



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Thursday 7 October 2021

Session 6



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# Scottish Parliament

Thursday 7 October 2021

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

## General Question Time

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

The first item of business is general question time. In order to get as many members in as possible, I prefer short and succinct questions, and answers to match.

Question 1 has been withdrawn.

### MV Glen Sannox and Vessel 802 (Cost)

2. **Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what the latest estimate is of the public cost of procuring the ferries MV Glen Sannox and hull 802. (S6O-00260)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** The turnaround director of Ferguson Marine updated the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee on the delivery timetable and budget for vessels 801 and 802 on 30 September 2021. The cost to complete the vessels remains the same as was reported in the turnaround director's December 2019 report to the Parliament—namely, between £110.3 million and £114.3 million.

**Graham Simpson:** The turnaround director, Tim Hair, said in his 30 September letter that Ferguson's uses seven different data systems that do not talk to one another. In other words, no one knows what anyone else is doing. Is it any wonder that the vessels are so late and so over budget?

Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd—CMAL—has just ordered a small, slow, second-hand ferry from Norway, the diesel-powered MV Utne, at an overall cost of £9 million. It was for sale at under £6 million. Will the cabinet secretary explain what the gap is for? Is it just for livery? Why are we going for gas-guzzling cast-offs and not for the same kind of eco-friendly ferries that the Norwegians are buying?

**Kate Forbes:** I confess to having a constituency interest as much as a Government interest in the vessel that has just been procured, because it frees up the MV Coruisk to go back to the service between Mallaig and Armadale for which it was

designed, which has been met with great celebration in the communities of Sleat and Mallaig.

It is important that the Government looks at all options for ensuring that our lifeline vessels are secure and resilient. I am sure that the member joins me in that view. When it comes to the future of the fleet, we have committed £500 million over the next few years to ensure that we invest in ferry infrastructure right across the west coast.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** As the cabinet secretary knows, vessel 802 is intended to serve Lochmaddy and Tarbert. However, there have been calls from the communities of North Uist and Harris for each area to have a dedicated vessel. What consideration is the Scottish Government giving to that question, which has been raised for some years?

**Kate Forbes:** [*Inaudible.*—know how actively he represents his constituency on those matters.

Consideration of vessel replacement and deployment options is an on-going process. My colleague Graeme Dey was pleased to meet members of the North Uist and Harris communities during his recent visit to the outer Hebrides. I understand that the future option of an additional vessel on those routes, at least during peak summer, has been identified for further assessment as part of the work on the islands connectivity plan and investment programme. I hope that that work will continue at pace, and I am sure that the member will have the opportunity to represent his constituents on those issues.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** Does the cabinet secretary agree that the only way for shipbuilding at Port Glasgow and Greenock and Inverclyde to continue in future was for the yard to be taken into public ownership? The Tories' record of hammering shipbuilding communities is there for all to see. Nobody should listen to the Tories when it comes to saving shipbuilding jobs.

**Kate Forbes:** The member is right to remind the chamber that, in the face of a decade of Conservative cuts, the efforts of the Government saved not only Ferguson Marine from closure but more than 300 jobs that support the communities of Inverclyde. Those efforts ultimately ensured that two much-needed vessels will be completed and that the yard has a future.

We are investing in the future: we are supporting the yard to be more efficient, more competitive and more able to win contracts on the merits of its success. We will always back the shipbuilding industry in Scotland and deliver not only for Inverclyde but for our island communities, which rely on those lifeline services.

### Seagulls (North-east and Moray)

**3. Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address the problem of gulls in urban areas in the north-east and Moray. (S6O-00261)

**The Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan):** The Scottish Government supports gull management in Moray and north-east Scotland through NatureScot and others. NatureScot's role is to provide advice regarding gull management and, as the licensing authority, to license gull management where necessary. I understand that Moray Council has extended its voluntary nest and egg removal pilot. Similar schemes are available to local authorities across Scotland.

**Karen Adam:** I recently had a meeting to discuss issues that had arisen due to the prevalence of urban gulls in Banffshire and Buchan Coast. During the meeting, it was drawn to my attention that the most recent relevant Scottish Government research on the biodiversity of urban gulls is from 2006. Will the Scottish Government provide an update on research on urban gulls and their management in Scotland?

**Màiri McAllan:** I am aware of the public meeting that the member attended. I understand that NatureScot was represented and spoke to some of the member's constituents, and I heard that the meeting went well.

A current United Kingdom seabird census, which was organised by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, aims to estimate the populations of species that breed in urban environments. The findings of that research will help me and officials by informing future policy on dealing with urban gull populations.

### Sewage Sludge Spreading

**4. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to publish the James Hutton Institute report on the impact on human health and the environment arising from the spreading of sewage sludge on land. (S6O-00262)

**The Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan):** I am pleased to inform the member that we intend to publish the report this month.

**Michelle Thomson:** My constituents in Falkirk East are anxious for the report to be published. The spreading of sewage sludge was raised as a concern with my predecessor, Angus MacDonald, and has now been raised with me. The smell and inconvenience generate multiple complaints, but it is the potential risk to human health that is most

concerning. Can the minister confirm whether the Scottish Government has considered the risk to human and animal health of sewage sludge when it is used as a soil conditioner and advise what recent assessment it has made of the viral, heavy metal and bacterial loads in sewage sludge?

**Màiri McAllan:** I am aware of the concerns of the member's constituents and of the member. The Government takes matters of human health and environmental policy very seriously. A full review of the legislation and guidance that are relevant to the storage and spreading of sludge was undertaken in 2016, and the more recent piece of work that I referred to, which will be published this month, will help us to carefully consider the situation in 2021.

The spreading of sewage sludge on land is a long-established practice and an effective way of recovering value and avoiding waste. The practice is tightly regulated by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, but issues of odour, which I know the member's constituents are concerned about, are the responsibility of local authorities. I assure the member that SEPA will never hesitate to take enforcement action against anyone who is not complying with the current regulations for storage and spreading.

### Collective Rent Bargaining

**5. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the Swedish national system of collective rent bargaining through a national union of tenants would help to address any housing issues in Scotland. (S6O-00263)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** We are currently considering a wide range of information and evidence on rent controls and other issues that will be part of our new deal for tenants. That will include examining international comparisons with Sweden and other countries, which will help to inform our thinking as we progress policy development in that important area of work.

**Maggie Chapman:** I thank the minister for that response and I am pleased to note the work that is on-going.

It is clear that we have a lot of work to do to ensure that we have the right data from the right people and places, so that we adopt appropriate mechanisms for setting and reviewing rent levels. I am keen to ensure that tenants play a central role in those discussions—their voices and concerns must be at the heart of their new deal, and we need to hear from those with lived experience. How will tenants' voices be involved in shaping the strategy? Will the minister join me in Dundee to

speak to members of Living Rent and hear about their experiences of a tenants union?

**Patrick Harvie:** Absolutely. The basic thrust of the question is really important. Tenants' voices need to be not only heard but effective. We have begun work on gathering tenants' views through partnership working with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. There are other examples around the country, including in Glasgow City Council, which is working to ensure that tenants' voices are heard in its deliberations. I recently met Living Rent—one of the first stakeholder groups that I met when I took on this role. Living Rent has done extraordinary work to ensure that tenants' voices are both heard and effective. I would be very happy to meet local groups in Dundee and elsewhere, and I would encourage the member to contact my office to arrange that.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** The pandemic has caused a sharp rise in rent arrears, which now stand at more than £3 million in Dundee and nearly £8 million in Aberdeen, yet support for landlords has been prioritised—landlords have received around 14 times more in financial support than tenants have received. When will the Scottish Government start to support tenants who are facing rent arrears, given that no money has yet been paid out from its £10 million tenant hardship grant fund?

**Patrick Harvie:** The member is probably aware that that issue was debated long and hard across a range of political parties during the previous session of Parliament as we developed the emergency legislation and that a wide range of views were expressed about the prioritisation of support. The tenant hardship loan fund has only recently been replaced with a grant fund, and I hope that the member will be willing to let that system be operational before she judges whether it is a success. *[Patrick Harvie has corrected this contribution. See end of report.]* Many voices—mine and others, including from the Labour Party—quite rightly criticised the idea that loans alone would meet the needs of tenants. That is why a grant fund has been agreed and put in place by the Scottish Government.

**Siobhan Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** What does the minister think the Scottish Government can learn from our neighbours across Europe in its approach to fair and socially just housing?

**Patrick Harvie:** There is a great deal to learn from neighbours in other European countries. A crucial part of our work on developing policies in this area—rent controls and the wider new deal for tenants—will be listening carefully to and learning from the experience of countries such as the Republic of Ireland, Sweden and Germany. That could include looking at the role of tenants unions, which are an important way of shifting power in the

relationship between landlord and tenant. Tenants unions could play a much bigger role in that in Scotland. We are also working with academia to consider alternative approaches to rent control that could be considered in the Scottish context.

I thank the member for her interest.

## Cancer Survival Rates

**6. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to recent comments from Cancer Research UK regarding cancer survival rates in Scotland. (S6O-00264)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** Despite the recent pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic, cancer remains a priority. Our national health service staff have worked incredibly hard over the past year to ensure that the majority of cancer treatment and care has continued. We have treated more patients within the 62-day standard this quarter compared to the same time in both 2019 and 2020.

Over the next five years, we will invest £40 million to support cancer services, focusing on the most challenged cancer pathways. We are investing £20 million to support our detect cancer early programme to improve public awareness of the signs of cancer. Additionally, the £114.5 million cancer plan will roll out innovative treatments to improve services and ensure that access to care is equitable across Scotland.

**Russell Findlay:** The charity says that

“too many people are waiting far too long for ... treatment”

and that

“chronic shortages in staff and equipment”

predate Covid. It also says that cancer survival rates could start going down for the first time. A breast cancer charity says that more than 1,000 Scottish women are living with undiagnosed breast cancer. Cancer Research UK wants a firm commitment to tackle staff shortages and investment in equipment. Will the minister meet those commitments to ensure that no one waits too long for the vital treatment that they need?

**Maree Todd:** Early diagnosis is absolutely vital, and we have invested in the NHS workforce. Staffing levels in Scotland's NHS have reached a new record high after an increase of 5,000 full-time equivalent staff in the past year. Since 2006, there has been an increase of 87.7 per cent in consultant oncologists and an increase of 57.4 per cent in consultant radiologists. Our NHS recovery plan commits more than £1 billion of targeted investment for the recovery and renewal of our health service.

As well as investing in the workforce, we are investing in new technologies and making sure that those technologies are available around the country. This year, we have invested £5.6 million to support additional mobile magnetic resonance imaging scanners and three computed tomography scanners, which are operational throughout Scotland, and we have invested in mobile units that are located in NHS Highland and NHS Tayside to increase capacity.

We are working hard on the issue, and I expect that we will meet the demand, as the charity is requesting.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** The minister will be aware that the uptake rate of cervical screening tests in Scotland's most deprived areas is 63 per cent, compared with 74 per cent in the least deprived areas. That is totally unacceptable health inequality that leaves women from deprived areas at greater risk of developing serious health conditions.

What is the Scottish Government doing to encourage more women from deprived areas to attend their appointments, and will the minister outline today a timescale in which the Scottish Government expects to have closed the alarming gap?

**Maree Todd:** The member draws attention to an issue that impacts not only cervical cancer screening but screening more generally. There is an inequality in the uptake of the screening offers, which are vital. Cervical cancer is largely preventable, so it is vital to encourage people to come along to their cervical screening in order to prevent cancer before it happens.

We have in place a programme to improve access to screening, which involves a variety of work, including specific work on access to cervical screening—for example, to help people who cannot leave their house. The work also involves looking at the barriers faced by individuals who are not accepting the offers on screening and removing those barriers.

After this session, I can update the member in writing about the range of work that we are doing. We are really focused on improving the situation because we recognise the impact that it can have on citizens in Scotland.

#### **Bus Services (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale)**

**7. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what assistance it is giving to maintain bus services in the Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale constituency. (S6O-00265)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** While use by customers has been depressed due to the impacts of the pandemic, the Scottish Government has supported bus operators to maintain services through the Covid support grant and the Covid support grant restart.

Since June 2020, up to £210 million in emergency funding has been made available to support services across Scotland, including in the Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale constituency.

**Christine Grahame:** I am aware that, despite the additional support from the Scottish Government for bus companies, Covid has had a substantial and continuing impact on services, with some being cut.

As we enter Covid recovery, will the Scottish Government's funding be conditional on the return of direct services such as those to the Borders general hospital, the Royal infirmary of Edinburgh and the Astley Ainslie hospital, which serve my constituents both as patients as employees?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am sure that the member's question reflects concerns that are felt in her constituency and elsewhere.

It is a condition of our Covid funding that participating operators plan services and keep them under review in consultation with their transport authorities, having regard to the services that are required to minimise public transport connectivity disadvantages, including for island and rural communities. Similar requirements would continue under any recovery funding for bus operators. However, on average, current demand for bus services is only at 65 per cent of pre-Covid levels across Scotland, and it will take some time to return to pre-Covid levels. Bus operators and local transport authorities will have to make decisions about where to deploy services to meet current, and hopefully growing, passenger demand, which might differ from pre-pandemic travel patterns.



## First Minister's Question Time

12:00

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I intend to take some constituency and general supplementary questions after questions 2 and 3. Members who wish to ask supplementaries should press their request-to-speak buttons during question 2. I will keep a note of members who press their buttons and may take further supplementaries at the end, if we have time. Members who wish to ask a supplementary to questions 4 to 6 should press their buttons during the relevant question.

### Drug Deaths

**1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Every day in Scotland, four people lose their lives as a result of drug misuse. That is four lives every day cut needlessly short and families mourning the loss of loved ones every single day in Scotland. That is a crisis and a national shame. The longer we wait and the longer we fail to act, the more lives will be lost. People are looking to the Parliament to deliver solutions to halt that crisis and save lives.

Today, I published the Scottish Conservatives' right to recovery (Scotland) bill to guarantee that everyone who needs treatment for addiction can get it. I shared that with the First Minister earlier this morning.

In June, the First Minister said that she would "look with an open mind at any proposals" that are brought forward,

"including proposals for legislation."—[*Official Report*, 17 June 2021; c 5.]

Will she commit to her Government fully supporting our proposal to tackle Scotland's drug deaths crisis?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I will certainly repeat what I said before. We will look at any bill very carefully. I received the consultation this morning, and I have an open mind on it. As a point of fact, unless I am mistaken, I understand that Douglas Ross did not publish a bill this morning; indeed, the consultation that was sent to my office stated that, at this stage, there is no bill but only a draft proposal. I am not criticising that; it is important that legislation is properly consulted on. We will consider the proposals in the consultation and, as and when that develops into actual proposed legislation, we will consider that in detail.

I think—perhaps this is a point of agreement—that speed of action now is essential. We all know

that legislation takes time to go through the proper processes. I looked briefly at the document that was sent to me this morning and, on the face of it, it does not appear to suggest anything that goes beyond what we are already doing, although it suggests that those things should be enshrined in legislation. I will take funding as an example. Part of the consultation is in regard to the establishment of a new national funding scheme that is separate from alcohol and drug partnerships, but it does not appear to suggest additional funding. For example, it says that what is proposed is

"well within £50 million annual spending"

that is already being delivered.

We will continue with the action that we have set out. I do not think that it is right to wait for legislation, but I repeat that we remain open minded to looking at the details of legislation when it comes from the consultation that has been published today.

**Douglas Ross:** The First Minister will be aware that I am going through the non-Government bills unit's detailed process and that I am following the advice of parliamentary officials. I am very grateful that they have provided that advice to me and the Conservative Party.

On the issue of funding, we know that the money that is currently being spent on the issue to try to save people's lives is not getting to those who need it most. That is why we are saying that there are alternative ways to do it. I hope that the First Minister will continue to be positive in her response to the consultation and the legislation that comes forward.

Earlier this week, the First Minister proposed that we go on a joint visit. She knows that I immediately agreed to that offer. A key author of the bill and his colleague, the manager of Bluevale community club in Haghill, have suggested that the First Minister and I visit them to see the need for a right to recovery. Volunteers at that club pointed out that it is in the second most deprived area in Scotland. People in places such as Haghill are 18 times more likely to die from drugs than people in the most affluent areas are. Bluevale is trying to build a whole community and a whole-systems response to the drugs crisis, and the bill would help it to get even more lives back on track. Will the First Minister agree to a joint visit with me to Bluevale so that we can find some common ground and get around the table with those on the front line to hear why the bill is so desperately needed?

**The First Minister:** I will come to that point in a moment, but I want to complete the point that I addressed in my first answer.

I think that I said explicitly that I was not criticising the process that Douglas Ross is going through, but in his initial question to me he said—I think—that he had published a bill this morning, and I was simply making the point that that is not the case.

We will consider the consultation fully and with an open mind, and when that is translated into an actual bill, as I expect that it will be in the fullness of time, we will consider that in the normal parliamentary processes that all legislation goes through. I do have an open mind and I hope that we can find maximum common ground. I suspect that there will continue to be issues that divide us on the correct responses to the drugs crisis, but I hope that none of us in this chamber allow those issues to get in the way of the areas where we can build agreement and consensus.

On the issue of a visit, I am glad that Douglas Ross accepted my suggestion earlier in the week that we go together to a working-class community. My office will be in touch to take that forward shortly. I am certainly willing to meet organisations and, indeed, individuals affected by drugs misuse, as I have previously.

This is an equally important point and I hope that it is one that will be accepted by Douglas Ross: the issues faced by working-class communities go beyond drugs. Indeed, drug misuse can, in some cases, be a symptom of deeper issues—poverty, for example—so I am sure that Douglas Ross will agree that, if we are to undertake such a joint endeavour, it will also be important to meet, for example, those who have just had their universal credit withdrawn, driving them deeper into the poverty conditions that then sometimes lead to the other issues that we are talking about. So, I look forward to finalising the details of that and to meeting people who will, no doubt, have things to say about Scottish Government policy, what we are doing and what more we should do, but also people who are being deeply affected each and every day right now by United Kingdom Government policy that is doing a lot of damage in working-class communities the length and breadth of the country.

**Douglas Ross:** I am grateful to the First Minister for that answer, and I give an unconditional acceptance to an invitation to meet any community anywhere at any time, because this is an issue of national importance. I am raising the issue of drugs deaths today because of the consultation that I have brought forward. I know that the First Minister has said this a couple of times, but if I could just introduce a bill right now—*[Interruption.]*—no, it is important that everyone understands this. If I could introduce a bill right now, I would, but the non-Government bills unit, which the Parliament supports, sets out a very

specific process for those not in Government to go forward with.

We heard from the drugs minister and others in the Government that they were waiting to see our proposals, and our proposals are in the consultation document that was launched today. This bill has been built by front-line experts like FAVOR Scotland and has the backing of recovery groups across the country. One of those is—*[Interruption.]*—I am sorry, but this is—

**The Presiding Officer:** Continue, Mr Ross.

**Douglas Ross:** Thank you, Presiding Officer.

This is a serious issue, because I was saying that what we are putting forward has been backed by recovery groups across the country. One of those is Recovery Enterprises Scotland in Kilmarnock, whose founder, Mark Gallagher, says that people have given up trying to access treatment because they see the system as broken.

That is why he believes that we need to take forward the proposal that I have launched today. Will the First Minister listen to those experts and, instead of delaying any longer, commit her Government to backing our bill at stage 1 so that Parliament can properly scrutinise it? The First Minister's concern seems to be the lack of scrutiny. Her saying right now that she would approve our proposals at stage 1 would give Parliament the opportunity to look at them in detail.

**The First Minister:** I am genuinely trying to be helpful and to build some agreement here. I have said twice that I understand the process that Douglas Ross is going through. My comments are not meant to be a criticism. I would simply ask him, in return, to understand the proper and due process that any responsible Government has to go through in considering legislation. I cannot engage with a bill that does not yet exist, for the reasons that we have heard. We will engage with the proposals in the consultation. There is one that, having looked at it briefly already this morning, I would immediately welcome. For example, when it comes to treatment, the consultation document seems to recognise that we need a range of different interventions and services and that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach.

That is a welcome step forward from the Conservatives, who previously have appeared to suggest that the only solution was residential rehabilitation. Already, I see the emergence of some common ground and I genuinely want to treat the consultation with the respect that it deserves. However, equally, Douglas Ross must know that I cannot stand here and say that I will vote for a bill—giving it *carte blanche*—when, by his own admission and for understandable

reasons, that bill does not yet exist. Therefore, let us try and move forward with a genuine determination to build consensus where we can.

My final point is one that I made earlier: there is a real need to move forward at pace with this work. With the best will in the world—as we are demonstrating today—legislation takes time and it does so for good reason. I do not want to wait for legislation, however merited or otherwise it might turn out to be. We have set out a very detailed plan of action, which is backed by significant additional resources and has, at its heart, guaranteed standards of treatment, including access to same-day treatment. We will get on with that plan and if, as a Parliament, we think that legislation can help to underpin it in the future, I am open minded about that, as I have said many times. However, if we want to build consensus, let us both understand the processes that we have to go through, in order that—hopefully, in the interests of people across the country—we can get there.

**Douglas Ross:** That is a fair comment, but stage 1 of a bill is about agreeing its general principles, and the First Minister has already looked at some of the principles that we are putting forward. [*Interruption.*] She has already looked at the issues around funding and the areas where there is agreement.

Although there seems to be opposition from her back benchers, I am more encouraged by her response than that of those behind her. Our proposal is also supported by grieving families and, if Scottish National Party members want to talk over grieving families, shame on them. I will speak about the case of Vicky, who has lost two brothers to drugs and lost Stewart just last year. A father of twins, he was only 43 and he came from a loving family. Vicky said that Stewart tried to get treatment, but that

“He was moved from pillar to post. He was passed about by the system. He was treated like he didn’t matter.”

Vicky is backing the proposals. She cannot know for sure that the bill would have saved Stewart, but she told us:

“If we had this bill, I wonder how many people would still be here?”

The First Minister was absolutely right to say that we have to move forward at pace, so will she listen to the experts and the grieving families and ensure that urgent parliamentary time is given to consider our proposals on such an urgent issue?

**The First Minister:** I think that Douglas Ross has accepted that I am genuinely trying not to make this exchange politically divisive, because, although we do not agree on all the detail or the background, we all agree that this Parliament and Government have much work to do.

I will try and make some progress here. I cannot agree to vote for a bill that does not yet exist, because I do not know what the bill will say in detail. I received the consultation only this morning and I will study it in more detail later, but I have had a chance to have a brief look at it and, if its broad proposals translate into the general principles of a bill, it is likely that we will want to give that bill a fair wind through Parliament, in order to see whether we can reach consensus on the detail. Given that we are talking about a bill that is not yet in existence, any reasonable person would think that that is a reasonable response from a First Minister who has a duty to make sure that we go through all the right processes. I hope that we can agree that that is a reasonable starting point.

