for their support for the motion.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Briggs. Yes, I think that we are still at lunch time,

although in a different place, we would be at a different time.

Elena Whitham will be followed by Sharon Dowey. You have up to four minutes, Ms Whitham.

12:54

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I congratulate Miles Briggs on securing the debate and I refer members to my entry in the register of interests: I am still a serving councillor in East Ayrshire.

I remember vividly the moment when my jobcentre adviser said that she had an opportunity that she felt would be perfect for me. I was 22 and had not long taken possession of my first home, a wee granny flat bedsit in Kilmarnock, after negotiating the homelessness system and sofa surfing for what felt like ages. I was desperate for work and, as I tried to eke out my £37 per week jobseekers allowance, I had become fixated on watching how much of my power card was eaten every time I boiled the kettle. Thankfully, the low rent meant that housing benefit rules did not punish me further due to my age and, with a mixture of family hand-me-downs and the lifeline that was the Kilmarnock and Loudon furniture redistribution project, I created myself a wee home to be proud of.

Therefore, when I was offered an interview for part-time youth work with a third sector project—funded as part of an area of priority treatment—which was aimed at preventing car crime, I jumped at the chance. The post was created for young persons such as me, who needed a wee helping hand into the world of work. After much coaching from the jobcentre, I attended the interview and nailed it. I was elated and terrified to be offered the job but, thankfully, the staff at the project also ensured that I was given the tools to manage my tenancy on the £100 per week wage, as I had lost all benefit entitlement. I absolutely loved my time with the Kilmarnock car project and, a year down the line, when I was able to secure full-time work, the staff at the project were made up for me, as I took my next steps into adulthood. I have never forgotten the time and energy that was afforded to me by the third sector.

As a councillor, I worked with many community trusts, voluntary sector projects and social enterprises that, through the community jobs Scotland programme, have given opportunities to the young people who are furthest away from the world of work. That symbiotic relationship has meant that young people have been able to gain skills and experience in a person-centred, flexible and supportive environment, while the

organisation has been able to tap into much needed funding for staffing.

Those organisations are often the life-blood of our communities. An example in my constituency is Yipworld in Cumnock, which is currently hosting its seventh community jobs Scotland opportunity, as interviews were conducted last week for two further vacancies for junior youth work posts. Janice Hendry, Yipworld's chief executive officer, told me:

"we are very aware youth work is one of the best ways to engage young people in confidence building and taking responsibility for delivering activities for children and young people, learning about work ethic and discipline and of course gaining much needed qualifications and certificates to build their CVs for employment opportunities."

The pandemic has tilted our world on its axis, and recovery from its effects will be a monumental collective effort. There is a shared ambition for the transformation of employability support and provision in Scotland, through the no one left behind strategy and the young persons guarantee. Currently, employability support is fragmented, so it needs to be co-ordinated and managed, in order to have the best results for young people and the public pound, and it needs more accountability and local governance.

Phase two of the no one left behind strategy will help accelerate the move away from multiple, inflexible national programmes that offer specific support for a time-limited period, towards a single gateway of local service delivery, which is backed with local intelligence and a more holistic and flexible package of support that is tailored to the needs of individuals and communities.

A monumental amount of work is happening across our 32 local authorities to strengthen our local employability partnerships, and all council leaders have signed up to delivering on the no one is left behind strategy. Collegiate work is paramount, and it is imperative that there is a recognition for the crucial role that the third sector will and must play in ensuring that our collective aims are realised.

12:58

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): It is a pleasure to join the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. We have already heard from my colleague Miles Briggs about some of the fantastic things that the community jobs Scotland project has achieved nationally, so I will use my time to focus on some of the projects that we have been working on in Ayrshire.

I recently completed my summer street surgery tour across South and East Ayrshire, having visited many different communities and encountered a cross-section of Ayrshire life.

Although some areas of the county are noticeably wealthy, others are not; they often score high in the Scottish index of multiple deprivation and suffer from social issues, such as antisocial behaviour, drug misuse and unemployment. When I spoke to residents, sadly, all too often, they commented on how there were too few opportunities for young people, too little employment and, as a result, too few incentives for young people to remain and contribute to those communities.

I share their frustration; I have lived in Ayrshire all my life and I have seen the traditional industries in the region fade away to nothing. As a parent of three young Ayrshire residents, I know how hard it is for young people to find work, particularly in a rural area such as the south-west, far from the bright lights of Glasgow or Edinburgh. That is why I found it really heartening to read about some of the truly remarkable work that the SCVO and community jobs Scotland have done to turn around young people's lives in Ayrshire.

There are stories such as that of James, from Muirkirk in East Ayrshire, who, like so many people in the region, felt that there was no support and sadly little hope of getting a job locally. CJS signposted him to a Street League employability course, which led to work with Auchinleck Community Development Initiative, where he specialised in helping people with mental health or learning difficulties. Now James works with the National Autistic Society, doing work that he loves and improving the lives of others.

The Carrick Centre has been another Ayrshire CJS success story. Led by centre manager Andrea Hutchison, the much-loved community centre has supported 31 young people through the scheme. Despite facing enormous challenges thrown up by the pandemic, Andrea has been a stellar advocate for the CJS and the impact that it can have in young people's lives. She highlighted the work of one CJS participant in particular, Alastair Stobbs. Despite experiencing barriers to employment, Alastair has become a valued member of the Carrick Centre team. He has developed his skills to adapt to the pandemic, helping to set up online workshops and a weekly newsletter and updating the website to enable the centre to stay in contact with its service users. Not only that, Alastair now mentors two new trainees at the centre.

Alastair and James are only two out of the thousands of people who CJS has helped to put their lives on track. Encouraged by employers such as Andrea, CJS enables them to grow, both as people and as leaders, by providing them with rewarding, meaningful employment that makes a real contribution to their communities.

Any story of a young person succeeding is a good-news story, but 10,000 of them is another thing—absolutely fantastic. What SCVO and CJS have achieved is remarkable. I am glad that we can mark their efforts in Holyrood today.

13:02

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank Miles Briggs for bringing the debate to the chamber. As other speakers have done, I congratulate the SCVO on this significant milestone in the delivery of community jobs Scotland.

I recognise the immense contribution that the SCVO makes to society in Scotland, supporting our voluntary sector to flourish and working in communities across Scotland with people from all backgrounds. We must also recognise the immense challenges that have been placed on the sector, and on all other sectors, by Covid-19. However, we also want to celebrate the way in which the voluntary sector in Scotland has risen to the challenge of supporting the most vulnerable people and, more widely, our cities, towns and villages in this time of crisis.

I wanted to speak in this debate because, prior to my election to Parliament, I had the great pleasure of working for over a decade in the voluntary sector. After leaving university, in 2010, I landed my first job at Volunteer Centre East Dunbartonshire, based in Kirkintilloch, as a development officer. Part of my role was supporting people to get back into work through volunteering and getting involved in community projects. In my first year in the role, community jobs Scotland was created, and I was able to directly support people into the new roles that were created across the voluntary sector.

I met people whose confidence had been shattered, who felt that they did not have a pathway to work and who felt that there were just too many barriers for them to get a job. They were people who, as the motion describes, had caring responsibilities, were care-experienced young people, held criminal convictions, were leaving the armed forces early or were living with disability. Community jobs Scotland offered a new avenue for people and a new sense of hope that they could gain the experience and skills that they needed to enter employment, and not through unpaid or tokenistic work but through a meaningful paid role for a fixed period, with the support that they needed for the role and to move beyond that and into longer-term employment.

Voluntary sector partners such as Citizens Advice Scotland, carers organisations and advocacy services provided roles that gave a strong standard of skills development and training.

Perhaps most importantly, those partners met people where they were: they took time to get to know them as individuals and to know their needs, and they developed strong support within teams in their organisations.

Later in my career, while working for Enable Scotland, I managed a number of community jobs Scotland roles and was able to give the same support, having learned so much all those years before in East Dunbartonshire.

When writing this speech, I was reflecting on one person in particular, who started in an admin role with Enable through community jobs Scotland and went on to become an integral part of our membership and events team, eventually running large member events and conferences. That person left Enable and went on to work full time in other roles across the voluntary sector and continues in full-time employment today. I hope that that demonstrates the real impact of community jobs Scotland. I know other members have spoken in similar terms about their experience.

As has been said and as the SCVO outlined clearly in its briefing, we should be a little concerned that community jobs Scotland will come to an end as funding transfers to local authorities. We would certainly want to see the bridging that Miles Briggs outlined in terms of the relationship between the SCVO and local authorities. In the words of the SCVO, CJS is a successful

“national ... programme which supports young”

people

“into employment”.

It seems counterintuitive to remove it at exactly the point that furlough ends, particularly when we have seen the examples of young people being able to access the right support at the right time and finding that pathway into work, as I said at the start of my remarks.

We have much to do to rebuild from the pandemic. Our priority must be to support existing and new avenues to employment for everyone who needs them, particularly the most vulnerable. We should not forget the key role that our voluntary sector has played and must continue to play.

13:06

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I commend my colleague Miles Briggs for securing the debate and I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in it. The significant contribution that the SCVO community jobs Scotland scheme has made to the lives of so many young people over the past 10 years cannot be overestimated. It has been an honour to learn more about some of the

successful case studies that have been brought to Parliament's attention today.

Supporting our young people is a subject very close to my heart. As we take steps together to address the devastating impact of the Covid pandemic on so many families and communities, providing that support for young people must be about reaching all young people. All our young people deserve no less. To do that effectively requires working in partnership, and community jobs Scotland's employability scheme has an impressive record in that regard.

In West Lothian, I refer to the example of the Larder project, which provides work experience and training through food production, delivery of hot meals and the operation of cafes. The importance of equality of access to good-quality food and allowing everyone to dine in dignity is at the heart of the project's goal, along with supporting young people into work. The feedback from 100 per cent of the young people who completed the Larder's CJS programme told us that they were more confident and felt that they had been given time to develop their skills in a supportive environment. I am so proud to be able to bring the work of that project to the attention of my colleagues. As the Larder says:

“Community Jobs Scotland was a game changer for us and the young people we employed”.

Through the SCVO's management of community jobs Scotland, it is able to provide a level of tailored and specialised support for both employers and employees from many different sectors and industries. There is a strong record of partnership working and joined-up referral processes with partners in the Department for Work and Pensions, Skills Development Scotland, local authorities, key workers, developing the young workforce and across the third sector.

The implementation of the no one left behind strategy will bring changes, and it is of course important that those should be well prepared, and for the better. As the pandemic has placed significant demands on the work and resources of all those partners, I ask the minister whether consideration has been given to delaying the implementation date for the changes to ensure that we do our best for young people who are furthest from employment opportunities. I urge the minister to assure members that, whatever lies ahead, the Scottish Government will take on board the best of the CJS program, to which so many have contributed so much over the past 10 years. We cannot risk losing the expertise that has allowed so many young people to benefit from CJS.

The Parliament celebrates the achievements of all those young people and I join others in placing

on record my congratulations to the 10,000th young person to come through CJS. It was of particular interest to me that this 10,000th job is in Impact Arts. As members have mentioned, the creative industries contribute so much to our society and our economy. I look forward to seeing many more young people being given the support to secure work in that sector.

As the furlough scheme comes to an end and uncertainty dominates the labour market, I hope that we will continue to see co-ordinated and focused support for those young people in our ethnic minority communities, those who are live-in carers and those with additional support needs, disabilities or caring responsibilities. I know that we can learn from the young people who have completed the CJS program and I look forward to working with everyone in Parliament to give all our young people a future. I again thank Miles Briggs for the debate.

13:12

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): I thank Miles Briggs for bringing the motion to Parliament. I add my congratulations and thanks to the SCVO for achieving this impressive milestone.

Many members have referred to the fact that employability support, which includes programmes such as community jobs Scotland, supports Scotland's economic recovery and responds to the immediate labour market impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. We are thankful to the SCVO, partners and all employability providers across the public, third and private sectors for their flexibility in providing support to those who need it the most and for their ability to adapt their delivery models to respond to Covid restrictions and the wider implications of the pandemic.

Miles Briggs and Sharon Dowe, through case studies from Lothian and South Scotland, gave inspirational stories about how young people have been helped through new pathways to a career ladder and to improve their life chances. Paul O'Kane worked with CJS and brought some colourful insights into the importance of the organisation, where he met and worked with many of those young people.

As we turn our focus to delivering the priorities that the programme for government set out and to long-term recovery, we are continuing to take forward our no one left behind approach to employability, which is based on partnership and collaboration to deliver joined-up person-centred services through transformational change. It is about delivering a system that focuses on the needs of the service user first and that is flexible

enough to respond to any unforeseen labour market shocks in the future.

Partnership and collaboration will be critical to the delivery of no one left behind, with services that local employability partnerships, which comprise of representation from third sector organisations and other public service providers, including Skills Development Scotland, collectively design at a local level.

Phase 2 of no one left behind, to which members have referred, is scheduled to come into force in April 2022, after a delay to take into account the circumstances of the pandemic. The Government clearly wants to be assured that local employability partnerships are ready and able for phase 2 to take place in April 2022, and we are receiving those assurances. However, we are meeting and corresponding with the SCVO and others to discuss some of the issues that they face.

Elena Whitham emphasised the value of local decision making, how it is a big step forward and how we have to support that. There is, I think, cross-party support for taking more decisions at the local level. We want to press ahead with that, but we are taking into account a number of the issues that have been brought to our attention and we will make further announcements in due course. We want to ensure that the value of the community jobs Scotland programme and the whole concept is not lost but is protected.

Councillor Parry from COSLA wrote to me recently to reassure me that our local employability partnerships are ready, able and prepared for phase 2. I urge all members to speak to their local employability partnerships if they have any concerns. I hope that that will also reassure them about the future. In her letter, Councillor Parry says:

"The LEP survey was a genuinely hard-look at local policy and practice. Those survey findings highlight that, even in Spring this year: more than three quarters of LEPs' funded third sector employability provision was through local commissioning; 94% presently have a commissioning procurement framework in place or intend to establish one; and the vast majority are in favour of establishing a national framework for procuring employability services. Since that survey was undertaken LEPs and their processes have been further strengthened."

That is a quote from Councillor Parry's letter, and I have no doubt that I will hand that to the official report later.

When I spoke to the local employability partnerships about all the benefits of community jobs Scotland and moving to the next stage of the no one left behind plan, they were adamant and at pains to say that they are champing at the bit to get on with the next stage, and to help local young people and others who are that bit further from the

labour market. They also say that they cannot envisage moving forward without the third sector being at the heart of what they do. The extra flexibility of working with some local third sector organisations in their communities and having local decision making is seen as valuable, and that is the view of Parliament.

We will continue to hold discussions and correspond with the SCVO and third sector organisations that might have on-going concerns. We want to make sure that we can reassure them as we move forward.

On that note, I will conclude by saying that it is fantastic to mark and commemorate a milestone that the SCVO and community jobs Scotland have achieved for many young people in Scotland. As I said, many of the stories are inspirational, and that is the evidence that we need to hold at the forefront of our minds as we move forward. We need to ensure that those values are captured and promoted in phase 2 of no one left behind, as we support young people and others who we want to help to get on with their lives, improve their life chances and get into the labour market at the same time.

13:17

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Education and Skills

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. I remind members that Covid-related measures are in place in the chamber and around the Holyrood campus. Face coverings should be worn when members are moving around the chamber and across the campus.

The next item of business is portfolio questions on education and skills. I remind members who want to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak button or to put an R in the chat function during the relevant question.

Education Agencies (Recruitment)

1. **Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what the recruitment policy is for its education agencies, in light of the plan to abolish the Scottish Qualifications Authority and reform Education Scotland. (S6O-00149)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): There has been no change to the recruitment policy for the education agencies following my announcement that we will replace the SQA and reform Education Scotland. Recruitment policy remains a matter for the individual agencies and is publicly available in the framework agreements for Education Scotland and the SQA. I am committed to continued support for the SQA and Education Scotland to ensure that they have sufficient resources to perform their functions during this transitional period.

Russell Findlay: I have been looking at many job adverts for the soon-to-be-overhauled Education Scotland. Right now, the quango is looking for a head of leadership learning. Apparently, this person

“will lead and co-ordinate the work of the Professional Learning and Leadership Directorate, providing national support for professional learning and leadership development. The Head of Leadership Learning will work closely together with the Head of Professional Leadership and Learning to bring a coherent approach to professional learning and leadership learning and development on a local, regional and national basis”.

Sorry—that was not my fault; that was the advert.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I know that you are making a point, but will you ask a question?

Russell Findlay: One lucky person will get up to £77,000 a year for the role. Will the cabinet secretary explain to pupils and parents the

benefits of such lucrative quango jobs? Would that money not be better spent on teachers?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The Government is investing heavily in additional teachers. We made that commitment and have taken action on it in our first 100 days.

Education Scotland and the SQA continue to have exceptionally important roles in supporting teachers to support learners during the transitional phase. I trust that all those working in Education Scotland and the people who reply to the job advertisements will do their utmost to support our education system through this difficult time by supporting our teachers to support our learners.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: On the assumption that they will not read out job descriptions, Martin Whitfield and Willie Rennie will ask brief supplementary questions.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer—I will not read out a job description.