With regard to the fact that we have a duty—which I feel very strongly—to make sure that what has not worked well in our drug treatment services in the past is rectified for the future, we also have an obligation to make sure that we listen to lived experience and use it to drive proposals. My condolences and sympathies are with Vicky on the loss of Stewart and with every other family who has lost someone to drugs. They are the ones we must keep in mind, but part of keeping them in mind and living up to our responsibility to them is making sure that we think seriously about what has to be done. We are demonstrating today the time that it takes, understandably, even to get a draft bill before Parliament so, while we consider that legislation, we are moving on with various measures now. That is the commitment that the Government has given and will continue to take forward.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek clarification. The objections that I made from a sedentary position when Douglas Ross was speaking were because he seemed to be trying to bypass the normal governmental rules and processes for a bill, which we all have to go through, whereby there is a proposal and a consultation and then a bill is introduced. I seek clarification about those exchanges. Is Mr Ross trying to bypass the process that other members have to go through?

**The Presiding Officer:** I thank Ms Grahame for her point of order. The member and other members will be well aware of the processes that a bill has to go through, and that will apply in this case as it would for any other bill.

#### **Queen Elizabeth University Hospital (Water Contamination)**

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Two years ago, I stood in the chamber and revealed what brave national health service whistleblowers had

uncovered about water contamination at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital in Glasgow. It was met with denial, delay and attempts to bully into silence by the health board. Two years on, we have had a discredited independent review, a case note review, the commencement of a public inquiry and on-going police investigations. Every step of the way, we have had to fight the system to bit by bit, piece by piece, uncover the truth.

Thanks to the case note review, we know that two children's deaths were linked to hospital-acquired infections. There is now a criminal investigation into one of those deaths, that of Milly Main. However, the health board referred Milly's case to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service only when her family applied for a fatal accident inquiry.

The health board did not take that opportunity to refer the case of the second child, nor did it take the opportunity to refer it when the case note review was published. I met the Crown Office, which did not know the details of the second child and had to ask me to provide them. I could do so only thanks, once again, to the bravery of whistleblowers. That case note review was commissioned by the Scottish Government. Why was that child's death not reported for investigation?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** These are serious matters that the Government has taken and continues to take seriously. The Government commissioned the independent review, and I do not accept that it is discredited, although the Government also accepted that there had to be further process to ensure that parents and families who had been affected by what happened at the Queen Elizabeth hospital knew that it had been fully and properly investigated. The Government established the public inquiry that is under way. It will take its course and is completely independent of Government and, of course, of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. As Anas Sarwar has said, there is also a live police investigation into some of the cases that have been discussed in the chamber before.

For all those reasons, it would not be right, appropriate or helpful to the families concerned for me to get further into the detail of any of those cases, given the independent processes that are under way. However, as I have said before, I want to leave no one in any doubt about how seriously the Government and I take these issues, or about how determined we are, through the processes that we have established in the form of the public inquiry, to get to the answers and the truth. Then all of us, as a Parliament, will have the opportunity to reflect on those findings and consider what further action is necessary.

**Anas Sarwar:** I think that the First Minister misses the fundamental issue here, which is that campaigners, families and whistleblowers are still having to take on the system to get answers, instead of the system working in their favour.

At the heart of this is grieving families. We know that one of the families had not been told the truth about why their child died and had not been contacted. The First Minister gave Parliament a personal commitment that every effort would be made to contact that family. I would appreciate an update on progress with that.

There is a fundamental issue here. In the one case, Milly's family is fighting for answers, and they now have a criminal investigation into her death. The other family had been kept in the dark, and until now there has been no criminal investigation into their child's death. Those cases should not be being treated differently. It should not take a family publicly fighting for answers—that is not acceptable. Criminal investigations should have been launched into both deaths as soon as the circumstances became clear. Why is it still falling to whistleblowers, families and campaigners to do the job of the health board and the job of the Scottish Government for them?

**The First Minister:** I have the greatest respect for whistleblowers, and I have the greatest respect and the greatest sympathy for the families. I do not hesitate to say that.

I go again to the point that I made earlier: it was the Government, through the previous health secretary Jeane Freeman, who commissioned and established the public inquiry. The public inquiry is now under way. There are criminal investigations under way. It is, rightly, not up to me which cases are investigated from a criminal perspective and which are not. It is up to the police and the Crown Office.

As I said in my previous answer, it is important to try not to divide on such issues, but to recognise the actions of, in this case, Anas Sarwar. I know that he cares deeply about the families involved. That is why I also know, or at least hope, that he will recognise that the worst thing I could do, standing here as First Minister, in light of the independent processes that are under way—a statutory public inquiry and criminal investigations—would be to in any way inadvertently prejudice either of those processes by getting further into the detail right now.

We have done what I think is the right thing in establishing the independent inquiry. It is entirely for the police and the Crown Office to determine what criminal investigations are undertaken. It is incumbent on all of us who take the issues seriously and want to get to the answers that we allow those processes to take their course. Of

course, when we have the findings from them, the Parliament will have not just the opportunity but the duty to reflect on any further action that is necessary.

**Anas Sarwar:** I note that the First Minister did not give an update on the progress in finding the family, and I would appreciate that in her response to this question. However, I think that she is also missing the fundamental point that it should not take a family having to campaign in a newspaper to get a child's death investigated, which is fundamentally what has happened. Milly Main's death is being investigated because of the bravery of Kimberly Darroch in going on television and speaking in a newspaper about what happened to her daughter. The other family does not have the opportunity to do that because they do not know what happened to their child. That cannot be a reason not to have a criminal investigation into that child's death. Months ago, I asked the First Minister to help to find the family and, years ago, I asked her to hold the health board to account. Every time we ask the Government to take action, little happens. Every bit of progress has been fought for by the families and the campaigners.

I note what the First Minister says about the public inquiry, but it was hard fought for and won by the families and the campaigners, frankly, not by the Government. Nicola Sturgeon was health secretary when the hospital was commissioned, she was First Minister when the hospital was opened and she has been in charge throughout this scandal. Surely there must come a point when it stops being whistleblowers, families and campaigners taking on the state in order to get answers and, instead, the state takes the side of the whistleblowers, families and campaigners to find the answers and get justice. We cannot wait for the outcome of the public inquiry for families to get justice. That could take years. Words of sympathy from the First Minister are, frankly, wearing thin. What is it going to take for Nicola Sturgeon to take responsibility, own the crisis, get a grip of this rotten health board and get the families the truth and justice that they deserve?

**The First Minister:** Before I go on to that question, I apologise for not addressing the point about the efforts to trace the second family. Last time Anas Sarwar asked about that, I set out the steps that the health board had taken to try to locate the family. As I understand it, the board has not located the family. As I understand it, that is not for the want of trying and effort, and appropriate steps will continue to be taken.

On the issue of criminal investigations, it is a fundamental point of constitutional democracy that it is not up to the First Minister of the country—at any time, whoever he or she may be—to determine what cases are and are not subject to

criminal investigation. It would be deeply improper if that was the case.

On the question that Anas Sarwar has just posed to me again, a Government that has established a full, independent, statutory public inquiry cannot be said to be trying to hide away from getting to the truth. We want the answers so that, if there are issues to be addressed with the health board or in Government policy, they can be addressed, and, fundamentally, so that the families, the most important thing of all, get the answers that they want.

However, it is not credible for Anas Sarwar to say that a public inquiry was fought for and campaigned for—I accept that, although the Government did establish the inquiry—and then in the next breath say that the inquiry does not matter, we cannot wait for it and we have to do something different. It is an independent statutory public inquiry. Those who have a genuine interest in getting to the answers and the truth now have a duty to allow that inquiry to properly do its work. That is what the Government will do and I would suggest that that is what Anas Sarwar needs to do, as well.

### Pig Cull

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** The First Minister will be aware of the Prime Minister's outrageous and condescending response on "The Andrew Marr Show" and elsewhere regarding the cull and incineration of pigs that should have gone into our food system. Does she agree that that waste is unacceptable, as is the financial and emotional toll on the farmers involved, and that having a robust supply chain is completely undermined by the lack of a trained workforce?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Yes. It was deeply regrettable that the Prime Minister treated the very serious issues of animal welfare with such disdain on Sunday, just as it was outrageous that he made an entire speech to his party conference yesterday and did not mention the fact that his Government took away £20 a week from the poorest families across the country on that very day.

The Government is monitoring the specific issue that Jim Fairlie raised very carefully. At the heart of that issue is labour shortages, which are impacting on many sectors of our economy. Those labour shortages have been significantly exacerbated by the ending of freedom of movement that came about because of Brexit.

Although we will do what we can through employability and skills work to try to address that, fundamentally, the answers and the solutions have to lie with the United Kingdom Government. I call

on it to take urgent action to ensure that the problems that are already being experienced do not get even worse as the winter progresses.

### **Mental Health Treatment (Young People)**

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** There have been long-standing issues with mental health treatment in my region. It is therefore troubling to learn about reports of inappropriate admission of children under the age of 18 into adult psychiatric wards. It is vital that young people, who often have complex needs, get the help that they need and deserve. What action will the Scottish Government take to address those failings?

**The First Minister:** It is important that everybody who needs mental health treatment gets that treatment in the best possible setting. That is especially important when we are talking about children and adolescents.

The Government is already taking a range of actions to further develop community wellbeing services for children and young people. For example, we are providing funding for counsellors in schools so that there is much earlier intervention for young people so that fewer of them require the services of more specialist provision. A range of work is under way, which we will continue to progress with additional funding over the months to come.

### **Police Scotland (Culture)**

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** Yesterday, an employment tribunal upheld former police officer Rhona Malone's claims of victimisation against Police Scotland. The judgment was damning. It found that the firearms unit in which she served was an "absolute boys' club" and that the culture was "horrific". It also found that evidence that had been provided by officers from the professional standards department—the department that is responsible for investigating complaints within the police—to be "implausible" and "wholly unsatisfactory".

I am sure that the First Minister has, as I do, huge respect for the work that the police do locally and nationally. However, I am concerned that the experience of Ms Malone is not unique. In recent years, I have been approached by female officers who have raised issues regarding culture, out-of-hours behaviour, deployment rotas and equipment. Their complaints are often lost in a system that is difficult and stressful to navigate, which has ultimately led to officers resigning from the force rather than pursuing their complaints.

I know Rhona Malone and have spoken to her. Will the First Minister join me in commending her for her bravery in pursuing her complaint? In the

light of the Sarah Everard case, does the First Minister feel that there is a need for fuller investigation of and inquiry into the culture and practice in Police Scotland in relation to sexism and misogyny?

**The First Minister:** First, I will take the opportunity to pay tribute to Rhona Malone and to say how deeply troubling the findings of the tribunal are. I commend her bravery in taking her case to it. The findings paint a picture that should trouble us all.

In confronting the issues—as we all must—it is important that, first, we do not assume that any such case is necessarily an isolated incident, and secondly, that we do not assume that any organisation in our society, however well respected it is by us all, is somehow immune from the misogynistic culture that pervades our whole society.

The findings of the tribunal must be taken seriously, so I welcome the response of Police Scotland in accepting the findings and expressing how serious it is about addressing the issues.

More generally, the case is another reminder—there have been too many painful reminders of this in recent weeks—that behind the spectrum of unacceptable experiences that women have, which goes from inappropriate comments to discrimination in the workplace to violence and serious sexual assault, lies unacceptable behaviour on the part of men. That is the problem that must be addressed and rectified.

I am old enough to have seen and experienced some parts of that spectrum over the years. It has taken too long to get to this point so I do not say this lightly, but I hope that we are finally at a watershed moment and a turning point at which we stop expecting women to fix the problems and instead put the full glare where it belongs—on men who behave in deeply unacceptable and misogynist ways.

I say to all the men in the chamber and across the country that they should challenge such behaviour when they see it in other men that they know, and that they should challenge their own behaviour. Then let us, as a society, turn the page and turn the corner so that women can live free of fear of harassment, abuse, intimidation, violence and—in the worst cases—death.

### **Cabinet (Meetings)**

**3. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** To ask the First Minister when the Cabinet will next meet. (S6F-00339)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Tuesday.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton:** Muscle spasms, chronic fatigue, diarrhoea, and air hunger to the point of gasping for breath—figures released today show that 79,000 people are now living with long Covid. It could be the biggest mass disabling event since the end of the first world war.

The Scottish Government's initial intervention could help only 60 people a month, which is why the much-delayed long Covid plan that was published last week should have been transformative. I have spoken today with a constituent who suffers from long Covid. He was, in his words "devastated" to discover that nothing has changed. I have previously warned that people who have the condition are better off moving to England where there are well-established clinics and a care pathway, and nothing in the Government's long Covid plan will match that.

Long Covid Scotland has been trying to meet the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, but he has refused at every turn. If he has not met those people, how can he possibly know what they need? Will the First Minister either meet them herself or instruct her health secretary to do so at the earliest possible opportunity?

**The First Minister:** I believe that the health secretary has met long Covid patients and am sure that he would be more than willing to meet others. It is a serious issue, the impact of which we will be living with for some time.

I am not going to comment, because I am not an expert on the arrangements south of the border, but I suspect that they do not in detail live up to how they are talked about in the chamber—that is another matter.

We have published the long Covid strategy to which Alex Cole-Hamilton referred. There are 16 commitments in it that are backed by a £10 million funding commitment. Part of that is for furthering our understanding of the reasons for and the implications of long Covid, so that the services that are developed properly address them. There is nothing to stop health boards from establishing specialist provision right now, but we also want to make sure that, throughout more general national health service provision, clinicians are capable of addressing the impacts of long Covid as they present.

The issue is serious now and will continue to be an obligation on the Government, which is why the commitments in the strategy are so important.

#### **Smoke and Heat Alarms (Retailers)**

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** —[*Inaudible.*] fire and heat alarms in Scottish homes by February 2022. Is the First Minister aware that several retailers are still

selling the previous generation of smoke and heat alarms that cannot be interlinked and cannot meet the new standards that are being brought in? Does she agree that such stores should be clear with customers about the February 2022 regulations ahead of any purchase being made? Will there be any support for homeowners who are struggling to pay for installing such smoke and heat alarms?

**The Presiding Officer:** Are you content that you heard enough of the question, First Minister?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** I think so, Presiding Officer. I apologise to Bob Doris—I missed the start of the question. The sound could not be heard here in the chamber, but I think that I got the general thrust of the question.

Such issues are important, given the expected demand for smoke alarms ahead of 1 February next year, when the new standard is due to come into force. There is significant public interest in the matter because of the public awareness campaign. We know that some retailers might have short-term supply issues, but we have been assured by manufacturers that there is a sufficient supply of alarms available to meet expected demand.

We will continue to consider whether there is more that we need to do to support home owners to be compliant with the new standard. We will take a range of actions, should we consider that to be necessary. The public awareness campaign has been important in making sure that people have increased understanding of what will be expected as of February next year.

#### **Domestic Abuse Charges (2020-21)**

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** A report that has been published by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service reports that there were 33,425 charges of domestic abuse in 2020-21. That suggests that there was an average of 91 incidents of domestic abuse every day in Scotland, which is the highest level since 2015. The figure relates only to cases that were reported.

I know that the First Minister has taken an interest in that unacceptable situation. Does she agree that the Scottish Government needs to review the policies that are currently in place? Will she also investigate the possibility of establishment of family violence courts?

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** We will consider any reasonable proposal. As people will know from her background, the new Lord Advocate has a very strong interest in ensuring that victims of domestic abuse and women who are victims of male violence get appropriate and speedy access to justice. I know that she is very keen to ensure that all the Crown Office's policies

and procedures are helping to ensure that that that case.

I have commented on the underlying driving reasons for domestic abuse and violence against women and girls. When women and girls experience them—it is important to recognise that some men experience domestic abuse, but the majority of people who do are women—it is important that the justice system responds appropriately.

Although the numbers are deeply troubling—that anyone is a victim of such crimes is deeply troubling—the increases in the numbers might mean that people are now feeling that they are more able to come forward and report such crimes, which we should welcome. In addition, of course, Parliament, to its great credit, passed a new law that made criminal certain behaviour—coercive and controlling abuse—that was not previously criminal. We must bear those factors in mind when we look at the numbers.

However, making sure that people have access to justice is an important part of our overall approach to reducing the impact of domestic abuse and violence on women.

### Libraries

**4. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister, in light of this being libraries week, what the Scottish Government's response is to reports that some libraries remain closed. (S6F-00343)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Libraries week is an opportunity to celebrate the contribution that libraries make to our communities. A small number of libraries across the country have not yet reopened after the Covid closures. I understand that there are a number of reasons for that, including the fact that some are still being used as Covid test centres and some are co-located within schools, and in some cases there is a requirement for refurbishment before reopening. However, I hope that most of the others will reopen soon.

Of the 481 libraries across Scotland, 432 are open as of Monday, and a further 24 have announced reopening dates that will be forthcoming. Therefore, well over 90 per cent of all libraries across the country are already open, and I think that we should welcome that.

In the programme for government, we announced a £1.25 million public library Covid support fund, which is intended to give local authorities and libraries support in getting open again and staying open, because libraries are a vital and integral part of communities across our country.

**Christine Grahame:** I thank the First Minister for her detailed response. Many libraries are indeed open, although some of them are open on reduced hours, including in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale.

Does the First Minister agree with Pamela Tulloch, chief executive of the Scottish Library and Information Council, which administers that welcome £1.25 million libraries recovery fund, which is targeted at libraries in areas of deprivation, that although that money helps, part of the problem has been the councils' understandable redeployment of staff elsewhere during Covid? Does she agree, therefore, that, as we move out of Covid, full staffing of libraries should again be possible, with the result that all libraries can be fully open?

**The First Minister:** I agree: that is important. Every reasonable person recognises the impact of Covid on not only libraries, but many of the other services that local authorities deliver. There will be a period of getting back to normal and of again reconfiguring services that had to be reconfigured at the start of Covid. It is important that libraries fully re-open, unless there is a very good reason why that cannot happen, such as a need for refurbishment or use as a test centre.

It is important that libraries give people—especially young people—access to books. It was access to a library that fuelled my own love of reading when I was young. That is vitally important. Libraries are also used for many other things these days. It is important that that community provision is there. In Glasgow, where my constituency is, the vast majority of libraries are open again, as is the case across the country, and that is welcome. It is important that we support councils to open the remaining libraries as quickly as possible.

### Primary School (Deferral of Start)

**5. Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will review the implementation date for changes to allow parents to defer their child's start at primary school. (S6F-00348)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** Entry to school can be deferred if a child is not yet aged five on the first day of primary school. Not all children who are deferred are yet automatically entitled to a funded place in early years education. However, we have introduced new legislation to guarantee funding for early learning and child care during any deferred year. That legislation comes into force from August 2023, on a timetable that has already been approved by the Parliament.



There are no plans to change that timetable, because it has been developed in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities so that it is realistic and achievable. In the meantime, we have already committed £3 million to fund five local authorities to deliver early learning and childcare in 2021-22 as part of a pilot programme to support the wider roll-out of that commitment. The Minister for Children and Young People will soon announce additional pilot authorities for 2022-23.

**Meghan Gallacher:** Despite legislation being approved by the Parliament, parents are still being refused the right to defer their child's school start. The Scottish Government has opted for a trial approach that has created a postcode lottery for whether a council will grant permission for a child to start school one year later. School deferrals were not even mentioned in the Scottish Government's recovery plan. Why has the full implementation date been delayed until 2023? Will the Scottish Government commit to bringing that date forward so that all parents have the same right to make the best possible decision about their child's education?

**The First Minister:** I appreciate that the member was not in the Parliament on 3 February 2021, when the August 2023 implementation date was agreed. Unless I am mistaken, it was supported by all Conservative members at that time. There is a pragmatic reason for that date: we have to work with COSLA to ensure that that date is achievable and deliverable. That was the consensus that was reached and backed by the Parliament.

Along the way, as I said, we are piloting the approach in a number of local authorities to deliver on that commitment and to support the wider roll-out. I understand that parents want that to happen straight away and I understand their reasons for that, but we are doing this in the proper way so that it is deliverable and is properly delivered, so that when we get to that implementation date, should parents want to defer their child's entry to primary school, they will have that right.

### **Scottish Qualifications Authority (Public Sector Equality Duty)**

**6. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the announcement that the Scottish Qualifications Authority has entered a two-year agreement with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to improve equalities practices after the Commission established that the SQA was not routinely assessing the impact of its policies and practices against the three needs of the public sector equality duty. (S6F-00341)

**The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon):** The education secretary met the chief executive of the SQA earlier this week and impressed upon her the need to deliver against the section 23 agreement. The EHRC's findings refer to historical omissions at the SQA. Learners can be assured that all the required equality impact assessments regarding the awarding of national qualifications in the past two years were completed and published by the SQA and the Scottish Government. I welcome the SQA's action plan and its commitment to complete any outstanding equality impact assessments for all of their current policies and practices, with 28 new equality impact assessments already having been published since August.

**Martin Whitfield:** The First Minister spent the whole of the last parliamentary session telling us that education was her number 1 priority. One of the causes of the attainment gap that she claims her Government is working so hard to close is, infamously, inequality. Can she tell me, if it was her absolute priority, why she never thought to ask her education governing body whether it was looking at the question of equality?

**The First Minister:** I would expect the SQA and all bodies, whether they are Government agencies or otherwise, to have equality at the heart of everything that they do. That has been impressed on the SQA, as I said in my opening answer. As I also said, the EHRC's finding refers to historical omissions. Over the last period—indeed, since the current chief executive was appointed—any new SQA policy or practice that has been introduced has been subject to an equality impact assessment in line with duties under the Equality Act 2010. The SQA is right, now, to go back and make sure that that applies to all current policies and practices, and the Government expects it fully to do so in line with its action plan.

## World Mental Health Day 2021

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

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-01009, in the name of Paul McLennan, on world mental health day 2021: mental health in an unequal world. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament notes that 10 October 2021 is World Mental Health Day; welcomes this day of global mental health education, awareness-raising and advocacy; recognises the relevance of this year's theme, Mental Health in an Unequal World, to Scotland; considers that, based on available data, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in mental health; understands that this includes those with mental ill health, who, it believes, live on average 20 years less than the wider population, and those living in deprived communities, who are more likely to experience poor mental wellbeing, anxiety and depression, and welcomes the work by organisations across Scotland, including through Scotland's Mental Health Partnership, to address both the causes and outcomes of these inequalities, in East Lothian and across Scotland.

12:48

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** It is a privilege to open this debate on such an important issue. After a year of unprecedented challenge for the entire world, I am pleased to be joined by colleagues to debate world mental health day 2021 and its chosen theme, which is mental health in an unequal world. World mental health day provides us, as elected representatives in this Parliament, with an opportunity to highlight the importance of and need for mental health education, as well as to raise awareness of the inequalities in our society and their implications for our mental health and wellbeing.

In March 2020, we entered a global lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and we are still experiencing its challenges today. Many of us then were unable to comprehend how much our lives would be altered in the months that followed. The pandemic has impacted on all of us, and Scots are now experiencing higher levels of psychological distress, anxiety and depression than we were pre-pandemic. Data from the Covid and mental health tracker suggests that people are now nearly twice as likely to experience those mental health challenges. Changes in work status, including being furloughed or losing one's job, have had significant impacts, with people affected by such circumstances experiencing higher levels

of depressive symptoms, thoughts of suicide and high psychological distress.

In my East Lothian constituency, I have heard directly from people who have been hit hard by the pandemic. I recently met the inspiring folk of Andy's Man Club in Dunbar, which is a free-to-attend mental health support group for men. I attended one of its men's support meetings, where I heard the experiences of other men and how Covid had impacted their mental health. It gave me an opportunity to pause and open up about my own mental health, and I found it incredibly helpful to speak to other men about their experiences. I was able to see at first hand how specialist groups such as that—like many others—are and have been essential. In the future, as we move on from the pandemic, they will absolutely continue to be so.

As I said, this year's world mental health day theme is mental health in an unequal world. Since I became an MSP, one thing that has struck me is the true extent of inequality. Across all aspects of society, Covid-19 has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, and mental health is no different. It need not be said that Scotland remains a society with significant inequalities, which extend to those with mental ill health and are mirrored in the mental health outcomes of disadvantaged groups.

According to the Scottish health survey, prior to the pandemic, the likelihood of a person experiencing poor mental wellbeing and mental ill health was partly linked to their socioeconomic status. During the pandemic, those from lower socioeconomic groups have consistently reported higher rates of depression and suicidal thoughts compared with those from higher groups.

It is no surprise that adults living in the most deprived areas in Scotland are approximately twice as likely to have mental health problems as those in the least deprived areas. In my constituency, that means that people who live in Tranent and Prestonpans, which are among the 10 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland, are up to twice as likely to have mental health problems as those who live in the most affluent areas of, for example, North Berwick.

When I was preparing for the debate, it was clear to me that mental health impacts on all of us in many ways and in many spheres of life. I want to give a few examples. In its briefing for the debate, the Royal National Institute of Blind People stated:

"A sight loss diagnosis can have a serious impact on a person's emotional wellbeing ... There is a link between sight loss and higher rates of depression and anxiety ... Eye Clinic Liaison Officers (ECLOs), counselling services and support groups can all help someone with sight loss come to terms with their diagnosis".

Up to 40,000 people a year are impacted.

In its briefing, the Construction Industry Training Board said:

“11% of inwork suicides happen in the construction sector, which employs 7% of the UK workforce. The risk of suicide among some site based male construction workers was three times the national average and skilled finishing trades, such as painters and plasterers, were twice the national average”.

Twenty-six per cent of construction workers who responded to a survey in 2020 had experienced suicidal thoughts, and 97 per cent had experienced stress over the past year.

Hospitality Scotland was in touch regarding the wellbeing of hospitality workers. It said:

“Hospitality is a sector with many workers and owners working extra shifts to keep businesses running. Others may have experienced reduced working hours as businesses offer a restricted service due to shortages. Customer expectations are still high. I would like to reiterate that it is in everyone’s interests to continue to be kind to each other.”

That is a direct quote from Hospitality Scotland.

Prior to my election in May, I had discussions with the Royal College of Psychiatrists on the nation’s mental health. I thank Aidan Reid for all his help and guidance. I have had several meetings with the royal college and the Scottish Mental Health Partnership since then.

I very much stand by the philosophy of “Deeds, not words” when it comes to the response on mental health recovery, especially for those experiencing mental health inequalities. Last year, 18 per cent of people waited more than 18 weeks for a psychological therapy appointment in NHS Lothian. Forty-two per cent of children and young people waited more than 18 weeks for treatment and support from child and adolescent mental health services. We all know that we need to do better.

**Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Will the member give way?

**Paul McLennan:** I am conscious of the time, so if it is okay, I will keep going.

Recovering our nation’s mental health needs action, as outlined in the Scottish Government’s Covid-19 mental health transition and recovery plan and demonstrated by the £120 million funding for the mental health recovery and renewal fund, which will recruit 800 additional mental health workers this year and will ensure that, by the end of this parliamentary session, 10 per cent of all front-line national health service spend will go towards mental health improvement. Such commitments will help to shift the focus to prevention and early intervention and will reduce demand and waiting times for clinical services

while addressing the evident mental health inequalities by ensuring that the right mental health support is available to every Scot when they need it, no matter their postcode.

Those are welcome steps in the right direction, but I am under no illusion: we can and must do more. In my maiden speech, I made a pledge to be a champion of mental health. For as long as I am an elected representative in the Parliament, I intend to be exactly that.

12:55

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I congratulate Paul McLennan on bringing this important debate to the Parliament. I am pleased to join colleagues around the chamber in debating world mental health day and, within that, mental health in an unequal world.

I thank all the organisations that provided members with briefings ahead of the debate. I also acknowledge people present in the chamber and beyond who have lived or living experience of compromised mental health. I thank them for listening.

Earlier this week, I joined a Scottish Association for Mental Health briefing for north-east MSPs. Although the focus of the briefing was suicide prevention, I had an overwhelming sense of déjà vu listening to the updated data on young people and suicide risk, albeit that it was framed in the context of Covid-19.

In its briefing paper on the impact of Covid-19 on 10 to 17-year-olds, Public Health Scotland outlined how

“Loneliness has been an unintended consequence affecting young people.”

In particular, it has affected vulnerable young people with communication difficulties, young carers, young people in the justice system and those who previously sought support because of mental health difficulties.

Studies indicate that some young people who had poor mental health and wellbeing prior to the pandemic had better mental health during lockdown, possibly due to school closures and the removal of school-based pressures. However, young people with pre-existing mental health issues described many barriers to seeking help, including not wanting to burden their families, feeling ashamed or feeling that they were not sufficiently unwell to seek help.

The World Federation for Mental Health report that was published to coincide with world mental health day states:

“Equality, fairness and opportunity have to be central to developing our young people in order to address existing inequalities and their effects on young people’s mental health wellbeing.”

World mental health day 2021 provides an opportunity for us to consider how we might achieve that.

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care recently outlined poverty as the single biggest driver of poor mental health. We know that the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing structural inequality in our society, but disadvantaged groups have disproportionately felt the adverse impact on mental health. As Paul McLennan outlined, the Scottish Government has committed £120 million towards a mental health recovery and renewal fund, with £10.3 million being allocated to improve access to child and adolescent mental health services.

The World Federation for Mental Health report reminds us that Covid-19 has underscored how critical mental health and wellbeing are for all children and young people, but the magnitude of the mental health burden that the world faces is simply not being matched with the response that it demands.

This month, UNICEF launches its report, “The State of the World’s Children 2021: On My Mind: Promoting, protecting and caring for children’s mental health”. It will call on Governments to commit to increase investment in CAMHS, promote connection through evidence-based interventions and take a leading role in breaking the silence surrounding mental health. Let us make 10 October—world mental health day—the starting point for that. I very much hope to see members there.

12:59

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank Paul McLennan for lodging the motion, which enables us to highlight the upcoming world mental health day 2021.

Almost every person in the chamber or watching at home will have experience of mental health issues or know someone who has suffered mental health problems. Experiencing a mental health problem is often upsetting, confusing and frightening, particularly at first and especially for the young. Those fears are often reinforced by the pernicious stigma that surrounds mental health. Although the see me campaign and others have worked hard to eliminate stigma and discrimination against people with mental illness, research conducted by SAMH and the Mental Health Foundation found that 56 per cent of people who experience mental health problems have also suffered discrimination. That, in turn, is likely to

increase distress and a sense of isolation or even lead to suicide.

In Scotland, 805 people took their own lives last year. Sadly, about one in four people in Scotland is estimated to be affected by mental health problems in any given year. Covid has made that worse. As the Royal College of Psychiatrists has noted, those with pre-existing mental health conditions have been most adversely affected, as have the most disadvantaged, as Paul McLennan said.

Sadly, the stark truth is that Scotland is experiencing a mental health emergency. For too many people, accessing psychological support through the national health service is too difficult or, as the Public Audit Committee found out this morning, too disconnected or distant.

Launching its new strategy, which is called “We Won’t Wait”, SAMH said that

“Too many promises and a pandemic later, people are still being left behind. Rejected referrals, indeterminate waiting times and inadequate support”

are, sadly, common in the system. Before the pandemic, Scottish National Party ministers repeatedly failed to get a grip of the mental health crisis among young people. We must not let ministers dodge accountability for that. The problems that we are experiencing are not caused by Covid, although I recognise that they have been exacerbated by the crisis.

Research by the Mental Health Foundation Scotland reveals that lockdown and the closure of schools increased levels of distress and that many pupils suffered anxiety due to feelings of loneliness and worries about education and their future.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** The member makes an excellent point about access to mental health services. Does he agree that we should also be concerned about those who love people who suffer from mental illness? The sense of helplessness can sometimes be overwhelming, as many members and family members will have discovered.

**Craig Hoy:** Absolutely. Last week, I talked to a mother in East Lothian whose son had been thinking about suicide. She talked to me about her torment and her fight to get him the treatment that he needs but that the system is not giving him.

Like many SNP targets, mental health targets are routinely being missed. Almost one in four young people is rejected when they ask for help. In NHS Lothian, 37 per cent are not being seen within the 18-week treatment time target, and the situation in the Scottish Borders is even worse, at 46 per cent. Referral rates in Scotland have reached their highest levels on record. One in

every 100 children and young people is being referred to child and adolescent mental health services for care. That is why SNP ministers must urgently ensure that the money that has been allocated to CAMHS, which was made available through the recovery and renewal fund, is delivered quickly. We all hope that the minister will elaborate on how that will be done. As SAMH has said, the Government must expand the network of support, increase funding for community-based care and increase the NHS psychological workforce by 50 per cent so that it mirrors levels in England and Wales.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Hoy, please bring your remarks to a close.

**Craig Hoy:** Evidence shows that, with the right combination of self-care, treatment and support, a person with mental health problems will get better. That is why we urgently need to get to a position in which no one is left behind or left without support when they need it.

13:04

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** World mental health day 2021 carries particular significance, with people from nations across the globe facing a pandemic that puts restrictions on our daily freedoms, limits our contacts with friends, family and wider society and continues to cause many of us to lose loved ones.

For our young people, the pandemic has been especially difficult, because for months at a time they have been without the educational interaction that sustains much of their daily lives. SAMH highlighted:

“Covid led to a 55% reduction in referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services ... at a time when children and young people needed more support than ever.”

It went on to state:

“Many children and young people feel that they have been at a point of crisis before they seek help.”

We cannot stand by and watch as young people struggle. A functioning mental health service would actively offer help, be in communities and educate people about the signs of mental health difficulties and when to seek support. We must properly utilise the expertise of groups such as SAMH that know the struggles that many face, and start dealing with the silent pandemic.

As we come through the Covid pandemic in Scotland and look towards recovery, we must be prepared to enhance mental health services with greater funding and resources. That starts with the creation of more posts to support those who are struggling with mental health problems. However, this is a global pandemic and, as the theme of this

year’s world mental health day is mental health in an unequal world, the United Kingdom and Scottish Governments must be prepared to support other countries coming through the pandemic. That starts with supporting vaccination programmes across the globe and, as soon as possible, bringing an end to the pain that many continue to face daily. The UK may be making progress now, but no country can expect to progress fully from the pandemic and its impacts, including on mental health, until every country has equal access to medical assistance.

Health inequalities in Scotland predate the pandemic. When I met SAMH recently, it explained that the mental health crisis predates the pandemic. The failure to address waiting times for adult psychological services and CAMHS services predates the pandemic, too. The pandemic has exacerbated the problems that we collectively face and has exploited global inequalities—inequalities that we must all do more to address. We do ourselves and our services no good if we pretend that those problems are new.

The often alarming figures, which mental health charities across Scotland have highlighted for today’s debate, should be a wake-up call to ministers that there is no excuse for undervalued and underfunded services; nor is there any excuse for not giving mental health policy the priority status that it demands and deserves. Words do us no good when they are not backed up by action. I plead with the minister and the Government to listen to members, understand the figures and act—act to save lives and improve services for those who desperately need them.

I welcome world mental health day, the awareness that it raises and the focus that it puts on education, understanding and the need for investment in services across the globe. We know that those living in deprived areas, with less access to public services and facilities, and to outdoor green spaces, are more likely to experience mental ill health, so it is crucial that, in our endeavours, we do all that we can to address health inequalities whenever we find them and create a fairer mental health service that supports everyone who needs it.

Scotland has a chance to lead the way; indeed, it has the power to lead the way. Let us use world mental health day 2021 to revisit strategy and deliver for the people the services that they need so much.

13:08

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** I welcome this debate in advance of world mental health day and thank Paul McLennan for securing it.

As the motion states, the pandemic has “exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in mental health”.

We need to understand what is driving those inequalities, or attempts to address poor mental health will be immediately undermined.

Health and income are inextricably linked. According to the Mental Health Foundation, poverty is both a cause and a consequence of mental ill health. Its report, “Coronavirus Scotland: The divergence of mental health experiences during the pandemic”, states that

“already, before the pandemic, those at the lower end of the economic ladder were more likely to be experiencing a mental health problem.”

We must acknowledge the impact that poverty and income inequality has had on mental health during the pandemic. We know that Covid-19 has not affected everyone equally, and the Tories’ cut to universal credit will seriously worsen matters. Indeed, the British Psychological Society has warned of “devastating consequences” for people’s mental health. There will be an immeasurable impact on individuals and families, who will struggle to pay their bills and be forced to make the awful choice between heating their home and buying food, at a time when they are already dealing with rising living costs and the continued uncertainty of the pandemic.

Services will always struggle to meet demand while the Tories continue to enact policies that decimate people’s mental health and income. A truly preventive approach would seek to tackle the link between poverty and poor mental health. The Mental Health Foundation is calling for a universal basic income pilot to be carried out in Scotland. The Scottish Greens have long supported the introduction of UBI in Scotland, and I have no doubt that it would be an important tool in our efforts to tackle Scotland’s poor mental health. The Scottish Government has committed to introducing a minimum income guarantee in the absence of powers to implement UBI. I look forward to those proposals.

However, we must recognise that many interlinking factors affect mental health, including racial inequality, gender, disability, age and sexuality, as well as economic status.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Does the member agree that loneliness is a modern-day plague and that it is a huge contributor to issues with the mental health and wellbeing of people in our country?

**Gillian Mackay:** Absolutely. Loneliness is a particular concern for older people, who may have become isolated from friends and family during the pandemic because of people wanting to keep them safe.

The Mental Health Foundation report identified a need for better recording and reporting of information on ethnicity. It is clear that there is much work to be done on that. Wave 4 of the Scottish Government’s Covid-19 mental health tracker survey revealed that only 20 people from an ethnic minority background took part, which is only 16.5 per cent of those who engaged in wave 1. That is a particular cause for concern, given that the wave 1 report revealed that respondents who identified as black, Asian and minority ethnic frequently reported worse mental health indicators.

Quality data is vital if we are to understand and address the specific mental health challenges that people from ethnic minority backgrounds face. I look forward to hearing from the Scottish Government on how it will improve data collection.

Finally, I want to focus on the mental health of health and social care staff. They have been going at more than 100mph for almost 19 months. Many are exhausted, demoralised and at increased risk of burn-out. Yesterday, the NHS Lanarkshire branch of Unison published a letter detailing how the current pressures on our NHS are affecting the mental and physical health of those on the front line in my region and more widely across the country.

I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care’s announcement earlier this week of an additional package of £4 million to support front-line workers. When staff cannot access basic necessities such as food and water or restrooms during a shift, it will undoubtedly have an impact on their mental health. Staff have been under enormous pressure and have worked tirelessly in extremely difficult conditions to keep us safe. Now is not the time to turn our backs on them and demand that they get on with the job. I look forward to working with members across Parliament to ensure that those front-line staff get the support that they need and deserve.

13:12

**Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD):** I thank Paul McLennan for bringing such an important debate to the Parliament. Sunday is world mental health day, which gives us the opportunity to reflect on treatment of mental health and the availability of support. The theme of world mental health day this year is mental health in an unequal world. We must improve mental health treatment the world over. We must also improve parity between mental health care and physical health care the world over.

In Scotland alone, statistic after statistic proves that more must be done. However, every statistic is also someone’s life—and a person’s mental health has an impact on families, friends and

others around them. The Covid-19 crisis has disproportionately affected some groups, such as carers, those who are part of the LGBT+ community, refugees, migrant workers and young people. Even before Covid, mental health issues were prevalent in those groups and others. For example, as the Construction Industry Training Board briefing advises us, construction accounts for 7 per cent of the UK workforce and 11 per cent of in-work suicides. Suicide rates among some site-based, male construction workers is three times the national average.

We will continue to see the impact of Covid on mental health. In February 2021, the Scottish Liberal Democrats led the Scottish Parliament in declaring a mental health crisis. People are struggling, and when they seek help, they often find that it is not there. Problems that start small become crises, as help is either not available or arrives too late.

There is a range of things that we can start to introduce and build on. We can act now to expand services; train more mental health specialists for community services, hospitals and schools; establish new walk-in services in accident and emergency departments and crisis centres; and get mental health first aiders into workplaces. We can work together to end long waits for diagnosis and treatment, and create more services closer to where people live. That is more difficult in rural and island areas.

In communities that are more spread out, loneliness and isolation can often take hold more easily, and access to mental health services is simply tougher. No one should be left to struggle in silence, and no service should require people to go through endless hoops to access it. A first hoop that may leave people stopping seeking help is of no use.

Years of working hours have been lost to mental ill health. It is long past time to end the stigma and discrimination around mental ill health.

I am full of admiration for Chillax, a Shetland youth group that, pre-Covid, voluntarily started a self-help group to raise awareness of mental health and has developed workshops for schools and youth clubs.

Pandemic restrictions make us more vulnerable, and they have highlighted the issue. As a co-convenor of the cross-party group on mental health, I look forward to that group's work and to developing ideas and strategies to reduce suffering. Just maybe, that will help to reduce the statistics and have a large, positive impact—even on one person, their family, friends and support network.

13:16

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** As co-convenor, with Beatrice Wishart, of the cross-party group on mental health, which is supported by SAMH, I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate, and I congratulate my colleague Paul McLennan on securing it.

World mental health day, which is on 10 October this year, will focus on the theme of mental health in an unequal world. That is hugely important in ensuring that mental health is on the national agenda. It is also crucial to work on tackling the stigma that is associated with mental health and educating people that it is, indeed, okay not to be okay and to seek help and support. We need to remind people of that.

Covid-19 has changed all aspects of our lives, but it has also brought people and communities closer together. It has placed greater emphasis on supporting local businesses, on helping one another, and on the importance of kindness. It is really important to be patient and kind. The pandemic has allowed for a far greater understanding of the need to take mental health seriously and to have a society that puts the wellbeing of its citizens first and foremost.

I have pursued the issue of supporting the mental health of our front-line health and social care staff over the course of the pandemic. Being a member of NHS Dumfries and Galloway's vaccination team has allowed me to hear directly from front-line staff and the public about the very real challenges that everyone is facing.

I am pleased that, since the beginning of the pandemic, the Scottish Government has provided more than £18 million, which includes support for NHS workers through £1.2 million for computerised cognitive behavioural therapy. I encourage the minister to ensure that those services continue to be available and are expanded on a needs basis, if that is required.

Across my South Scotland region and nationally, there are many examples of fantastic, hard-working groups that are dedicated to supporting all those who are concerned about their mental health. I have worked with many mental health organisations to promote the importance of positive health and wellbeing. They include organisations in rural and agricultural Scotland, such as the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution, the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs, Dumfries and Galloway farmers choir, SAMH, Support in Mind Scotland and the Scottish Mental Health Partnership. All provide support to anyone who is concerned about their mental health and wellbeing, including people who are affected by inequality. [*Interruption.*] I do not really have time to give way. I want to proceed,

because I have a couple of important points to make.

I thank each and every one of those organisations for all the work that they continue to do, particularly in these circumstances.

The impact of the pandemic on mental health has been highlighted well in the Scottish Government's mental health tracker study, which contains some interesting information. In particular, the report indicates that more than a third of the sample reported high levels of psychological distress, a quarter reported levels of depressive symptoms, and nearly a fifth reported anxiety symptoms of a similar level. Approximately a tenth of the sample reported having suicidal thoughts in the past week, and a fifth of young adults reported suicidal thoughts. The report suggested that particular groups in our population were at elevated risk—specifically, women, young adults, people with pre-existing mental health conditions, and individuals from a lower socioeconomic background.

Finally, I want to raise awareness of the HelloYellow campaign. Thousands of people in schools, offices and communities across Scotland, including in Dumfries and Galloway, will be wearing yellow on Friday to raise awareness of the work of YoungMinds and child and adolescent mental health services, which are fighting for young people's mental health needs. I congratulate them and encourage all to consider participating in the HelloYellow campaign—#HelloYellow—to raise awareness of mental health issues.

Again, I welcome the debate and I remind everyone that it is okay not to be okay and that support and help are out there.

13:20

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I believe that this is Paul McLennan's first members' business debate, so I congratulate him on choosing such an important topic and thank him for his commitment to being a mental health champion, which is a call to action to all of us to be champions of mental wellbeing. That brings me to the minister, who I welcome to his new role as the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care, which is an important job. I am sure that the minister is telling colleagues across the Government that they all have to be part of the solution.

Thinking about the pandemic and its impact on the workforce across social care and the NHS, I am concerned about levels of post-traumatic stress disorder among front-line staff and I worry about those on low pay and those unpaid carers, particularly women, who take on the greatest

burden of the caring work. However, the minister is well placed to look at what has happened to older people and disabled people during the pandemic and to ensure that we address the isolation that many colleagues have acknowledged today. That is why Anne's law is so important and relevant to mental health.