Will the cabinet secretary give an undertaking that Scottish Government will wholly fund the new agency rather than require it to raise resources, as the current SQA must do, which diverts attention from its core purpose?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Ken Muir will report on the remit, role and functions of the replacement to the SQA, and he is due to report back to me in January. Scotland is not alone in having a qualifications authority that has to seek recompense from local authorities. Ken Muir may wish to put in a submission on those issues and, if anyone wants to put in a submission to him as he carries out his work, I am sure that he will listen closely. I will certainly listen closely to his recommendations.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Will it be possible to recruit staff who are able to produce timely guidance, unlike yesterday's guidance, which notes that further guidance on this year's qualifications will be produced in October? That is two months into the school year—how on earth will that help pupils and teachers?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The first guidance came out before the summer holidays. What came out yesterday gives detail in addition to that. The SQA is right to work with stakeholders through the national qualifications group to look at what guidance can be put in place and to put that out as expeditiously as possible once it has been agreed. It is sensible for the SQA to do that in stages, when agreement is reached, rather than to wait too long. Often, the SQA and other organisations are criticised for taking too long in their approaches.

On the contingencies for which the SQA gave further detail yesterday, it stressed the fact, for example, that there is no increased workload for teachers. I think that that statement was useful and I hope that it will be reassuring. It was right to do things so quickly and, as I have said, it will provide further guidance in due course, once that has gone through stakeholder consultation via the NQ group.

Climate Change (Information and Resources for Schools)

2. **Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what information and resources schools will provide to engage pupils with the issues that will be discussed at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26. (S6O-00150)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Although it is a matter for schools and authorities to decide the details of how to engage with COP26, Education Scotland is co-ordinating a package of learning materials and live online engagement with schools, education authorities and national partner agencies. Schools are also supported to engage with COP26 through the Scottish Government-funded eco-schools and climate-ready classrooms initiatives, which support schools in planning action on climate change and other environmental issues, through providing resources and training for educators and pupils.

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish Government may be aware of the Scottish Youth Film Foundation's COP TV programme, which will feature films and interviews created by young people from all over Scotland during COP26. COP TV will be broadcast into schools across the USA, due to the foundation's partnership with *The New York Times*. Is the cabinet secretary willing to liaise with the foundation's organisers and with Education Scotland to ensure that that programming is also made available to pupils in Scotland, and can she offer any assistance so that the young people who are involved with COP TV can access the conference of youth that is to take place?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I was delighted to hear about the Scottish Youth Film Foundation's COP TV programme. We are working with organisations across Scotland, including Youngo, the UN's official youth constituency, which is hosting the conference of youth, to ensure that children and young people in Scotland have as many opportunities as possible to make their voices heard on the global stage.

Education Scotland is liaising with the Scottish Youth Film Foundation to explore how young people can engage with COP26 through its plans. Screen Scotland is also providing funding towards

the climate challenge 1.5° films project, working with Film Access Scotland and other partners to support climate change film making with young people in eco-schools.

Skills and Labour Shortages (Brexit)

3. Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what analysis it has carried out of any sectorial skills and labour shortages in Scotland following Brexit. (S6O-00151)

The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn): The office of the chief economic adviser to the Scottish Government has been working closely with Skills Development Scotland to carry out an analysis of official labour market sources, in order to provide insights into sectoral skills and labour shortages in Scotland following Brexit.

In July, I, along with the Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work and the Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise, met a number of business representative organisations in order to better understand their recruitment challenges, many of which have been directly linked to the United Kingdom Government's immigration policy. We have continued to engage with business on mitigation measures and to press the UK Government to hear the concerns that have been raised and act accordingly.

Paul McLennan: Brexit has impacted on many sectors in my constituency, leaving many businesses with skill shortages and increasing labour shortages. What discussions have been held with the UK Government on its post-Brexit immigration scheme, and, in particular, on the tier 2 entry requirements? Does the minister agree that the best solution to the issue in the future is an independent Scotland that can make its own arrangements?

Jamie Hepburn: As I set out in my initial answer, we seek to engage regularly with the UK Government on such matters. For instance, Richard Lochhead wrote to the UK Government in July on the post-Brexit immigration policy, urging it to rethink in the light of skills shortages, and Marie Gougeon wrote in August to highlight some of the challenges in the food and drink sector.

On where we are now, I believe that the UK Government should consider the paper that we have pulled together—"Migration: Helping Scotland Prosper"—which outlines how the devolution of migration could work. However, I agree with the member that independence is ultimately the best way to shape an immigration policy that is fit for Scotland's circumstances.

School Leavers (Impact of Pandemic)

4. Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the positive destinations of school leavers. (S6O-00152)

The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn): The Scottish Government has responded to concerns about the impact that the pandemic has had on young people by introducing the young persons guarantee, providing £70 million of funding this year in addition to the £60 million that was allocated last year. The 2019-20 data showed that 92.2 per cent of school leavers were in a positive destination at the nine-month point after the end of the school year. The 2020-21 figures will be available in due course.

Stephen Kerr: In Falkirk, the number of apprenticeships has dropped from 587 last year to 160 this year. That fall is replicated right across the country. Without whataboutery, and without any defensiveness, does the minister recognise that that is a disaster for young people, for businesses and for all of us? Is he satisfied that enough is being done to address that issue?

Jamie Hepburn: Of course we saw a significant impact on the number of apprentices being recruited in the past year; how could we have seen anything but, given that we are in a global pandemic and demand was suppressed? However, what satisfies me is the positive news that, in the first quarter of this year, there were 3.7 times as many modern apprenticeship as there were in quarter 1 of the previous year. We are, therefore, recovering.

In relation to Stephen Kerr's point about "whataboutery", I take that as a reference to what is happening in Scotland by comparison to the rest of the UK. I will update the chamber with regard to that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly.

Jamie Hepburn: In 2016-17, we had 26,262 apprenticeship starts; by 2019-20, that number was up to 27,875. Over the same period in England, by contrast, the number of apprenticeship starts declined by 172,400.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will take a brief supplementary question from Kaukab Stewart, who joins us online.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): How is the Scottish Government supporting Scotland's young people into employment, education or training?

Jamie Hepburn: We have a range of initiatives under way. For example, our developing the

young workforce activity is now well embedded and is being accelerated and enhanced by the nearly 300 DYW school co-ordinators who are employed across every secondary school in Scotland. The young persons guarantee, which I mentioned, will provide at least 24,000 new and enhanced employment, education and training opportunities over a two-year period in addition to all the activity that we already have in place.

Outdoor Education

5. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what measures it is putting in place to support outdoor education. (S6O-00153)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey): In addition to the £2.5 million that we have provided to the sector over the past 18 months, we work with the sector on an on-going basis to support schools to access and use outdoor centres and to ensure that our Covid-19 guidance provides clear advice on safe and supported visits to centres. The most recent update to that guidance, which removed caps on the number of young people within dorms and tents, was issued on 19 August.

The programme for government contains a number of commitments, including commitments to trial Scotland's first outdoor primary learning facilities, to provide support for children to go on curriculum-related trips including primary 6 and 7 residentials, and to give secondary school pupils the right to go on at least one optional trip during their time at school.

Liz Smith: I thank the minister for that update. One of the most urgent concerns remains the future viability of around a third of our outdoor education centres. Even more important is the future employment of the very highly specialised members of their staff, whose skills are absolutely crucial to the education of our young people, especially after the Covid pandemic. I therefore press the Scottish Government on what it is doing to secure the future of our outdoor education centres.

Clare Haughey: Liz Smith may be interested to know that, on 10 August, I met the Outward Bound Trust Scotland Scouts and the chair of the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres. Some of the issues that Liz Smith has raised were raised during that meeting, and it was agreed that officials would follow up in order to gather more detailed information and evidence. A further meeting between officials is being arranged for sometime in the next few weeks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will allow a supplementary question from Collette Stevenson if it is on outdoor education.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that the climate emergency is reflected in children's and young people's learning?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask the minister to tie that back in to outdoor education.

Clare Haughey: Our learning for sustainability action plan, which includes climate education, contains actions to support teaching skills in sustainability education, to develop and promote qualifications relating to sustainability and to encourage schools to take a whole-school approach.

To coincide with the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—summit, Education Scotland is providing a series of online countdown-to-COP26 events for schools, and the learning for sustainability awards 2021, which will be announced on 27 October, will also help to gather and share examples of sustainability education across Scotland. I am sure that that will include outdoor education, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Saved at the last.

Upper-secondary Education Student Assessment

6. Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it will take forward the recommendations in Professor Gordon Stobart's review of upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland. (S6O-00154)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Professor Stobart's work looks at approaches to qualifications and assessment that are taken around the world and sets out options for consideration in a Scottish context. We will draw on that work to inform wider conversations and ensure that our future qualifications and assessment approaches better align with the early stages of our curriculum and are accessible to all learners, including those with additional support needs and those from more deprived backgrounds.

I will provide a further update to Parliament in October, as part of an update on the on-going implementation of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's recommendations in its review of curriculum for excellence.

Bob Doris: Professor Stobart's international comparisons between high-stakes exit examinations and robust and adequately moderated continuous assessments highlight real

opportunities to rebalance Scotland's model of certification and make it less reliant on such high-stakes exams. Having spoken to members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and fellow members of the Education, Children and Young People Committee yesterday, I know that many young people would not only welcome that work but would be keen to be involved in shaping it.

Can the cabinet secretary provide any additional update to Parliament on the Scottish Government's latest thinking in that area? Can she also reassure young people that they will be meaningfully involved in discussions on reshaping Scotland's model of certification to ensure that young people receive the qualifications that they merit?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are committed, as a Government, to ensuring that the voices of young people, parents and teachers as well as practitioners are at the centre of our education policy. We want it to be the norm that children and young people are involved in those decision-making processes.

On 22 June, I outlined that we will reconvene the Scottish education council, and we will ensure that the council includes young people's representatives. In addition, we are establishing the children and young people's education council to sit alongside the Scottish education council, and they will have parity of esteem. Along with wider engagement, that will help to ensure that children's and young people's voices influence education policy, including by shaping the reform of qualifications.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): The cabinet secretary should not need a further review or committee to answer this yes-or-no question. Will she give a simple guarantee that Scottish pupils will still have the opportunity to gain an externally assessed exam-based qualification before leaving school?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I have said on numerous occasions, the Government is open to the opportunities that we have.

Oliver Mundell: Yes or no?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: With the greatest respect, I say to Mr Mundell that it is not a simple yes-or-no answer, because we are having serious and detailed conversations about what assessments will look like. "Yes or no?" does not quite cut it in government, although it might do for Mr Mundell's press release.

As I was saying, Presiding Officer, the Government is very open to considering the best way of doing assessments and qualifications in the future, and Professor Stobart has given us a range of options. Many of the opportunities that we have

are based on combining assessments at the end of term—exams—with more continuous assessment, ensuring that we give everyone in Scotland the opportunity to develop to their full potential.

I am determined to do that. I hope that the Opposition rises to the occasion, gets past asking for yes-or-no answers and joins the detailed conversation on the role of exams, in the current set-up and in any future set-up, and how we can take things to the next level to provide the best opportunities for Scotland's young people.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Yesterday, the Scottish Qualifications Authority published a two-page document that stated that the final decision on national qualifications in 2022 will be made next March. It lacked any detail of the criteria that will be used in making that decision—particularly around whether disruption will be assessed on a pupil-by-pupil, school-by-school, council-by-council or national basis. Will the education secretary make a statement to Parliament to clarify that important issue?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: In its statement yesterday, the SQA gave further detail of what will happen in different scenarios. One aspect that the SQA looked at relates to a scenario in which there is increased disruption but exams are allowed to happen. Those changes can be made very late on in the process, because they relate to what will happen in the exams themselves. The other scenario that the SQA considered relates to what happens if exams cannot happen because of the pandemic. That is why the SQA has given the reassurance that assessments will inform the process and that that will not create an additional workload for teachers. Yesterday's announcement gave a lot of certainty and reassurance to teachers, young people and parents.

As we go through the year, the situation will be fluid and flexible. I am not sure whether Mr Marra has a crystal ball showing what the pandemic will look like in a couple of months, but I certainly do not. That is why we and the SQA are continuing our discussions with stakeholders, including parents, teachers and young people, to develop our understanding as we go. Of course, the SQA will give further detail in due course, once those discussions reach the point at which announcements can be made.

Children with Additional Support Needs (Support for Schools)

7. Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it supports schools in delivering high-quality education for children with additional support needs. (S6O-00155)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): We are committed to ensuring that all children and young people get the additional support that they need to reach their full potential.

In October 2020, we published our joint response to the independently chaired review of implementation of additional support for learning. Angela Morgan's report sets a clear direction for how we will continue to work with partners to build on progress in that area. The joint action plan sets out the measures that we will take to implement her recommendations.

Rachael Hamilton: Borders parents whose children live with ASN have expressed how, due to children and adolescent mental health service waiting times, they find it difficult to gain a diagnosis, with some having to pay for a private assessment. Even then, private assessments are sometimes not accepted. In the light of such difficulties, what additional resources can be made available to ensure that more assessments are done, so that children with ASN receive the educational arrangements to which they are entitled?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I thank Rachael Hamilton for her question. If she provides my office with further detail of the specific local concerns that she has raised, I will be more than happy to provide further detail.

Rachael Hamilton is absolutely right to point out that children and young people, including children with additional support needs and those who might be awaiting a diagnosis, have been adversely affected by the pandemic. Additional funding has been given to support local authorities and health boards, and additional support has also been given to CAMHS. As I say, if Rachael Hamilton has a particular issue in her local area, I am more than happy to follow that up with her.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I want to take two supplementary questions, but they will need to be brief—and the answers likewise.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): What steps have been taken so far in appointing a commissioner for learning disability, autism and neurodiversity, and what role is the commissioner expected to play in ensuring a high-quality education for children with those specific additional support needs?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As the First Minister announced in her programme for government, we are carrying out scoping work on the remit and powers of a learning disability, autism and neurodiversity bill in this parliamentary year, which will include work on a learning disability, autism and neurodiversity commissioner.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the Scottish Government set out its plan for a transition strategy, to which it committed in its recent programme for government?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I know that Pam Duncan-Glancy is particularly keen to press the Government on the issue and ensure that we deliver on it. We have made progress with that work, in terms of meeting stakeholders and working groups. I know that there was a meeting on the matter recently, although I was not at it. I will ensure that the minister—I think that it is Clare Haughey, who is involved as part of the work that she is doing with Christina McKelvie—provides further detail to Pam Duncan-Glancy.

Mental Health in Schools Working Group

8. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the work of the mental health in schools working group. (S6O-00156)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): The mental health in schools working group has overseen the development of new resources for school staff, including a new online professional learning resource, which was introduced in June 2021, and new guidance to support whole-school approaches to mental health and wellbeing, which was published in August 2021.

The resources help school staff to understand and respond to the range of mental health and wellbeing concerns that young people might experience. The Scottish Government will continue to work with the mental health in schools working group to embed those approaches across Scotland.

Tess White: The working group's whole-school approach framework includes access to school counselling services. However, Aberdeenshire Council has identified a shortage of qualified and accredited counsellors in the north-east, which means that the counselling service will not be at full capacity until January 2023. Given the pressures on children's mental health, what action is the Scottish Government taking to support the delivery of school counselling services?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As Ms White will know, the Scottish Government has provided support to local authority partners to ensure that every secondary school has access to counselling services, because we want to ensure that those who require that support receive it. If there are workload issues in obtaining staff in particular areas, that is clearly a concern. The Scottish Government will take all the measures that it can to improve access to counselling services, and we will work with our local authority partners, which

have responsibility for recruitment and retention in relation to such issues.

Fairer and More Equal Society

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-01248, in the name of Shona Robison, on a land of opportunity—supporting a fairer and more equal society.

I invite members who want to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible or, if they are joining us remotely, to put an R in the chat function.

14:27

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison): I am pleased to open the debate by outlining the action that the Government is taking to create a fairer, more equal society for all who live here. We are well aware of the challenges ahead. We know that Covid-19 has not gone away and that we must be vigilant while the virus remains part of our daily lives. Its impact has been far reaching, with disproportionate impacts being felt by certain communities and, in particular, by low-income households. We face the double whammy of Covid and Brexit, with rising prices, shortages and a particular toll being faced by many industries.

As we rebuild from the pandemic, we have an opportunity to ground our recovery in changes that will create a more equal and inclusive society that is green and fair. By building on our national mission to tackle child poverty, support thriving communities, provide people with a safe, warm place to call home and deliver fair jobs, we will create a land of opportunity for everyone.

Last week, the First Minister set out our plans to deliver that vision over this parliamentary session. We will work across party lines to do so. The recent agreement with our Scottish Green Party colleagues exemplifies our determination to come together to make Scotland a greener, fairer country, and I welcome having a new minister responsible for delivering a new deal for tenants.

Our goals are clear, and we are building on the work of previous Governments and the unprecedented action that has already been taken to achieve them. We have already done so much through our delivery of affordable homes, our action on isolation and loneliness, our funding to organisations that help women and girls who are victims of abuse and violence, and our action to tackle child poverty and the poverty-related attainment gap, to name but a few policies. We are working hard to ensure that opportunity is never limited by economic or social background.

Let me turn first to a policy area that creates jobs and boosts our economy: housing. We know that housing is pivotal to our recovery and our goal of a fairer, more equal society, and to reaching our net zero and child poverty targets. Through our long-term housing to 2040 strategy, we have an opportunity to ensure that our actions are guided by principles of social justice, equality and human rights.

A strong supply of affordable homes is crucial to that aim. Since 2007, the Scottish Government has delivered more than 103,000 affordable homes, and our housing to 2040 ambition is to deliver a further 110,000 energy-efficient affordable homes by 2032, which would support a total investment package of £18 billion and up to 15,000 jobs each year.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Does the cabinet secretary accept that the Scottish National Party Government's attempts so far to scale up housing first have been a failure?

Shona Robison: No—I totally reject that. Housing first has been a success, helping those with additional needs, particularly those with addiction, to remain in a stable tenancy with the wraparound support that they need. If the member paid any attention, he would know that housing first is a success and is going from strength to strength. *[Interruption.]* I will come back later; I want to make some progress.

At least 70 per cent of the affordable homes will be for social rent and at least 10 per cent will be in our remote, rural and island communities. With more than 4,800 homes delivered in rural areas in the four years to 2019-20, we know that we are reaching across Scotland, but we want to go further. We are developing a remote, rural and islands housing action plan, which will be backed by at least £45 million over this parliamentary session, to ensure that we meet the needs of those communities.

This Government has already introduced sweeping changes to the private rented sector, protecting tenants and improving standards. Now we will go further. We will publish a new rented sector strategy to improve accessibility, affordability and standards across the sector and deliver a new deal for tenants, and we will introduce a new housing regulator for the private rented sector to improve standards and ensure fairness.

We will also build on success in preventing evictions during the pandemic, supporting our aim for everyone to have a safe, warm, affordable home that meets their needs. That includes introducing new restrictions on evictions in winter, when people are most vulnerable and support services are not as readily available. We will

introduce a new homelessness prevention duty on relevant statutory bodies.

The right to a home is a human right, as is social security, and we are creating a social security system that enshrines that principle. In July, we successfully introduced the pilot of our first major disability benefit, the child disability payment, the national roll-out of which is due to start on 22 November. We will shortly begin transferring Scottish clients who are currently in receipt of disability living allowance for children on to our new Scottish benefit, which will be the first time that we will undertake the complex transfer of cases from one Government to another.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Is the cabinet secretary concerned that the costs of setting up Social Security Scotland have now doubled and that we are now looking at £100 million being spent on staff in 2022, to deliver just £386 million of additional benefits? What work is the Government doing to look at the cost overruns?

Shona Robison: There are not cost overruns. We have already introduced 11 benefits and, when fully operational, Social Security Scotland will administer 17 benefits in total. It is a growing organisation that is delivering more benefits, and, when that process is complete, the administration costs will be no higher than those of the Department for Work and Pensions. The member should recognise that Social Security Scotland is an important employer in my city of Dundee and in Glasgow, employing people who quite often are the furthest from labour market.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): The cabinet secretary mentioned the transfer of disability benefits and carers benefits. We are consistently told that if we were to address eligibility and advocacy issues for those benefits any sooner than 2025, the capacity in the system would be exceeded. Can the cabinet secretary say whether we need to look now at resources and capacity in Social Security Scotland? Can she outline why, if the system is going to be so much better in the way that it delivers in Scotland, we expect it to be delivered at the same cost as the DWP?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you some time back, cabinet secretary.

Shona Robison: Thank you.

The system will be delivered better. It will be far more personal. At the moment, local teams are supporting families to apply for the child disability payment. It is very much a system that encourages and supports people to apply for the benefit.

Pam Duncan-Glancy will be well aware of the need for a safe and secure transfer of adult

disability benefits, but we are also committed to a review a year down the line once the benefit is in place. As she will understand, there are potential complexities and knock-on effects for passported benefits. I am sure that we will discuss that in more detail when I appear in front of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, because it is a really important issue.

The adult disability payment will follow, replacing the DWP's personal independence payment, with a pilot in the spring of 2022 and full roll-out by the summer.

We are aware of the impact that the pandemic has had on unpaid carers in Scotland and we are grateful for their vital contribution. We will make a further payment of the coronavirus carers allowance supplement in December, should the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill be passed. We will also introduce our new Scottish carers assistance in the current session. We are continuing to work with carers on ways in which support can be improved and we will consult on proposals this winter.

We will introduce our new low-income winter heating assistance to replace the current cold weather payment. That will provide around 400,000 low-income households with a stable annual £50 to help with their winter fuel bills. We will take responsibility for the annual winter fuel payment to those of pension age, which is currently provided to more than 1 million Scottish recipients each year. We will deliver it on the same basis in order to provide continuity for clients.

My portfolio covers many areas that change lives. One of those is human rights, and I am delighted that Scotland remains a global leader in that area. This year will see us consult on a human rights bill for Scotland to incorporate four United Nations human rights treaties into Scots law as far as is possible within devolved competence.

Over the next year, we will take forward two other consultations: one on an ambitious strategy to improve how we centre equality, inclusion and human rights in all Government policies, decisions and spending and support the wider public sector and others to do likewise, and the other on the operation of the public sector equality duty and potential regulatory changes to improve inclusive communications and data on ethnicity and disability pay gaps. *[Interruption.]*

I am sorry, but I will not take an intervention now as I must make some progress.

In the Government's first 100 days, we allocated an additional £5 million to support front-line organisations that tackle domestic abuse and sexual violence. We will invest over £100 million to support front-line services and ensure dedicated

resources to prevent violence against women and girls and advance gender equality. Our gender-based violence in schools working group will identify good practice and review and develop new resources. Following the conclusion of that work, alongside looking at harmful sexual behaviour, we will commission an independent review to establish positive practice and further areas for improvement during the current session of Parliament.

I turn to the important area of our national mission on child poverty. In 2020-21, we invested around £2.5 billion to support low-income households, including nearly £1 billion to directly support children, and we will see that level of support continue. Our actions in the programme for government are wide ranging, reflecting the fact that it contains a package of measures that can tackle poverty, not just one. Those actions include supporting more parents into work, expanding free early learning and childcare to one and two-year-olds and building a system of wraparound school-age childcare to increase households' incomes and reduce their costs.

Education is the right of every child and we are taking action to reduce the costs of the school day and ensure that children can access the subjects and opportunities that they want, regardless of family income. We are also committed to a £1 billion investment to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and support education recovery. From next August, we will deliver free school meals and milk for all primary pupils, having already introduced the Scottish milk and healthy snack scheme for children in pre-school. We met our commitment to increase the value of best start foods in our first 100 days and we will expand eligibility during the current session of Parliament, benefiting 60,000 more children.

We will publish our second tackling child poverty delivery plan next March, setting out ambitious actions to deliver at the pace and scale that are required to reach our child poverty targets. The plan will be backed by a further £50 million tackling child poverty fund.

Stephen Kerr: Does the cabinet secretary have any concerns about the quality of the meals that are being served to children in schools? I have had many representations from parents and teachers who are concerned about how appealing, attractive and even digestible some of those meals are because of the way that they are pre-prepared, frozen, delivered and heated up. The food is sometimes not very appetising.

Shona Robison: There are standards and it is important that all local authorities meet them. If the member has concerns about a particular authority, he should write to the cabinet secretary, giving more detail.

In the teeth of the pandemic, we still delivered our groundbreaking Scottish child payment. It is the most ambitious child poverty reduction measure anywhere in the United Kingdom and now supports 105,000 children under the age of six. It is part of a significant overall package of financial support that sees low-income families receive more than £5,300 in the early years of a child's life. There is more to come. If the DWP provides the data that we need and in line with our timescales, we will deliver the payment to under-16s by the end of 2022. That is a game-changing payment that, even at its current value, could reach up to 392,000 children and reduce child poverty by an estimated two percentage points in 2023-24.

To provide immediate support to families, we are delivering bridging payments for children in receipt of free school meals, providing £520 a year for around 148,000 children. Of that, £200 has already been paid, with £160 to be paid in October and December.

My party's manifesto committed us to doubling the Scottish child payment to £20 during this session of Parliament. That is four times the amount that was originally called for to tackle child poverty. We want to, and will, do that as soon as possible. As the First Minister said last week, it is a significant investment and will be part of our budget process later this year. Our plans will be set out shortly in the budget bill, ahead of our next tackling child poverty plan.

That is a clear action to tackle child poverty. It is designed to lift people out of poverty but is taken in the face of the actions of another Government, one that holds the levers of around 85 per cent of welfare spending and has taken no action to tackle child poverty since its election 11 years ago. While we take the positive action that I have set out today, we look at the UK Government and its fixation with austerity and the many changes to welfare policies that have contributed to poverty.

There is another of those around the corner. The Tories often talk about Scotland having two Governments. One of those aims to double the Scottish child payment; the other is about to take £20 a week out of the pockets of low-income households. That will happen soon, unless there is a complete change, and it will be a scandal the likes of which we have not seen in more than 70 years. More than 6 million UK households will lose more than £1,000 a year. Many of those people are unable to work due to ill health, disability or caring responsibilities; many others are in work but have to rely on universal credit to make ends meet.

Those issues have been raised by campaigners and by every devolved government. The UK Government has ignored the social security

committees of the four UK nations, which joined together to stand up for the people that they represent. That Government has ignored its own back benchers—although none from Scottish constituencies, who were posted missing—and former DWP secretaries of state. It has also ignored its own officials, one of whom has said:

“The internal modelling of ending the universal credit uplift is catastrophic. Homelessness and poverty are likely to rise, and food bank usage will soar. It could be the real disaster of the autumn”

Today provides an opportunity for all of us to lay out what we are going to do to tackle child poverty and to make Scotland a fairer nation. I look forward to working with members from across the chamber to do so.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the ambitious programme of work laid out in the Programme for Government to create a fairer society; agrees that tackling child poverty is a national mission and recognises Scottish Government actions, including doubling the Scottish Child Payment as early as possible within the current parliamentary session, new bridging payments until the Payment is rolled out to under-16s, increasing access to advice services to maximise incomes, expansion of free school meals provision, new statutory guidance to reduce the costs of school uniforms, supporting working parents with a system of wraparound childcare for school-age children and an investment of £1 billion over the session to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to expand early learning and childcare to one- and two-year-olds, starting with those from low-income households; further welcomes the continuation of the ambitious social security programme, including the doubling of Carer's Allowance Supplement this year and the introduction of new disability benefits; recognises the ambitious programme of work to ensure that everyone has the right to a safe warm affordable home; welcomes the new deal for tenants; acknowledges the work needed to be done to embed and advance equality, inclusion and human rights across society, and commits to working together during Scotland's recovery from COVID-19 in order to build a fairer and more equal society.

14:44

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): As the cabinet secretary did at the start of her speech, I begin by saying that I hope that we can, where possible, find agreement and consensus on a number of issues during this session of Parliament, so that we can address poverty and inequality. At the election, there was genuine cross-party commitment to working to tackle child poverty and, as the motion suggests, to make that a national mission. Indeed, all the parties that have been elected to Parliament agreed to double the child payment and to work to meet the target to reduce child poverty.

Scottish Conservatives supported the introduction of the Scottish child payment and have continued to support and press for reforms.

That is why my amendment calls on Parliament to support doubling of the Scottish child payment within the next financial year—something that all the charities and stakeholders that have provided useful briefings for the debate have called on MSPs to support.

The negative impact that the pandemic has had on Scotland's children and young people is only just starting to be fully understood, but for the most vulnerable children and young people in our society, we know that the impact has been significant. We all agree that realising the potential of every child and young person in Scotland must be a key focus of Parliament and the SNP-Green coalition Scottish Government. We must all be prepared to work hard to meet the ambitious targets that are set out in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act. 2017.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): It is with complete humility that I ask this question. How on earth can you stand there with any credibility or dignity and say that you are concerned about vulnerable children—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Not “you”, Mr Doris.

Bob Doris: —when the member is going to rob those vulnerable families of £20 a week? The most impoverished families, who are already on the breadline, are resorting to food banks. How can you look anyone in the eye and say that you are helping those vulnerable children? That is an absolute disgrace.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please, Mr Doris.

Miles Briggs: Bob Doris will be aware that I am on the record supporting an extension of that payment. I note that the Scottish Government's motion does not include any mention of the issue. What is on the table, though, is my amendment calling for doubling of the Scottish child payment within this financial year. Will the member support my amendment this evening? He seems to have lost his voice on the issue. I respectfully suggest to SNP and Green members that they, too, get their houses in order when they come to the chamber to ask questions of Opposition members.

One of the areas in which I believe urgent action is needed is the long-term impact that lockdown has had on children's learning, which we heard about during education questions. Long-term system-wide support is required if every child is to catch up and recover from the educational disruption that we have seen during the pandemic, which has had an impact on child development across Scotland. We know that prior to the pandemic SNP ministers were failing to close the educational attainment gap; indeed, the Audit

Scotland report that was published in March this year exposed the lack of progress in closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

That is why Scottish Conservatives want the Scottish Government to focus more on prioritising young people's education with delivery of additional support for catch-up schemes for disadvantaged children and young people.

It is also important to consider the skills and training opportunities that are available for young people to find work in key growth sectors. The loss of more than 100,000 college training places under the SNP Government has clearly impacted on the number of opportunities that are available for young people. Making sure that young people in Scotland who are not in training or education have opportunities to access schemes and apprenticeships, for example, is critical and is something that we all need to work to make happen.

I want to take this opportunity, as I did in Tuesday's debate on health and social care, to specifically thank and highlight the contribution that is being made by unpaid carers, especially young carers, during the pandemic. The pandemic has significantly increased the number of unpaid carers across our country. Research in June 2020 showed that 392,000 more people had become unpaid carers, taking the total to more than 1.1 million of our fellow Scots now taking on caring for a family member.

It is estimated that 45,000 young people across Scotland are now carers. Undertaking a caring role is a key factor that contributes to poverty. Whether someone is a paid carer or an unpaid carer, they are more likely to live in poverty as a result. Given the importance of care to people and our society, and the invaluable contribution that unpaid carers make, that cannot be right.

The pandemic has exposed the extent to which our NHS and social care services rely on unpaid carers. Scottish Conservatives welcome the doubling of the carers allowance supplement, and we want more progress in support for Scotland's carers, especially our young carers.

Scottish Conservatives support early action to extend payments for carers after a bereavement and we support a new support package for carers, who often have to give up work to care for a loved one. We also want there to be help to access training, and more mental health support.

I hope that ministers will work with the Scottish Conservatives to seriously consider as soon as possible reforms to the young carers grant and reforms to entitlement, in order to allow younger carers to qualify for the carers allowance supplement.

For care-experienced young Scots, we need to ensure that the Government retains a real focus on improving access to services, transition and care. The recommendations of the independent care review were widely supported across Parliament, but we have seen little progress from ministers on implementing that promise, or a national minimum allowance for foster carers, as was previously committed to and as is in place in other parts of the UK. My colleague Meghan Gallacher will outline more on that important issue later. Care-experienced young people expect the promises that have been made by ministers to be kept and action to be taken to implement the recommendations of the review.

I turn to the critical issue of housing and homelessness. The number of children in temporary accommodation reached the highest level on record before the pandemic. At the end of March 2020, there were 7,280 children living in temporary accommodation due to homelessness. That is the highest number since records began in 2002 and represents a 7 per cent increase on the previous year. In the year leading up to the pandemic, someone was made homeless in Scotland every 17 minutes. We know that the number of people and families in temporary accommodation has increased over the course of the pandemic.

Shona Robison: Miles Briggs raises an important point. We are working with local authorities to tackle the issue of temporary accommodation as a matter of urgency, and we are providing £37.5 million to do so. Can the member genuinely answer the question whether he thinks that the £20 cut to universal credit will help or hinder the number of people in temporary accommodation? Does he think that it will put more or fewer people into temporary accommodation?

Miles Briggs: The support that has been provided and the reforms that we have seen have been to try to prevent that very issue. I welcome the steps that local authorities have taken to provide emergency accommodation during the pandemic. However, we now need a long-term plan to end homelessness—something that SNP ministers have failed to do for 14 years. Rough sleeping and homelessness need a system-wide shift towards a preventative model. I agree with the cabinet secretary: I hope that there is genuinely an opportunity for us to look at that.

SNP ministers pledged to tackle homelessness by scaling up the housing first approach, as my colleague Stephen Kerr mentioned, but we have missed previous targets of supporting 800 people into housing first tenancies. The 2021-22 programme for government states that ministers will

“invest ... in a new Ending Homelessness Together Fund”

and that

“Funding for rapid rehousing will also support the scaling up of Housing First”.

However, we know the pathfinder total number of people moving into their own home through the housing first project. Only 381 people, not 800, had actually entered secure tenancies by the end of November 2020. We know that there has to be improvement from the Government.

There is a huge amount of work to do and, as Crisis Scotland stated in its useful briefing ahead of today’s debate:

“Ending homelessness does not mean that nobody will ever lose their home again. It means that, through prevention, homelessness only happens very rarely.”

At present, around 8 per cent of the Scottish population, or one in 12 people, have experienced homelessness. I very much support the calls to bring forward the preventative model, so where we can we will work with ministers to achieve that. Action to prevent homelessness should start six months before a person faces losing their home. Public bodies including health services should ask about people’s housing situations in order to try to identify issues earlier.

I hope that the recommendations that were set out to ministers through the homelessness prevention review group will now be taken forward. Those recommendations were supported by every party in Parliament, and I hope that the discussions that I have already had with the cabinet secretary can help to ensure that we make the issue a national priority.

It is clear that we need proper cross-portfolio efforts to make progress in addressing poverty, in achieving specific reductions across the board and in meeting the targets that we all supported.

There are also longer-term issues that the Parliament must consider, if we are to bring about real change. For example, we must take action to address intergenerational unemployment and we must provide opportunities to genuinely improve social mobility.