Colleagues have talked about the fact that we all have mental health issues and all have to be champions of mental health in this place. I continue to be concerned about what sometimes appear to be endless waiting times, the worrying statistics around rejected referrals and people speaking out and saying that they are not okay but are not sure where to turn. At the weekend, I was fortunate to meet local heroes from across Scotland who are doing their bit in their communities to show that kindness and provide that cup of tea and an open door to people.

However, we have to recognise that, despite all the good work and good effort from ministers and many across the public and private sectors, the system is still not quite right. We need to see system change, which is why I am passionate about supporting a constituent from my Central Scotland region, Karen McKeown, who has an excellent petition in front of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee. Members, including Tess White from the Conservatives, spoke strongly in support of the petition. We therefore have an opportunity to listen to people with lived experience who know the change that needs to happen.

I was pleased to hear many colleagues mention the construction industry in the mental health context, because as the continuing convener of the cross-party group on construction, I want us to look at that area. Paul McLennan and I will take away what members have said about it. I hope that the minister can come along to a future meeting of the group, as I know from his previous work in local government and building standards that he has a keen interest in that area.

I have a lot of empathy for people affected by alcohol and drug misuse, and I know how that intersects with mental health and wellbeing. When I was in my teens and early 20s, I had to reach out for help and had counselling. I worry about young people who have had to be at home during the pandemic and were not in school, but particularly when there was substance misuse in the home. I am keen to hear from the minister what more can be done to support those young people and their families.

Many stakeholders have sent briefings for the debate that have all made important points. In particular, Scotland's Mental Health Partnership is looking for a radical refresh of the mental health



strategy, which is why Karen McKeown's petition is important.

I invite colleagues and anyone listening to join me, Clare Adamson MSP and others at Strathclyde country park on Sunday, where FAMS is hosting its "Let's Walk and Talk About Mental Health" event, at which the minister would be welcome. That is a public way for us all to show that we are all human and all have mental health issues, and that if we continue to talk about that openly, we can address stigma and get the system changed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call the minister to respond to the debate on behalf of the Scottish Government.

13:24

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** I congratulate Paul McLennan on bringing this debate to the chamber, and I am pleased to close for the Government.

Before I get into responding to everything that has been said, I want to highlight two extremely important points that Mr McLennan made. The first is that we should be kind to each other. In this world, we are sometimes not. We do not know whether folk are okay, so we should think twice before we use harsh language and be as kind to each other as we possibly can. That said, I know that that is sometimes difficult to achieve in this chamber.

Secondly, I was struck by Paul McLennan's comment that he would be a champion of mental health in the Parliament. I congratulate him on that, but I think that we all need to be champions of mental health each and every day.

It is important that we continue to mark world mental health day each year. I welcome the passion that has been shown across the chamber today, and I thank colleagues for sharing their personal stories and speaking so passionately on this topic. I am afraid to tell Ms Lennon that I cannot come to Strathclyde country park on Sunday, but I thank her for the invitation. Instead, I will be speaking at a mental health conference at St Mirren, which I am sure Mr Paisley—George Adam—will be happy to hear.

I commend the fantastic work of our NHS services, the third sector and their staff, who have continued to do an incredible job over the last year and a half. Since I have taken up this post, I have had the privilege of meeting many front-line staff and those with lived experience, and I will be doing more of the same this afternoon when I leave the chamber. I am very impressed by and grateful for the sheer resilience and dedication that

those people have shown in this most trying of times.

That said, I know that some folk in the workforce are struggling. It is important that we recognise their needs, which is why the additional investment for the mental health and wellbeing hub and the other supports for staff that was announced earlier this week by Humza Yousaf and which Gillian Mackay mentioned is so important.

**Craig Hoy:** How does the minister intend to train more psychiatrists and recruit them into the NHS to relieve the pressure on staff?

**Kevin Stewart:** I thank Mr Hoy for that intervention. I remember that he talked about the workforce in his speech, which I thought was interesting. Indeed, I am more than happy to discuss workforce numbers with him.

Let me give members an idea of the workforce situation in Scotland. Since 2006, CAMHS staffing has gone up by 81 per cent and the psychology workforce by 110 per cent, with a 3.3 per cent increase over the past year. With regard to adult acute services, we have 56 whole-time equivalents per 100,000 here in Scotland versus the United Kingdom average of 40. I would therefore dispute some of the things about workforce that Mr Hoy said earlier.

On the issue of the workforce for the future, although we have seen that great increase in numbers, we all know that there is more to do. That is why workforce planning for the future is absolutely essential, and one of my key priorities is to ensure that we get that right as we move forward. The fact is that there has been an increase in the number of people presenting with mental health problems. We might look at that and think that that is a bad thing, but actually it is a good thing. For far too long, folks have kept things to themselves, and we need to encourage people to come forward for the help and treatment that is available.

I will go back to the point that I was going to make. The past year and a half has been tough for everyone in Scotland, and the impacts of the pandemic continue to bring significant challenge to our everyday lives. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in our society, hitting some population groups disproportionately hard. In recognition of that, we published our transition and recovery plan last October, which set out a blueprint for improving mental health across the country. We need to continue to expand on that plan, because, as Gillian Mackay pointed out, we are missing some data. As Beatrice Wishart mentioned, there are some groups for which we are not getting the data that we need to shape the services that people require. LGBTI communities were mentioned, as

were folks from ethnic minorities. We need to do more work there, and we will do so.

**Stephen Kerr:** I am grateful to the minister for giving way. Paul McLennan gave an excellent speech this afternoon. He highlighted the length of time that people have to wait for services. The minister is explaining that the pandemic has made the situation worse. We all hear many heartbreaking stories from our constituents. Therefore, what is his aspiration for waiting times for mental health support, particularly for young people?

**Kevin Stewart:** That was a rather long intervention, and Mr Kerr had the opportunity, like everyone else, to give a speech today but chose only to make interventions. That is quite surprising. My aspiration is to bring waiting times down as quickly as we possibly can. Health boards are putting together plans to ensure that waiting times come down. However, one of the key things that we need to do is to stop folk being referred in the first place, which means investment in services at community level—in schools and in GP surgeries. That is why the Government has resourced school counsellors, which is important; it is why we are moving forward in investing in mental health link workers in GP practices; and it is why we will soon make further announcements about community support. We will continue to look at the prevention agenda, because prevention is better than cure.

That is not to say that we will not continue to invest in child and adolescent mental health services and psychological therapy, too. We have already provided £45 million to health boards to focus on CAMHS improvement, to help to clear the waiting list. We are also providing funding for around 320 additional staff in CAMHS over the next five years. We want to build on the innovative changes that have been made to services, some of which has happened during the pandemic.

As Emma Harper said, we want to ensure that we can continue to invest in things such as cognitive behavioural therapy, which is very important to some folk. Our £15 million investment in children and young people's community wellbeing this year has delivered more than 200 new and enhanced services. I look forward to sharing details of equivalent support for adults.

This week is challenge poverty week, and it is important to recognise that poverty is the single biggest driver of poor mental health, as Audrey Nicoll said. I will continue to say that because it is the reality. Therefore, we will continue to strengthen the alignment of mental health policy with work to tackle poverty and reduce inequality.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, please bring your remarks to a close.

**Kevin Stewart:** I have highlighted some of the Government's work, some of which is cross-Government work. However, we all have a part to play in reducing inequalities and stigma and ensuring that the right help is available in the right place at the right time. I would again like to thank Paul McLennan for securing today's debate. Like him, I hope that everyone in the chamber will become a mental health champion.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, minister. That concludes this—

**Stephen Kerr:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. The minister, somewhat incongruously, started off by talking about how we should be nice to one another and then made a comment about my contribution to the debate. Can you confirm that it is absolutely in order for a member to attend a debate and to attempt to make interventions and that it is entirely up to the speakers whether to take interventions?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** First, I am not responsible for what members, including ministers, say in their contributions. Secondly, it is indeed up to members whether they take interventions and whether they wish to put themselves forward to speak. That is clear from the rules.

If that deals with the matter, I now suspend proceedings until 2.30 this afternoon.

13:35

*Meeting suspended.*

14:30

*On resuming—*

## Portfolio Question Time

### Education and Skills

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

The next item of business is portfolio questions on education and skills. Members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak buttons or type R in the chat function during the relevant question.

### Young Persons Guarantee

**1. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the young persons guarantee scheme. (S6O-00251)

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** Since the launch of the young persons guarantee in November 2020, we have invested an additional £130 million, which aims to provide at least 24,000 new and enhanced opportunities for young people. An update was provided in our “Young Person’s Guarantee: Implementation progress report”, which was published in July and demonstrates that we have delivered on our first 100 days commitment. More than 200 employers have signed up to the guarantee to support young people in their communities, and there are developing the young workforce school co-ordinators in every mainstream secondary school.

**Annabelle Ewing:** It would be helpful if specific information could be provided on the roll-out of the young persons guarantee scheme in Fife. In particular, what will the minister do to ensure that the opportunity for real job progression is built into the scheme, so that it can be truly life changing for the young people concerned?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I acknowledge Annabelle Ewing’s long-standing interest in this issue. She has been a champion for developing the young workforce in Fife, where the school co-ordinator role that I mentioned was piloted, and I know that she was keen to see that approach embedded.

Partners in Fife have taken forward a number of actions in supporting young people to access short, industry-focused courses on subjects including digital literacy, data science and security,

and they provide Scottish Qualifications Authority qualifications to support young people to access higher-skilled, better-paid employment as they progress through their careers. There has also been a particular focus on support for mental health and for those who live in deprivation, to ensure that additional barriers are eliminated. I have been clear that the approach must ensure that there meaningful, sustainable and enduring opportunities. That is as true in Fife as it is across the entire country.

### Scottish National Standardised Assessments

**2. Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it plans to implement the recommendations made by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development on Scottish national standardised assessments in its report, “Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future”. (S6O-00252)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Scottish Government has welcomed the OECD’s independent review and accepted in full all its recommendations. We continue to consider carefully all the observations in the OECD report.

**Willie Rennie:** National assessments were originally introduced by Margaret Thatcher’s Government, before they were scrapped by the Liberal Democrat-Labour Government here, because they resulted in crude league tables. The recent OECD report criticised the use of the Scottish Government’s assessments for national monitoring purposes, and now we have crude league tables once again. Why is the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills more persuaded by the logic of Margaret Thatcher than that of the OECD?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I thank Willie Rennie for that question. I will make clear, as I did in the Education, Children and Young People Committee meeting yesterday, that the purpose of the Scottish national standardised assessments is primarily formative. The OECD made no recommendations about standardised assessments, but we will consider the commentary in the report that recognised that assessments are a valuable tool to support teachers’ judgment.

We are keen to ensure that the OECD’s recommendation about what we can do with data—and do it effectively—is considered. That work is on-going, but, as I made clear to Willie Rennie in committee yesterday—so I am confused about why we are having the same conversation today—the Government does not collect and, therefore, does not publish the standardised assessments.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have a couple of supplementary questions.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** The cabinet secretary is either in denial or is keen to hide her Government's dire record on education. We need the right data for the right purpose and any cabinet secretary who was serious about restoring standards across our education system would want to end the data desert. Why will the cabinet secretary not get a refreshed Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy, or SSLN, back up and running and rejoin the internationally respected trends in international mathematics and science study and progress in international reading literacy study—TIMSS and PIRLS—assessments?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I will start on a note of consensus: I absolutely believe that we should have the right data for the right purpose. Since the introduction of the national improvement framework for education in 2016, there has been an increase in data and the performance information that the Scottish Government collects. The Government continues to participate in the largest international survey—the programme for international student assessment, or PISA, survey—as well.

As I also think I said at committee yesterday, we undertook to reconsider the merits of SSLN data compared with ACEL—achievement of curriculum for excellence levels—data in response to an inquiry by the former Education and Skills Committee. That work is on-going; it had been delayed during the pandemic. We will respond on that, and on the other recommendations and commentary in the OECD report in due course.

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):** How does the Scottish Government plan to engage with stakeholders, including children and young people, as we move forward with education reform?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** It is very important that we engage with stakeholder groups, because there are a variety of opinions on different aspects of education reform. I have asked Professor Ken Muir to act as an independent adviser. He is engaging widely to understand the needs of schools, practitioners and, very importantly, learners as we look to design our new national education agencies. He has recently published a consultation on that issue.

I also intend for the Scottish education council, which is the key strategic forum for oversight of education improvement activity, to have a key role in that, as will the children and young people's education council, once it is established.

## Vocation Skills Training

3. **Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure the future workforce can have access to vocational skills training, in light of the current staff shortages in certain sectors. (S6O-00253)

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** Ensuring a sustainable workforce supply requires continued investment and collaboration across the system, so that provision is aligned to economic and social need.

We have committed an additional £500 million investment over this parliamentary session to support new, good green jobs of the future, including £20 million this year through the national transition training fund for sectors that have been impacted by the pandemic and Brexit. We will also continue to urge the United Kingdom Government to rethink post-Brexit immigration policy to prevent labour shortages from undermining our recovery.

**Sue Webber:** The issues that I am raising existed long before Brexit. There has been a sharp decline in the number of students in further education during the pandemic, and the number of 16-year-olds who are enrolled full time at college has fallen by nearly a quarter in the past decade. With businesses also struggling, how will the Scottish Government support those very businesses and their apprenticeship schemes to ensure that all our young people have the best opportunities as they leave school?

**Jamie Hepburn:** We will do what we have always done and continue to invest in apprenticeships in the country—that is the approach that we have always taken. We have seen some disruption during the past year. How could we have seen anything other, given the impact of Covid-19?

However, I am pleased to be able to tell Ms Webber that, as of the first quarter of this year, we are seeing 3.7 times the number of modern apprenticeship starts as we saw last year. We are recovering, and the Government will continue to work to that end.

**Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** How many school leavers are going to positive destinations?

**Jamie Hepburn:** The latest available data, which is from 2019-20, shows that 92.2 per cent of school leavers were in a positive destination nine months after the end of their final school year. The 2020-21 figures will be available in due course. I believe that those figures reflect the resilience and tenacity of young people, and of our education system as a whole.

### **Lifelong Learning and Reskilling (Rural Areas)**

**4. Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support lifelong learning and reskilling in Argyll and Bute and other rural areas. (S6O-00254)

**The Minister for Higher Education and Further Education, Youth Employment and Training (Jamie Hepburn):** We are making significant investments to ensure that people of all ages in rural communities have the right skills, now and in the future, to support our recovery and transition to net zero.

Argyll and Bute is covered by six Skills Development Scotland career centres in Campbeltown, Rothesay, Islay, Dunoon, Helensburgh and Oban. They play a critical role in guiding people to skills opportunities.

Since the individual training account scheme began in 2017, we have invested nearly £100,000 in support for learners in Argyll and Bute. Over the next 10 years, through the growth deal, we have committed £25 million to the region by supporting a rural skills accelerator programme with a mobile science, technology, engineering and maths academy, learning hubs and a rural enterprise accelerator programme.

**Jenni Minto:** Both Argyll College and the Scottish Association for Marine Science provide a variety of courses across a number of locations in Argyll and Bute to local people and people from outwith the area. I recently took part in a round-table meeting with the SAMS to discuss the lack of student accommodation. Will the minister outline what support is available to colleges to provide suitable living accommodation for students?

**Jamie Hepburn:** I would always encourage students who are worried about their housing situation to seek, in the first instance, advice and support from the institutions that they attend. The issues in Jenni Minto's question are important, however, which is why our programme for government commitment to review purpose-built student accommodation and our 100-days commitment to establishing the next stage of it are already under way. That work is being taken forward in parallel with work to ensure rent affordability and improved standards across the private rented sector.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There are a couple of supplementaries.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** In the summer, I had the pleasure of visiting the award-winning Gloagburn farm shop in Perthshire. The owners told me how difficult it is to recruit butchers in their local area.

According to a survey by Meat Business Women, 37 per cent of women believe that

“they would face barriers to success because of their gender”

and 80 per cent say that they are

“unable to see role models in the sector who would encourage them to join.”

In the light of the long-standing shortage of butchers, especially female butchers, what support does the Scottish Government offer to help women and young people in rural areas to reskill to become butchers?

**Jamie Hepburn:** In this financial year, we are committing £300,000 to bring about practical solutions to support women in the agricultural sector in the wider sense, including in Argyll and Bute, which the original question was about, and in Perthshire, which the supplementary question was about. That will include wider roll-out of Be Your Best Self personal development training, a pilot of business skills training and a range of other activity. I recognise the challenges that Ms Hamilton has laid out. We must respond to them, which is exactly what we are doing.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Well done on knitting those questions together.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I will allow the minister to extend slightly further.

Young people from rural parts of Scotland who want to stay in their area already struggle to get apprenticeships or to find studies that allow them to stay, which is leading to a rural brain drain and to depopulation. That is now being exacerbated by the fact that lecturers at one of the main places for rural-related studies, Scotland's Rural College, are having to take strike action to get their voices heard, as their pay and grading have fallen significantly below the norms that exist across further and higher education. Our lecturers carry out vital work for our citizens who want to continue their studies, so what steps will the minister commit to in order to resolve that deadlock?

**Jamie Hepburn:** On the first part of Mr Whitfield's question, I do not have the latest figures before me, but the last figures I saw showed that the spread of apprenticeships across the country broadly correlated to population share. That has been the experience in the past few years.

On the situation at the SRUC, I would, as always, encourage the management and unions to come together. The last thing that I think any of us want to see is disruption to learning—or disruption to research, on which the SRUC is a world leader. I encourage management and unions to get together to resolve the situation.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I remind members who are asking supplementaries to try to keep them broadly relevant to the initial question, but I congratulate the minister again on managing to knit them together.

### National Digital Academy

**5. Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the national digital academy. (S6O-00255)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Work on developing a national digital academy is at an early stage. Its development will build on learning from the pandemic, including the national e-learning offer which built on the Glow Connect and e-Sgoil programmes.

Over the coming year, we will engage with young people, in particular, to understand fully how remote learning has worked for them over the pandemic and how it can support their on-going learning. A number of colleges already offer Scottish credit and qualifications framework level 6 courses and qualifications including highers remotely. Work will take place to understand how those already support provision of courses outside traditional educational settings.

**Siobhian Brown:** I welcome that response. I believe that implementation of the digital academy will give a lot of people comfort—especially those of our children who have missed a lot of school during the pandemic and did not get the exam results that they needed for the courses that they wished to get into. What other steps are being taking to support senior-phase learners across Scotland?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** It is important that we support our senior phase students, who have gone through an incredibly difficult year over the course of the pandemic. The work that has already been announced includes, for example, e-Sgoil learning. In addition to that, the investment that we have already put into local authorities and schools directly through the Scottish attainment challenge and pupil equity funding will assist schools to develop what is right for them in their situations and communities, to support their pupils during this time. That might—I am sure that it will—include online learning, at some points. We will learn from that as we go forward in order to see what more can be done, as we build the national digital academy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 is from Sarah Boyack, who joins us remotely.

### Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (Teachers)

**6. Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how many additional qualified teachers of children and young people with vision impairment will be recruited as part of its commitment to recruit 1,000 new teachers and 500 pupil support assistants in the next academic year. (S6O-00256)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The recruitment and employment of teachers are matters for individual local authorities. Since the pandemic, we have provided £240 million to support educational staffing, including our commitment to support the recruitment of 1,000 additional teachers and 500 support staff. Furthermore, we have provided £145.5 million, which is baselined into the 2022 local government settlement, to support sustainable employment for those additional staff. We are committed to providing an additional 3,500 teachers by the end of the parliamentary term.

The Scottish Government is committed to increasing the capacity and expertise of school staff to support pupils with visual impairments. We fund the Scottish Sensory Centre to provide specialist training to school staff to support pupils who have sensory impairments.

**Sarah Boyack:** In the past decade, the number of visually impaired young people in our schools has doubled, and a large number of qualified teachers of visually impaired children and young people will reach retirement age in the next decade. The quickest route to qualification is postgraduate education, which costs about £9,500. If people go down the competence route, it takes a lot longer. Will the cabinet secretary agree to look at the issue? We will, potentially, have a shortage of QTVI teachers over the next decade, so we need action now to ensure that our young people do not miss out on the skills and experience that people who are visually impaired, in particular, need.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I thank Sarah Boyack for that question, which raises an important issue. I give her the assurance that we will look at it more. We are, as a Government, aware of the issue and of the campaign about it that has recently been organised by Sight Scotland. I am, nonetheless, certainly more than happy to take the issue away again and look at it further.

### Schools (Scottish Literature)

**7. Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is

doing to promote Scottish literature in schools. (S6O-00257)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Scottish Government does not prescribe literature to be used in schools. However, curriculum for excellence provides schools and practitioners with the opportunity to make choices about the literature that is studied in schools to reflect the circumstances and needs of learners. That will often include the use of Scottish texts.

Scottish Qualifications Authority national 5 and higher English courses have a strong focus on Scottish literature, allowing candidates to develop an awareness and appreciation of Scotland's rich social and cultural heritage.

**Dr Allan:** Will the cabinet secretary say whether the Government feels that there are lessons to learn from other countries around Europe, where learning extensively about their country's literature is almost without exception regarded as an essential outcome of secondary education for learners?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Dr Allan has made an important point. The Government is always keen for opportunities to learn from other countries in that and other areas of education. For example, we recently commissioned the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to review curriculum for excellence and its implementation, precisely because we are determined to learn from good practice from abroad.

As I outlined in my earlier response, curriculum for excellence provides young people with the opportunity to engage with a range of literature, including Scottish texts. I am sure that that is being done across the country with great enthusiasm by our teachers and learners.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 8 has not been lodged. That therefore concludes portfolio questions.

I note that all the members who need to be present for the next item of business are here, so we will move on to that shortly.

## Heat in Buildings Strategy

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a statement by Patrick Harvie, on the heat in buildings strategy. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:50

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):** Today, we publish Scotland's heat in buildings strategy and, with it, we mark a significant step towards bringing to an end the contribution that heating our homes and buildings makes to climate change. The ambition that is set out in the strategy is significant, and rightly so on the eve of the 26th UN climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow. Urgent action is needed if we are to stand a chance of limiting warming to under 1.5°C.

The strategy presents a pathway towards decarbonising our homes and non-domestic buildings in line with our statutory climate change commitments, which all parties united behind when the Parliament passed the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. It sets out the Government's vision that our homes and buildings will be cleaner, greener and easier to heat by 2045. That means improving energy efficiency standards and replacing fossil fuel heating systems with zero emissions ones.

The strategy sets a clear and overarching objective that, by 2030, greenhouse gas emissions from homes and buildings must be 68 per cent lower than they were in 2020. That will require more than a million homes and the equivalent of 50,000 non-domestic buildings to convert to zero emissions heat this decade. It is a huge transition that will affect communities, businesses and households all across Scotland.