As I said at the start of my speech, I hope that Parliament can, where possible, find agreement and consensus on many issues and areas of work, so that in five years’ time we can all be proud of the effort that we have put into tackling poverty and inequality in Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-01248.1, to leave out from first “welcomes” to “across society” and insert:

“agrees that tackling child poverty is a national mission; calls on the Scottish Government to double the Scottish Child Payment within the next financial year; notes with

concern the recent figures that show that 5,000 families have been living in temporary accommodation for at least a year; further notes that an Audit Scotland report released in March 2021 exposed the lack of progress that has been made in closing the poverty-related attainment gap and calls on the Scottish Government to do more to prioritise young people's education; notes the recommendations of the Independent Care Review and calls on the Scottish Government to set out in more detail how it plans to implement The Promise Scotland; calls on the Scottish Government to implement a national minimum allowance for foster carers, as has been previously committed to; welcomes the doubling of the Carer's Allowance Supplement this year, but regrets that the Scottish Government will not take control of all devolved benefit powers until 2025".

14:55

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): People who are living in poverty right now and who are watching the debate and looking at what is happening across both Parliaments and Governments seriously need us all to get our act together. The £20 uplift that was introduced during the pandemic, in recognition of the fact that social security was at its worst in decades, cannot be taken away because that will leave people in destitution. However, the Scottish Government cannot sit on its hands and point fingers. The Scottish Government is using the same arguments to not roll out payments to under 16-year-olds that the DWP used to not give the £20 uplift to those on legacy benefits—it is claiming that it is logistically difficult and that the information technology system is not in place. People out there really need us all to get our act together before poverty becomes part of more people's lives.

Shona Robison: We are not dragging our feet. We are delivering bridging payments while those issues are resolved in order to get the money into people's hands. Surely the member recognises that important aspect of the Scottish Government's delivery?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I recognise that. However, 125,000 children who should get the under-16 payments are not getting those bridging payments because they are paid only to people who get free school meals. There are 125,000 children out there who should be getting the money but are not getting it.

It is a great privilege to lead the debate for Scottish Labour. The debate is entitled "A Land of Opportunity", which is what all of us in the Scottish Parliament want Scotland to be—a place where, no matter who you are, who you love, or where you were born, you can live up to your full potential. Sadly, for too many people, we are not there yet. As we sit here today, 1 million of our fellow citizens are living in poverty, and 260,000 of them are children. We are set to miss the child

poverty targets that we as a Parliament set without caveat.

Half of the families living in poverty have a disabled person in them. Disabled people in Scotland are twice as likely not to be in education or employment when they leave school. The disability pay gap remains at 8.3 per cent. Tens of thousands of disabled people live in homes that they cannot get in and out of. Disabled people do not have the care that they need and are underrepresented everywhere from the high street to the boardroom. The fact that six in 10 people who died from Covid-19 were disabled shows the disproportionate impact that the pandemic has had, as well as the chasms that existed in society before it.

Things are not equal for women, either. Women are more likely to be in poverty, more likely to experience in-work poverty and find it harder to escape poverty than men. Women's work in sectors such as care, cleaning, hospitality and retail has long been undervalued, underpaid and underprotected. The pandemic has meant that women are doing more unpaid labour and are being forced to carry out more unpaid caring responsibilities, childcare and housework than ever before. It is estimated that a collective £15 million of income has been lost each day in Scotland as a result of the work that many women have had no choice but to take on.

LGBT+ equality is nowhere near where it needs to be in Scotland. Stonewall research found that almost a quarter of LGBT people have witnessed discrimination and negative remarks against them by healthcare staff, and a startling 37 per cent of trans people avoid healthcare as result. It also found that 6 per cent of trans employees have been physically attacked by customers or colleagues, and that only half of LGBT staff agree that equalities policies in their workplace protect trans people.

I think I am explaining clearly why people in the groups that I have highlighted so far cannot see Scotland as a land of opportunity right now.

Miles Briggs: The number of homeless deaths in Scotland rose by nearly a third over two years. Would the member support my calls for the Government to hold a full review of access to healthcare for homeless people and rough sleepers, especially given the drug deaths that we have seen recently?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The drug deaths and homelessness show that we need to take homelessness and healthcare for homeless people very seriously. This morning, we heard that a homeless person is more likely to die in their late 30s—that is their life expectancy. Therefore, there

is absolutely an urgent need to look at healthcare for people who are homeless.

People from ethnic minority backgrounds in Scotland are 20 per cent more likely to be out of work, and 19 per cent of all the people who reported that they had experienced harassment were from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. That figure is the highest for any group. People from black and minority ethnic backgrounds also still face disproportionately higher rates of poverty.

Scotland is not a land of opportunity for those people. Thousands are held back by poverty and inequality and are denied their rights and their potential. The past year has been tough for every one of us—I believe that it is the hardest year that most of us have had. The pandemic has meant that people have been unable to leave their homes, to travel to see friends or family, to go to shops, and to do the things that they enjoy. None of us has enjoyed living in that way. However, women, people in poverty, disabled people, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and LGBT+ people have faced such restrictions on their human rights and freedoms for years. They have tried their best, knocked their pan in and still struggled to make ends meet, and they still face barriers at every turn. They have been overlooked and undervalued. They have needed more affordable homes, a crackdown on unscrupulous landlords and a pay rise for years.

Although this year has been dreadful for many people, things were hard before Covid. Poverty was rife, insecure and precarious work was too common, social care was creaking at the seams, and inequality was holding us back then. Things were bad before, but the pandemic has made things worse. All is not equal, and all never was equal.

However, the past year has shone some light in dark corners. One such corner was the inadequacy of the social security system. That led to the £20 uplift in universal credit. Cutting that now is abhorrent, and it will be devastating. The United Kingdom Government must do the right thing and keep the uplift.

The Scottish Government must act, too. It must find a way to ensure that the 4,000 families that are set to lose eligibility for the Scottish child payment as a result of the cut to universal credit retain that eligibility.

We—all of us—must see now that the opportunities that we want for our family, friends and country are not there, and we all have to act.

However, we have a reason to be hopeful. The past months have been difficult for everyone, and they have forced us to work together in new ways and to think about doing things differently. As we go forward and begin our journey to recovery, we

have an opportunity to take the lessons and do things differently. From hardship and pain come strength and hunger for change. However, bold and transformative change will be needed to ensure that things do not go back to the way they were. We need to include everyone on our journey and ensure that things are better than they were before for everyone.

That is why I continue to be hungry for more ambition and bold action from the SNP-Green programme for government. It is also why I am disappointed that it lacks urgency, innovation and real action to change lives now. The Scottish Government can use, and should be using, all the powers that it has to radically transform lives. Crucially, it must act on its mission to end poverty. Declaration is not enough; it will not put food on tables.

We are at a unique point in our history at which we have an opportunity to rebuild our social security system from the ground up. So far, change has been incremental, and the system is at risk of failing to live up to the hopes that it would be a radically fairer one. We know that a well-designed and properly funded social security system can tackle poverty and reduce economic, health and education inequalities, and

“It is time for a radical reinvestment into Scotland’s social security system.”

I believe that many agree with that statement, and I know that it has the support of some in government, because it comes from the Scottish Greens’ manifesto on social security. I look to my colleagues in the Green Party and ask them to work with us in the Labour Party, please, to support our calls, to stand by their commitments, and to take the opportunity to encourage their Government colleagues to be radical.

I cannot mask my frustration that the Government is failing to meet the moment in front of us and to seize the opportunity to be radical as it builds a new system. That system must be adequate, dignified, accessible and automated where possible.

We are happy to support much of the Government’s motion, but not the lack of ambition in that regard. We are not yet using our powers to their full potential. We need to quickly address the eligibility for, and the adequacy of, carers’ and disability payments. Waiting until 2025 is too long—that is both time and opportunity lost. We have to go harder and faster.

We urge the Government to back our amendment to accelerate an ambitious and urgent timetable for transformation. That is why our amendment focuses on action that we can take right now. Doubling the Scottish child payment and adding £5 for families with a disabled person in

them would help to protect them from poverty. That is why we are calling on the Government to immediately increase the payment to £20 a week. However, that will not go far enough for us to meet our targets. We know that, despite the Government's current commitment, we are going to miss them. That is why we are calling for the Government to double the Scottish child payment now, and again in a year, lifting 50,000 children out of poverty and putting us on track to meet the 2023 target.

We have heeded the First Minister's calls for a constructive Parliament. Where we can work with the Government, we will, and we have done. Today, the Government has a chance to work with us to get us back on track on child poverty, by backing our amendment and calls from charities across Scotland.

One person held back by inequality or overlooked by discrimination is one too many. One child in poverty is one too many. One day in poverty is one day too long. As the debate is entitled "A Land of Opportunity", I urge members to seize their opportunity and act to open opportunities for thousands of people across Scotland by doubling the Scottish child payment now, and again in a year. I urge members to back our amendment.

I move amendment S6M-01248.2, to leave out from first "welcomes" to "affordable home; welcomes" and insert:

"notes the programme of work laid out in the Programme for Government to create a fairer society; agrees that tackling child poverty is a national mission and calls on the Scottish Government to immediately double the Scottish Child Payment and then double it again to £40 per week in 2022-23 for all children under 16 in order to meet the interim target of child poverty levels of 18% in 2023-24, as agreed by this Parliament; notes that the Programme for Government has committed to increasing access to advice services to maximise incomes, expanding free school meals provision, new statutory guidance to reduce the costs of school uniforms, supporting working parents with a system of wraparound childcare for school-age children and an investment of £1 billion over the current parliamentary session to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap; further notes the Scottish Government's commitment to expand early learning and childcare to one- and two-year-olds, starting with those from low-income households; recognises the continuation of the social security programme, including the doubling of Carer's Allowance Supplement this year and the introduction of new disability benefits; acknowledges the programme of work that contributes to ensuring that everyone has the right to a safe warm affordable home; notes".

15:05

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I hope that ministers were listening to that contribution, because it was one of the most powerful contributions that I have heard in the chamber for some time. There is a lot to learn from Pam

Duncan-Glancy—her speech was an encyclopaedia of information about the state of poverty in Scotland. Ministers should listen and, more importantly, they should act.

I will focus my contribution on child poverty. Eradicating child poverty is an urgent mission. After 30 years of decline across the United Kingdom, it is once again on the rise. That means that more than one in four—260,000—Scottish children are officially recognised as living in poverty. In the absence of significant policy change, the figure is likely to increase in the coming years, reaching 38 per cent in 10 years. The Resolution Foundation suggests that the Scottish child poverty rate will be 29 per cent in two years. That is a lot of numbers, but I will clarify the situation for members. The rate is 25 per cent now. In two years, it will rise to 29 per cent and, in 10 years, to 38 per cent. That should be to our shame if we do nothing, and what we are doing so far is just not enough.

The connections between poverty and poor educational outcomes, behavioural problems, chronic illness and mental health are clearly evidenced—[*Interruption.*]

I will come to the Conservative Government later, on universal credit, but every Parliament in the UK needs to work to address the poverty that is gripping too many of our children. We should not simply complain about another Government, but take action on areas within our power. I am afraid that the Scottish Government too often points the finger elsewhere, rather than taking action here at home.

For Liberals, education and work are the route out of poverty. We support putting power in the hands of young people by giving them the educational tools that they need to achieve, and to get a good job and a warm home for themselves and their family in the future.

The performance in Scotland has just not been good enough. Five years ago, the First Minister promised to close the poverty-related attainment gap completely. She said that it was simply unacceptable that youngsters from the most deprived areas of Scotland were doing only half as well as their counterparts from the richest areas when sitting higher exams. She went on to say:

"I want our work to close the attainment gap to be the mission not just of this Government nor even of this Parliament but of the country as a whole."—[*Official Report*, 25 May 2016; c 5.]

Yet, over five years later, the poverty-related attainment gap still stands at 35.8 points of difference at Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 6 or above.

At that rate of progress—I acknowledge that there has been some modest progress—it will take

another 35 years for the poverty-related attainment gap to close. The First Minister promised to close the gap completely; she did not say that it would take 35 years.

This area of public policy is completely in the hands of the Scottish Government. The Government has talked a good game on education and poverty, but it has failed to deliver. It has been slow-footed on introducing early years education for two-year-olds, and it is still slow-footed. Only about a third of those two-year-olds who are entitled to nursery education access it. That has been going on for years, yet the Government has failed to take action.

The Government has been slow-footed in adopting the pupil premium in England that targets funds at the poorest pupils in school. The “not made here” belligerence of the SNP has had a dramatic effect on the life chances of thousands of young people. The clock is ticking for the SNP-Green coalition Government because the clock is ticking for our young people. A poor child starting school now will be 40 years old by the time that the coalition Government closes the poverty-related attainment gap. Those children deserve so much more than that.

Turning to the Conservatives, modest criticism from the Conservative benches here is just not enough. I happen to agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, who declared that

“the best way to take people out of poverty is to find them high-quality work.”

Who could disagree with that? That also happens to be the best way of cutting the cost of universal credit to the public purse. High-quality work cuts the universal credit bill by not £20 but £100 a week. However, the Conservatives have an unhealthy belief that the best way to tackle poverty is to make those who cannot find well-paid work, which is what is required, even poorer than they are now. That is not the way to tackle poverty or get people into work. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation was clear about the issue and said that the universal credit cut could force 500,000 people—almost half of them children—into poverty.

The Scottish Conservatives need to speak up and make their voice heard. If they do not agree with the policy, let them speak, criticise the UK Government and force it into taking action. The Conservatives have been cavalier on the issue. It is no longer acceptable and is short sighted, cruel and mean-spirited to punish people who are in their hour of need.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. I call Neil Gray, who will be followed by Pam Gosal. You have around six minutes, Mr

Gray, but we have a bit of time in hand, so I think that we can recompense you for any interventions.

15:12

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): A fellow Orcadian knows how this one likes to talk. Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I am pleased to be speaking in favour of the motion today, as it highlights the ambition that the Scottish Government has for the session ahead. I note from the proposed amendments to the motion, particularly the Labour amendment, that there is quite considerable consensus, even if it is tacit, across the chamber on the measures that are being brought forward by the Scottish Government. It was, therefore, perhaps a wee bit contrary for Anas Sarwar and many of his Labour colleagues, since the programme for government was announced, to say that it somehow lacked ambition, when the areas that are mentioned in the motion match or go further than Labour’s manifesto commitments and so little is sought in the amendment.

Indeed, the one area of real deviation—*[Interruption.]* I will answer that later. The one area of deviation between what is set out in the programme for government and today’s Opposition amendments is on the Scottish child payment.

All parties went into the election promising to double the Scottish Government’s anti-poverty, game-changing Scottish child payment. As someone who is an anti-poverty campaigner and believes that building consensus drives and sustains progress, I found that incredibly heartening. The question mark, of course, is about timing. We all want to see that increase happening as quickly as possible, but it highlights the limitations of a hybrid tax and social security system.

The Scottish child payment is demand led. That means that the budget commitments will change year on year, depending on eligibility, which of course will be higher at times of higher unemployment or poor economic performance that suppresses wages; that is also the time when consequential tax receipts are also lower. When we need to fund more social security, our revenue is reduced and that is why demand-led social security requires borrowing to work. The Scottish Parliament does not have adequate borrowing powers, which means that it takes longer to safely deliver and sustain social security benefits than it would do if they were being delivered with full powers.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The member mentioned ambition. Our amendment absolutely recognises the work that is on-going but, as is consistent with

the evidence that we heard this morning in the Social Justice and Social Security Committee—Neil Gray will have heard it, too—the social security system will have to do the heavy lifting, so that is where we need to put our energies, in order to lift children and families out of poverty. Does the member agree that that is the single biggest thing that we need to do right now?

Neil Gray: Yes; obviously, we are in a tale of two Governments, in which one Government is investing in social security and one is cutting it.

However, as I was going to say to Miles Briggs, neither Labour nor the Tories included in their manifestos the commitments to the Scottish child payment that they make in their amendments today. Therefore, I look forward to seeing their costed budget submissions coming up, because it would lack credibility for either party to make those demands, which go beyond their just four-month-old manifestos, without explaining how they should be paid for. We have to operate within a fixed budget in Holyrood and new spending commitments have to be met from existing resources, because we do not have the necessary borrowing powers that a normal Parliament has when it delivers social security.

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I am slightly confused by that line of argument, because all social security benefits are demand led, yet this Government has been very happy to take on PIP and DLA, which, again, go up at different times. How will we pay for those?

Neil Gray: The commitments that have been made are being forecast and budgeted ahead of time, so that is exactly the same point that has been made around the Scottish child payment. For that to happen properly, it needs to be done in a way that ensures that the budget's safety is built in over time, which is why the two Opposition parties need to come forward with where they would make the cuts in order to deliver the commitments that they are making.

However, the investment that the Scottish Government has budgeted for in this session, in order to make improvements to our social infrastructure, will make a real difference to the lives of the people in Airdrie and Shotts and across Scotland. Those improvements include: expanding our childcare offer to one and two-year-olds; investing £1 billion to tackle the poverty-related educational attainment gap—I declare an interest, as my wife is a primary school teacher and will soon take up a role as a local authority equity development officer—expanding wraparound childcare; doubling the Scottish top-up to carers allowance, so that carers in Scotland will receive better support than anywhere else in these isles; doubling the Scottish child payment and providing bridging payments as the roll-out to

16-year-olds continues; providing new adult and child disability payments; building 100,000 new affordable homes, including 70 per cent for social rent; expanding free school meals; and increasing school uniform grants. I could go on, because this Government is investing in social security, social housing and education, in order to tackle poverty, give our children the best start in life, support families and develop the progressive and compassionate society that will deliver for the people we are here to represent.

However, I spoke earlier about Scotland having a partly devolved, hybrid social security system and, sadly, we are seeing a tale of two Governments. UK inflation is at its highest level in a decade, having had its sharpest rise since records began, and it is predicted to keep rising into the Christmas period, meaning that the cost of essential items is rising and family budgets are being squeezed, but the UK Government is embarking on a perfect storm of tax rises and social security cuts that will devastate those on the lowest incomes. A regressive 10 per cent rise to national insurance is coming, which will disproportionately hit younger workers and the lowest paid. The disgraceful cut to universal credit, which is the biggest single cut to social security since the second world war, will force 60,000 people in Scotland, including 20,000 children, into poverty. That cut will completely undermine the benefit of the Scottish child payment and serves to highlight the real limitations of having a shared or hybrid social security system. In Airdrie and Shotts alone, 10,500 people—and their families—who receive universal credit or working tax credits will see their annual income cut by £1,000.

From the cabinet secretary, we have already heard the quote from the *Financial Times* last week:

“The internal modelling of ending the UC uplift is catastrophic.”

We have regressive tax rises and cuts to social security—while inflation soars—from the UK Government, versus investment in social security, social housing and education from the Scottish Government. The Tories have got a real brass neck coming here and trying to lecture us about poverty.

I support the motion and the Government's programme and I look forward to its transformational policies being delivered at pace.

15:19

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): Social justice, social security or welfare—whatever name you want to give it, it is the most important responsibility for any Government. Today's debate is a useful reminder that far more needs to be

done to tackle poverty in Scotland and ensure that everyone can live their lives to the fullest in a fair society.

We should spend all day debating our thoughts on how Scotland can be a fairer country, but when we look at the levers that could help create a fairer society—better healthcare, a good education system, stable employment and affordable housing—let us be honest that those are hardly areas in which the SNP excels.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Pam Gosal: If I get the time back, I am happy to.

Shona Robison: The member says that the Scottish Government does not excel on affordable housing, but we have delivered over 103,000 affordable homes so far. That is 75 per cent more affordable homes per head of population than have been delivered in England by a Tory Government. What does that say about the Tory Government's record on affordable housing?

Pam Gosal: I thank the cabinet secretary for her observations, but we are talking about Scotland—[*Interruption.*] Let me finish, please. All we keep hearing about today is the United Kingdom or comparisons with England. I will be honest: the cabinet secretary was talking about homes—[*Interruption.*] Please let me finish. She was talking about homes. Why is there so much homelessness if the Scottish Government is doing such a great job? That is what I want to know. I need to get on with my speech.

Organisations such as Barnardo's and Save the Children have said that even before the pandemic struck, one in four children in Scotland were living in poverty, and the levels are rising in every local authority area. The attainment gap remains very wide. We cannot continue with that postcode lottery. Pupils from the most deprived areas do significantly worse at every level of education on average than those in the least deprived areas.

To give some home truths, I will talk about my own region. We have a tale of two towns, Milngavie and Clydebank. They are only minutes away from each other, but they are worlds apart. One of their schools ranked 14th out of 340 schools, and one of the other's schools ranked 230th. At one, 68 per cent of pupils leave with five highers; at one, only 33 per cent leave with five highers.

Moving on from two towns, we look at the bigger picture of my whole region of West Dunbartonshire. There is almost double the national average of homeless households per 100,000 people. People can expect to fall into ill health more than 10 years before their neighbours in East Dunbartonshire do. The number of children

who go on to positive destinations has dropped almost 4 per cent on the previous year. Presiding Officer, let me be clear. If those figures do not leave you questioning the Scottish Government's priorities, I do not know what will.

I am sure that that will be a familiar story for many MSPs here today; sadly, that situation is reflected across the country. However, those are not just statistics. They are real people and they matter.

Let me tell members how the story goes with welfare—and by the way, for those who do not know, 11 benefits were devolved to Scotland in 2016. That means that the Scottish Government is in charge of those benefits—yes, the Scottish Government, not Westminster. It is no surprise, however, that the SNP was not ready and had to hand back those powers to the DWP. That was done by a party that said that it could set up an independent Scotland in just 18 months, but which will now not take those devolved welfare powers until 2025.

If we are to be serious about making Scotland a fairer society, we need to start thinking long term and not do what the SNP is doing today, which is sticking plasters over the cracks. Scotland needs much more. People need real change.

The motion refers to

"doubling the Scottish Child Payment as early as possible within the current parliamentary session".

The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey): Will the member give way?

Pam Gosal: We support that. In fact, our amendment goes further and calls for the payment to be doubled

"within the next financial year".

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The member is not giving way.

Pam Gosal: It has only taken the SNP three years to implement such an important payment. I strongly doubt whether there is anyone in the chamber who does not want to see a fairer Scotland. There is real inequality in our society and that must change. I hope that poverty and inequality will get the full attention of the Scottish Government during this session of Parliament, and will not be limited to an afterthought with endless reports and policies being published and no real action being taken.

We want to build a Scotland that not only supports people who are in financial crisis but helps to lift people out of poverty for good by tackling the root causes of poverty. We all agree that poverty must be reduced. We all agree that attainment gaps must be tackled, that health and social care must be improved and that housing

should be safe, affordable and warm. We cannot afford to be sidetracked by meaningless debates on independence—

The Presiding Officer: Will the member wind up, please?

Pam Gosal: —and endless false promises, while Scotland's children go hungry.

I am sorry, Presiding Officer. I was told that I would get some extra time.

15:26

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Like one in 12 people in Scotland, I have experience of homelessness, so a programme for government that aims to prevent it is something that I welcome very strongly.

Homelessness is not, or certainly should not be, just a fact of life and something that happens to people in the process of a normal society functioning. It is a symptom of many things: a lack of affordable housing, inadequate social security, a bad attitude towards disabled people, carers and others who are unable to work and, frankly, the inability, or, more likely, the indifference of certain Governments. I am glad to be able to say that that is not the case here. The programme for government seeks to address all those issues in so far as it can with current devolved powers, although, of course, a true transformation of our society requires the powers of independence.

This is the country that ended the right to buy and declared that anyone unintentionally homeless was entitled to a permanent home, and this will be the country that says no, people are not going to be homeless in 21st-century Scotland. We are going to listen to them, understand the issues that face them and do what we can to make sure that they have access to a safe and secure home.

Something that is often missing from homelessness action plans is tackling the wider drivers of poverty, rather than throwing money at tackling homelessness once the person is already homeless. What homelessness shows is that someone has fallen through a net. Perhaps they have had to wait six weeks before they got their first universal credit payment, lost their job due to shameful employment practices or were failed by a landlord who took advantage of loopholes in a tenancy agreement. I am therefore glad to see that a focus on the availability of homes, decarbonising homes, and putting money into supporting families with children in their early years are priorities for this Government.

I do not think that people appreciate just how often poverty is essentially predetermined. We have heard a lot so far, and I am sure that we will

hear a lot more, about child poverty. Nobody can blame a child for living in a poor household, but when that child grows up, somewhere around the late teens and early twenties, it seems to start becoming okay for people to say that it is that person's fault that they do not have the same educational background, they do not have money in the bank for a rainy day, they could not afford their driving licence when they were 16 or they have poor health due to lifelong nutritional or exercise issues.

It is important that we tackle those drivers of poverty. A fairer Scotland is a Scotland that addresses the issues at the root, rather than once a person has already had the whole course of their life changed by being homeless even for a short time. Take it from me—employers, credit agencies and landlords do not like to see “care of” addresses.

I move on to the Tories' amendment. I note that it laments the fact that the Scottish Government is not taking full control over devolved benefits until 2025. I agree that it is a real shame that it took so long to devolve those powers and that it is taking a couple of extra years—pandemic years—to bring in social security properly, something that their party down south has not managed in more than a decade of power.

Jeremy Balfour: I appreciate that the member was not here in the last session of Parliament, but we passed the bill in the first 18 months of that session. It is going to take almost eight years for that to happen. The delay is not due to the Parliament. It is the Scottish Government not being able to take on the powers and relying on the DWP to do all the work.

Emma Roddick: It is a real shame that my colleagues on the Conservative benches have no sense of irony, hypocrisy or shame when they criticise the Scottish Government for being too slow in implementing benefits. The Scottish child payment, for example, was only brought in to mitigate the harm caused by a UK social security system that started as inadequate and then suffered years of cuts.

It is a real shame that so much of Government budgets in this country is spent trying to stop UK austerity hitting our worst off the hardest, and that the Scottish Government has to wait another few years before every power is devolved for decisions to be made for this country, in this country. I am sure that, in the spirit of their amendment, my Conservative colleagues will be delighted when that day finally comes.

I am also grateful to the homelessness charity Crisis for drawing my attention yesterday to a number of incredibly pertinent points, including its belief that the current plans that the Government

has to prevent homelessness, which were developed with input from those with lived experience, hold the potential to make Scotland a world leader in homelessness prevention.

Every time I, as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, read a paper that discusses homelessness, I am reminded of the process in which my housing officer told me that she needed an address in order to process my entry to the housing register, and in which I faced at least two years of temporary accommodation before I could imagine walking into a council house that I could call home.

Whenever we discuss homelessness, poverty, or disability benefits, which I currently receive, the personal connection is not lost on me, nor is the weight of responsibility. I will always truly value those who offer their lived experience to me and the Parliament to aid our decision making and improve the lives of others. I encourage my colleagues to reflect and do the same, and to listen to those in poverty.

15:31

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

Right now, more than one in four children in Scotland live in poverty. As Willie Rennie said earlier, according to a Resolution Foundation analysis, the Scottish child poverty rate will be 29 per cent by 2023-24—the highest rate of child poverty in more than 20 years.

All of that stands in stark contrast to the fall in child poverty that was observed in the UK in the 1990s and early 2000s. Labour reforms from 1997 saw an £18 billion annual increase in spending on support for families with children, and an £11 billion annual increase in support for pensioners by 2010-11. The result was that millions of children and pensioners were lifted out of poverty, and the country was on track to eradicate child poverty by 2020. The key point is that if we want to tackle poverty and child poverty in the short term, the evidence is clear that we have to put resources and money in to increase people's spending power.

Successive Tory Governments managed to dismantle those achievements with their failed austerity agenda, and we now have a situation in Scotland, as across the UK, in which we have food banks in every city and every town. Those who have not seen the film "I, Daniel Blake" should have a look at it, because it brings home the reality of failure by Government to support people when they need it.

The author James Baldwin once said that

"Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor",

which is why the hypocrisy of the Scottish Tory Party in coming here to talk about child poverty while at the same time supporting a move by the Johnson Government to cut £20 a week from universal credit—the largest overnight cut ever seen since the creation of the welfare state 70 years ago—is incredible. If the Scottish Tories believe that the £20 a week cut to the poorest, the most vulnerable, and the lowest paid workers is wrong, they need to stand with the rest of the Parliament and condemn that cut. It will result in more children in Scotland being in poverty and more people in Scotland having to go to food banks.

Pam Gosal talked about independence earlier. The greatest driver to increased support for independence in Scotland is driving more people into poverty through the direct action of a Westminster Government. If she cannot see that, pray help us.

It is true that, if we look to the medium term, we have to get more people into work and earning a good wage. When the SNP came to power 14 years ago, it promised to cut class sizes. In Fife, the area that the education secretary and I represent, the number of primary classes that have more than 30 children—some have 32, some have 35—is utterly unacceptable. How can those children get the same opportunities as children whose parents are able to afford to buy their education and get them into classes in which the teacher-pupil ratio is one to 16, and the ratio of children to adults, such as support teachers, is one to eight? There is no comparison. If we are going to tackle poverty in the medium term, we need to give every child the same opportunities for a proper and good education, regardless of how rich their parents are.

Likewise, on the skills shortages, Save the Children says:

"We believe that it is about scale and pace. We believe the priority for the Scottish Government should be to focus on key drivers of poverty. This includes the jobs market, work opportunities, low-paid roles often largely held by women."

That is true; they cannot recruit for social care right now, but if we look at the inequalities and the low pay in social care, is it any wonder?

What about the skills agenda and skills shortages in construction? What opportunities are there out there for young people to get into the construction industry? The other day, I heard a lorry driver talk about companies who were quite happy to recruit lorry drivers from abroad on lower pay, but that has driven pay down from where it should be in that sector. That lorry driver, who was being interviewed on BBC Scotland, talked about getting a £20,000 pay rise, which is where the sector should be.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Rowley, could you wind up please?

Alex Rowley: Rather than depending on bringing people in from abroad and paying them low wages, what opportunities will we give so that people get the education and skills that they need to get the jobs.

15:38

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I became involved in politics because I was driven by a passion to see Scotland become a fairer and more equal society. I believed then, and I believe even more now, that an independent Scotland is the best way to achieve that.

I remember growing up in the 1980s and watching the deliberate destruction of Scotland's manufacturing base by a Tory Government. We are still to recover from that. At the same time, we watched the acquiring of Trident, which would cost £12 billion today.

In his book "The Righteous Mind", Jonathan Haidt wrote:

"Everyone cares about fairness, but there are two major kinds. On the left, fairness often implies equality, but on the right it means proportionality—people should be rewarded in proportion to what they contribute, even if that guarantees unequal outcomes."

How true that is in today's Tory Britain. That quote gets straight to the point of today's debate. What kind of country do we want? I want one that places equality, fairness and compassion at its heart. In his speech about making poverty history, the great Nelson Mandela stated:

"Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life."

Right now, the UK Government is getting ready to impose a cut to universal credit. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has been mentioned a few times. It estimates that 8,500 families in my constituency and 450,000 in Scotland will lose out, with half of those having children. Indeed, six out of 10 of all single-parent families in the UK will be impacted. Analysis that the Scottish Government conducted in June shows that the plan to cut the £20 per week uplift in universal credit in October could cut social security payments in Scotland alone by more than £460 million a year by 2023-24. Withdrawing that payment is expected to push 60,000 people in Scotland, including 20,000 children, into poverty. I have 5,000 children in my constituency who are in poverty.

So, what is the devolved Scottish Government, with its limited powers, doing to create a more equal and fairer Scotland? The recently announced whole family wellbeing fund, which will

be resourced through the provision of £500 million over the parliamentary session, is a very welcome step that will help to deliver support to families.

The Scottish Government is making major progress by taking ambitious steps to tackle child poverty, to promote social justice and to create a level playing field for young people from low-income backgrounds and their families. That includes investment to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap and support education recovery. In its first 100 days, the Scottish Government made payments of £100 as part of the £520 payments to support low-income families, and it paid the first instalment of £215 million of the £1 billion attainment Scotland fund. In 2020-21, the Scottish Government invested around £2.5 billion to support low-income households, which included nearly £1 billion for directly supported children.

The Scottish Government will roll out the Scottish child payment to all under-16s by the end of 2022. Thereafter, the Scottish Government will double the payment to £20 per week as quickly as possible. Like Neil Gray, I look forward to members of the Opposition parties making proposals in the budget discussions about how they intend to pay for that. If we are to meet the expected demand, we need to have the borrowing powers.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: At this morning's meeting of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, the committee heard in evidence that a number of the things that we need to do to tackle poverty in the long term will take much longer to do, so it will be long after 2023 before we meet the target. If the Government is only going to double the Scottish child payment—I hope that it doubles it today—how does it intend to meet the 2023 target?

Paul McLennan: Pam Duncan-Glancy makes a valid point, but I come back to the point that Neil Gray made. We, in this Parliament, do not have the borrowing powers to achieve that. If we had those powers—as we would in an independent Scotland—we would be able to do that. As Neil Gray said, we must look at the demand and how we can meet that.

That brings us to the fundamental question about the myriad of powers that are split between here and Westminster. We need to have all the powers here.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): What did the member think of the Deputy First Minister's comment on television at the weekend that Scotland would not be able to undertake quantitative easing and therefore would not be able to borrow?

Paul McLennan: That is an issue on which there still needs to be discussion. I did not see the

interview in question, so I cannot comment on Mr Marra's specific point. I come back to the issue of the borrowing powers. We need to ask the UK Government for those.

An important point that has not been mentioned is the fact that the Scottish Government has taken the first step in establishing a minimum income guarantee, which will help to ensure that everyone in Scotland can live healthy, financially secure and fulfilling lives.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will the member take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I have taken a few and I am conscious of the time.

Nine local authorities with Scotland's highest concentrations of deprivation are sharing £43 million of investment. A further £7 million from the schools programme is being shared between 73 additional schools with the highest concentration of pupils from areas of deprivation. Headteachers are being given an enhanced £147 million of pupil equity funding to support disadvantaged pupils. In addition, of course, all councils are offering 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare to eligible children, thereby making high-quality early learning and childcare available to families and saving parents up to £5,000 per year for each eligible child.

The Scottish Government's recent announcement about building a system of wraparound childcare for school-age children over the course of the parliamentary session is to be warmly welcomed. That will offer care before and after school and in the holidays, which will be free to families on the lowest incomes.

This afternoon's debate gets to the heart of why we are here: to protect the most vulnerable in our society and to provide hope and opportunities. I ask members to please support the motion.

15:44

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to take part in this debate on supporting a fairer and more equal society. As a Scottish Conservative, I believe in the principle of equality of opportunity. We have a role to play in ensuring that what people achieve in life is determined not by where they come from, who their parents are or where they went to school but by their drive and determination to succeed. To achieve that, we need to tackle the root causes of poverty in Scotland, but the SNP's record on tackling poverty is, quite frankly, shocking.