To pave the way, it is essential that homes and buildings achieve a good standard of energy efficiency. By 2030, we want to see a large majority of homes achieving a level of energy efficiency that is at least equivalent to an energy performance certificate C, with all homes meeting that standard by 2033 where that is feasible and cost effective. That will ensure that future energy costs are affordable, and that we continue to remove poor energy efficiency as a driver of fuel poverty.

As we address the damaging climate change impact of heating with unabated fossil fuels, we must do so in a way that supports our efforts to tackle social inequality. We must deliver a just transition. The strategy therefore sets out the

guiding principles that will ensure that our actions to decarbonise heat do not have a detrimental impact on rates of fuel poverty.

We recognise that there are challenges. Many zero-emissions heating systems are currently more costly to install and can be more expensive to run than fossil fuel alternatives. Just as we have seen with renewable electricity, however, costs are coming down rapidly and they will continue to do so, but we need to work together across sectors and jurisdictions to overcome barriers and build momentum. We will provide support to help people to switch to zero-emissions heating, reducing household costs, improving homes and helping to tackle the climate emergency.

The strategy that we publish today builds on the draft that was published in February. I was pleased that the draft received so many supportive responses, and to see the breadth of stakeholders who welcomed the scale and pace of ambition that it set out. The final strategy reflects much of the insight that was generated through the consultation, as well as the additional actions that have been agreed as part of the Scottish Government's agreement with the Scottish Green Party.

As we undertake the heat transition, we know that there will be more issues to resolve and we are committed to doing so collaboratively, drawing on the best knowledge and ideas from across society. Today's strategy sets a clear direction for the heat transition, but it also acknowledges that no one has all the answers at this stage. The strategy lays a firm foundation for on-going work, including through the refreshed energy strategy and energy just transition plan that will be published next year, and the fuel poverty strategy that will be published later this year.

Over this session of Parliament, we will invest at least £1.8 billion in heat and energy efficiency projects across Scotland. As well as helping to meet our targets, that will provide a much-needed stimulus to the heat and energy efficiency sector and the broader construction and home maintenance and improvement industries, thereby contributing to a green economic recovery for Scotland.

I am pleased to announce that we are doubling the social housing net zero heat fund to at least £200 million. That capital funding will support decarbonisation of social housing, and it illustrates our on-going commitment to working with the sector. We are also more than doubling the funding that is allocated to improving public sector buildings such as schools and hospitals to at least £200 million, which will enable the public sector estate to showcase zero-emissions buildings. In addition, we have committed to investing at least £400 million over the parliamentary session in

large-scale heat and energy efficiency projects, including zero carbon heat networks and large-scale heat pumps.

Alongside that support, the strategy sets out further detail on how we will accelerate the transition more broadly. We estimate the total investment that will be required to transform homes and buildings across the country to be in excess of £33 billion. It is clear that that cost cannot be borne by Government alone. We are establishing a new green heat finance task force to identify innovative solutions to maximise private sector investment and find new ways to help to spread the up-front cost of making properties warmer, greener and more energy efficient.

Investment in the heat transition will generate significant opportunities for Scotland. We estimate that 16,400 jobs will be supported across the economy in 2030 from the deployment of zero-emissions heat. We will continue to flex our delivery programmes to support local jobs and create opportunities for young people. Over the next few months, we will co-produce with the sector a supply chain delivery plan to create new investment opportunities and support high-value local jobs.

We will also bring forward a framework of regulations that sets clear standards for property owners across all tenures and building types. That framework will provide the certainty and assurance to secure investment and give confidence to the supply chain.

Our regulatory framework will build on existing standards that are already in place and will require action on energy efficiency and zero-emissions heating. In 2025, we will introduce regulations that will require all homes to reach a good level of energy efficiency—EPC C or equivalent—for example, at point of sale or change of tenancy. All homes will have to reach that standard by the backstop date of 2033, with the private rented sector having an earlier backstop of 2028. That will support our commitment to phasing out the need to install fossil-fuel boilers in off-gas properties from 2025 and in on-gas areas from 2030, to the extent that devolved powers allow.

Public engagement will be critical. While technologies such as heat pumps and heat networks have long pedigrees in other European countries, they are unfamiliar to many of us. We will increase public engagement by building on our existing advice services and taking steps to raise awareness. To support that, we will establish a national public energy agency to provide leadership and harness the potential of scaled-up programmes to decarbonise heat. In addition, we are working with local government to put in place local heat and energy efficiency strategies for



decarbonising homes and buildings for all parts of Scotland.

The heat transition is an unprecedented challenge that will directly touch the lives of virtually everyone in Scotland. Building owners and supply chains need to have confidence in the long-term pathway and the policies that underpin it. The scale of the challenge requires a cross-party approach. I have therefore invited party spokespeople to come together to discuss how we can work collectively to take forward our heat in buildings strategy, just as we acted collectively to set the climate change targets.

The strategy sets out an ambitious package of work and maximises the Scottish Government's impact within the confines of the devolution settlement. However, we do not have all the powers that are necessary to deliver the transformational change that is required. We are therefore calling on the United Kingdom Government to take urgent action to support the just transition to decarbonised heating.

The delayed UK heat and buildings strategy must set out how the UK Government will use its regulatory and policy levers to incentivise rapid deployment of zero-emissions heat technologies. We urgently need a stronger commitment and a clearer action plan from the UK Government, including reforms to energy markets and decisions about the future of the gas grid. Recent volatility in global natural gas markets further underscores the urgency of action in reserved policy areas to maintain security of energy supplies and to support vulnerable customers.

This morning, I had the opportunity to visit a communal air source heat pump project in Springburn in Glasgow. The project, which is co-funded by North Glasgow Homes, the district heating loan fund and the Scottish Government's low-carbon infrastructure transition programme, delivers zero-emissions heat to six high-rise social housing tower blocks. Not only will that significantly reduce emissions, but it will reduce heating costs for 600 homes by up to 60 per cent, improving tenants' wellbeing by making their homes warmer and cheaper to heat.

We must get the transition right for every community. The heat in buildings strategy is the foundation for doing so; securing the necessary reduction in emissions from our buildings to respond to the global climate emergency, demonstrating tangible commitments to our international partners at COP26, creating economic opportunities in Scotland and improving the buildings in which we live, work and play.

I commend Scotland's heat in buildings strategy to Parliament.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. Members who wish to ask questions should press their request-to-speak button now or enter R in the chat box.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement.

I am concerned by the length of time that it has taken to get to this point. If the Government is to meet the target that is set out in its statement—to decarbonise 1 million homes by 2030—more than 335 homes must be decarbonised every day from now until 31 December 2029. The strategy is heavy on what must happen but light on how. I will try to help by asking three straight questions.

First, the strategy estimates that the total investment required to transform our homes and buildings is likely to be in excess of £33 billion. The Scottish Government will make £1.8 billion available. From where, or from whom, does the minister expect the other £31 billion to come?

Secondly, decarbonisation requires a huge number of people to retrain or upskill in new technologies and methods, which requires people to teach them in properly funded schools, colleges and universities. The strategy suggests that the private sector will drive that, but it also says that there will be another plan for that in the summer of 2022. Has the private sector confirmed that it is comfortable with the coming costs and responsibilities, and what is the Government doing now to upskill colleges and schools?

Thirdly, the statement says that the Government wants to upgrade all homes to EPC band C by 2033. It has been reported that that could cost £17,000 per household. Interest-free loans of up to £15,000 will be available, but not many households will have the extra £2,000 to make up the difference. What funding will be put in place to support owners and private landlords to achieve those targets?

**Patrick Harvie:** Mr Kerr knows that I and members from a number of parties across the chamber have been pushing for action on this not for years but for decades. I hope that he is not suggesting that we should not have consulted on the draft strategy that was produced earlier this year. I hope that he recognises the value of consultation. The final version of the strategy is stronger and richer for having had constructive input from many stakeholders. I hope that Mr Kerr will welcome that.

The total cost of investment between now and our target date of 2045 is immense. I made that clear in my statement. The commitment that the

Scottish Government makes during this session of Parliament will not be the end of the story. This is a multi-decade programme that we must all commit to. As my statement said, costs will be met not only from public funding but from a wide range of sources. I hope that Mr Kerr will engage constructively with our proposal for a finance task force to look at those challenges.

Colleagues who are responsible for other portfolios will address some of the issues affecting schools, colleges and universities. Those are important points. Many private sector companies and contractors that install conventional heating systems see big opportunities if we can give them the right support to access the work and take on more people to do the incredible job of addressing the climate change emergency, and if we make sure that all communities across Scotland can do so affordably.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests as the owner of a rental property in North Lanarkshire. I thank the minister for early sight of his statement and for providing a copy of the strategy earlier today.

In the strategy, no longer does the minister who is responsible say,

"We will transform Scotland's homes";

instead, the strategy says that homes "must be" transformed. We agree that we need to decarbonise, improve the fabric of our homes and cut fuel poverty, but the strategy pushes a £33 billion bill and all the risk and disruption on to home owners, tenants and landlords, without enough funding or a partnership approach being evident so far. The extra £200 million that has been announced will not come close to reducing the burden on those who are least able to pay.

Tony Cain of the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers told the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee last week that the Government

"has not allocated enough resources"

and that its plans put

"an unbearable burden on social housing tenants' rents."—  
[*Official Report, Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, 28 September 2021; c 25.*]

Low-income households have been the guinea pigs so far. They have been subjected to useless, costly infrared heating panels in the Western Isles and have been disconnected from district heating systems in Glasgow. The Glasgow city region deal says—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Griffin, will you please bring your question to the fore? Thank you.

**Mark Griffin:** Certainly, Presiding Officer.

Can the minister say when householders will know what their share of the £33 billion will be and what support they will get, or whether the Government just intends to regulate them into submission and debt?

**Patrick Harvie:** I thank Mr Griffin for his question. I have to admit that I am a little disappointed by its tone, because, as I said, this is a huge challenge for us all and it is one that requires cross-party collaboration. I would have hoped that the Labour Party would welcome the idea that we are going to set out an ambitious way to achieve the agenda for all of Scotland.

Can I tell every home owner what the precise share of investment for every private home is going to be between now and 2045? Of course I cannot. What we are doing is committing to looking at a wide range of sources for the investment. It cannot all come from public funds. Even I might blanch at the idea if Mr Griffin came forward with a proposal for a £33 billion tax rise so that we could fund it all from public sources.

On the social housing issues that he mentions, I recently spoke at the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations conference about the zero emissions social housing task force report. I note that there is a real positivity and, I think, an appetite across the sector to work with the Scottish Government to rise to the challenge. Many social housing providers know that reducing heating costs is one of the most effective ways that they can reduce not just fuel poverty but poverty more widely, because the saving does not get clawed back by the UK benefits system.

I really hope that Labour and all other political parties will respond positively to the invitation that I have put out for us to sit together and talk about how we take this forward, because it is going to work only if we are willing to work together between political parties, between levels of government and across the whole of society.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I allowed a bit of latitude for the front-bench exchanges. I have 10 back benchers seeking to ask questions, and we need to finish this item of business by 15:25. I just put that out there.

I call Stuart McMillan, who is joining us remotely, to be followed by Brian Whittle.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** I welcome the statement and the £1.8 billion of investment, but can the minister provide an assurance that communities with high Scottish index of multiple deprivation rankings and growing older populations will be at the forefront of any roll-out of the investment?

**Patrick Harvie:** That is an important issue. Funding allocations for local authority-led, area-based schemes reflect need, and councils use the Scottish index of multiple deprivation to target areas with higher numbers of fuel-poor households. In our area-based schemes, the funding enables fuel-poor households who live in their own home to benefit from energy efficiency improvements, and over a third of those people are older people. We also continue to support people to convert their heating systems to zero-emissions ones, targeting that help—again—to those who are least able to pay. Our delivery schemes that target households in fuel poverty already take a zero-emissions, heat-first approach.

I am conscious of the time, Presiding Officer. There is a great deal more in the strategy that will help to answer Stuart McMillan's question, but I will leave it at that.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** It is clear that hydrogen-powered boilers could play a substantial role in the replacement of natural gas boilers. Although I note that there is a strong emphasis on heat pumps in the strategy, when does the Scottish Government expect to be able to provide home owners with greater guidance about the likely availability of a mains hydrogen network in Scotland and help them to make an informed choice about the best route to take when replacing their heating?

**Patrick Harvie:** I thank Brian Whittle for that question, which is an excellent question to put to the UK Government. As he will know, it is the UK Government that regulates the energy economy, including decisions on the gas network.

Mr Whittle is shaking his head. I am sorry, but I am speaking about the reality. This Government cannot currently control the gas network and cannot make those decisions.

The UK Government's heat and buildings strategy has been delayed for so long. I was really hoping that it would make a big splash announcement at the Conservative Party conference about how it will take some of these issues forward, but what did we hear on this agenda? The UK Government wants to make it easier to arrest the people who are campaigning and protesting for insulation and other energy efficiency measures.

That response—blaming the messenger—is not the response that we need. This Government hears the message and is cracking on with doing the work that it can with the powers that it has.

**Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):** Cultural venues such as Dundee Museum of Transport, Dundee Contemporary Arts and Dundee Heritage Trust are all keen to play their part in Scotland achieving net zero. Can the

minister advise on potential support for cultural venues to undertake retrofitting?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am pleased that Joe FitzPatrick sees that the cultural sector is enthusiastic. It not only has a direct role to play in terms of its buildings; its buildings can also be showcases, because many of them are publicly accessible and can lead on the public awareness of the transformation that we need.

Cultural venues will be eligible for support, but that will depend on their ownership. Public sector support schemes can help to decarbonise those buildings that are in public ownership, whereas our small to medium-sized enterprise loan scheme can provide support to independent cultural venues. There is also support available to community organisations and national or regional non-profit organisations with charitable aims and objectives.

I would encourage all such organisations to contact the energy efficiency business support service, Local Energy Scotland or the Scottish Government directly to find out what may be available. If the member has in mind specific issues in his own area, he is very welcome to write to me.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Sarah Boyack, who is joining us remotely.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

The statement does not include reference to the opportunity to develop community and co-operative-launched heat and power networks. In the Non-domestic Rates (Scotland) Act 2020, we agreed to rates relief to such low-carbon heat networks. Will the minister agree to build on the experience of existing networks such as the Aberdeen Heat and Power network and the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative network, so that we get the win-win of low-carbon networks benefiting our communities?

**Patrick Harvie:** I hope that Sarah Boyack knows that I would be very enthusiastic about working with her on that issue.

I see a really important role for the public energy agency in supporting the development of skills in this area. I know that there has been a little bit of political back-and-forth about whether we need an agency or whether we should crack on and create a single national energy company in the first instance, but the national public energy agency that is being created will be able to do a great deal to skill up local communities and make sure that we are sharing best practice and facilitating our ambition for communities to take control of the agenda.

There is a great deal about the agenda to be enthusiastic about and, again, I very much hope that we can work on a cross-party basis to achieve that.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** Covid-19 has put a strain on every household in Scotland and many are no doubt wondering how we can achieve net zero while rebuilding from the hardships of the pandemic. What part does the minister believe that the strategy will play in Scotland's Covid recovery?

**Patrick Harvie:** As I said in my statement, we see the strategy as really critical to a green economic recovery for Scotland. We estimate that an additional 16,400 jobs will be supported across the economy by 2030 as a result of the investment that will be deployed in zero-emissions heat. In the immediate term, as outlined in the strategy, an investment of at least £1.8 billion over the course of this parliamentary session aims to strengthen demand and to support an increase in jobs and skilled workers through investment in the supply chain. The pace of the transition will require substantial growth in supply chains, particularly in the availability of skilled heating and energy efficiency installers. We will be working with Scottish Renewables to undertake a heat in buildings workforce assessment project and, towards summer next year, we will co-produce with industry a heat in buildings supply chain delivery plan. I hope that we will be able to maximise the opportunities that Rona Mackay has identified.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I welcome the strategy. The minister says that public engagement will be critical to the strategy, but recent changes to the warmer homes Scotland scheme took place with no prior consultation, leaving some of my constituents in the dark and without the new boilers that they were due to receive. Will the minister commit to island proofing the strategy to ensure that areas that suffer the worst fuel poverty have their needs properly reflected? Will additional resources be made available in recognition of the higher costs of low-emission technologies and their deployment in island and rural areas?

**Patrick Harvie:** Yes—absolutely. I very much recognise Liam McArthur's concern about this issue as the constituency member for island communities. He has written to me and lodged a number of questions on it. I have sought to make it clear in my answers to him that we want to give the right support in the right places. We recognise the distinct challenges that remote, rural and island communities face, and we are making sure that, even as we move away from some of the worst and most polluting fossil fuel heating systems, we are making available in all those

communities the right renewable, zero-carbon heating systems and energy efficiency measures. I will continue to engage with Liam McArthur if he wants to continue writing to me. I hope that he is aware that we are making those offers available to people in his constituency and elsewhere in Scotland.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I welcome this transformative strategy and, in particular, the commitment that the minister has given to work across the chamber. I hope that that will set a better tone for the rest of this parliamentary session.

I want to ask the minister about the commitment to a renewed ambition for decarbonising public sector buildings. Does he recognise that there is often a lack of capacity and skills in councils and other public sector organisations to bring forward new projects such as heat networks and the complex innovation that will be required to meet targets? How does he envisage us building capacity over time so that we can innovate and deliver?

**Patrick Harvie:** I have already set out the doubling of the funding that we will give to the public sector to engage in this agenda. I come back to the answer that I gave earlier about the national public energy agency, because, as well as supporting community organisations, it will have a critical role in building skills and capacity at local government level. Councils around Scotland want to be part of the agenda and want to show that it can work for their communities. I put out a call to members across the chamber and all political parties to work with the Scottish Government—if there are opportunities in their constituencies and regions that they think we need to be aware of and should be working with them and their local authorities on, we would be very happy to hear from them.

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** I recently met Tighean Innse Gall, a trusted insulation provider in my constituency, which is encountering serious difficulties because of the new UK-wide industry standard, PAS 2035. Among other things, the new ventilation standard requires fixed mechanical ventilation and large permanent window vents. In Hebridean properties, the strict requirements result in a permanent and significant draft—made worse by a requirement to remove the bottom 2cm of every internal door—which is significantly deterring people from using insulation schemes. Is the minister willing to meet Tighean Innse Gall and me to discuss the company's concerns about that?

**Patrick Harvie:** I will of course be very happy to have a discussion with Alasdair Allan about that. I am aware that PAS 2035 introduces a new retrofit co-ordinator role to ensure compliance with

standards and to co-ordinate work so that the intended outcomes are achieved.

That includes provision for improvements in indoor air quality and is particularly true when the energy efficiency improvements are detrimental to natural air flow, in which case the co-ordinator may insist on additional measures to address that.

However, we understand that the retrofit co-ordinator ultimately decides on the course of action alongside the designer. We are in continual discussions with the British Standards Institution to ensure that Scottish stakeholders' views are factored into the development of those standards. I would be happy to meet Alasdair Allan and the provider that he mentions to look into those issues.

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Is the £1.8 billion of funding that was announced in today's statement in addition to the core budget that is allocated to these portfolios? In other words, is that extra money or is money being reallocated from other areas? Will Mr Harvie acknowledge that the massive amount of additional Scottish Government funding that is required in the area and to deliver the transition to net zero will have to come from the Barnett formula, given that the Scottish Government is running a fiscal deficit of £36 billion?

**Patrick Harvie:** In relation to the first question, at least £1.8 billion is the total commitment over the course of this parliamentary session; I hope that that is clear.

As I have referenced to other members, we need to recognise that the strategy is by no means the end of the story. If we are to commit to a programme of work that is as transformational as it needs to be to reach the targets that we have all voted for, it will have to be a substantial, multidecade programme of work. It would be absurd for any Government minister to stand here in 2021 and say that we know exactly what will happen right through to 2045. The strategy for this parliamentary session lays a strong foundation for beginning that work. Of course all the funding will not need to come from the Barnett formula, because we will be independent well before 2045.

**Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** The minister will be aware that the first large-scale district heating system in Scotland was officially opened in my constituency last week. It uses water from the River Clyde to create green energy that will heat homes and buildings in Queens Quay in Clydebank. Will the minister outline what lessons can be learned from that pioneering system to ensure that it can be rolled out across Scotland?

**Patrick Harvie:** Absolutely; that is an example of the importance of delivering such flagship heat

networks. The project is now commissioned and open, and we will be working closely with West Dunbartonshire Council to produce a lessons learned report that we will share widely to ensure that heat network projects such as that one can be replicated across Scotland.

Lessons from the delivery of such a project will help us to develop a successor programme to the low-carbon infrastructure transition programme and a refocused district heating loan fund that will seek to address the barriers to the delivery of heat networks and large-scale zero-emissions heating infrastructure projects.

**Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** Thousands of householders are currently worried about how they will pay for new heat and smoke alarms by next February, but the minister says that by 2025 he will bring in regulations that could land householders with bills of tens of thousands of pounds. He has twice failed to say how he will help people to pay for that; will he do so now?

**Patrick Harvie:** I have laid out in detail how we support that work. I see the scepticism on Mr Simpson's face; I ask him to acknowledge that decisions need to be made at every level of Government, including in relation to regulating prices. The Scottish Government cannot do that; the UK Government can and must change the pricing structure so that it is more affordable for people to operate low-carbon heating systems.

As I said to Labour colleagues earlier, if Mr Simpson wants to come forward with a proposal for a £33 billion tax increase and persuade us to do that so that the public sector funds all that work, he is welcome to write to me about that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes the statement on the heat in buildings strategy.

## Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3

15:25

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

The next item of business is stage 3 proceedings on the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill. In dealing with the amendments, members should have the marshalled list and the groupings of amendments. The division bell will sound and proceedings will be suspended for five minutes for the first division of the afternoon. The period of voting for each division will be up to one minute. Members who wish to speak in the debate on any grouping of amendments should press their request-to-speak buttons as soon as I call the first amendment in the grouping.

Members should now refer to the marshalled list of amendments.

### **Section 1—Increased amount of carer's allowance supplement in respect of the period of 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022**

**The Presiding Officer:** Amendment 6, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, is grouped with amendments 3 and 7.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** Many people told us in the Social Justice and Social Security Committee that the low level of carers benefit was not sufficient to lift carers out of poverty. The Government has said that it could be some time before it considers increasing the adequacy of carers benefits. The amendments in this grouping attempt to help carers and provide them security until that time. I thank Maggie Chapman MSP for lodging the first of those, amendment 6, at stage 2. Sadly, she withdrew the amendment at the time, noting that it was a probing amendment. I thought then, and I still do, that the amendment was the right thing to do, which is why I am moving it in my name today. It would mean that the carers allowance supplement would be calculated on the basis of universal credit and not jobseekers allowance, and it would fix the rate of universal credit at pre-cut levels.