Nearly one in five Scots—which is over a million people—is living in relative poverty after their housing costs are taken into account, and that statistic rises to nearly one in four children across

Scotland. Those rates have been gradually rising for the past decade. In the previous parliamentary session, the First Minister claimed that education was her number 1 priority. [*Interruption.*] I want to make progress. I will take an intervention later.

The First Minister has, in fact, presided over a stubbornly wide attainment gap, which has shown that pupils from more deprived areas are not managing to succeed, and there are no signs of that gap closing across many different measures. The usual excuse for that failing that we hear from the members on the nationalist benches is that they do not have the necessary powers to tackle poverty, but we all know that that is simply not the case.

Despite a range of new welfare powers being devolved in 2016, the SNP has said that it will not be able to successfully implement them until 2025—nine years later. Members should remember that the SNP is also the party that said that it could set up an independent Scotland in just 18 months.

In one case, the social security minister simply had to hand back responsibility for a benefit to the Department for Work and Pensions to avoid “unnecessary duplication”. Even SNP ministers now seem to see the benefits of having some welfare powers on a UK-wide basis.

The proposals put forward by the cobbled-together coalition of nationalists and Greens are even worse, being ill thought out and unaffordable. The new coalition has suggested that it will seek to introduce a universal basic income, but that scheme will simply give with one hand and take with the other. According to documents released under freedom of information by the Scottish Government, the scheme could cost the economy £58 billion a year. The policy appears to have been put forward to appease hardline supporters in the coalition of chaos rather than to target support to those people who need it most.

Another poor suggestion is the introduction of rent controls, which simply do not work and are not supported by economists across the political spectrum. Capping rents will make renting out properties a less attractive prospect for landlords and will lead to a reduction in the supply that is required. We have heard of similar proposals being introduced in Sweden, and people in Stockholm are waiting up to nine years to get a rent control problem resolved. That is yet another flashy policy from a party that is not looking at the real problems but only working towards its goal.

It has been mentioned many times in the debate that the SNP wants the full powers of independence. Unlike the coalition of chaos, the Scottish Conservatives have a real, workable solution to tackle the root causes of poverty and

give everyone a chance to succeed. We will deliver the biggest programme of social housing building since the Scottish Parliament reconvened in 1999. We want to assist the construction sector to get back to pre-2007 levels of house building. Instead of introducing debating society proposals such as rent controls, we would address high rents and ensure that supply and demand of houses allowed people to rent and buy.

We would also provide funds for councils, which are delivering many of the front-line services on which the poorest people in our society rely. They have had to deal with swingeing cuts from this chamber and this Government over the past few decades. SNP and Green budgets have done that to councils again and again. We would ensure that increases to the Scottish Government's budget were passed directly to councils through the funding formula that we would set in place. That would ensure that councils could continue to deliver vital public services.

However, it is important to point out that there are some areas where we are in agreement. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Excuse me. Mr Gray, Mr Stewart is not giving way at the moment.

Alexander Stewart: We were the first party to announce plans to expand free school meals to include all primary school pupils, and I am pleased that the Scottish Government has since adopted that policy. We also pledged in our recent election manifesto to double the Scottish child payment. Again, I am glad to see that the Scottish Government is proposing to do the same, but we would like it to happen much more quickly, within the next financial year.

The Scottish Conservatives are committed to tackling the root causes of poverty to ensure that there are equal opportunities for everyone in Scotland. The nationalist coalition is too fixated on holding another referendum on independence to give this important issue the attention that it deserves. We will continue to hold this Government to account for its failings, which have been seen across Scotland for years. I support the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs.

15:50

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): As we all know, Covid-19 has had a huge impact on our society, and we need bold action in order to recover. The cabinet secretary's motion outlines many of the ambitious plans in the programme for government. We need to rebuild from the pandemic and grab the opportunity to create a fairer and more equal society, and so much of that revolves around education. It is important that, as we go forward, we remove barriers and ensure

that pupils get the most out of their time in education.

Since the election, the Scottish Government has already increased the school clothing grant and abolished charges for music, art and other practical subjects, and the SNP is committed to extending free school lunches to all primary school pupils and introducing breakfast clubs. Those additional measures to tackle the cost of the school day are so important and will ensure that more children have the opportunities that they deserve.

Early learning and childcare plays a huge role in children's development, and a universal system can do so much to minimise the consequences of poverty for children. The plans to extend early learning and childcare to one and two-year-olds and the introduction of wraparound childcare for school-age children will benefit children and families immensely. That builds on the achievement of 1,140 hours of early learning and childcare funded by the Government.

I remember, as a working parent, having to give up my pension contributions so that my daughter could go to nursery. There was no way that I could afford both. I am sure that many parents, and especially mums, have faced that problem. For some, the decision could not be starker: it involves choosing between work and childcare. It is important that the Government does as much as possible to support parents in, or into, the workplace.

Many new-build nurseries have sprung up across the country. At East Kilbride shopping centre, we have the new Rooftop Early Learning and Childcare Centre. The kids there have a huge roof garden where they can play and learn outside safely.

Providing outdoor space is really important as part of efforts to encourage children to get outdoors and help them to become more aware and appreciative of our natural environment. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I will not take an intervention. I would like to make progress.

The programme for government contains the welcome commitment that the Scottish Government

"will continue to promote and support outdoor learning, including trialling Scotland's first outdoor primary learning facilities."

I used to work for an outdoor education charity and we ran a project called bushcraft bear for nursery children from deprived areas. We created our own book starring the bear and the outdoor education instructors. We took children and their favourite soft toys to Chatelherault country park with our very own bushcraft bear dressed up as an explorer. We read stories, created a den and

foraged for food for the teddies. I saw at first hand the positive outcomes that the project delivered. For some kids, it was the first time that they had experienced being out in the forest. We also gave every child a book voucher and encouraged them to visit the library more often. Most important, we invited parents and carers to come with us to show that a fun day out does not have to be costly. I would like to see such schemes become more widespread.

Delivering outdoor education, reducing the cost of the school day and expanding early years provision—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I will not take an intervention. I would like to make progress. Those things will help to tackle some of the problems that affect people who grow up in poverty, including low educational attainment and poorer health outcomes.

We must eradicate child poverty. The SNP Government will continue to drive forward that national mission. More than 6,000 families in South Lanarkshire have already benefited from the SNP's game-changing Scottish child payment. We must tackle the root causes of poverty and treat people with fairness, dignity and respect. Scotland's new social security system does exactly that, and I am sure that the upcoming introduction of disability benefits will be welcomed by many across the country.

Workers deserve fair employment and should earn, as a minimum, the real living wage. We must also be radical by ensuring that all our fellow citizens have enough money to live on. A minimum income guarantee will give everyone the dignity that they deserve. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but I will not take an intervention. I would like to make progress. The foundations for the guarantee have been laid and I look forward to hearing the steering group's deliberations.

With most social security powers reserved to the UK Government, the Scottish Government is acting with one hand tied behind its back. The Scottish Government is working hard and using the powers that it has to build a fairer country, but the events of recent weeks show the limits of what we in this Parliament can do. The Scottish Government will support our young people by removing council tax for the under-22s. Meanwhile, at Westminster, Boris Johnson has appointed a Deputy Prime Minister who has called for the minimum wage to be scrapped for some of those aged under 21.

The Presiding Officer: Please begin winding up.

Collette Stevenson: As my colleague Neil Grey said, this is a tale of two Governments. As we rebuild from the pandemic, we have an opportunity and a duty to make Scotland a more equal and

inclusive society. The reality is that the only way to keep Scotland safe from more Tory cuts and Westminster Governments that we do not vote for is to become an independent country so that this Parliament—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Stevenson.

15:17

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The past 18 months has laid bare the brutal inequalities in our society, but they have also revealed our will and capacity to heal them. More than ever, we recognise how the fundamental pillars of green politics support and strengthen one another—not just environmental sustainability but social justice; not just non-violence but genuinely participatory democracy. Our vision, and our imperative for action, is of a Scotland that is fairer, more inclusive, more progressive and more equal.

The history of the past century and the experience of communities across the globe show us the centrality of human rights in achieving that vision. We want to see a Scotland where people understand their rights and those of their neighbours, where they feel valued and included and where they are empowered to claim their own rights and to stand in solidarity, compassion and justice to help others to achieve theirs too.

That is why it is so important to embed equality, human rights and inclusion across the entire public sector and especially in Government decisions, policies and spending. It is only when those who hold the power—which is us—are reminded day by day of our specific obligations to fairness that we will begin to uproot the structural inequalities that are so deeply rooted and bitterly toxic. In the coming year, the beginning of the conversation about how we will embed those principles will be among the most important work that any Scottish Government has ever done.

I also warmly welcome the commitment to begin consultation in Scotland on the public sector equality duty and the potential regulatory changes that that will require. The new duty on relevant public bodies to develop accessible and inclusive communications and the expansion of existing duties to include reporting on the disability and ethnicity pay gaps will be vital tools in creating greater inclusion and fairness.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I also look forward to seeing those regulations. They could be transformative. Does the member agree that when ScotRail is brought into public hands, it should also be subject to those duties?

Maggie Chapman: Yes, absolutely.

How Governments make spending decisions on behalf of people and communities has a huge impact on the direction in which a country moves, and the work of embedding equality and human rights within all stages of the budget process is an essential part of that wider transformation. By taking account of the equality budget advisory group's recommendations, we can help to ensure that spending decisions advance equality and human rights for everyone in Scotland.

Miles Briggs: Over the past decade, the member's party has supported the SNP when it has cut local government budgets. We have seen a 7 per cent reduction over the past decade. Now that her party is in government, will that be turned round, with fair funding for local government delivered?

Maggie Chapman: I would ask the member what his party has managed to achieve through budget negotiations over the past seven years. I think that the answer is zero.

As we all know, the moral health of a society can be reliably judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members. I therefore especially welcome the focus on child poverty contained in the new fairer Scotland duty guidance, which provides a vital statutory basis for public bodies to consider fundamental issues of socioeconomic disadvantage when making their decisions.

In the coming year, we will see consultation on a new human rights bill—a key aspect in advancing the 30 recommendations from the national taskforce for human rights leadership. The bill will incorporate, as far as possible within our devolved competence, key human rights treaties. I am going to name them all, because this is a truly historic commitment. They are the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The bill will also follow international best practice in including a right to a healthy environment, and equal access for all, especially older and LGBTQI+ people, to the rights contained in the bill. The incorporation of those treaties into Scots law must, of course, be accompanied by decisive, bold action.

The right to adequate housing is one of the ICESCR's central provisions. We in the Greens have been especially determined to realise that right for private sector tenants. We welcome the start that has already been made in working towards ensuring that everyone has a safe, warm place to call home, with rights and security, regardless of tenure. We will work actively in bringing about the new deal for tenants, ensuring equality of outcomes and protection. We look

forward to enhanced tenants' rights, including greater flexibility to make their homes their own and keep beloved companion pets; greater protection from winter evictions; more stringent penalties for unscrupulous landlords; an effective national system of rent controls; and a rent guarantor for estranged young people. Taken together, that represents the biggest transformation for tenants in decades, and I am pleased that the Greens secured it as part of the co-operation agreement.

A few months ago, I said in the chamber:

"At the heart of our collective wellbeing must be social security—not as a system or an idea but as a fundamental right.—[*Official Report*, 8 June 2021; c 45.]

We know that the societies that guarantee their citizens' social security are the societies that perform best: they have the longest life expectancy, the lowest levels of crime and the highest levels of innovation and economic performance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Ms Chapman, could you bring your remarks to a close, please?

Maggie Chapman: I am about to close.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You are over your time, so please do so now.

Maggie Chapman: There is so much more that I would like to say: on care and disability, benefits, child poverty and more, but I will close—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Chapman. I had asked you to close.

16:03

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I am delighted to speak to the motion.

I am a firm believer that we should always strive to do the best for our communities. I also sincerely believe that that is what our Scottish Government is doing with the programme for government and the specific interventions that are outlined in the motion. Those interventions will be simply game changing for individuals, families and children who are in need of help. However, while those interventions are very welcome, we must admit that they can only go so far.

Our Scottish Government can do only so much while continually fighting against the tide of, quite frankly, downright disgraceful decisions made by the Tories at Westminster. The Westminster Tories are removing the £20 uplift to universal credit, plunging more than 8,000 people in Aberdeen alone into poverty. Nationally, that figure exceeds 241,000 people. Removing that £20 uplift reduces their household incomes by £1,040 a year. I will say that again: £1,040 per year, which

is being stripped from those in most need in our society. That forces some families and individuals to make horrendous decisions either to feed their children or to heat their homes—to make the horrendous decision as to who gets to eat that day: themselves or their children. That is the reality that many people will face once the universal credit uplift is ripped from the pockets of those who are most in need.

In recent weeks we have heard of yet another hammer blow by Westminster, again hitting the poorest in our society, through the raising of national insurance to pay for social care in England and Wales, a provision in Scotland that is already funded by the Scottish Government. While we do not know the full extent of the damage that that will do, members should be under no illusion that those decisions will mean less money in the pockets of the lowest-paid workers in our constituencies. That is less money to buy food, to pay bills and to meet the expenses of daily life.

I firmly believe that the Tories at Westminster have absolutely no interest in creating a more equal society. All I can see coming from Westminster is the broadening of the gap between the richest and the poorest of our society, with more working families forced on to the breadline.

In stark contrast to that, the Scottish Government has committed to an ambitious programme for government, a programme that, as my friend Neil Gray said earlier, will invest around £2.5 billion to support low-income households—a programme that commits nearly £1 billion to directly support our children. Pupils who live in Scotland's most deprived communities will be among those who are set to benefit from a record investment of more than £215 million of targeted funding in this financial year to help close the poverty-related attainment gap.

The Scottish Government is committed to delivering a doubling of the carers allowance supplement. That will be a very welcome boost to the inadequate payments made by the UK Government. The SNP has also committed to doubling the Scottish child payment and extending it to all eligible under-16s by the end of 2022.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: On the point about the carers benefit, we, too, of course support the doubling of the carers benefit, as it will put more money in carers' pockets, but what do the member and her Government intend to do for the 39,000 people who have an underlying entitlement to carers benefit but will not receive the supplement?

Jackie Dunbar: I would like to think that the Scottish Government has that within its sights, and it will hopefully be able to deliver. I am sorry that I do not have the answer to that, but I am sure that the Scottish Government is very much aware of it.

We have committed to expanding free school meals provision, we have extended childcare provision to 1,140 hours, and we are committed to supporting working families through the provision of wraparound care and care for one and two-year-olds. The Scottish Government is also investing more than £12 million to provide access to free welfare and money advice services, ensuring that those constituents who are struggling the most have access to good-quality advice and support, allowing them to maximise their incomes. I know that that will be greatly received by many of my constituents in Aberdeen Donside.

As we rebuild from the pandemic, we have an opportunity to make Scotland a more equal and inclusive society. However, Scotland does not hold all the powers that it requires in order to achieve that. The UK Government has shown time and again that it does not hold the same progressive values regarding equality and fairness as Scotland does, and that only reaffirms the need for Scotland's future to be in Scotland's hands.

I believe that the Scottish Government will do all in its power and will continue to fight tooth and nail for equality in Scotland. I also truly believe that only once all decisions are made here will we be able to achieve our goal of truly becoming a fair, equal and prosperous country.

16:10

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): One of the first steps towards building a fairer and more equal society is to ensure that all children get a fair start in life, no matter where they are born. All too often, the issues of rural poverty are swept beneath the carpet—out of sight and out of mind. As our world becomes ever more connected, the communities on our periphery are being left behind. Ensuring that rural communities are connected, with young people afforded the same opportunities as their urban counterparts, is a key part of the challenge, and nowhere in Scotland is that more evident than in Ayrshire.

Looking at the Scottish index of multiple deprivation, it is sad to see that several communities in Ayrshire appear in the top 10 per cent of Scotland's most deprived areas. However, the majority of those areas lie outside Ayr, in the countryside. Despite being a few miles from the promenades of Troon and Prestwick, those areas feel a million miles away.

Recently, during a street surgery tour, I visited towns in rural East Ayrshire, which has some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country. While I was there, residents pointed out the number of derelict buildings in one of the towns—there were 12 on one street alone. The effects of housing

poverty can be felt clearly in rural communities, and derelict buildings are the final result. Without adequate funds to keep houses in good condition, living standards deteriorate, which causes further hardship and stigma, with a knock-on effect on young people's development.

In East Ayrshire, 37 per cent of buildings failed the Scottish housing quality standard, with that figure rising to 46 per cent in South Ayrshire—nearly half the local authority's dwellings. In South Ayrshire, 41 per cent of dwellings were judged to have critical elements of disrepair—in other words they are flawed in terms of weather-tightness and structural stability—while 25 per cent were in need of immediate repair, affecting a horrifying 34 per cent of families.

Fuel poverty is another issue that holds back people in rural areas. In East Ayrshire, fuel poverty affects 15,000 households, including 2,000 families. Meanwhile, in South Ayrshire—a wealthier local authority—a staggering 12,000 households are affected, which is nearly a quarter of all households. In South Ayrshire, the fuel poverty gap, which is the amount of money it would take to pull households out of fuel poverty, has reached £850. Those figures truly highlight the disadvantage at which many people in rural communities find themselves.

Shona Robison: Does the member think that the cut to universal credit will help those people who are in fuel poverty in those communities? Will it help or hinder those people that she was talking about to have £20 a week taken off them?

Sharon Dowey: We fully supported the temporary uplift in universal credit at the height of the pandemic, but now that we are coming through it we need to get people back into work. People in my area do not want to live on benefits. They want investment from the Scottish Government in the area.