The carers allowance supplement was brought in to recognise that carers do not have enough money to live on. It was doubled because of the extensive work of carers during the pandemic. The pandemic is not over. The Government spent last week arguing eloquently with us and our colleagues across the UK that the pre-cut level of universal credit is not enough for anyone to live on. We should not accept less than that for carers either. With amendment 6, we have an opportunity to use the powers of the Parliament and put money in carers' pockets by increasing the uplift to

the carers allowance supplement, bringing it in line with pre-cut universal credit rates. I urge members to vote for amendment 6 in my name.

Jeremy Balfour's amendment in this group, amendment 3, would allow the supplement to be paid every year at Christmas and until the new carers assistance benefit is developed. That goes further than the bill, which doubles the supplement only this December. However, I believe that carers are not just for Christmas and that they should be supported 52 weeks of the year. I have therefore lodged amendment 7, which will guarantee that the uplift for carers stays in place until the new carers assistance is finally introduced by the Government.

In evidence to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Engender wrote:

"Any additional payments have been ad hoc and offer little certainty to individuals, failing to be an adequate response to recipients' well-evidenced needs. This is in spite of 21% of carers reporting spending more as a direct result of Covid-19."

Leaving the uplift at the discretion of regulation leaves far too much uncertainty for carers—uncertainty at one of the most difficult times of their lives. We have a chance to make a hard time a bit better. We should take that chance, and I urge members to vote for the amendments.

I move amendment 6.

15:30

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I thank all carers for what they have done, not only in the past 20 months, but day in, day out, often unseen and unpaid. Without those carers, society would be in a much worse place. Over the last months we have heard warm words from all five parties, thanking carers for what they do—as is right. As someone who benefits daily from an unpaid carer, I know how important those individuals are. However, words do not put food on the table or pay the heating bills. We can use nice words, but unless those words are followed by action, the Scottish Government is simply throwing stones in glass houses.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** Does Mr Balfour not accept that the Scottish Government is backing up its words with action by doubling the supplement in December, which will take support for carers way beyond the levels enjoyed by carers elsewhere in the United Kingdom? Will he call on his colleagues in the United Kingdom Government to provide additional support for carers allowance so that the supplement can go further?

**Jeremy Balfour:** It is very strange that, at the moment, members on that side of the chamber want to spend 90 per cent of their time talking

about powers that are reserved and never wants to talk about powers that we have in the Scottish Parliament. I suggest that some of those members who keep jumping up might want to seek election to the next Westminster Government and leave the Scottish Parliament, given that they do not seem to be interested in using the powers that we have in Scotland. I remind Mr Gray that he left Westminster and that he is now in the Scottish Parliament.

In committee, we had a good debate at stage 2. Marie McNair commented that we do not want an ad hoc system. I totally agree. We do not want a system that relies on Government ministers making a decision when they feel that they can. We want to give carers certainty. Members have two choices this afternoon: they can give the certainty that the extra payment will be made once a year by voting for my amendment 3, or twice a year by supporting amendment 6. That is the choice that the Parliament will have to make in the next few moments.

That choice is a financial one. It is a choice that the Scottish Government tells us must be taken seriously. As Mr Macpherson made clear in last week's debate on universal credit, it is a political choice. Members can either vote for it or simply offer warm words without giving anyone any extra money. That is a political choice—and members will have to make it in the next few moments.

There is not a shortage of money. Lorna Slater said in a tweet a few days ago:

“There is no shortage of money.”

The money is there—we just have to decide how to spend it. That is a choice.

**The Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity (Lorna Slater):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Jeremy Balfour:** I am sorry, but I do not have time.

We have to give carers the certainty that, until 2025, the payment will be doubled either twice or once a year. That is a political choice and the decision that the Parliament will have to make. I hope that members will support amendment 3.

**Neil Gray:** It is my pleasure to speak—albeit briefly—in today's stage 3 debate, which will hopefully complete the bill's journey that began only a few short weeks ago in the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, which I convene.

Amendments 6 and 7 in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy and amendment 3, in the name of Jeremy Balfour, were considered and rejected by the committee at stage 2. We heard substantial evidence from carers and from organisations representing carers on how welcome the bill is and

how welcome the second double payment will be in December. Like Jeremy Balfour, I want to take the opportunity to put on record my thanks to all those who engaged with our evidence sessions and to carers across Scotland for the work that they do.

There is no doubt that we need to continue to invest in supporting our carers. We heard testimony that was very challenging at times about the challenges that unpaid carers face and how those challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic. That is why it is right that the Scottish Government is, with the bill, taking support for eligible carers way beyond what is available elsewhere in the UK.

I do not oppose the principle of continuing to pay additional supplements next year or until the new Scottish carers assistance benefit is established, if that is what is required—our carers deserve that—but it is really important that, as the current devolved, hybrid settlement means that the Scottish Government has to operate within a fixed budget and without the borrowing powers that are enjoyed by normal Parliaments that deliver social security, commitments to make new payments are properly costed and taken through the formal budget process, as the committee heard in evidence from the Scottish Fiscal Commission this morning.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** I thank my colleague on the Social Justice and Social Security Committee for taking an intervention.

Does Neil Gray agree that we also have to consider the financial stability of carers who have to make decisions about whether to eat or heat every day as a result of their poverty? I am pleased to hear that he thinks that, in principle, it is good to give certainty. When the committee voted against my amendment, it was called “reckless” by the Government. I do not think that it is reckless at all to put more money into carers' pockets. I hope that Neil Gray recognises that and that there is a significantly bigger availability of resources to Government to support it to budget into the longer term than there is for households that are struggling to make ends meet.

**Neil Gray:** I absolutely take Pam Duncan-Glancy's point about providing certainty, but I note that the Scottish Government is providing a pretty well-established level of certainty in providing the December payment as a double payment. It is doing that in time to ensure that carers have that in their pockets for the crucial Christmas period. That was warmly welcomed by carers and their representatives who gave evidence to the committee. Obviously, the difficulty that we face, as I have already outlined, is that the Government has to operate within a fixed budget and it has to go through the appropriate budgetary channels to

be able to allocate the resources and ensure that that is done in a sustainable way.

I do not doubt the commitment of Jeremy Balfour or Pam Duncan-Glancy to see payments to carers rise further, so I have no doubt that they will engage with Kate Forbes and Shona Robison over the coming months, just as they will on other areas of spending, to ensure that there is a fully costed way to ensure that that can happen in future.

**Jeremy Balfour:** Does Neil Gray agree that it is good to give unpaid carers certainty beyond just one year? Does he recognise that a lot of the benefits that are now devolved to Scotland will have to be paid on an on-going basis? Why should the benefit that we are discussing be different from any other benefit that has been devolved?

**Neil Gray:** My point is exactly that: it is no different from any other benefit, and it has to go through the normal budgetary processes to ensure that it is sustainable over the financial period that we are talking about. That is absolutely right.

The Conservatives have some cheek; in the same week in which we have seen a cut to universal credit impacting the same carers that we are talking about, they are asking the Scottish Government to do even more to make up for that cut.

I support the idea of looking at ways of providing further support to carers, but I do not agree with using the bill to do that, as it is primarily about ensuring that the December payment can be doubled. I will vote against the amendments in the group if they are pressed.

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** I thank members for their contributions on the amendments.

The Government shares the sentiment that members have expressed about the gratitude to, respect for, and recognition of carers throughout Scotland. It is from that sentiment that we introduced a bill to support carers and to provide the additional support that we intend to provide in the months ahead for the festive period if the bill is passed. That is why we introduced the bill in an expedited process. We must look to support carers. The Government wants to provide more support to carers beyond that—of course we do—but we must do that in a way that is proper and responsible.

We have secured resource for a doubling of December's carers allowance supplement. That is why we prioritised introducing the bill. This is the first programmed bill—we had emergency legislation a few months ago—to get to stage 3 in this parliamentary session. We prioritised the bill

to ensure that we get the double payment to carers in good time in December.

As the discussions on the bill to date, including this afternoon, have emphasised, we have political choices to make and financial choices to make too. Jeremy Balfour cited the debate that we had on 28 September. I ask him to recall what he stated then:

“The reality is that effective governance requires more than empty promises to shake the magic money tree and pay for anything and everything without consequences.”—*[Official Report, 28 September 2021; c 53.]*

If that is true of a UK Government with the full fiscal and monetary powers that he defended last week, it is certainly true for a devolved Government with limited powers. We have financial choices to make and, as I said at stage 2 when we debated amendments similar to those in this group, the Scottish Government chooses to mitigate the low value of the carers allowance through the carers allowance supplement at a cost of over £40 million every year—we have done that since 2018—with the additional payment, if we pass the bill today, adding another £20 million of support this year.

We also choose to mitigate the bedroom tax at a cost of £70 million a year and we chose to introduce the Scottish child payment and bridging payments to support thousands of children. Those decisions and choices will put £130 million into the pockets of families in this financial year. We also chose to give everyone in receipt of council tax reduction £130 to support them through the pandemic, a payment that is rolling out to 400,000 people this month.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I know that the minister was not here at the time, but does he accept that it took the Scottish Government a year to mitigate the bedroom tax because it chose not to let Westminster “off the hook” but was quite happy keep the people of Scotland on the hook?

**Ben Macpherson:** I am not clear whether that is an accurate quote from Ms Baillie, but what I recall, as a citizen of Scotland, is that the Scottish National Party Government took action to mitigate that poor choice by a Westminster Government. However, would it not be better if those decisions were not put our way?

The Scottish Government makes political and financial choices every year within its fixed budget and limited powers, and we have to be prudent and responsible.

**Jackie Baillie:** It is no longer the case that we have a fixed budget. The Scottish Government can and does raise taxes, so surely Mr Macpherson should correct his narrative.



**Ben Macpherson:** I think that that is what I said. We have a largely fixed budget—*[Interruption.]* I will correct myself and say that we have a largely fixed budget, with limited powers. However, Jackie Baillie, as somebody who sat on the Smith commission and knows the fiscal framework well—

**Jackie Baillie:** Get it right, because you are wrong.

**Ben Macpherson:** Okay—I retract that statement and apologise for that inaccuracy. However, what I was going on to say was that somebody of Jackie Baillie's experience and knowledge of the fiscal framework will appreciate the relationship between our income tax powers and the block grant, and the weakness in those income tax powers because of the fact that we do not have powers over dividend income tax and that we have limited taxation powers. I am sure that Jackie Baillie will acknowledge that as a factual statement.

It is important to emphasise—*[Interruption.]* I want to make some progress. I emphasise that we have to be responsible and not be reckless, which is why it is important to acknowledge that, at this point, the Parliament has already agreed a budget that makes no provision for the further increase that amendment 6 proposes to apply from this December—*[Interruption.]* I want to make some progress.

15:45

It is important to recognise that context, because this Government chose to pay an additional supplement last year and was elected on a manifesto that promised to pay again this year an additional carers allowance supplement of more than £230. We will be able to make that choice again in the future, depending on budget and what else we do with Scottish carers assistance, as it develops into a new replacement benefit for carers. If the bill is passed, we will have the power to pay an additional supplement in the future, if that is the will of Parliament, through the budget process and considering taxation choices that have been emphasised by others and the wider budget questions in the round.

**Jeremy Balfour:** First, does Ben Macpherson agree that the decision on amendment 3, in my name, has nothing to do with this year's budget but is to do with future budgets? Secondly, does all social security not have to go through that process? There are benefits that are the responsibility of the Scottish Government that will be paid for the next number of years. Why is this benefit different from any other benefit? Is the minister saying that personal independence payment or attendance allowance is in doubt? I

presume that those are all part of the negotiations that the minister has with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy every year. Why can this not be written into the budget like all those other benefits?

**Ben Macpherson:** I refer Jeremy Balfour to my earlier point, which was specifically about this year's budget with regard to amendment 6, and I was very clear on that.

With regard to our decision making in the round, an important consideration is that we already pay 13 per cent more through the carers allowance supplement, which was the first benefit that we introduced in 2018. Whether we make an additional additional payment again in future years needs to be considered in the round with the development of Scottish carers assistance; we are looking at options for the longer term that will increase our support for carers through our Scottish social security system. In the period ahead, we will begin our consultation on proposals for the delivery of Scottish carers assistance, and that will require us to carefully consider the balance to be struck between extending eligibility to and increasing the amount of Scottish carers assistance. I look forward to engaging with colleagues and stakeholders more widely on those important points in due course.

As I said in the stage 1 debate and again to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee at stage 2, future increases will and should be considered in the context of the circumstances that carers face and the financial constraints that we face as a devolved Government. If we were to commit further resource now for future years, we might not be able to utilise that resource to support carers in other ways, which is why I cannot support amendments 6, 3 and 7 at this time. I urge members not to press them but, if amendments 6, 3 and 7 are pressed, I urge Parliament to reject them.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Pam Duncan-Glancy to wind up and to press or withdraw amendment 6.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** I will deal with some of the points that we have heard so far. First, I agree with Ben Macpherson that it is a political and financial choice. I am asking the Parliament to make the political and financial choice to put more money—again—into the pockets of unpaid carers across Scotland. In the short timescale that we had to consult on the bill, we heard consistently—

**Ben Macpherson:** I appreciate the position that Pam Duncan-Glancy is advancing, but will she acknowledge that, with the bill that is before us today, we already intend to pay an additional additional payment ?

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Yes, I acknowledge that. As Ben Macpherson is aware, we think that the bill and the additional payment are necessary and essential, because carers are already living in poverty. However, we are asking the Government to go beyond warm words of support and support in principle for the idea that people might get money in their pockets, and actually put money in people's pockets. The Government needs to double that money continually until it has looked at the carers allowance in the round, because people are living in far too much poverty. We have also heard a lot about the Scottish Government budget. The Government has 44 billion quid and 21,000 civil servants at its disposal to determine how it might want to use that budget. I urge the Government to contrast that with what it asks from households that have disabled people and unpaid carers living with them. In some cases, they get less than £80 a week to balance their budgets and only have the people in those households to help them do it.

I ask the minister to please consider providing that certainty. It is not fair to leave it to discretion and leave carers wondering how they are going to cope next year.

A third of carers have said that they are struggling to pay utility bills, 47 per cent of them have been in debt and half are struggling to make ends meet. In the past year, they have told us that they are undervalued, that they feel invisible, exhausted and broken, and that they have worked 24/7 with no break. Seventy-eight per cent of them have said that, overall, their financial situation has got worse as a result of the pandemic.

Uplifting the carers allowance supplement, and doubling it at this point, is the right thing to do. However, the pandemic is not over, and it will be the right thing to do for a considerable number of months, and possibly years into the future. Until the minister addresses the grossly underresourced funding for carers' benefits, I hope that he will please consider supporting the amendments and providing that certainty to carers across Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** Ms Duncan-Glancy, for clarity, are you pressing or withdrawing amendment 6?

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Forgive me, Presiding Officer. I press amendment 6.

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment 6 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. As it is the first division of the afternoon, there will be a five-minute suspension.

15:51

*Meeting suspended.*

16:00

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment 6 be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

**Ben Macpherson:** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I apologise, but I am having some difficulties with my connection. I would have voted no.

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

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 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)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 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)  
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 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)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 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)  
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 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 is: For 24, Against 93, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment 6 disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** Group 2 is on reviews. Amendment 1, in the name of Jeremy Balfour, is grouped with amendments 2, 4 and 5.

**Jeremy Balfour:** I do not want to take credit for the amendments. In fact, Maggie Chapman lodged the same amendments at stage 2 and was very helpfully able to show how we could improve the bill and make it slightly better. I therefore thank her for lodging her amendments, although I was disappointed that she did not move them. I hope that, after debating the amendments this afternoon, the Government will take them on board and we can move forward together.

During the stage 2 debate, I was slightly unsure why the Scottish Government was not willing to accept the four amendments; I was unclear about what the minister was saying against them. During one part of the debate, he said that doing the work would take civil servants away from doing other jobs. Later on, during his stage 2 summing-up speech, he said that the work was already being done and that it would take longer to publish and scrutinise it.

Will the minister clarify why the amendments cannot be accepted? I fear that the reason is that the Government simply does not want Parliament to be involved in any of the process. That, again, is the Government running away from scrutiny by Parliament. It wants to keep all the powers in Government and to make all the decisions and simply get its back benchers to rubber stamp them, at the appropriate time.

That is disappointing from a transparent and open Government, as it likes to call itself. All we are asking is that the work that has already been done be published so that Parliament can see the report and, if appropriate, the Social Justice and Social Security Committee or the whole Parliament could debate it to see how we are getting on and what progress has been made. I genuinely cannot see what the Government has to fear in that regard.

On amendment 2, Maggie Chapman brought up one of the key issues in our society today: people who care for more than one person are penalised. Again, we are not asking for any money up-front. All that amendment 2 asks is that the Scottish Government carry out a review and report back to Parliament. At that point, Parliament could make a decision.

Perhaps the minister can tell me why he is not willing to carry out such a review, and why is he

not willing for Parliament to be involved by seeing a report then coming to a decision, which is all that amendment 2 asks for. That seems to me to be reasonable, so I hope that members will accept the amendments in my name.

**Ben Macpherson:** As Jeremy Balfour said, at stage 2, amendments that were the same as amendments 1 and 2 were withdrawn by Maggie Chapman, who had lodged them. They were discussed and rejected by members who then chose to press them, anyway.

On 6 October, I wrote to members of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee with more information about the on-going work to review carer benefits—in particular, the carer's allowance supplement and the young carer grant. In my letter, I set out that a wide range of data and methodologies are used in developing and evaluating our social security policies, including quantitative survey data; benefits statistics; input from users, including through our experience panels; existing research by other organisations; and commissioned research.

Carer benefits analysis and wider research on carers and the caring experience are both considered in evaluation of our carer benefits. That work, combined with the client insights work of Social Security Scotland, provides a rich stream of evidence to help us to build a social security system that works for all of Scotland's communities.

The Scottish Government has recently published evaluations of the carers allowance supplement and the young carer grant. They are available for Parliament to consider. They show that the supplement has gone some way towards meeting its overall aims of improving outcomes for carers by providing extra financial support, and of ensuring greater recognition of the essential societal contribution that carers make. The evaluations also show that the majority of young carer grant recipients feel that the supplement has made a difference to their lives, given them access to more opportunities and improved their mental wellbeing.

We are working to deliver Scottish carers assistance, including the additional payment for people who have multiple caring roles. One of the key issues that we are seeking to address is the limited data that is available to enable us to identify who would be eligible. As I noted at stage 2, I do not believe that the review and reporting obligations that are proposed by the amendments are required. Furthermore, if the amendments were to be accepted, meeting those reporting requirements would require reallocation of resources away from our work on developing Scottish carers assistance.

For those reasons, amendments 1, 2, 4 and 5 are unnecessary and would be unhelpful, so I urge Parliament to reject them all.

**The Presiding Officer:** Mr Balfour, can you confirm that you moved amendment 1?

**Jeremy Balfour:** I thought that I had. If I did not, I am happy to move it now.

I move amendment 1.

Again, I am genuinely confused by the minister. He just said that doing a review would take away resources, but in the opening two or three minutes of his contribution, he was saying, "Here is all the work that has been done." Either the work has been done and can be reported to Parliament, or it has not been done and he does not want us to know that. Would the minister like to make an intervention to tell me whether the work has been done, and if it has, why it cannot be published? Will it take away resources that are needed for the work? Which is it?

**Ben Macpherson:** I am happy to advise Mr Balfour of all the work that is being done to evaluate our benefits, which I set out in my letter to the committee of 6 October. I think that his amendments would create unnecessary work and take away civil service time from the development of Scottish carers assistance. The amendments are superfluous, so I urge Parliament to reject them.

**Jeremy Balfour:** So, the minister is saying, "The work's been done, but we don't want you to know about it." It is clear that that is the attitude of the Scottish Government. It is a secret Government that does not want any scrutiny at all by Parliament. That is what we are hearing today.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** The minister says, "Read the letter." Basically, it is one paragraph with an excuse in the middle of it. The letter does not answer the questions that were asked in committee. It says:

"One of the key issues that we are seeking to address is the ... limited data ... available".

The minister has said that the data exists and that the Government has done the work. Where is it? Why cannot Parliament see it?

**Jeremy Balfour:** I thank Miles Briggs for his intervention. In his usual insightful way, he has put the spotlight right where the Scottish Government does not want it to be. The work has been done, but the Government does not want us to see it.

What is worse is that, from what we hear, it also plans to vote against amendment 2, which proposes reviewing—not financially supporting—what we can do to help people who care for more than one person in the household. We are simply

proposing that that be reviewed, but the Government is saying no.

The message from the chamber today is that the SNP-Green coalition will give people warm words, but if people want change, if they want money or if they want to make a difference, they should not support it.

**The Presiding Officer:** Do you wish to press amendment 1?

**Jeremy Balfour:** I do.

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment 1 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

**Ben Macpherson:** On a point of order.

I apologise, but I am having difficulty connecting with the app today. I would have voted no.

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

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order.

I, too, had connection difficulties. I would have voted yes.

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

**Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** On a point of order.

I had connection issues as well. I would have voted yes.

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

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** On a point of order.

I am having connection problems. I would have voted no.

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

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysoyl (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)

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

#### Against

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 50, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment 1 disagreed to.*

*Amendment 2 moved—[Jeremy Balfour].*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment 2 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

16:15

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** On a point of order. The app did not allow me to vote, but I would have voted yes.

**The Presiding Officer:** We will ensure that that is recorded.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** On a point of order. I was unable to vote, but I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** We will ensure that that is recorded.

## For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
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 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
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 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
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 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

## Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
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 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
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Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)  
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 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)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 51, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment 2 disagreed to.*

#### After section 1

*Amendment 3 moved—[Jeremy Balfour].*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment 3 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

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

#### Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Denham, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (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)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (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)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 51, Against 66, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment 3 disagreed to.*

*Amendment 7 moved—[Pam Duncan-Glancy].*

**The Presiding Officer:** The question is, that amendment 7 be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**Jackie Baillie:** On a point of order. I am afraid that I lost my connection. I would have voted for amendment 7.

**The Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Baillie. We will ensure that your vote is recorded.

## For

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

## Against

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

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division is: For 51, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment 7 disagreed to.*

## **Section 2—Power to increase amount of carer’s allowance supplement**

*Amendments 4 and 5 not moved.*

**The Presiding Officer:** That ends consideration of amendments.

At this point in the proceedings, I am required under standing orders to decide whether, in my view, any provision of the bill relates to a protected subject matter—that is, whether it modifies the electoral system and franchise for Scottish

parliamentary elections. In the case of this bill, in my view no provision of the Carer’s Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill relates to a protected subject matter, therefore the bill does not require a supermajority to be passed at stage 3.

There will a brief suspension before we move on to the stage 3 debate.

## Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so as quickly and quietly as possible. The next item of business is a debate on motion S5M-01554, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill. I invite members who wish to contribute to the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons or enter R in the chat function.

16:23

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** I am very pleased to present the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill to Parliament for this stage 3 debate. I recognise and thank, as we have collectively done throughout our consideration of the bill, the thousands of unpaid carers across Scotland, who make a remarkable contribution to our society.

I also put on record my thanks to the Parliament and the Social Justice and Social Security Committee for allowing me to secure an accelerated timetable for the bill. That has been critical to ensuring that we can increase December's carers allowance supplement payment. I thank committee members and clerks for their work on the bill, and also my bill team and private office.

The Scottish Government has taken action to address the fact that carers allowance was the lowest of all working-age benefits. Carers allowance supplement, which was the first payment made by Social Security Scotland, increases carers allowance by around 13 per cent. It provides carers with an additional £462.80 a year on top of their carers allowance in recognition of the role that they play in our society.

Since September 2018, we have paid more than £149 million to around 120,000 carers through the carers allowance supplement. Carers in Scotland who have been continuously in receipt of carers allowance and carers allowance supplement will have received over £2,270 more than carers in the rest of the UK since the supplement was launched.

Moreover, since October 2019, we have invested around £1.3 million through our young carer grant, which is the first support of its kind in the United Kingdom. We have heard from young carers how it has made a difference to their lives and helped them to access more opportunities.

Overall, using our social security powers, we invest more than £350 million a year in supporting carers through carers allowance, carers allowance supplement and the young carer grant.

Of the 11 benefits that we are now delivering, the carers allowance supplement and the young carer grant are two of seven brand-new benefits that support people across Scotland by putting money directly into their pockets. That, of course, is in stark contrast to the UK Government's £20 a week cut to universal credit this week.

As colleagues will know, the provisions in the bill seek to increase the amount of carers allowance supplement to be paid in just a few months' time in December, in recognition of the increased pressures that carers have faced and are facing as a result of the pandemic.

The bill ensures that a payment of £462.80 will be made in December to all carers allowance supplement recipients, instead of the planned £231.40. This is the second time that we have done that. The additional supplement payment was first made in June last year as a result of emergency coronavirus legislation. As it did then, the Government is now investing more than £20 million to assist carers in these challenging times.

Our total investment this year and last year in our carers allowance supplement and our additional payments is around £120 million from our own budgets. As we discussed during the debate on the stage 3 amendments, we are doing that in a largely fixed budget under the devolved settlement.

**Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con):** Now that we are in the last stage of the bill, will the minister address the issue that my colleague Jeremy Balfour has repeatedly raised? Given everything that the minister is saying in his speech, why will the Government not review and report the success that he is describing? Why will he not allow Parliament to see the review and scrutinise the performance of this benefit?

**Ben Macpherson:** I thank Stephen Kerr for his intervention, which I know that he makes from a position of advocating the principles of transparency and collective evaluation. I would point him to my letter of 6 October, which is several sides—not one side—of A4, from which he will get an indication of all the ways in which we measure our performance and set our direction, including the evaluation work that has been done and is on-going to make sure that our benefits are delivering as was envisaged by the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 and our social security charter.

If we pass the bill today, the increased payment will help to mitigate some of the negative impacts of the virus on carers' finances and wellbeing; it

will also help them to provide vital caring roles at a time when health and social care services are being stretched more than they would be in normal times.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** Will the minister give a commitment to unpaid carers across Scotland that the money that they need in their pockets will be available again next June? They need that certainty.

**Ben Macpherson:** There will be a payment of the carers allowance supplement in June, as there has been since its introduction in 2018. As we have debated through the various stages of the bill, whether there is a further additional supplement will be down to budget matters that the Parliament will consider collectively in due course.

We also recognise that the pandemic has identified a need for greater flexibility in how we support carers when society faces significant changing circumstances. The bill includes a power to enable ministers to introduce regulations that, if approved by Parliament, could increase the amount of the carers allowance supplement in future periods, which Pam Duncan-Glancy inquired about.

As I noted during stage 1, we continue to work with carers and organisations that represent and support them to consider the options to improve support through the introduction of Scottish carers assistance—our replacement for carers allowance—ahead of the consultation that is planned for this winter.

I will say a bit more about Scottish carers assistance in my closing speech, but I highlight now that we will create a carers assistance that works better for carers than the current carers allowance does. The improvements that we make will build on changes that we have already made, and those that are planned, to improve support for Scotland's unpaid carers, which has been a priority with our social security powers.

I urge everyone to support the bill.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill be passed.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** To avoid curtailing the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice to move decision time back.

*Motion moved,*

That, under Rule 11.2.4 of Standing Orders, Decision Time on Thursday 7 October shall begin at 5.20 pm.—  
[George Adam.]

*Motion agreed to.*

16:31

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** Like the minister, I thank everyone in and outside the Parliament who has been involved in the passage of the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill, especially the organisations that have provided assistance and briefings.

The Scottish Conservatives accepted the reasons that the minister gave for the expedited timetable for the bill's consideration, and we have worked constructively to ensure that unpaid carers receive the double payment in December ahead of Christmas. However, I put on record my disappointment that the bill has not provided the opportunity to progress at an earlier stage some of the improvements that all parties supported at the May election and, indeed, the constructive amendments in the name of Maggie Chapman and Jeremy Balfour that were lodged at stages 2 and 3.

I am disappointed in the Scottish Green Party. Green members seemed to lose their voice at stage 2. We proposed positive amendments that the Parliament has now rejected. That is disappointing.

The passage of the bill has presented a number of important areas in which there is cross-party support for reform to, and improvement of, the uptake and delivery of support for carers.

I welcome the letter that the minister sent to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee yesterday regarding on-going work to review carer benefits, including work on the young carer grant. Unpaid carers are the backbone of our social care system, but they often go unrecognised. I thank our unpaid carers—especially young carers—for everything that they have done, including the work that they undertake to provide care and love to people throughout Scotland. It is because of those efforts that, throughout the passage of the bill, the Scottish Conservatives have tried to progress further support for carers.

The committee heard many responses outlining concerns about the qualifying rules for carers allowance, including young carers not being able to get the young carer grant if they are in receipt of carers allowance when they apply for the grant. The committee report raised all those important issues with the eligibility criteria. I hope that the minister, and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, who is still in the chamber, will be able to outline to Parliament at the earliest opportunity their approach to those issues and how and when progress to extend the additional payment to people who care for multiple persons can be delivered. There is cross-party support for that and

I hope that that will be implemented as soon as possible.

As I outlined during the stage 1 debate, the Scottish Conservatives also support early action to extend payments for carers after a bereavement and a new support package for people who often have to give up work to care for a loved one. Carers organisations have supported that call, as we heard at the committee. Although the minister has not included that specific ask in the letter that he wrote to the committee yesterday, I hope that he will agree to meet me to discuss that important reform and how we can progress that change at the earliest opportunity.

I have written to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to ask what support and reforms can be introduced for bereaved carers to access training and mental health support in particular. The number of young carers who have been impacted has increased during the pandemic, and we now need to look to their educational needs and at the attainment gap, which has grown wider and wider. That is an incredibly important issue, and I hope that we can find cross-party support for improvements and reforms.

We need to take a cross-portfolio approach to carers' rights and the package of support that the country can deliver. I hope that ministers across Government will consider how they can individually add value in their respective departments.

As has been stated by carers and their representatives during the passage of the bill, it is vital that we recognise the importance of carers being able to access support. However, that goes beyond just financial support. We need to have in place a system and package of support for carers that takes account of carer's individual needs and the carer as a whole. I hope that all arms of Government and local authorities, and all sectors, will look towards where we can add value to help support Scotland's carers and improve their lives and future opportunities.

The Scottish Conservatives welcome the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill. Unpaid carers are the backbone of our social care system and it is only right that they receive an additional payment to mitigate the financial effects of the pandemic. I hope that many the reforms and carers' asks that we heard during the bill's passage will be heard by ministers today. The Social Justice and Social Security Committee took on board many of the views that were put to us by carers during our evidence taking. I hope that ministers and Parliament will consider how we can progress those at the earliest opportunity. The Scottish Conservatives will support the bill at decision time.

16:36

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** I thank the clerks and committee members for their hard work on the bill. The bill seeks to put more money in the pockets of unpaid carers this December by doubling the winter payment of the carers allowance supplement. As someone who relies on paid and unpaid care, I cannot stress enough the importance of the care that is provided by all carers across Scotland. I again thank every carer across Scotland, paid and unpaid, for the years of support for me and the millions of people throughout the country who rely on care.

Scottish Labour recognises the importance of unpaid carers and the contribution that they make. Carers have gone above and beyond during the pandemic by working more hours and taking on more responsibility while the services that should have been there to support them have been reduced and, in some instances, removed altogether.

Carers deserve far more than our praise; they need bold and transformative action. One carer said to me that thanks and love do not pay the bills. Although the bill does not go far enough in recognising carers, we appreciate that it does more for them than is the case now, so we will support the bill at decision time.

Nevertheless, the Government has much to do. There are an estimated 1 million unpaid carers throughout Scotland, and they need us to go further in order to tackle the poverty and inequality that they face. I am disappointed that my amendments and those in the name of Jeremy Balfour were not passed, as those amendments would have given carers more certainty over the money they will have in their pockets.

The uplift to the carers allowance supplement was introduced because the Government recognised the additional pressures that unpaid carers faced during the pandemic. It was the right thing to do, but the pandemic is far from over. Last week, the Scottish Government rightly condemned the Tory UK Government for its failure to maintain an uplift to universal credit that was also introduced in recognition of the unprecedented situation that has been brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was wrong to remove that uplift to universal credit—its removal is catastrophic, in my view—and it is also wrong for the Scottish Government not to give carers certainty by committing to the carers allowance supplement uplift.

I have met many carers, carers' organisations and people who require care, and the realities that they have shared with me have highlighted why—now more than ever—we need to focus our efforts on the inequality that they face. I have heard that

some carers are caring for 24 hours, seven days a week, and 90 per cent of carers say that they have done so without a break. In many places across the country, they are still waiting for the services that they relied on before the pandemic to recommence. I reiterate to the Government the importance to carers and service users of getting those services back up and running. We are not back to normal—far from it. Although I hope that we will strive for a better, new, more equal normal, we must recognise that the additional pressures brought about by the pandemic still exist, especially for unpaid carers in Scotland.

We must also recognise that unpaid carers were struggling to make ends meet long before Covid and that the reason to act is longstanding. The reality is that, often, carers do not have a choice whether to care. They take on responsibilities in the absence of a social care system that fully meets the needs of those they care for. They are stepping out and stepping in when there is no one else to do so. Some—many of whom are women—have had to give up work, which has put them further into poverty. Indeed, in the Social Justice and Social Security Committee this week, we heard of the need to address that inequality and the importance to reaching our child poverty targets of lifting women who provide unpaid care out of poverty. Engender highlighted that this morning and noted that, in doing so, there is an urgent need to address the chronically low carers benefits.

Carers allowance is currently set at the equivalent of 15 hours a week at the living wage, which is below the poverty line. The Scottish Government has held powers to reform that benefit for the past four years, yet it does not expect to be in a position to review Scottish carers assistance and pay more until 2025. I have already aired my frustration about that and about the constraints that have been placed on our freedom to amend the bill and bring long-term transformation. It is a shame that we are not today debating a bill that would do just that—a policy that could have the potential, if done right, to give financial security and certainty to carers in the long term. This is a missed opportunity.

With 90 per cent of Scotland's carers still unable to claim carers allowance, we should be using the powers of this Parliament to revise eligibility criteria that currently let too many slip through the net. Instead, carers are being left in the hands of the Department for Work and Pensions until the Scottish Government is ready to pick up the DWP's rule book. Carers simply cannot wait that long.

The bill will provide a welcome but temporary measure that will ease the financial pressure on carers right now, and we will support it, but it by no

means addresses the wider inequalities that carers face. We know that the effects of the pandemic will be felt far beyond the payment. We also know that caring responsibilities will not disappear; indeed, they will increase. In the weeks and months ahead, Scottish Labour will continue to push the Government to go faster and do everything in its power to support unpaid carers and reform carers allowance. Today, though, we recognise that, although it may not be enough, the bill will put money in the pockets of carers, and Scottish Labour will always support doing that.

16:42

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** If they had not done so before, the value of and the need for unpaid carers have shone brightly throughout the pandemic. The bill is our commitment that recognises their commitment. It does not cover every carer—it falls far short of doing that—but those it does cover will receive an essential supplement to their income. It is an essential supplement, but we should never kid ourselves that it will be enough for most. We know the financial struggles that carers endure week in, week out, which is why we must return to the issue when we consider shaping the new benefit—Scottish carers assistance.

I had hoped that the Government would end the uncertainty about next year, at least by committing to the supplement for next year. However, unpaid carers now face the prospect of a cut next year, just like the universal credit cut, because the trauma of the pandemic has not ended. In fact, the costs continue to rise for carers just as they do for everyone else.

**Ben Macpherson:** Willie Rennie will acknowledge that we have had an additional payment since 2018. What we did in June 2020 was—and what we intend to do in December this year is—make an additional additional payment, and we intend to secure the power potentially to make such additional additional payments in the future, if that is the will of Parliament.

**Willie Rennie:** But it is not guaranteed. Yes, it could result in the payment going up, but, equally, it could go back down again. The sooner we get the commitment, the sooner the unpaid carers of this country will get the certainty that they need in incredibly difficult times. I am sure that the minister understands that.

I just do not buy the argument from the minister and the Government that the issue is subject to future budget negotiations. The Government makes multiyear commitments all the time, and, given its multibillion-pound budget, the cost is insignificant. When he was challenged, the minister qualified the description of the

Government's budget by calling it "largely fixed", not completely fixed. He has flexibility within a multibillion-pound budget; therefore, he could make the commitment to reduce the uncertainty for carers.

For individual carers, the supplement is worth so much more; for the Government, it is not a big deal. Given that we require carers to provide 35 hours of care a week, the amount is equivalent to £2 an hour. The increase is not enough to take them out of poverty; therefore, we will have to look at the financial commitment that we can make if we are to address the fundamental problems that carers experience. We need to look at the matter in the long term, in the carers assistance process.

The underlying entitlement issues need to be addressed, too. At present, there is a massive gap between the number of unpaid carers in Scotland and the tiny number who receive the allowance. The current benefit provides support to only one in 10 carers. Those who are of pensionable age are denied support, as are those in many other categories. With carers assistance, we need to investigate how we can extend the coverage.

I thank the committee, the clerks, the officials and the minister for their rapid work on the bill. I pay particular credit to Pam Duncan-Glancy and Jeremy Balfour for provoking and challenging the minister, the Government and those on the SNP and Green benches throughout the process. I admire the work that they have done.

At stage 1, I talked about Amy Newton, who has multiple sclerosis, and the experience of her world that she provided for me in just one afternoon. I was exhausted after shopping with clouded goggles, thick gloves and heavy weights on my arms and legs. We owe Amy, the hundreds of thousands of people like her and their carers a proper level of support. The Parliament must return to the job with a full commitment to do right by them.

We will support the bill this afternoon.

16:47

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** Further to my earlier contribution, I will make a more general speech about the merits of the bill before stage 3 is completed.

The bill delivers a second double payment of the Scottish Government's carers supplement. It means that eligible carers in Scotland are due to get an additional £462.80 in December on top of their regular carers allowance. The evidence that we heard in committee from carers and representative stakeholders proves why that payment is necessary. It goes a small way towards demonstrating the value that the Scottish

Government places on the role played by unpaid carers. Carers Scotland estimates the economic value to Scotland of unpaid carers to be over £10 billion a year, but it is far harder to measure the social and wellbeing impact that they have.

There is no doubt that carers and the people they are caring for have had a particularly difficult time over the past 18 months. Many have had to take on additional roles and faced additional costs during the pandemic. We heard about those challenges in evidence to the committee and, at stage 1, the financial challenges, as well as those in relation to respite services, were also raised.

It is right that we make sure that we keep doing what we can to assist those heroes to keep doing their phenomenal work for the people they care for. The doubling of the December payment means that carers in Scotland will be £690 better off this year compared to those on carers allowance elsewhere in the UK.

An earlier line of argument being pursued by Miles Briggs, Jeremy Balfour and Stephen Kerr—in an intervention—needs correction. The letter from the minister of 6 October, which Mr Briggs said was just a paragraph actually extended to three pages. Perhaps Mr Briggs should check his printer settings—maybe it was only the final page that came out.

**Miles Briggs:** I was specifically referring to carers of multiple persons. Having had a long discussion about that in committee during the passage of the bill, Mr Gray will be very aware that there is just one paragraph in the letter on that point.

**Neil Gray:** I thought that Mr Briggs and Mr Balfour were referring to the section on evaluation, which is certainly longer than that. There is also a link to the published evaluation that the Scottish Government produced in December 2020. There is no secrecy or conspiracy, as some of the Conservatives would have wanted people to believe—far from it.

Perhaps the Tories need reminding that their party continues to preside over the carers allowance as the most miserly form of social security. The supplement is available only to eligible carers in Scotland. Perhaps if the Tories want the supplement to go further, they could persuade their colleagues at Westminster to pull their weight by expanding the payment of, or eligibility for, the carers allowance. If they will not, the calls that we hear today for the Scottish Government to go even further than their colleagues in Westminster lack any credibility.

While the Scottish Government is investing in providing additional support to carers, the UK Government is shamefully cutting universal credit by £1,040 per year. It should be remembered that

many unpaid carers who will receive the supplement will also receive universal credit. One Government is investing in social security to support our citizens who are carers and the other is driving poverty by cutting social security.

I have no doubt that we will have further discussions about future supplements via the regulatory power that the bill gives to ministers, and I look forward to taking views on the new Scottish carers assistance when those proposals are published soon.

To conclude, I put on record again my thanks to carers in Scotland for all that they do. I also thank those people who submitted their evidence and suggestions to the committee for our consideration and the team who support the committee, such as our clerks and the Scottish Parliament information centre, for getting our scrutiny done in the truncated timescale. I very much hope that the bill will pass unanimously and that we can get the crucial support that our carers deserve into their pockets for December.

16:51

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I welcome the final stage of the bill, and I am pleased that it will get all-party support. I thank the clerks and others who have got the bill through so quickly and smoothly.

The Parliament has the power to implement the measure. It is, unlike many issues that have been brought to the chamber over the past couple of weeks, within our remit to enact it. However, it is disappointing that the bill does not go as far as it could have gone. We pay other benefits on a recurring basis, such as personal independence payments. That is fixed within the Scottish Government's budget. I am still not clear why the Government cannot commit to what is a small sum for it but a massive sum for carers in the long-term budgeting process. Carers who do so much unseen work require longer-term stability.

I hope that we will get an early announcement from the cabinet secretary or the minister, as soon as the budget is announced, on whether what is going to happen will happen again next summer and next Christmas, and I hope that the minister will at least commit in his summing-up speech to coming back to Parliament before the end of the year to give us a commitment on that one way or another.

Members will have noticed that I lodged a number of amendments, some of which were originally lodged by Maggie Chapman at stage 2. I found it curious that the SNP and the Greens voted against the amendments at stage 2 and today. They were lodged by a member of their coalition, and they were interesting and helpful

amendments that would have given Parliament a greater role in scrutiny, but they were quickly dismissed by the minister. Ms Chapman has evidently learned the harsh lesson that the Government is in no way interested in constructive deviations from its rigid and dogmatic agenda. *[Interruption.]* No, I am afraid that I will not take an intervention.

We have seen today that the party of Government talks about reaching out to other parties and working together but, when people propose constructive, non-financial amendments, they are rejected.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** The member lodged financial amendments that require to be looked at through the budget process. A number of members have made a point about the reach to carers. People say that they want to reach more carers. Surely it is better to look at the need for carers support in the round rather than to try to amend a very clearly tight bill.

**Jeremy Balfour:** The cabinet secretary has obviously not read the amendments. I was asking in some of my amendments for reports on what the Government was doing, but she did not support them.

The point that the minister made when discussing the amendments was that we have started the consultation period now and that any new benefit is likely to be introduced in 2025, which means that for four years unpaid carers have to live with this uncertainty because of what the Scottish Government has decided.

Again, our carers are individuals who are invaluable for our society. It behoves us in this place to offer them not just warm words but proper financial support. We will support the bill, but it could have been so much better if the Government had listened to what was said in my and Labour's amendments.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Marie McNair, who will be followed by Mark Griffin. Ms McNair, you have around four minutes.

16:56

**Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and put on record my support for unpaid carers, because I have long recognised what they do. My support is shaped by my daily contact in my previous job as part of the nursing team at St Margaret of Scotland Hospice in my constituency. I repeat my praise for the staff and volunteers of Carers of West Dunbartonshire and Carers Link in

East Dunbartonshire, who provide outstanding support to carers in my constituency.

Throughout our communities, the contribution of carers is invaluable and inspiring. I said during the stage 1 debate that the care that they have given during the pandemic has been life-saving. It is often someone looking after a parent, relative or friend, and they see it as an automatic response to help someone who they love and care for. However, with that support, the person who they care for can live in their house, be part of the community and participate in the way that they want to.

This debate gives us the opportunity to put on the record our thanks to every single unpaid carer for their dedication, love and compassion. This period has been incredibly difficult for many in society, but many carers will have felt it more than others. The bill, if passed today, will, first, recognise the massive contribution that unpaid carers have made during the pandemic by doubling the amount of carers allowance supplement; and, secondly, it will get the money into the pockets of carers for Christmas, a time of real financial pressure for families.

I welcome that the chief executive of the carers group VOCAL said:

“We believe the Carer’s Allowance Supplement is a positive step towards valuing the role of carers as equal partners in care and recognising their crucial contribution to Scotland’s economy.”

We really do value carers. The carers allowance supplement is part of the wider support to carers that has been clearly set out and carefully budgeted for. I did not support the Opposition’s amendments, and it is disingenuous to suggest that we set future amounts of the supplement in that way, given the scale of what needs to be done, including the mitigation of a Westminster wrong that put carers on the lowest level of earnings replacement benefit.

The Opposition parties should bring forward their budgets for debate and scrutiny at budget time, and to do it any other way will be seen by many carers as a continuation of promises to them that have never come to fruition. Doubling the supplement payment for December means that over 91,000 carers will receive additional support, which I know will bring some relief. However, more action is needed, and I hope that colleagues across the chamber will agree to add their voice to calls for the UK Government to increase carers allowance, which is the lowest of all earnings replacement benefits. Surely the Opposition must have better aspirations for the UK social security system, and this really is a test of whether we are “better together”.

The supplement has fixed a wrong inflicted on carers for years, because for 45 years successive UK Governments have refused to align the amount paid with other earnings replacement benefits. Now, because our Parliament is listening, carers in Scotland have a 13 per cent increase and, in addition, will be £690 better off than carers south of the border. The Labour, Liberal and Tory parties have had all those years at Westminster to sort this, but refused to do so. In fact, from what I can see, their current Westminster leaders have never called in Parliament for the carers allowance to be aligned with the rate of jobseekers allowance. Again, we are left to mitigate their shameful policies.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Will Ms McNair take an intervention?

**Marie McNair:** I am nearly finished.

If the Westminster parties finally do the right thing, we will ring fence the money to further enhance support for carers in Scotland. Once we pass the bill, we must work closely with carers as quickly as possible to devise the new system of carers assistance that leaves behind the inadequacy and inequality ingrained in the Westminster approach and responds to the real-world demands on carers in Scotland.

16:59

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** As one of the co-conveners of the cross-party group on carers and a former member of the Social Security Committee, I am grateful to speak in this debate, because carers deserve this additional payment.

Being an unpaid carer is a 24-hour job, which is done out of love, not for the allowance, but unpaid carers have likely lost income in the pandemic and had the huge task of supporting severely disabled people, many of whom have been shielding in the past 18 months. Although they rightly get a lot of thanks from us, they have been waiting years for a carers allowance that makes the best of the powers that this Parliament now has.

When the minister and I were on the Social Security Committee, the supplement was one of the landmark policies that the whole committee agreed on. For my part, I was proud to ensure that the supplement was protected from inflation.

The pandemic legislation saw us agree to unique and substantial measures. The additional supplement, the £20 uplift in universal credit and the pandemic support payments to low-income families have all had a substantial positive impact on household budgets. They have not only been lifelines but made our social security more adequate, so they should never have been special measures in the first place.



When we look at the responses that the committee received to its call for evidence, we can feel the importance that the additional payment makes to carers. One says that caring

“can be very stressful for some carers”,

who are

“over worked and need a break”.

Another said:

“I get roughly 34p an hour to look after them I don't get a break ... sometime all day and all night. I care for them cause I love them I do it so they get best care”.

One carer said that the payment will relieve stress, and that

“December is the hardest time financially as I want to give my kids all I can but also need to be able to put food on table.”

Those responses show the impact that the payment has, so why should it be a one-off that is ending?

We should consider the possibility that this might be the final additional supplement, so it is similar to the decision to end the universal credit uplift. The Scottish Government has not done it with the same public malice as the Tories have shown in that debate, but the effect on carers' income is no different because, if we do not see a similar intervention next June, their income will fall.

In its next budget, I hope that the Scottish Government will offer a permanent uplift to the supplement, and then set a route map to the incorporation of that payment into the weekly award.

It is time that the Government brought legislation on carers allowance to the chamber, to set out a long-term settlement for unpaid carers to look forward to, or even just to give them hope. Allowing full-time students to claim or offering a taper to end the earnings cliff edge would be a start.

The underlying allowance is low and is still delivered by the DWP, so we need to get to a point where carers have a choice—even certainty—over whether they get a better weekly payment or a lump sum. Although carers get a great deal of thanks from us, they have now been waiting years for a carers allowance that makes the best of the new powers of this Parliament, and they have been waiting long enough.

17:03

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** Just yesterday, when the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions was performing at the Tory party conference karaoke, her

Government implemented the largest ever cut to the social security system.

In real terms, the support that is paid to unemployed people is now as low as it was in 1992 and, as a proportion of earnings, it is the lowest that it has been since the modern social security system began in the late 1940s.

The £20 a week—or £1,040 a year—cut to universal credit and working tax credit will impact more than 400,000 Scots households, of which more than 20,000 have a recognised unpaid carer. Scottish Government analysis suggests that that will put an additional 60,000 people into poverty, including 20,000 children. That is on top of the benefit cap, the rape clause, the two-child limit, the benefit freeze and PIP. Those constant attacks on the incomes of our poorest citizens form the backdrop to the bill that we debate today.

The additional support for carers that is provided in the bill seems modest by comparison, and it is. An extra £231 increase to carers allowance and a power for the Scottish Government to introduce further such increases are both very welcome, and that is why we will support the bill at decision time. However, we must recognise that it is only one very small part of the fundamental change that we need in how unpaid care is recognised, valued and supported.

Let us be clear about how valuable unpaid care is. Recently, the University of Strathclyde published a report on the value of the unpaid care that is provided for people with learning disabilities. The care that is done by unpaid carers would cost an average of £35,000 per person if it were paid at the rate of the living wage. If those being cared for had instead to be transferred to supported accommodation, the cost per person would average £114,000. A carer who was interviewed as part of that research said:

“Unpaid carers are the mortar in the wall. We're there, we're essential, but we're hidden.”

*[Interruption.]* No—I have a lot to get through.

For decades, carers allowance has been hidden away, a backwater of the social security system that has been neglected by successive UK Governments. Unfair rules have also been in place for far too long. There is no recognition of care that is done for more than one person, nothing is offered to those who care part time, there is nothing for those who claim other income-replacement payments, and so on. Proposals in 2008 to provide an extra payment were welcomed by the Labour Government but were never implemented. That must change. We must have a social security system that reflects the incredible work that unpaid carers do.

The forthcoming introduction of carers assistance and the consultation on the future of support for unpaid carers are crucial opportunities to build a fairer social security system for carers, and we cannot miss them. However, there is no escaping the fact that, given the powers that this Parliament has, we are restricted to tinkering on the edges of a broken system. Scotland clearly needs greater powers over borrowing and social security.

Before I close, I want to briefly raise the issue of take-up. About 80,000 receive carers allowance and the supplement and so will receive the additional payment, but we know that 1 million people do some level of unpaid care. DWP work to estimate the take-up of disability and carer benefits was started long ago but never finished.

It does not have to be this way. The Scottish Government's shared policy programme with the Greens has earmarked £10 million for income-maximisation services, including for households with disabled people. We must see urgent action on that, and I would welcome an update from the minister on the issue.

Greens will vote for the bill at stage 3 today but, in doing so, we are clear that it is but one small step towards a system that offers true dignity and respect to Scotland's unpaid carers.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches. As members will be aware, those who have participated in the debate should be in the chamber for closing speeches. I note that Mr Gray is not in the chamber, and I would expect an explanation for that.

17:08

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** I would like to begin by restating what everyone in the chamber has said already, which is thank you. Thank you to all those who have contributed to the bill's progress, and to all organisations that gave evidence and briefings that contributed to the passage of the bill. Thank you also to carers, who do so much and too often receive too little support and not enough recognition. We have heard from colleagues across the chamber just how challenging the past 18 months has been for carers—indeed, they have been the most challenging times that unpaid carers have ever faced.

Services continue to be squeezed, and enough respite care is still not available. Colleagues have alluded to that very powerfully today, including when Mark Griffin and Willie Rennie spoke about the experiences of people who are caring for loved ones. In the past few weeks, we have seen councils across the Lothians and in Glasgow, for example, cutting back on care-at-home provision

and asking unpaid carers yet again to do more. All that is before we even get to the worst of winter.

At stage 1, I said that it is important that we hear the voices of carers in the legislation and respond to what they ask of us. That is the least that we can do, and those of us on the Scottish Labour benches have reiterated that through our amendments. Although there has been a very constrained timetable for the bill, we have sought to hear what carers have told us and to act on it.

The ability to increase the supplement, albeit for a limited number of months, is of course welcome. As colleagues have said, we have supported the bill and will support it today, because we believe that putting extra money into the pockets of carers in time for Christmas is a vital step in supporting them at a very demanding time of year and in the midst of a pandemic that is still very much impacting people's lives.

However, the bill only goes so far and we must do more. That is what my colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy's amendments and Jeremy Balfour's amendments sought to do. The bill provides a one-off increase in carers allowance, and it also gives the power to increase future payments of the supplement but, as we have heard, that is not guaranteed. The bill should not be a missed opportunity to ensure that there is a guaranteed bridge of uplift for carers so that they have more financial security until the advent of carers assistance, but I fear that it will be.

The Government had the opportunity to change the calculation, to use universal credit and fix that to the rate prior to the Tories' shameful cut. That would have meant that eligible carers would be entitled to a higher supplement that was £480 more than the current supplement level, but the Government refused to take that amendment on board. I ask what that says to carers in Scotland. I was disappointed not to hear Maggie Chapman speak about that amendment, which she had pursued in the committee.

The Government could also have ensured that the increased supplement is paid every six months until carers assistance is rolled out. Currently, the bill guarantees only one payment of the increased supplement in December 2021, as we have heard. Mark Griffin talked about what we would hope to see as a long-term strategy and solution to providing a meaningful uplift for carers in carers allowance.

At stage 1, the minister suggested that the Government intends

"to introduce Scottish carers assistance for new applications long before 2025."—[*Official Report*, 23 September 2021; c 93.]

Those were his words. Therefore, it would be helpful if, in his concluding remarks, he would

clarify what is meant by that. When will carers have extra money in their pockets before 2025, and how long before 2025 will that be?

The convener of the committee, who is in his place now, said in his speech and, I think, in remarks to the *Daily Record*, that the additional payments from the supplement will ensure that we provide greater recognition to the people who help to look after a loved one. We have seen today that there is a consensus on that in the chamber, but we have to ask ourselves whether that recognition ceases at the end of December.

Scottish Labour will support the bill to make more support available to stretched carers, but it is a sticking plaster to cover a gaping wound, and carers and carer organisations have been clear that it is not sufficient to lift carers out of poverty. We can do more. We must do more. The Scottish Government must hear the voices of carers, who for too long have felt like an afterthought.

17:12

**Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I am delighted to close this stage 3 debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. Through each stage of the bill, we have heard thoughtful contributions from members of all parties regarding the importance of unpaid carers. It has been said previously, but it is worth repeating, that unpaid carers are the backbone of our social care system. It is clear that that perspective is shared across the chamber.

While the bill's progress has been swift, it has provided the opportunity to debate and scrutinise how we can best support unpaid carers, and it has also given us the opportunity to hear that during the pandemic an additional 400,000 carers were involved across Scotland. For example, one challenging topic that has been discussed this afternoon is the area of supporting carers who have more than one person to look after, such as someone who has two elderly parents. The bill had the potential to help to address that issue. Members also spoke about the role of young carers and how we can best support them. The amendments lodged by my colleague Jeremy Balfour would have provided a key opportunity for ministers to review the issue, but unfortunately the Government was not willing to seize that opportunity.

It was also disappointing that an amendment lodged by the Conservatives at stage 2, which would have provided greater financial certainty for unpaid carers by making the double supplement permanent, was also rejected. Representatives from organisations such as Family Fund and National Carer Organisations in Scotland have made it clear that that additional layer of financial

certainty would have helped over the winter months. Another example is Lanarkshire Carers, who have spoken about how a permanent doubling of the supplement would give unpaid carers a fixed idea of their income over a longer period of time and would also give them more opportunity to plan ahead. Although the bill as it stands will ensure that ministers have discretionary powers to double future payments on an ad hoc basis, we do not believe that that should be left to ministerial whims.

Those are just some of the issues that arose in the debate and which the bill provided an opportunity to address. The fact that the Government failed to capitalise on the potential has been described as a missed opportunity.

I will move on to some of the comments that we heard this afternoon. The minister himself talked about opportunities; however, as I said, we have seen a missed opportunity to provide greater financial certainty to unpaid carers.

My colleague Miles Briggs spoke about how there has been constructive work across the chamber and across parties; that has been recognised. However, we also need to say how disappointed we are by how the Greens seem to have lost their voice. Miles Briggs also talked about carers and bereavement and mental ill-health, and the opportunity to address those issues has not been seized on either.

Pam Duncan-Glancy spoke about carers giving and going above and beyond and about there being more than 1 million unpaid carers in Scotland. Without anyone noticing, the pandemic has helped to ensure that many unpaid carers have been put under huge pressure. She also spoke about missed opportunities.

Willie Rennie commented on our commitment to recognising the commitment of carers—that is vital. He also talked about how, although the subject of future budget negotiations was talked about, a gap still exists and will continue to exist.

I pay tribute to Jeremy Balfour for his powerful speeches on the amendments that he lodged and for the passion that he has on this topic—nobody in the chamber can deny that. He talked about the commitment of carers and how they go far beyond in doing what they can. Once again, however, he also spoke about the missed opportunities that we see today.

Nothing that I have said should imply that the bill is not welcomed by the Conservatives, because it is. However, although it will provide financial assistance to more than 90,000 carers this winter—which we wholeheartedly support—it is nevertheless disappointing that the bill has failed to reach its full potential.

The debate around the vital contribution that unpaid carers make to our society, and how the social security system should impact them, will be important as we go forward, and will continue to be discussed in the weeks, years and months ahead. Although the bill has failed to address many of the aspects that we hoped it would, the potential is still there.

I have no doubt that supporting the bill—which the Conservatives will do—will provide very welcome support to individuals this December. I support the bill.

17:17

**Ben Macpherson:** It is clear from this afternoon's debate that there is cross-party support for the intent behind the bill, which is to increase December's carers allowance supplement payment; I really appreciate that from all parties. We have also demonstrated together our recognition and appreciation of the remarkable role that carers across Scotland play and have played, particularly during the pandemic, as well as the impact that it has had on them.

As I made clear in my opening contribution, the Government is building a social security system based on the principles of dignity, fairness and respect. The bill intends to offer further support to carers across Scotland, who have been under additional pressure because of the pandemic. This is more than simply warm words—this is standing up and making a financial investment at an important time, and undertaking a legislative process in order to do that. This Government is committed to doing things, and that is what the bill is all about.

A number of points were raised during the debate, and I may not have capacity to address them all. However, a series of questions were raised around Scottish carers assistance and how we move forward from here. It is clear that there is a determination across the chamber to do more; we want to do more—we all want to do more.

That is why we continue as a Government to make good progress towards the launch of Scottish carers assistance, including the additional payment for those with multiple caring roles. Due to the impacts of the pandemic, the Scottish Government and the DWP—which is integral to our work during this phase—have had to work on a new timetable for delivering Scottish carers assistance and transferring Scottish clients in receipt of carers allowance. However, we are, as I said, making good progress.

We have started feasibility work with the DWP that will carry on into the new year. That will give us a much more detailed understanding of what needs to be done and how long it will take. Our

aim is to begin to build the systems required for Scottish carers assistance and the additional payment in the new year, and we anticipate that that will take a minimum of 18 months, given the complex interactions between carer benefits and the reserved benefits system.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** Given that it might take 18 months to get to that point, and that carers are living in extreme poverty now, I ask the minister again to give a commitment that he will double the supplement in June, when the pandemic will be far from over, and again in December, and again until the adequacy of the payment can be addressed.

**Ben Macpherson:** As I have said on several occasions, we will give consideration to those matters during the budget process, and I urge all parties to give them that same serious attention.

When we begin delivering Scottish carers assistance, our immediate priority is to protect the support that carers already in receipt of carers allowance rely on, and to ensure that the transfer of their benefits is safe and secure, as well as opening a new application process. That means that we will not be able to make any changes to eligibility criteria immediately. The one exception to that is introducing the additional payment for those with multiple caring roles.

That does not mean that we will not be making improvements from the launch of our new support. We want to deliver a better service, and will be working with carers to design applications and communications so that they will work for the people who use them. We will also use the new benefit to help carers to find out more about other support that they may be entitled to.

When looking to prioritise the further changes that can be made once safe and secure transfer is complete, we need to carefully consider the balance between extending eligibility for Scottish carers assistance and increasing the amount of Scottish carers assistance.

Working with carers and organisations that support them, we have identified 15 options for changes that we could make when we introduce our replacement to the carers allowance, the Scottish carers assistance. That includes the option to make a recognition payment to carers with underlying entitlement, as Willie Rennie raised, action to expand payments for carers after bereavement, as Mr Briggs said, and considerations around carers who are in full-time education, as Mark Griffin rightly highlighted. We are working with stakeholders and undertaking further analysis of those to identify which options should be progressed in advance of consulting on the final proposals for Scottish carers assistance this winter.

Moving back to the here and now, we have secured the financial resources for doubling December's carers allowance supplement, which is why we prioritised bringing forward the bill—one of our 100-day commitments and the first programmed bill to be passed by the Parliament, if the Parliament chooses to do so. It is about focusing on getting assistance to carers in December.

As was noted at stage 2, we could do more, and the UK Government could do more for carers allowance generally. Let us come together today to acknowledge the fact that the bill will ensure payment of £462.80 instead of the planned £231.40 to all carers allowance supplement recipients in December, and an additional payment of £694.20 will be made this year to unpaid carers in Scotland who are in receipt of Scottish carers allowance, which is more than is paid south of the border.

There has been a bit of negativity in today's debate but it is a positive thing that we have before us. We can and will do more together to support unpaid carers in the months and years ahead, but we can make a difference today, so let us make that difference. I urge the Parliament to pass the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill.

## Withdrawal of Scottish Statutory Instruments

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

The next item of business is consideration of two Scottish Government motions. I ask John Swinney, on behalf of the Scottish Government, to speak to and move motions S6M-01597 and S6M-01598, on withdrawal of Scottish statutory instruments.

17:24

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

It is vital for local democracy and local service delivery that councils are as representative as possible of the communities that they serve. Following the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, Boundaries Scotland has reviewed the council ward boundaries of all local authorities with inhabited islands and submitted its recommendations to ministers.

The Scottish Elections (Reform) Act 2020 removed ministerial discretion to reject or modify such proposals. The decision on whether to implement Boundaries Scotland's recommendations now rests exclusively with Parliament. The Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee has considered each of the reviews, and I agree with the committee's assessment that Boundaries Scotland has discharged its duties in a professional and competent manner.

The committee disagreed with some of the recommendations for Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council. As a consequence of that decision by the committee, I consider that the appropriate action for ministers to take is to ask Boundaries Scotland to take a further look at the proposals.

Yesterday, Parliament agreed to the reviews for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council, Shetland Islands Council and North Ayrshire Council. Those changes will therefore be in place for the local government elections in May 2022.

It is regrettable that there was not sufficient agreement to allow the wards for Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council to be updated in time for the 2022 elections. The committee has called for the councils involved to engage with Boundaries Scotland on new reviews for those areas. I echo that call.

However, I stress to members that an independent boundary commission is widely considered to be a key feature of democratic societies. It will not always be possible for

Boundaries Scotland to resolve all concerns that are raised, but I believe that Parliament should have confidence in how Boundaries Scotland carries out its functions.

We will monitor progress with the new reviews closely, and will include that experience in our post-legislative assessment of the new laws surrounding boundary reviews. I therefore propose that the instruments in relation to Highland and Argyll and Bute councils be withdrawn.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Highland (Electoral Arrangements) Regulations 2021 [draft] be withdrawn.

That the Parliament agrees that the Argyll and Bute (Electoral Arrangements) Regulations 2021 [draft] be withdrawn.

**The Presiding Officer:** The questions on the motions will be put at decision time.

## Parliamentary Bureau Motion

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

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-01601, on temporary standing orders. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to speak to and move the motion.

17:26

**The Minister for Parliamentary Business**

**(George Adam):** Motion S6M-01601 amends temporary standing order rule 3 to extend the period for which access to the public gallery is suspended until 24 December 2021, in the light of the on-going public health circumstances. Members will wish to note that, should circumstances allow it, it would be possible for the Presiding Officer to reinstate access to the gallery before that date.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that, with effect from 8 October 2021, Temporary Standing Orders Rule 3 be amended—

(a) in paragraph 1 to delete “9 October 2021” and insert “24 December 2021”; and

(b) in paragraph 2 to delete “9 October 2021” and insert “24 December 2021”.

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

## Point of Order

17:27

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance, under standing order rule 13.2, on how I can request a minister to exercise their ability to provide a statement as to why, since the start of this academic year, in the daily coronavirus Covid-19 data that is issued at 2 o'clock each day, a subparagraph contains the phrase

"Data on students at universities and colleges testing positive for COVID-19 is no longer being updated as most teaching has stopped for the summer."

Universities went back for the new term as early as 4 September, so how can a Government minister be urged to attend Parliament to give a statement as to why the academic dates are not known within Government and, more importantly, why the data has not been provided?

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I thank the member for his point of order. Mr Whitfield will be aware that consideration of the business programme is a matter for the Parliamentary Bureau in the first instance. Therefore, he might wish to ask his business manager to raise the matter at the next meeting of the Parliamentary Bureau.

## Decision Time

17:29

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S6M-01554, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. As the motion is on the passing of the bill at stage 3, there will be a division.

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

17:29

*Meeting suspended.*

17:33

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to the vote on motion S6M-01554. Members should cast their votes now.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order. My app would not connect. I would have voted for the motion.

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

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)

Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (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)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)  
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)  
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)  
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)  
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 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)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-01554, in the name of Ben Macpherson, is: For 118, Against 0, Abstentions 0.

The motion is agreed to, and the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill is passed. [Applause.]

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill be passed.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-01597, in the name of John Swinney, on withdrawal of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Highland (Electoral Arrangements) Regulations 2021 [draft] be withdrawn.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-01598, in the name of John Swinney, on withdrawal of an SSI, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Argyll and Bute (Electoral Arrangements) Regulations 2021 [draft] be withdrawn.

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-01601, in the name of George Adam, on a temporary amendment to standing orders, be agreed to.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that, with effect from 8 October 2021, Temporary Standing Orders Rule 3 be amended—

(a) in paragraph 1 to delete "9 October 2021" and insert "24 December 2021"; and

(b) in paragraph 2 to delete "9 October 2021" and insert "24 December 2021".

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

*Meeting closed at 17:36.*



## Correction

Patrick Harvie has identified an error in his contribution and provided the following correction.

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie):**

*At col 5, paragraph 4—*

*Original text—*

The tenant hardship loan fund has only recently been replaced with a grant fund, and I hope that the member will be willing to let that system be operational before she judges whether it is a success.

*Corrected text—*

The tenant hardship loan fund has only recently been supplemented with a grant fund, and I hope that the member will be willing to let that system be operational before she judges whether it is a success.



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.

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