Shona Robison: Does the member recognise that many people on universal credit are already working, but do not earn enough to reach the living standards that she is talking about? Removing the £20 will just make that situation worse. Surely the member can see that?

Sharon Dowey: I have been to the Department for Work and Pensions and spoken to the people who work there. They think that this is the best system to encourage people to get into work—*[Interruption.]* We need to invest in rural communities and we need to give people the opportunity to get into work. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please can we have fewer comments from a sedentary position.

Sharon Dowey: In fact—*[Interruption.]* No, I am going to make some progress.

A doubling of the Scottish child payment would go some way towards resolving those issues, but it is not enough on its own, and it takes no account of rural and urban disparities. *[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask all members to stop having sedentary conversations and chattering. We would like to hear Ms Dowey.

Sharon Dowey: The Scottish Government has many worthy aims when it comes to resolving poverty, but there is often too much talk followed by too little change. Education followed by consistent employment is, and will always be, the best way to deliver real economic change in a community.

Making sure that we have the appropriate tools in place is an essential step on the road to reducing rural poverty. Inward investment is one mechanism, as is education, but employability programmes also have a role to play. With that in mind, I decided to look at how the Scottish Government's employability programmes have progressed. I was surprised by the results—and not in a good way.

Fair start Scotland has been operational since 2018, but its performance has been disappointing. Only 14 per cent of participants who started in April 2018, in the scheme's first quarter of operation, sustained one year of employment. The figures have not improved, and the pandemic is no excuse. In the final quarter of 2019, only 9 per cent of starts stayed in a job for a year. Although the pandemic has undoubtedly had an impact, at the height of Covid, in October to December 2020, 38 per cent of starts began a job. That figure plummeted to 9 per cent in the second quarter of this year. In June 2021, only 76 participants had achieved 12 months of work out of 878 starts the previous year.

If we are serious about curbing rural unemployment, the cabinet secretary needs to get a grip on Scotland's employability programme.

The number of Scots using devolved social security programmes is set to rise exponentially as the effects of the pandemic are felt and further benefits are devolved. We need robust measures in place to boost rural employment, cut rural poverty, and end rural barriers to employment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You should bring your remarks to a close, please, Ms Dowey.

Sharon Dowey: With that in mind, I hope to see the Scottish Government taking more positive action to bring genuine change to those forgotten communities.

16:17

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): The Parliament does a really good job of hiding where there can be consensus and agreement from time to time. Perhaps we should leave the Conservatives to one side when we talk about consensus and agreement.

I recall attending events in our Parliament in the previous session to hear the case for £5 per week per child as an anti-poverty supplement. As a back bencher, I took those calls seriously, as the SNP Government and members across the chamber did. In 2019, the Scottish Government announced that, rather than a £5 per week child supplement, a Scottish child payment would be introduced for families on qualifying benefits as a £10 per week per child payment. There was no rape clause or two-child cap; it was a straightforward, forthright and direct payment to those most in need and in poverty. We got agreement across the chamber. We got consensus, and that was to be extended to all under-16s, starting with under-sixes.

The announcement was a victory and a vindication for campaigners. They had shown movement, as well. They wanted a universal £5 payment at the outset. We have now moved to a £10 targeted payment.

Since then, of course, the SNP has fast-tracked the delivery and roll-out of the Scottish child payment to under-16s and brought in bridging payments, as we have heard. SNP MSPs were recently elected on the commitment to raise the Scottish child payment to £20 per child per week. Commitments have been made across the chamber, and our Scottish Government will do that.

I absolutely accept that campaigners wish to see that happen as soon as possible. There are always demands on Government money. When we were bringing in the Scottish child payment, anti-poverty groups suggested that, rather than increase it further, if there was additional money, it could be given to the families of teenage children during the summer. That is another pinchpoint when families are in poverty. We should bear in mind that there are always many ways to spend money to help those who are living in poverty.

With various other direct policy initiatives to tackle child poverty, such as best start grants, best start foods payments, increasing the school clothing grant, and rolling out further free school meals, the Scottish Government clearly has a policy programme that takes seriously action to tackle child poverty and will bring with it a fairer and more equal society, which this debate is focused on. There is no complacency there. Of course we must strive to do more. Entitlements to support must not only exist; their uptake must be

maximised. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government is embracing its statutory duty to promote benefit uptake. A similar statutory duty does not exist at Westminster.

The Scottish Government anticipated that, once the Scottish child payment was rolled out, uptake would be around 83 per cent. Of course, it wanted 100 per cent uptake, but that was the estimate. I absolutely welcome the fact that, from February, when the payment was introduced, to 30 June this year, 180,000 children have benefited to the tune of £176 million.

With around 133,000 children forecast to be eligible, that would suggest an uptake of around 80 per cent, although I am not sure about that figure. The Scottish Parliament information centre suggests that uptake was initially around 60 per cent. It is important that we work out what the current uptake is, and what we are doing to address any uptake gap, as those who are missing out may be the most vulnerable.

This year, the Scottish Government is distributing £12 million to support the provision of free welfare and debt advice. I commend various groups and organisations, such as citizens advice bureaux, local authority welfare workers and various other groups working in debt support and advice and income maximisation, on their work. However, the most vulnerable families often do not go to those bodies.

In my constituency of Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn, I am lucky to have on-the-ground, trusted organisations that do not just offer practical support for those who are most vulnerable but seek to ensure that individuals and families are plugged into the wider benefits system. There are many such organisations, but I highlight the Glasgow north baby food bank and Spirit of Springburn. The baby food bank does not just give out baby formula, nappies and clothes, along with providing moral and peer support; it also signposts those individuals and families to Scottish social security benefits to ensure that they get what they are entitled to.

Spirit of Springburn has a hub at the heart of the Springburn community and brings services to the people who most need them. It does not get direct funding from Government; perhaps we should do more to build the type of community resilience that Glasgow north baby food bank and Spirit of Springburn offer.

In the time I have left, I want to talk about the £20 cut in universal credit. Presiding Officer, you were not in the chamber at the time, but I used the word “you” time and again while intervening on Miles Briggs. I apologise for that, as it is not parliamentary etiquette, but I was so affected by the looming catastrophe that the £20 cut in

universal credit will bring to my constituents that I lost my sense of parliamentary etiquette.

There is a bit of a false debate in relation to the cut. Universal credit was not sufficient before the £20 uplift was brought in—it was never enough to live on. I have constituents who were already going to food banks, living in poverty and not heating their homes because benefits were too low. The increase of £20 a week just about got them to hang in there, and now it is being stripped away. It is disgraceful, appalling and shameful, and it is not dignified. It is quite simply wrong. The Conservatives in Scotland should get a backbone, stand up to their UK masters and stand up for the poorest in Scotland and across the UK.

16:23

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow that thoughtful contribution from Bob Doris, in particular with regard to universal credit. In particular, I echo his comments that, before the £20 uplift, the pressure on families with children—including families in work—was, quite simply, unacceptable.

I welcome the thought behind today's motion regarding an

"ambitious programme ... for Government to create a fairer society."

However, I want to take a moment to consider what we mean by "fairer society". A number of members have spoken about the need for an equitable and fair society. I want to look at what that means for the people who are living in our society, in our communities, right now.

I have to confess that, as a primary school teacher, I have sat through—I say this carefully—some very convoluted assemblies in which I have heard adults try to explain to children what "fairer" and "equitable" mean. I say that with my fingers crossed, as the headteachers I know will probably immediately email me.

To explain what a fairer society is, we need to get down to a simple principle. If we ask a child, "Is it fair?", they will say no if they have not benefited. Is a fairer society therefore about everyone being equal? I deeply hope that we all in the chamber can agree that it is not about everyone being the same. Indeed, I am minded of Henry Drummond, the character based on Clarence Darrow, who was perhaps the first human rights lawyer in the US and who took part in the monkey trial. When there are attempts to stack the jury, he says:

"Conform, conform! What do you want to do—run the jury through a meat-grinder, so they all come out the same?"

I hope that no one in the chamber—indeed, no one in Scotland—wants a society where everything is the same. Richard Lavoie, the educationalist, said:

"Fairness means everyone gets what he or she needs."

That flexibility is important going forward.

I welcome the fact that so much of the motion concentrates on young people, because that is important and it is crucial that the society that we bequeath them is one that is fairer, one that they feel attached to and one that they feel they have contributed to.

However, it is not enough to have slogans, it is not enough to have promises and it is not even enough to rebrand previous offers. Nineteen per cent of Scotland's population—1.03 million people—live in relative poverty each year. If we take away housing costs, that figure becomes 17 per cent. Child poverty levels in this country are an absolute disgrace. We have young people and families in this society who are supported by food banks, by third sector groups, by charities, by churches and by their friends and neighbours.

They are also supported by local authorities, and I welcome the work that is being done there. Indeed, East Lothian Council's poverty plan has been well received, but 25 per cent of children in East Lothian are living in poverty, as was so eloquently expressed by that area's constituency MSP, Paul McLennan. Further, 26 per cent of the children who live in the Borders and 24 per cent of the children who live in Dumfries and Galloway live in poverty.

We cannot live in a society where one child is hungry, and we should aim to prevent that. On current figures, without an alteration to the Scottish child payment, we will miss the target. We—this Parliament, this Government, we who have been elected to look after and support people—will miss the target that has been set. That is unacceptable. Scottish Labour has made a choice. I know that Neil Gray is not in his seat just now, but I am sure that he would leap up and intervene to say, "Where is the money coming from?" However, Scottish Labour has made the choice that the Scottish child payment should be doubled and doubled again next year. Why? So that 80,000 children and young people can be lifted out of poverty. It is a question of choices. It is a question of what is important and what lies at the heart. Earlier, Pam Duncan-Glancy mentioned that social security has to do the heavy lifting in the short term.

Shona Robison: On that point, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation was clear that it is not sustainable to expect social security to solve poverty or child poverty; the solution has to include

employability and reducing costs. Does the member agree with the foundation's position?

Martin Whitfield: Absolutely. It is not for social security to pay for everybody for ever, because that would reduce the dignity that people find as individuals. However, it is right in the short term that we use social security to do the heavy lifting and get those children and families out of poverty so that, as we look to their education, they feel more able to contribute and learn; and as they go on to find jobs, they can hang on for a job that they feel more fitted to rather than take the first thing that comes along, often pressed on them by those who administer the social security system.

I agree that social security is not the single answer, but I suggest that it is the answer going forward, so that we have children who can receive the bridging payments without the need to be on free school meals, and so that, after the abhorrent £20 cut, children in Scotland whose families will lose universal credit can continue to receive the Scottish child benefit.

I know that time is short, but I have one question, to which I ask for a response.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please ask it quickly, because time is very short.

Martin Whitfield: It is very quick. The Supreme Court is about to hand down judgment on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill case. Will the Government confirm that it will provide primary legislation time in order to bring the bill into force, should it be needed?

16:29

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): From my constituency office, I can see the Social Security Scotland headquarters building at Dundee waterfront. By autumn next year, 3,500 people will be employed by the agency across Scotland, including up to 900 in my constituency. We heard this week that another 300 jobs are set to be created nearby at the new NHS 24 regional hub in the city, so the SNP is delivering for Dundee.

As we have heard, Social Security Scotland is delivering the game-changing Scottish child payment to low-income families. It will be doubled to £20 per week per child as soon as possible. Social Security Scotland is also delivering the new child disability payment in three pilot areas, including in my constituency in Dundee.

When the actions of the Scottish Government are compared with the actions of the UK Government, it is clear who is serious about tackling poverty in Scotland. The Tories have imposed the bedroom tax, the benefits cap, the

five-week wait for the failing universal credit, benefit sanctions, the two-child cap and the abhorrent rape clause. Last night, Scottish Tory MPs at Westminster sat on their hands as Boris Johnson bulldozed through his £20-a-week cut to universal credit which, as many others have said, will push thousands of children in Scotland into poverty.

As the cabinet secretary put it last week, it is a total "disgrace" that Tory MPs have the "brass neck" to come into this Parliament and demand that the Scottish Government plug the holes that the Tory Government is creating at Westminster, so the Tories need to

"get their own house in order."—[*Official Report*, 9 September 2021; c 54.]

I am proud of the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to eradicate poverty. The Scottish Government is delivering for Dundee, including more than £4.2 million to 3,700 Dundee carers, through our carers allowance supplement.

Michael Marra: There is a slight dissonance between the rhetoric and the reality. Joe FitzPatrick must know that poverty in Dundee continues to increase dramatically, that child poverty is increasing dramatically under this Government, that drug deaths are increasing dramatically, that the outcomes for the people of our city—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Marra, you should make an intervention, not a speech.

Joe FitzPatrick: Clearly, no one is suggesting that poverty does not exist in Scotland. It does, which is why the Scottish Government takes the matter so seriously and is investing so hard, although that is difficult when every action that we take is reversed by Westminster Government actions, which we then have to mitigate against.

For Dundee, the Scottish Government has delivered more than £4.2 million to Dundee's 3,700 carers via the carers allowance supplement; more than £1 million via the two family pandemic supplements, which supported 5,422 children and young people in our city; more than £1.7 million via the best start grant and best start foods; and more than £0.5 million in funeral support payments, to support people at that most difficult time in their lives.

Miles Briggs: What impact does the minister think cutting £20 million from alcohol and drug partnerships has had in the city of Dundee?

Joe FitzPatrick: Obviously, I am not a minister.

However, over the past three years, the budgets for alcohol and drug partnerships in Scotland have risen year on year and, in this year's budget, there has been a significant investment of new cash,

which I welcome. Clearly, we have more to do; I hope that the matter is one of the things that we can work on together.

The Scottish Government has done other things for Dundee. Provision of free school breakfasts and lunches is being expanded to all primary school pupils, which is benefiting more than 10,000 children in Dundee alone. More than 6,000 children and young people in our city are receiving the school clothing grant. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry—I need to make progress.

Sadly, the progressive and ambitious work of the Scottish Government is constantly undermined by the callous approach of the Tories at Westminster—slavishly backed by their Tory colleagues in this chamber, who will defend the indefensible in order to preserve their precious union. Scotland cannot afford to remain part of the sinking ship that is the United Kingdom. Imagine what we could achieve in Parliament if we had full control of our welfare system, like any other normal country in the world.

I look forward to supporting the forthcoming independence referendum bill once the Covid crisis is over, so that the people of Scotland can decide whether to remain shackled to Boris Johnson's Brexit Britain or to choose independence, which will deliver the full range of powers to enable Parliament to put in place a transformational recovery that will lead to a fairer and more sustainable and prosperous nation. That will be a Scotland that is able to work in partnership with our friends in the rest of the UK and in Europe, in a genuine partnership of equals.

Often, when we talk about independence in the chamber, there are complaints from Tories that we need to focus on the day job. We had an election and its result was clear and decisive. The people of Scotland delivered their verdict on the Tories' fundamentally undemocratic position—that the people of Scotland should never have the chance to choose again. There is a clear majority in Parliament in favour of an independence referendum. That is what Parliament is duty bound to deliver, on behalf of the people of Scotland, whom we serve. I will be proud to support that, when the time comes.

I support the motion, and I particularly welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to putting human rights at the centre of our Covid recovery. A new human rights bill will be introduced by the Scottish Government that will incorporate all the conventions that Maggie Chapman mentioned.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please bring your remarks to a close.

Joe FitzPatrick: Although we in Parliament differ on other areas, I hope that on this one we can work together to do what is best for Scotland.

Bob Doris: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

In my speech, I spoke about an organisation called Spirit of Springburn and the wonderful job that it does. I did not declare that I am a director of Spirit of Springburn, which I should have done. I now place that on the record.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Doris. That is now on the record.

We move to the winding-up speeches. I call Michael Marra to wind up for Labour, for up to seven minutes.

16:37

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Thank you, Presiding Officer. That will give me the opportunity to follow on from what my Dundee colleague Joe FitzPatrick has said—which I will do later.

Only this weekend, during the online SNP conference, the First Minister took a short break from setting out conspiracy theories to tell us that Scotland can be Denmark, Ireland, Austria, Norway or Finland. Personally, I quite like being Scottish. Given all that, perhaps it should be no surprise to see the Government taking on the language of the United States with the phrase "a land of opportunity", which we have heard not very much about today.

Although we on the Labour benches strongly believe in opportunity, that has not really been the focus of the motion or the debate. The grasping of opportunities can become a reality only when there is a universal realisation of rights—the right not to be hungry, the right to a decent education and the right to live free of the indignity of poverty. My colleague Martin Whitfield was incredibly eloquent in painting a picture of the need for the realisation of those rights. I hope that the cabinet secretary picks up on Mr Whitfield's point regarding the implementation of Government legislation for the incorporation of rights legislation.

Those are fundamental principles that should exist in our social contract, yet that was not really what the afternoon's debate was about. Using the language of opportunity about those core issues shifts significantly the issue of the social contract. It speaks not really about equality, but about a wider sense of individualism. Perhaps we should hear about Susan Aitken's analysis that we should have the opportunity to empty our own bins, to sweep our own streets and to run our own libraries.

To end this analogy, maybe borrowing that language from Mitt Romney and Marco Rubio signals a new, more honest direction from the Government on how society should look—or,

perhaps, it is just a little bit odd, and a tired attempt by a press officer or civil servant to rebadge what has been a dull and timid programme for government.

The cabinet secretary started the debate by saying that the Government was

“well aware of the challenges ahead”.

I have to say that, across a wide range of portfolios, it does not really seem like it. There is a real lack of ambition around the remobilisation of education and of our NHS, which we have heard so much about today, and around the crisis that we see in our social services.

The cabinet secretary talked about rights, giving a list of bills, rights consultations and rights discussion groups. However, the rights framework has very little to say about the reality of the city in which we both live—Dundee. She mentioned the housing first programme, but she did not mention that 12 staff working on that programme have been made redundant and that four other staff have taken on full responsibility for the programme on top of their existing jobs, as a result of the funding ending and not being replaced by the Government.

The cabinet secretary talked about the protection of women and girls, but she did not mention the fact that refugees in the city of Dundee are often full, with no access available when a woman seeks refuge for her and her family.

Shona Robison: In recognition of the services provided by Women’s Aid Scotland and Rape Crisis Scotland, we provided £5 million of additional money to help them to meet the increased demand due to Covid. Would Michael Marra not recognise and welcome that?

Michael Marra: I certainly recognise that money has gone in recently, but in recent weeks there have still been incredibly long waiting lists for one-to-one work between women and Women’s Aid in Dundee, so that resource is not changing the situation. The refugees have been full in recent years and continue to be in a state of extreme pressure.

We have to think about the reality of the Government’s policy. Pam Duncan-Glancy talked about that very clearly when she skewered the cabinet secretary on the issue of the 125,000 young people who are missing out on bridging payments due to the approach taken by the Government, in a speech that was her customary tour de force on these issues.

Willie Rennie praised that speech, too, and he went on to highlight the key statistic in this debate, which we are all taking note of: the 25 per cent of children living in poverty in Scotland, rising to 38 per cent in 10 years’ time. Alex Rowley talked

about that statistic and told us, rightly, that Governments can and should do more, as Gordon Brown and Labour did. Simply put, warm words do not put food on the table; we need pounds in the pocket to make a difference. Mr Rowley made the point very strongly, saying that Labour took 1 million children out of poverty, but child poverty now continues to rise year on year under both of the present Governments.

The immediate moral imperative for the Scottish Government is to live up to its end of the social contract, which should be to eradicate the scourge of child poverty in Scotland. In my home city of Dundee, more than 25 per cent of children are living in poverty—7,046 children and families who need our support now. I am afraid that the picture that Mr FitzPatrick portrayed of that city and the challenges that we face did not meet the mark. He asked us to imagine what could be achieved. I ask him to imagine what could be achieved if one in eight teachers had not been taken out of the schools in Dundee by the SNP council, whose budget has been cut by the SNP Government.

Analysis shows that a £40 per week Scottish child payment would lead to a reduction in child poverty for up to 80,000 children in Scotland. Neil Gray said that we were asking for very little. That is not very little; it is a significant move.

Neil Gray: I do not doubt the sincerity with which Michael Marra makes his case, or that of Pam Duncan-Glancy or any of his colleagues, because I share that sincerity about the need to drive down poverty. Why was that commitment to £40 not in the manifesto that the Labour Party stood on four months ago?

Michael Marra: What we have done is seen that the writing is on the wall under this Government—frankly, the child poverty targets are going to be missed—and our party has listened. We have listened to the faith leaders across Scotland and the hundreds of third sector organisations that are telling us to take that action. I say to Mr Gray that the public accounts show us that the Government has more money this year than it has had in previous years and more than it is likely to have under the Tory Administration for years to come. If not now, when will it have the resource to deal with child poverty?

Mr Gray seemed to indicate in his retreat to the issue of powers that we need more borrowing to tackle it and Mr McLennan could not answer my point, although I understand that he missed the piece on the telly when the Deputy First Minister said that an independent Scotland would not have quantitative easing and could not borrow. Frankly, when Mr Gray accuses us of being confused, I think that he would take that point.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Marra, could you please conclude.

Michael Marra: To conclude, the broad consensus across the chamber is that there is a clear issue with the Tories, despite Miles Briggs's point. The Tories' position on the £20 uplift is, frankly, indefensible, but there is a moral imperative for the Scottish Government to act.

16:44

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): The pursuit of a fair and equal society is an endeavour in which we all have a part to play. It will take all of us to strive for our goal when so many different areas must be addressed. We must be ambitious in our plans to tackle issues of inequality and, more importantly, we must deliver on that ambition. Unfortunately, the Government is very good at ambition, but woefully inadequate at its delivery. We have heard across the chamber of all the times that the SNP has failed to deliver a fair and equal chance for the people of Scotland.

My colleague Miles Briggs highlighted the role of unpaid carers and young carers, yet no one has addressed the points that he has raised, so I hope that the Government will do so in concluding. My colleague Pam Gosal laid out the dreadful and truly heartbreaking disparities in her area, whether in school performance, instances of homelessness, or life expectancy. The postcode lottery should not determine one's school results or whether one has a home, and certainly not how long one lives.

Alexander Stewart referred to the fact that the Government has been handed powers over devolved benefits in 2016 but will still not take full control over them until at least 2025. It will take almost a decade before it gets its affairs in order, yet it keeps saying that it wants more powers.

Neil Gray: I merely point out to Jeremy Balfour that we have a Government that is investing in social security, but the Government that he supports is cutting it. Did the member hear Stephen Crabb, the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, say yesterday that it was a mistake for him to assume that cutting social security would get people into work? Mr Crabb backed the policy that this Government supports to see the universal credit uplift retained.

Jeremy Balfour: My colleague Mr Briggs made clear that we would have preferred an extension if possible. However, we also recognise, as Neil Gray does, that we have to make financial choices. All that we have heard from the SNP benches this afternoon is "let's have more power", but we have heard repeatedly that it has not even delivered with the powers that it already has. The SNP slags off the DWP, but without it, poor people

would be even poorer and people would not be getting benefits.

We have heard from my colleague Sharon Dowe of the terrible lack of opportunities in our rural communities around education, employment and so on.

I echo my colleague Alexander Stewart and say that we, as Conservatives, believe in equality of opportunity. The hallmark of a fair society is that it allows individuals to thrive regardless of the situation into which they are born and the type of family in which they live. Child poverty is a massive problem in Scotland.

We have the same powers north and south of the border, so I would love the minister to tell me why more disabled people are in employment in England compared to Scotland. The Government needs to answer those questions rather than slag off other Governments.

Members mentioned earlier that it is estimated that almost a quarter of children in Scotland live in relative poverty after housing costs. If that statistic does not hit you like a punch in the gut, you surely do not grasp the magnitude of it.

Shona Robison: Will the member give way?

Jeremy Balfour: Will you tell me about disability and employment?

Shona Robison: You were talking about child poverty and said that your Government needs to make difficult financial choices, yet you demanded that this Government double the Scottish child payment immediately. Do you not see the irony in that statement? Those people receiving money are Scottish families. How can you justify £20 coming out of their hands?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before Mr Balfour resumes, I remind members that they speak through the chair and that they should therefore not refer to other members as "you".

Jeremy Balfour: All five parties had that in our manifestos. We want to deliver on our manifestos, because we have listened to the faith groups and the third sector, who said that those things needed to be done. You have simply got your—

Shona Robison: You are talking about organisations that have quite rightly lobbied—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary—

Shona Robison: Yes, sorry.

The member has talked about organisations that quite rightly call for the doubling of the child payment. Those same organisations are telling members on the Tory side that cutting universal credit by £20 is the wrong thing to do. Why are

you listening to them only on one issue and not the other?

Jeremy Balfour: I might be wrong about this, but I understand that we are in the Scottish Parliament and we have responsibility for Scottish decisions. If you want to go and discuss universal credit, stand down and get yourself elected to Westminster. Let us focus on what we can do in this Parliament with the powers that we have, rather than focusing on other Governments. It is of the utmost importance that we as a Parliament seek—

Bob Doris: Will the member give way?

Jeremy Balfour: No, I have no more time.

As I have said, many charities have said that doubling the Scottish child payment to £20 would make a massive difference and have an immediate impact on the number of children in poverty. It would lift tens of thousands of children from the most tragic of circumstances. Of course, it is in no way a silver bullet, but it would make a real difference and it is something that I and all 128 other members can do when we vote on the budget in a few months.

If the Scottish Government wants to take these issues seriously, it must stop all the talk, roll up its sleeves and deliver effective policies that will actually promote a fairer and more equal society. What would be a better way to start than ceasing to kick such policies down the road and doubling the Scottish child payment now? Commit to it now. Vote for Miles Briggs's amendment, and let us give a clear message that we understand what the Scottish people want us to do.

16:51

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I thank all members for their contributions today. We have, understandably, heard a lot about the anti-poverty measures that are being taken by the Scottish Government, particularly the Scottish child payment. We heard about that right at the start, from Miles Briggs, and we have heard about it from many other members. It is, of course, this Government's intention to double the Scottish child payment to £20 as early as possible in this parliamentary session. It is, after all, a benefit that went from announcement to delivery in 18 months, which is a record delivery time for our new social security system.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: The cabinet secretary is quite right in saying that that was a record delivery. Can we replicate that with some of the other benefits so that people do not have to wait until 2025, for example, to get more eligibility or adequacy of payment?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will speak about some of that in more detail if I have time. However, I point the member to the fact that we are already delivering 11 benefits through Social Security Scotland, seven of which are brand new and unique. We are taking some time to develop the policy with those with lived experience in order to get it right and to ensure that we have a stable system that will allow us to make the change. When I was the social security secretary, I worked carefully with stakeholders on the reasons for that.

Going back to the Scottish child payment, as the debate went on, it was telling that we heard about the Scottish child payment and universal credit. According to Jeremy Balfour, we should not debate universal credit; we should just leave it to Westminster. He will forgive me if I do not take that offer up. It is a choice, and we all have choices. I will happily give way to any of the Scottish Conservatives here who would like to intervene and condemn the UK Government or— not going as far as that—at least cajole the UK Government into dropping its threat to make the £20 cut to universal credit. Anyone?

Miles Briggs: I will say exactly the same as I said to one of our back benchers. My motion seeks to make sure that we double the Scottish child payment during the current financial year. Will members support that, or are they about to vote against it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Well, there we go. At least Miles Briggs had the decency to stand up and attempt to defend the UK Government while the rest of the Tory members sat and looked at the floor.

None of the Scottish Tories will actually do that, which is testament to where their priorities lie and, as Jeremy Balfour said, to the choices that they have made. We have set out clearly what we will do with the Scottish child payment, and I look forward to seeing what will happen in the Scottish budget debates and what we will hear from every single party as we move forward with costed budgets.

As she always does in her speeches in the Parliament, Pam Duncan-Glancy took a very thoughtful, considered approach. However, I urge her to exercise caution on some issues. We would all love to get on with certain things, but specifically on the Scottish child payment, as Shona Robison pointed out in an intervention, we are providing bridging payments to make sure that we are getting on with it. Pam Duncan-Glancy mentioned that the provision of those payments does not match up with everyone who would get the Scottish child payment. That is simply because we do not have the data to allow us to deliver on that. Although that is a commendable desire, we can only work with the reality of what we have in

our social security system. The answer, therefore, is for us to have full powers, not split powers.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I apologise, but I want to make progress.

Neil Gray, Jackie Dunbar, Bob Doris and others rightly talked about the tale of two Governments. That point was exceptionally strongly made.

Emma Roddick made a very thoughtful contribution in which she talked about her experiences of homelessness and the absolute necessity of tackling the drivers of poverty. It is absolutely unacceptable that people fall through the net. We must take a cross-Government approach in order to deal with that.

I must mention Maggie Chapman's speech, because not many members mentioned the work that is being done on human rights and the incorporation of the UN treaties. In this parliamentary session, we have the opportunity to deliver something that is truly world leading in that respect. She mentioned the different parts of our society that will benefit from that. I genuinely hope that we will be able to make progress on that consensually.

Martin Whitfield: Is the cabinet secretary able to answer the question that I posed with regard to the Supreme Court judgment that we anticipate receiving within weeks?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I was just coming to Martin Whitfield's contribution on the UNCRC. The matter is, of course, with the Supreme Court at the moment, so I will not spend too much time commenting on a live case. The Government remains absolutely committed to the incorporation of the UNCRC to the maximum extent of the powers of the Scottish Parliament. I hope that that gives Martin Whitfield some comfort.

I want to move on to talk about some issues relating to education, children and families that have not come up in the debate. The pandemic has had a significant impact on families, and we must deliver support to them. That is why our programme for government sets out our commitment to invest at least £500 million over the parliamentary session to create a whole family wellbeing fund.

We must also take into account the promise that all of us made last year to thousands of care-experienced children and adults. We promised transformational change in the care system, and we intend to keep that promise. We will deliver on that promise despite the challenges that we face.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): Currently, there is not a streamlined approach to

adoption support for Scottish families, despite the SNP's pledge to implement its promise on that. Can the cabinet secretary provide an update on the grants for care-experienced 16 to 26-year-olds?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We are determined to move forward with that. The member has seen our programme for government and our commitment on the issue, which we are determined to deliver on.

I move on to the education recovery, which a number of members mentioned. We are aware that there have been negative impacts on the health and wellbeing, and the attainment, of some children and young people as a result of the pandemic. That is why £450 million of additional funding has already been committed as part of the education recovery. A significant amount of work on renewal and recovery in education is already under way, and we will continue to work with partners to ensure that pupils who have been negatively impacted are given the support that they need to recover.

An important part of that work is on the Scottish attainment challenge programme, which has a vital role to play. Audit Scotland has recognised that progress has been made on the poverty-related attainment gap, and headteachers have reported that they are seeing progress, but we know that there is more to do, which is why we have committed £215 million to the attainment Scotland fund, including a £20 million pupil equity funding premium. That is the first part of a £1 billion commitment to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap in this parliamentary session.

Miles Briggs: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am not sure how much time I have left.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The cabinet secretary is winding up.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Apparently, I am winding up. I apologise to Miles Briggs. I would have taken another intervention if I could.

We are determined to tackle teacher recruitment and ensure that teachers have permanent contracts wherever possible, although recruitment and retention lie within the gift of local authorities. We have already committed £248 million to support local authorities in the appointment of an additional 2,200 teachers and more than 500 support staff in schools across Scotland, and we are providing further funding for councils to support the recruitment of 3,500 additional teachers and 500 classroom assistants over the parliamentary session.

There is much in the programme for government that Ms Robison and I could have discussed today in our portfolios. There is an ambitious programme to create a fairer Scotland. We have seen progress, and we are proud of the Government's record. The results of the election have demonstrated that the Scottish people have, once again, put their trust in us to deliver on that, and we are beginning to repay that trust already. Looking at our first 100 days, it is clear that we have demonstrated that we are committed to delivering on teacher recruitment and on measures to tackle poverty. That is the type of delivery that we are already seeing within the first 100 days, and that is the level of delivery that we are committed to continuing over the session.

Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of legislative consent motion S6M-01243, on the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 8 September 2021, relating to Industrial Death Benefit, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, or executive competence of Scottish Ministers should be considered by the UK Parliament.—[*Ben Macpherson.*]

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

Decision Time

17:02

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are four 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 amendment in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-01248.1, in the name of Miles Briggs, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01248, in the name of Shona Robison, on supporting a fairer and more equal society, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. We will suspend the meeting to allow access to the digital voting system before voting.

17:02

Meeting suspended.

17:07

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Miles Briggs is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy will fall.

We move to the vote on amendment S6M-01248.1.

The vote is now closed.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer, my machine would not connect in time. I would have abstained. Thank you.

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

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 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)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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)
 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, 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)
 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)
 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)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-01248.1, in the name of Miles Briggs, is: For 33, Against 65, Abstentions 20.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-01248.2, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, which seeks to amend motion S6M-01248, in the name of Shona Robison, on supporting a fairer and more equal society, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

The Minister for Transport (Graeme Dey): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Apologies—I am having problems with the app. I would have voted no.

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

I call Jim Fairlie for a point of order.

Regrettably, a connectivity issue means that we cannot hear from Mr Fairlie at this time.

For

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)
 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)
 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, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 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)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (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)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 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)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (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)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (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-01248.2, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, is: For 25, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

Motion disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-01248, in the name of Shona Robison, on supporting a fairer and more equal society, 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, 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)
 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)
 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)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 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)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)

Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (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)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 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)

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)
 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)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-01248, in the name of Shona Robison, on supporting a fairer and more equal society, is: For 67, Against 30, Abstentions 20.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the ambitious programme of work laid out in the Programme for Government to create a fairer society; agrees that tackling child poverty is a national mission and recognises Scottish Government actions, including doubling the Scottish Child Payment as early as possible within the current parliamentary session, new bridging payments until the Payment is rolled out to under-16s, increasing access to advice services to maximise incomes, expansion of free school meals provision, new statutory guidance to reduce the costs of school uniforms, supporting working parents with a system of wraparound childcare for school-age children and an

investment of £1 billion over the session to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to expand early learning and childcare to one- and two-year-olds, starting with those from low-income households; further welcomes the continuation of the ambitious social security programme, including the doubling of Carer's Allowance Supplement this year and the introduction of new disability benefits; recognises the ambitious programme of work to ensure that everyone has the right to a safe warm affordable home; welcomes the new deal for tenants; acknowledges the work needed to be done to embed and advance equality, inclusion and human rights across society, and commits to working together during Scotland's recovery from COVID-19 in order to build a fairer and more equal society.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that legislative consent motion S6M-01243, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the relevant provisions of the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 8 September 2021, relating to Industrial Death Benefit, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament, or executive competence of Scottish Ministers should be considered by the UK Parliament.

Meeting closed at 17:20.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba