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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 3 February 2022

[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. Face coverings should be worn when moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

The first item of business is general question time. I would like to get in as many members as possible, so short and succinct questions and responses would be appreciated.

Budget (Local Authorities)

1. **Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether its draft budget will enable local authorities to deliver a consistent level of core services. (S6O-00716)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): While reductions in United Kingdom Government funding have reduced the overall Scottish budget for 2022-23 by 5.2 per cent in real terms, the Scottish Government has increased local government funding for day-to-day services such as schools and social care by £975.7 million in 2022-23, which is a real-terms increase of 6 per cent. That funding, including the extra £120 million that was added at stage 2 of the Budget (Scotland) Bill, will enable local authorities to deliver their core services in order to support communities across the country.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: At a time when public services, including those that are provided by councils, have been stretched to breaking point, the Scottish National Party-Green Government's cuts to council budgets are nothing short of an insult. Trumpeting an additional £120 million after cutting £371 million requires some brass neck from the minister—it is still a cut. What will the minister tell constituents across my region, and across Scotland, who now risk seeing that cut reflected in their vital local services being scaled back and their council tax bills going up?

Tom Arthur: I make it clear that I recognise the outstanding and vital work that local authorities do across Scotland. If anyone has a brass neck, it is the member, because it is his party in government at Westminster that has cut the Scottish budget by 5.2 per cent and has refused to engage

constructively in the budget process over the past two months. The reality is that we have a reduced budget, and we have given local government a fair settlement with a real-terms increase. I hope that, in future budgets, the Conservatives might want to engage in a more mature and considered fashion whereby, instead of simply calling for funding increases, they state clearly where that funding should come from.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): Last week, the leader of Orkney Islands Council announced that he was withdrawing from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and denounced the settlement from the Scottish Government as the worst that any local authority had received. Does the minister believe that such treatment of Orkney Islands Council reflects the actions of a Government that is committed to island proofing and supporting our island communities?

Tom Arthur: As the member will appreciate, the distribution of funding through a needs-based formula is a process that is undertaken in conjunction with COSLA. Our deliberations in Parliament concern the overall local government funding settlement, in which—as I said—there has been a real-terms increase. Again, I make the point that, if members wish to see in future budgets more money for one budget line, they will have to identify a corresponding budget line in which there should be a reduction.

Four-day Working Week (Trials)

2. **Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to introduce trials for a four-day working week. (S6O-00717)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): We are committed to establishing a £10 million fund to allow companies to pilot and explore the costs and benefits of moving to a shorter four-day working week. We are in the early stages of developing that pilot, and we are committed to developing a comprehensive design for it over the next year, supported by an initial £500,000 of funding. Our work will be informed by experience that is drawn from similar projects in other countries and, of course, elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Rona Mackay: The pandemic can be used as an impetus to change the dynamic of work for the better. What work is the Scottish Government undertaking to ensure that workers' voices and rights are at the heart of any upcoming four-day week trials in Scotland?

Richard Lochhead: The member is right. The pandemic has served to intensify interest in, and

support for, more flexible working practices. We have already seen the possibilities and positives of adopting alternative working practices for a better and more inclusive balance between work and people's personal lives. Ministers have met and continue regularly to meet trade unions to ensure that workers' voices and rights are at the heart of the pilots. That will be a guiding principle as we move forward.

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): What is the Scottish Government's reaction to the recent report by Autonomy that suggests that, even under the worst-case scenario, a four-day working week would be affordable for most businesses once the initial phase of the Covid-19 pandemic has passed?

Richard Lochhead: I have looked at the findings of that report, which was published around a year ago. It does, indeed, say that, under the best-case scenario a reduction in hours would be entirely offset by increases in productivity and price increases. Of course, there are also worst-case scenarios to which we must pay attention. Autonomy found a number of issues with cash flow for some companies as well. That is why the pilots will be so valuable in enabling us to learn the lessons for how to take the policy forward in a Scottish context.

Speed Limits (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale)

3. **Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how many instances of failure to comply with the 20mph speed limit in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale have been recorded since its introduction, including how many fines were subsequently issued as part of the enforcement of 20mph speed limits. (S6O-00718)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): The Scottish Government does not hold the information requested. Police Scotland is responsible for the enforcement of speed limits.

Christine Grahame: My next port of call is obviously Police Scotland.

Stow, a village in the Borders through which the A7 passes, has long-standing issues with speeding by cars and commercial vehicles. Anxiety is increased because the pavements are narrow and cannot be widened. Residents in the local community council thought that the 20mph speed limit would have a major impact on speeding, but I am told that breaches are frequent. What can the community do beyond contacting Police Scotland?

Keith Brown: The Scottish Government "Good Practice Guide on 20 mph Speed Restrictions" suggests that

"Any changes should be monitored, and where compliance levels are not at an acceptable level, consideration should be given to the addition of traffic calming measures or",

in some cases,

"reverting to a 30 mph limit, if necessary."

Such measures are the result of a dialogue between a number of partners, primarily the council—in the case that Christine Grahame mentions, councils—involved and Police Scotland.

The 20mph roads in Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale are a mix of local roads, which are under the responsibility of councils, and trunk roads. I know that that is a concern of Christine Grahame's. Scottish Borders Council has undertaken some speed surveys, including on the trunk roads that are of concern to Ms Grahame. If she wants to have further discussion with the local authorities and the police, I will be happy to pass that message on and add my support to the further dialogue that she seeks.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Is the cabinet secretary aware that new data reveals that there are 59 fewer local police officers in Lothian and the Borders than there were in the period before the creation of Police Scotland? Does he share my concern that those savage Scottish National Party cuts to front-line policing are undermining efforts to issue fines and combat speeding and that they could be putting lives at risk in Stow, across the Borders and across the wider South Scotland region?

The Presiding Officer: I am not wholly convinced that that referred to the substantive question, but you can answer briefly if you would like to, cabinet secretary.

Keith Brown: Craig Hoy neglects to mention that we have around 50 per cent more police officers per capita in Scotland than there are in England and Wales. His Government cut the funding for the police and cut 20,000 police officers in England and Wales, so we will take no lessons from the Tories on proper police funding.

Outdoor Education Sector

4. **Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions ministers have had with the outdoor education sector since December 2021. (S6O-00719)

The Minister for Children and Young People (Clare Haughey): I met representatives of the outdoor education sector on 9 November. The meeting was also attended by Councillor McCabe, the children and young people spokesperson for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Since

that meeting, Scottish Government officials have held a series of meetings and further discussions with the sector. I am pleased to confirm that an additional £2 million in support funding will be provided to the sector.

Liz Smith: I warmly welcome that £2 million commitment from the Scottish Government; it is essential that that money is there in order to safeguard our outdoor education centres.

Can the minister also comment on the article by Martin Davidson from the Outward Bound Trust in *The Scotsman* today, in which he asks the Scottish Government what it is doing to address the inequalities in access to outdoor education residential for many children across Scotland?

Clare Haughey: I thank Liz Smith for her welcome of the additional funding and for her question. She will be aware that, in the 2021-22 programme for government, we committed to providing financial support to low-income families, in order to ensure that all children can participate in curriculum-related trips and activities—not only trips to residential centres but all forms of school trips that have a curriculum-related purpose. The programme for government makes a further commitment to ensure that secondary school pupils will be supported to go on at least one optional residential centre trip during their time at school.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): Can the minister provide an update on the Scottish Government's actions to expand outdoor learning, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds? How will she work with organisations such as OutLET: Play Resource to achieve that?

Clare Haughey: Our vision is for all children and young people to participate in a range of progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences. As Collette Stevenson indicated, there are a range of commitments in the programme for government that relate to outdoor learning and school trips. During the course of this year, the Government will engage with key partners in local government and the outdoor learning sector to progress those commitments. That work will build on our Covid-19 outdoor education recovery fund, which provided an additional £500,000 for outdoor learning experiences last year, reaching many pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. A report from last year's funding programme will be published soon.

Gambling Addiction Services

5. **Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve the services available to people with gambling addiction. (S6O-00720)

The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd): We share the concerns that many have expressed around the impact of gambling-related harms in Scotland, and we recognise that gambling can have disastrous consequences. We agree with the view of our stakeholders that a public health approach is needed to tackle those harms and improve treatment services. We are working with Public Health Scotland and third sector stakeholders to develop an understanding of the scale of the problem in our communities. We are assessing person-centred and localised treatment options, and we recognise that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution.

We welcome the review of the Gambling Act 2005 and hope to see greater regulation and control of the gambling industry in the coming white paper, in order to prevent gambling-related harms in Scotland.

Kenneth Gibson: I thank the minister for that helpful and comprehensive answer. As we know, problem gambling is highly disruptive to sufferers and their families. GambleAware research found that one in five problem gamblers spent more on their habit during lockdown and that young people were particularly likely to increase their gambling. Will the minister therefore consider establishing or supporting the establishment of a residential clinic that is specifically for gambling addicts in Scotland?

Maree Todd: I thank Kenneth Gibson for that question. Gambling-related harms are complicated in origin and they affect a range of people, not just those who experience the most significant level of problem gambling, for which residential clinics might be of most use. No single approach will solve the issues that are related to gambling-related harms, so the introduction of a residential clinic cannot be the only approach. As I said in my earlier answer, we are very keen to work with the third sector and those with lived experience to understand the person-centred treatment options for those who experience gambling-related harms and to consider localised approaches.

Bullying in Schools

6. **Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support local authorities in dealing with instances of bullying in schools. (S6O-00721)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): [*Inaudible.*]—whenever it arises. In 2017, we published updated anti-bullying guidance for all adults who work with children and young people. In 2019, we introduced a uniform approach to recording and monitoring incidents of bullying in schools, and we published

guidance on that. In order to support local authorities, schools and all those who work with children and young people to build confidence and capacity to address bullying effectively, we have established and fully funded respectme, Scotland's anti-bullying service.

Fulton MacGregor: In the past few weeks, I have been dealing with four constituent queries relating to significant alleged bullying in schools—three in secondary schools and one in a primary school. In all cases, the child who experienced bullying has moved to another school and is doing well. However, what more can be done to help local authorities to educate those who are involved in bullying-type behaviours and to support victims, so that it is not always the victims who have to move away to escape the abuse?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: This must have been an exceptionally difficult time for Mr MacGregor's constituents, particularly for the young people who were involved in that. As I said in my original answer, our focus is very much on prevention and early intervention, and environments that engage with young people, promote respect, celebrate difference and encourage positive relationships and behaviour are key in supporting our young people.

Schools use a range of strategies to improve relationships and behaviour. Support in those approaches is provided by Education Scotland as well as through the relevant local authority. As I mentioned, the respectme programme provides support to all adults who work with young people to give them the practical skills and confidence to deal with bullying behaviour appropriately.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Would the cabinet secretary consider extending the 2019 recording so that instances of bullying using cyber methods, whether mobile phones or laptops, can be identified and centrally collated?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I would be more than happy to follow that up directly with the member in further detail. We are very aware that, as society changes, our bullying strategies need to be up to date and relevant to the challenges that our young people are facing. I would be happy to meet the member to discuss his particular concerns on the matter and to go into it in further detail.

Department for Work and Pensions (£10 Christmas Payment)

7. Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government for what reason the £10 Christmas payment will continue to be paid by the Department for Work and Pensions to recipients of disability living allowance and personal independence payment once the benefits are fully devolved. (S6O-00722)

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): The reason is that the payment Mr Balfour refers to is a reserved benefit and is not devolved to the Scottish Parliament. The £10 Christmas payment is a United Kingdom Government payment that is paid to people in receipt of various benefits, including disability benefits and low-income benefits such as pension credit.

As Mr Balfour is aware, we have worked with the UK Government to ensure access to passported reserved benefits, such as the Christmas bonus payment as well as other entitlements, for people who are receiving the Scottish Government's child disability payment and adult disability payment.

Jeremy Balfour: The issue is that, from this time on, we are still going to have two lists. Every year, Social Security Scotland is going to have to pass that information on to the DWP. Has the minister had discussions with the DWP about devolving that power to the new agency, in order to save us administration costs?

Ben Macpherson: The Scottish Government engages in regular dialogue with the Department for Work and Pensions with regard to data transfer and the sharing of relevant information across the delivery of our devolved benefits programme.

If Mr Balfour is arguing for more social security powers to come to the Scottish Parliament, I welcome that. We have seen, from the evidence of delivery so far, that both our agency, Social Security Scotland, and the Scottish Government are delivering social security with a human rights-based approach that is based on dignity, fairness and respect. We are delivering well and, with more powers, we could do even more.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): Given that the £10 Christmas payment is a reserved benefit, does the minister agree that Jeremy Balfour might like to join me and others in calling for the full powers over social security to be devolved to this Parliament?

Ben Macpherson: Indeed. As I have already stated, the delivery of devolved social security to date is something that all of this Parliament should be proud of. We set up Social Security Scotland from scratch, and it is developing, growing and strengthening each day. We are about to deliver our 12th benefit, and seven of those 12 benefits are new, including the remarkably important Scottish child payment, which has been strongly welcomed by stakeholders and families.

Importantly, we are making a really meaningful difference for thousands of households by spending an extra £361 million above what is in the fiscal framework and giving extra help. Members should compare that with the DWP's

withdrawal of £20 a week from family budgets and the UK Government's having been found to have wasted £8.3 billion on personal protective equipment contracts and £4.3 billion in fraud write-off.

We are delivering well and proficiently, and with more powers we will be able to make an even bigger difference for thousands of families. I, along with many other people in Scotland, look forward to the days—coming soon—when we will gain and utilise more powers to make an even bigger difference together.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

Covid-19 (Protective Measures in Schools)

1. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands (Con)): The Covid pandemic began more than two years ago. The Scottish Government has had all that time to make our schools fit for use. Why, then, are we in the position, after so much time, that one of the Government's ideas to protect kids and teachers is to chop the bottom off of classroom doors?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, our schools are fit for use, thanks to the dedication of teachers and other school staff. Thanks to the sacrifices of young people and their parents, we have managed to keep our schools open during some of the most challenging phases of the pandemic. That is a credit to everybody in our education system.

The Scottish Government continues to take a range of measures to ensure that children and staff working in schools are as safe as it is possible for them to be. One of those measures is, of course, one that Douglas Ross, against all logic and most expert evidence, opposes. That is asking staff and pupils in our secondary schools to wear face coverings. It is a basic mitigation.

On the issue of ventilation—

Douglas Ross: Chopping the bottom off of doors.

The First Minister: Douglas Ross is shouting, "Chopping the bottom off of doors." [*Interruption.*] In trying to improve ventilation in a room, a number of things need to be done. Partly, it can be about air filtration to purify the air; partly, it is about ventilation and mechanical ventilation systems. [*Interruption.*] However, it is also partly—

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): First Minister, I am sorry. We are just beginning this session and I am very keen that all members can hear the questions and responses. Thank you.

The First Minister: The key point is that it is partly about taking measures to ensure that the natural flow of air in a room is maximised. If doors or windows are not enabling that natural flow of air in the way that is wanted, it strikes me as basic common sense to take measures to rectify that. Therefore, we have given additional money to local authorities to allow them to take whatever steps are needed—air filtration systems, mechanical ventilation or basic rectification of the structure of classrooms—to improve the natural flow of air. That strikes me as basic common sense. If Douglas Ross wants to have serious

discussions about these matters, perhaps he could start by making sure that it is a grown-up discussion.

Douglas Ross: I want to have a serious discussion about the matter. This is a grown-up matter and issue. It was telling that, in a very long answer of several minutes, the First Minister could not bring herself to accept that it is about chopping the bottom off of doors. However she tries to dress it up and say that it is basic common sense, it has been met with derision. It is a serious issue.

There are more consequences, including safety issues. Concerns have been raised about the risk from fire from the plan. This morning, a retired firefighter wrote to us. He said:

“The doors in a school are essential for holding back heat and smoke, should a fire start.”

The First Minister wants a grown-up and serious conversation about the matter, so does she agree with that quote from the retired firefighter and will she stand up and tell us what consultation her Government had with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service about the plans?

The First Minister: This is an absurd line of questioning. First of all, to aid Douglas Ross’s understanding of the situation, I point out that we are not requiring local authorities to chop the bottom off every door in every classroom across the country. I am struggling to believe that I am having to take Douglas Ross through the matter in such a basic manner.

The first point—*[Interruption.]*—is this one. If a door is hung in such a way that it is inhibiting the natural flow of air, one of the options that a local authority should have is to rectify that—*[Interruption.]*—and we are giving them some money to do that.

The Presiding Officer: First Minister, can you pause for a moment? I am finding it difficult to hear the First Minister from here. I would be grateful if members could have a bit of respect when people are asking questions and responding to them.

The First Minister: I am finding it quite difficult to believe the infantile approach of the Scottish Conservatives to such serious issues.

My second point is that health and safety applies to all the decisions that a local authority makes when deciding which measures to take. The Scottish Government is giving local authorities the financial wherewithal to do what they consider necessary to improve air flow and ventilation in schools. Most of the spaces in our education estate will not need any of those measures. Where buying air filtration systems, such as high-efficiency particulate air filters, is appropriate, local authorities will have the ability to do that; where there is a need to deploy mechanical ventilation,

they will do that; and, yes, where there is a need to make some basic structural changes to aid the flow of air, they will do that, too. That is basic common sense, which is perhaps why—I do not know—it is evading Douglas Ross.

Douglas Ross: I do not know why it is evading Nicola Sturgeon to just accept that it is chopping the bottoms off of doors. It may be “basic structural changes” in the language of Nicola Sturgeon and the Scottish National Party, but it is basically chopping the bottoms off of doors.

It is interesting that the First Minister called my questions an infantile approach given that in her answer she could not bring herself to respond to the retired firefighter who is raising concerns and to confirm to Parliament what discussions and consultations she had with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service about the changes that her Government is asking councils across Scotland to make.

The First Minister also said that a range of measures are in place. Some of those are much more appropriate, but they are being delivered far too slowly. She mentioned the HEPA filters, so let us look at those. Bringing in air filters for classrooms is a far more sensible approach, which has been welcomed by every party in the chamber. I again ask the First Minister to answer a basic question. Can she tell us how many of those essential filters her Government has distributed across Scotland and how many are up and running in our classrooms right now?

The First Minister: First, I say to Douglas Ross that I addressed the point about fire safety: all those issues have to be taken into account when local authorities are making decisions on health and safety grounds for schools.

Secondly, is Douglas Ross really saying to me that if, in the judgment of the people who make those health and safety decisions for local authorities about our school estate, the way in which a door is hanging is inhibiting the air flow, he thinks that no rectification should be made to that? That is why I think his approach is utterly infantile.

Finally, on the point about HEPA filters or air cleaning and filtration units, which are temporary solutions—they are not recommended as long-term or permanent solutions for improving ventilation—we are not distributing those to local authorities. We have set up a £5 million ventilation fund so that local authorities can take the remedial measures that they think appropriate for any spaces in the education setting that they think require those.

On the estimate for the number of spaces, the funding that we have made available would enable local authorities to install, if they think it

appropriate, air cleaning and filtration units, small mechanical ventilation units or extractor fan units, or to make some basic structural changes to windows or doors if that is thought appropriate. We have provided £5 million in funding for the spaces that need such rectification, and the estimates suggest that what is required is £4.3 million, so we have built in some contingency. We have provided funding for local authorities, but we are not requiring them to chop anything off of doors; we are enabling local authorities, guided by health and safety considerations, to take the actions that they consider to be necessary.

The only thing that is being chopped off in this session of First Minister questions—it is entirely self-inflicted—is Douglas Ross's own legs at the knees.

Douglas Ross: They are still here, First Minister.

This is First Minister's questions and, just once, it would be nice to get a First Minister's answer. There was still nothing in her reply about the consultation that her Government has had with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. For the third time, First Minister, what discussion has the Government had with the SFRS about the proposals?

The funding has gone to local authorities, but the Scottish Government surely does not just give millions of pounds to local authorities without expecting to know how many air filters are being distributed. I would like an answer to that. The First Minister must know how many there are and how many are in place right now.

I thought that, throughout the pandemic, there was consensus across the Parliament and Scotland that young people's education should be the priority. However, schools seem to have fallen down the priority list for the First Minister's Government. Kids still have to wear face masks in the classroom when the requirement has been lifted elsewhere. This week, the Educational Institute of Scotland union described the extra funding for ventilation as "long overdue". On Sunday, a spokeswoman for the Scottish teachers for positive change and wellbeing group said:

"We've had summer 2020, we've had summer 2021, we've had two winters and two periods of long lockdown where all these things could have been put in place".

They are right, aren't they? Will the Government pick up the pace and guarantee that all the serious ventilation measures—not chopping the bottom off of doors—will be in place by the time that schools go back after the February break?

The First Minister: It is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that they have taken appropriate actions on ventilation in schools. We are providing them with the money to do that.

On the question about consultation with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, we are providing local authorities with the money and it is their responsibility to assess the spaces in schools. Local authorities are responsible for that, and we are often challenged in the chamber to respect the powers of local authorities. They have the ability and responsibility to do that, and the expectation is on local authorities to have appropriate consultations with the SFRS, if necessary, before making any changes. That is how these things work and it is how they will be done, rightly and properly.

Douglas Ross wants to pick and choose the mitigations that he thinks are appropriate. Today, he is talking about ventilation. He is absolutely entitled to ask the questions—if I was in his shoes, I might try to ask better questions, but that is just a matter of opinion. However, when the majority of expert opinion says that, in order to help us to keep schools safely open—as we have managed to do for most of the pandemic—it is appropriate to ask staff and secondary school pupils to wear face coverings, he opposes that for political opportunistic reasons.

Let us continue, as this Government is doing, to take the balanced approach to keeping our schools safely open. That is the responsible approach that this Government has been taking, and in that approach, according to all evidence, we are backed by the majority of people in Scotland. We will leave the political opportunism and, frankly, infantile approaches to Douglas Ross and the Conservatives.

Energy Price Increase

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): Today, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets announced an inflation-busting energy price increase that will cause pain and distress to hundreds of thousands of people across our country. Across Scotland, people will be wondering where they will, just months after bills rose by £139, find the extra £693 to keep the heating and lights on.

At the same time, Shell has announced profits of more than \$19 billion, which equates to more than £27,000 profit every minute. That is why Labour proposed a windfall tax on the profits of energy companies to help to pay for measures that would save most households £200 and the most vulnerable households £600. It is reasonable for those who are profiting from the crisis to help to cover the costs of the families who are struggling most. Why did Scottish National Party MPs fail to vote for those measures in the House of Commons on Tuesday?

The First Minister: I will come to the specific issue of a levy on oil and gas in a second. First, I recognise the point that today's Ofgem decision on

the energy price cap means that the increase in energy costs will be just under £700. The Chancellor of the Exchequer was still on his feet when I came into the chamber, so I have not heard all the detail of what he said, but he has just announced what sounded like welcome steps to help to mitigate the increase. However, in my view, those steps do not go far enough. They seem to offer about £350 of help against energy bill increases of around £700.

I also do not yet know what the position on consequentials will be, but I give the commitment, assuming that there are the consequentials that I expect, that every single penny will go towards helping people in Scotland to deal with the cost of living crisis.

There is one issue that we will have to deal with in Scotland, because part of the chancellor's announcement today was about council tax rebates. Of course, average council tax bills in Scotland are already significantly lower than they are in England. In band C council tax, people pay on average £525 less in Scotland than they would pay in England.

Another difference is that, because of decisions that were made by the SNP Government, approximately 400,000 people in Scotland do not pay any council tax because we have, unlike the situation in England, a council tax reduction scheme that can deliver up to 100 per cent relief. We will have to consider how to help people who also have rising energy bills; we are determined that that help will be delivered.

On the oil and gas levy, the SNP believes in fair and progressive taxation. Those who have the broadest shoulders should pay the most, which certainly includes companies, including oil and gas companies, that have rising profits. During the pandemic other companies fell into that category; Amazon's profits are rising and supermarkets have had rising profits. We need to make sure that we take a fair approach.

The Scottish Government does not have the power to do that; it is a decision for the UK Government. My only caveat is that we need to ensure that the burden of rightly providing households the length and breadth of the UK with as much help as possible does not fall only on people, jobs and investment in the north-east of Scotland, at a time when we are trying to make the transition from oil and gas to renewable energy in order to meet our net zero targets.

For decades now, Westminster Governments have seen the north-east of Scotland as a cash cow, so let us make sure that, however the UK Government chooses to fund it, the help that I agree with Anas Sarwar must be provided is provided fairly, so that all the companies that have

the broadest shoulders get the chance to contribute to it.

Anas Sarwar: A one-off windfall tax on one company in one year that has made \$19 billion profit, which equates to £27,000 a minute, will not mean that the company will disappear. It is not going anywhere. It is also difficult to suggest that because a windfall tax would benefit people in Doncaster, we should not be acting to help people in Dundee. That just does not sound credible.

We know that more than 200,000 pensioners already live in fuel poverty. That number will only increase because of the crisis. Back in September, we warned that Scotland was facing a cost of living crisis, and we outlined proposals for an increase to the winter fuel payment. The winter fuel payment is devolved to the Scottish Government, but rather than act, it handed it back to the Tory-run Department for Work and Pensions. In contrast, the Labour-run Welsh Government did act, by setting up funding to provide £100 to help families who are struggling with energy bills. It is now doubling that payment to £200. Will the First Minister now back our proposals and increase the winter fuel payment?

The First Minister: I will come on to what the Scottish Government can do, is doing, and will do, in a moment.

On the question about a levy, Anas Sarwar has asked me about something that I have no power to do, but I have no ideological objection to companies whose profits are rising—whether because of the global increase in gas prices or the effects of the pandemic—being asked to contribute. That includes oil and gas companies. I am simply saying that, if the UK Government is going to do that, it should do it fairly so that all companies that can make a contribution do so, and so that we do not just have another Westminster Government seeking to use only the north-east of Scotland and its people, jobs and investment for benefit. That, rightly, should be shared across the UK. If that is what the UK Government decides to do, I am certainly open to having companies that can do so making that contribution.

On what the Scottish Government can do, let me talk about what we are already doing. As I said earlier, council tax bills in Scotland are already significantly lower: band C council tax is, on average, £525 lower than it is in England, and is £376 lower on average than it is in Wales. We have a council tax reduction scheme that gives 100 per cent relief to approximately 400,000 people in Scotland. That is not available in most parts of England.

On payments during the pandemic, towards the end of last year approximately 500,000

households got a £130 support payment because of the pandemic. More recently, of course—which is more relevant to the issue we are talking about now—we have established the £41 million winter support fund, which is helping people to heat their homes—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister: The fund is helping with rising food costs and will allow support to be given to those who most need it. We will continue to do everything that we can do, including passing on any and all consequential that come from the chancellor's announcements today.

Anas Sarwar: The First Minister is missing the point. Things are getting worse right now and pressure is being put on people's bills right now. Labour's proposal predated the cost of living crisis. The First Minister says that we should look at such a tax across the board. On Tuesday, when the proposal was considered, Scottish National Party members of Parliament failed to vote for a tax on companies that are making profits of, for example, \$19 billion in one year.

The Scottish Government would rather play politics with the cost of living crisis than take action using the powers that it has. It is a Government that is lacking ambition and which is failing to use the Scottish Parliament. It is a Government that stands with energy companies that make £27,000 a minute, not with people who are struggling to pay their bills. It has refused to use the powers of the Parliament to top up winter fuel payments, it has refused to back Labour's proposal for a windfall tax on energy companies, and it has refused to stop rises in rail fares and water charges. The SNP is siding with the Tories and big energy companies, while Labour is on the side of hard-pressed Scots.

People are struggling right now. When will the First Minister stop commenting on the cost of living crisis and start doing something about it?

The First Minister: I know that his script was written before I gave my answers, but Anas Sarwar could still have listened to my answers. I am not opposed to oil and gas companies making a contribution when their profits are rising. I am saying simply that whatever approach is taken should be fair and equitable. That is the point that I am making. I also make the basic point that I do not have power over that. If Anas Sarwar wants to join me in demanding that the powers in question come to the Scottish Parliament, we might make some progress.

On what the Scottish Government can do, I am telling Anas Sarwar things that I am sure he knows; I certainly hope that he knows them. We have acted ahead of other Governments to deal with the cost of living crisis and, in particular, the

energy cost crisis. As I mentioned, we have recently established the winter support fund. Of that £41 million, £10 million will be available to help people who are struggling to pay fuel bills. That will include provision of top-up vouchers and better support for people in remote and rural areas. Third sector partners will receive £6 million so that they can give direct support to low-income families, and £25 million of flexible funding will be available to local authorities to help them to support people who are in financial insecurity.

We have already acted ahead of other Governments. If consequential come to us as a result of the chancellor's announcements today, we will take further action. We will continue to look across our budgets to make sure that we are maximising the support that we give.

Scottish Water will announce its decision on increases shortly. Affordability for customers will be at the heart of that. Average water charges are lower in Scotland than they are in other parts of the UK. Similarly, rail charges are lower in Scotland than they are in other parts of the UK.

We will continue to take the decisions that are necessary to support hard-pressed people. We do far more of that than any other Government across these islands.

The Presiding Officer: I will now take supplementary questions.

Heat and Smoke Alarms (Financial Support)

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I would like to raise the issue of financial help for people who qualify, through Care and Repair Scotland, for help in installing heat and smoke alarms. In part of Midlothian, in my constituency, there is no Care and Repair service. The council says that it has nothing to do with it and has directed me, on behalf of constituents, to approach Care and Repair Scotland. Not surprisingly, Care and Repair Scotland's phone line is constantly engaged and emails go unanswered. What can my constituents do?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We have already provided additional funding. We are also in discussion with Care and Repair about what further support can be provided. I take Christine Grahame's point about people—including people in her constituency—who do not have access to that service. I will ensure that the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government takes that into account and provides an update to Christine Grahame as soon as possible.

North-east Scotland (Oil and Gas Industry)

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): More than six weeks ago, an open letter that was signed by more than 50 north-east councillors and business leaders, which decried the potentially devastating impact of recent statements on oil and gas and north-east jobs, was sent to both of Scotland's Governments. Within four days, a detailed response that backed the industry was received from a United Kingdom Government minister of state. The Scottish Government has not responded. When will the Scottish Government respond, or is the lack of a response further evidence of how far the north-east has fallen from its concern?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I think that everybody in the north-east would have preferred it if, rather than writing a letter, the UK Government had reversed its decision on carbon capture and storage and made the investment in Aberdeen and the north-east that people there want, which would support jobs and aid our transition to net zero. Perhaps a bit less letter writing from the UK Government and a bit more action and investment would go a long way.

Mental Health Support

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Today is time to talk day, which is the nation's biggest mental health conversation. It is supported in Scotland by See Me and the Co-op and is promoted by trade unions such as the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. Will the First Minister join me in congratulating all the groups organising time to talk events today? Does she agree that having families, friends and communities coming together to talk about mental health is vital to supporting people? Further to that, what action is her Government taking in response to the growing mental health crisis in Scotland, which sees more than one in five adults waiting in excess of 18 weeks for support?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, I take the opportunity to thank everyone involved with the time to talk campaign and encourage people across the country to engage with it: to talk to others if they are struggling a bit with their own mental health and to look out for people in their lives who may be struggling and to offer help to them. It is a really important campaign and initiative.

The Government is investing heavily in mental health services and we must continue to do that. Rising demand was obviously putting pressure on services before the pandemic, and that is even more the case now. We are increasing investment. We are also seeking to reform how services are delivered, not least for children and adolescents. We will continue that work.

Increasingly, we have to look at different and more innovative ways of providing mental health support. Yesterday, I had the privilege of visiting Scottish Opera in Glasgow, to welcome the opening up of the culture and entertainment sector. I heard a lot about the work that it is doing with people who have been struggling—for example people with long Covid—and how they are using the power of song, music and culture to aid people. There are lots of organisations and people out there, as well as the Government investment in national health service services, that we can harness to ensure that we, as a society, emerge from the pandemic recognising the trauma and mental health impact that it has had and acting in an overall way to deal with that. The Government takes that responsibility extremely seriously.

The Presiding Officer: I will move to question 3 and will come back to supplementary questions if time allows.

Deposit Return Scheme

3. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to recent reported criticism of its plans for its deposit return scheme. (S6F-00776)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Our deposit return scheme, which is the first in the United Kingdom, will increase recycling, cut litter by a third and help to meet Scotland's climate targets. Among the most environmentally ambitious and accessible schemes anywhere in Europe, it will include online deliveries and tens of thousands of return points for plastic, metal and glass containers.

It is disappointing that, due to the impact of Covid and Brexit on businesses and of the United Kingdom Government's decision to charge VAT on deposits, delivery this year it is not possible. I have full confidence in the steps that industry is taking to deliver DRS, including work that is being done through Circularity Scotland. I look forward to seeing significant progress in the course of this year, including signed contracts to deliver infrastructure and logistics work beginning on counting centres.

Brian Whittle: Repeated delays, the use of a private company to avoid scrutiny and accountability, and a staggering lack of detail about how the scheme will work in practice have left the public baffled and businesses worried.

A recent Welsh Government pilot of a digital scheme allowing home owners to participate in a DRS by using kerbside collection and avoiding the need for bottles to be transported to reverse vending machines has yielded some interesting

results, yet the Scottish Government scheme has no facility for that. Meanwhile, the Scottish Government minister for the circular economy has spent more time announcing delays than she has addressing public concerns.

From the outset, the Scottish Government has seemed more interested in headlines and crowing about beating the rest of the United Kingdom to a DRS than in setting out the details of how its system will work.

Will the First Minister now accept that a practical and effective UK-wide system that takes a little longer to arrive would be a better option than the rushed and ill-thought-out mess that she and her Green Party partners are presiding over?

The First Minister: I am not sure that waiting for this shambles of a UK Government to get its act together on anything would be a wise decision for the Scottish Government to take right now.

I am interested in Brian Whittle's criticism of what he described as "repeated delays". The reason that I am interested is because that strikes me as utter hypocrisy. Here is what his colleague, Annie Wells, a Scottish Conservative MSP said in response to a previous announcement:

"Scottish Conservatives support the delay of implementation to July 2022 in light of the Covid-19 outbreak, but we do not think that that goes far enough."—*[Official Report, 13 May 2020; c 93.]*

She argued for the scheme to be delayed even further. It strikes me as a bit of a change of position, and yet another example of the utter opportunism and lack of any consistency or any principle at the heart of the Scottish Conservative party.

We are taking forward a scheme that will be the most environmentally ambitious and the most accessible scheme anywhere in Europe. We are working on the detail of delivery of that right now. Over the course of this year, we are going to see significant progress. We are going to see the contract signed and the infrastructure start to take shape. We will then have the first scheme in the UK and, I suspect, even if they are out of their current shambles, the UK Government might still only be thinking about it.

Independence Referendum

4. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether she will provide an update on the Scottish Government's plans to hold an independence referendum. (S6F-00773)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We intend to, firstly. The people of Scotland, of course, elected this Government last May. Their democratic decision was to elect a Parliament with

the biggest-ever majority of MSPs in favour of an independence referendum. In line with the clear mandate that was given by people in that election, preparatory work is under way so that a referendum can be held, as I have said, as the Covid crisis passes, and Covid permitting, within the first half of this parliamentary term. The people of Scotland will then have the choice to take our future into our own hands instead of being at the mercy of a disreputable, discredited United Kingdom Government.

Stuart McMillan: I thank the First Minister for that reply. She will be aware that, since the referendum in 2014, a number of promises that were made by the no campaign, including Mr Sarwar's party, have been broken, including those on Scotland remaining in the European Union and on protecting lower costs of food and energy.

This week, Sue Gray's report said that the parties that the Prime Minister and his colleagues put on were "difficult to justify" and that there were "failures of leadership and judgment"

from within number 10 and the Cabinet Office. That is before the Metropolitan Police judges whether there was any criminality involved.

Does the First Minister agree that, as the SNP and Scottish Green Party manifestos offered, it is time to deliver on what the people voted for, have a referendum, win that referendum and then deliver our independence from a wretched and, certainly seemingly, corrupt Westminster?

The First Minister: It is correct to say—I think that I can say this without fear of contradiction—that virtually every promise that was made by the no campaign in 2014 has since been broken. The crowning one of all of those, of course, was the fact that, according to them, the only way to protect Scotland's membership of the European Union was to vote no to independence, and here we are, ripped out of the EU against our will. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Colleagues, can we please have a bit of quiet so that we can hear the First Minister?

The First Minister: There is a key point here, Presiding Officer, because independence is about aspiration; it is about empowerment; it is about taking our destiny into our own hands so that we can build a better future. I think that it is because they fear the power of that positive argument that the Tories, Labour and the Liberal Democrats want to deny Scotland the choice.

Of course, what is the alternative right now? To be governed—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister is responding to the question. No one else in the

chamber is responding to the question at this moment, and I am sure that we would all like to hear the answer. Thank you.

The First Minister: Any political party in this chamber that was confident in its arguments around independence would not be desperate to deny the people of Scotland the right to make that choice. The alternative to independence is to continue to be governed by parties at Westminster that we do not vote for, and, right now, that is by a disreputable, discredited Government and a Prime Minister with, frankly, no integrity, no shame and no moral compass; a Prime Minister who even Douglas Ross does not think is fit for office. Scotland can do better than that, and with independence we will do better than that.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Is it really now the SNP position that pensions in an independent Scotland would be paid by taxpayers in England?

The First Minister: I think that the member should pay more attention to the UK Government's position on this. He might find that it gives him a bit of a shock. Let me set out the position—*[Interruption.]*

The Tories are really, really nervous about this argument. You can feel the discomfort coming from them because they know that, when the people of Scotland get the chance to escape Westminster Governments and take our future into our own hands, they are going to say yes to independence.

When Scotland votes for independence, as was the case in 2014, the distribution of existing UK liabilities and assets, including those related to pensions, will be subject to negotiation, and Scotland will fully pay its way in that. However, the key point for those who are in receipt of pensions is what the UK Government minister for pensions at the time, Steve Webb, confirmed: that people with accumulated rights would continue to receive the current levels of state pension in an independent Scotland. People will notice no difference—or perhaps the difference that they might notice is that an independent Scotland might be able to improve the level of pensions, rather than having, as the UK has, one of the lowest pension levels in the whole of the developed world.

Ferry Services (Public Ownership)

5. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will give a commitment to keep ferry services in public ownership. (S6F-00752)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will be very clear in that commitment: we have no plans whatsoever to privatise public service ferries and,

contrary to concerns that have been expressed in recent press reports, we have no plans whatsoever to split up the CalMac Ferries network. Those ferry services are delivered through public contracts, in line with relevant procurement requirements and guidance. That ensures control over service levels, timetables and fares. The contracts are operated by CalMac and Serco NorthLink Ferries.

The report that gave rise to those concerns has yet to be received by ministers. Once we have it, we will study it with interest but, by definition, it represents the views of the authors and not those of ministers.

Katy Clark: I am pleased that the First Minister seems to have ruled out privatisation. Will she commit to publishing the report once she has it? Will she rule out any part of the current CalMac contract being awarded as a private contract as well as the full privatisation of CalMac? Does she accept that the current ferries crisis is the result of a failure to invest in new fleet since 2007? Over the past five years, more than 1,000 ferry sailings have been delayed due to mechanical issues. Will she commit to a long-term ferry plan for investing in new fleet, as part of an industrial strategy to build in Scotland?

The First Minister: Over the years that we have been in government, we have invested more than £2 billion in the Clyde and Hebrides ferry service, the northern isles ferry service and ferry infrastructure. We have also announced an investment of £580 million in ports and vessels to improve ferry services over the next five years, as part of the wider infrastructure investment plan.

However, to come back to the thrust of the question, I did not seem to rule out privatisation—I ruled it out. I will say it again: we have no plans whatsoever for that—we will not privatise our public service ferries and, equally, we have no plans to split up the CalMac network. That is the Scottish Government's position, and we will continue to invest in our ferry network to give people on our islands the service that they have every right to expect.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): As the First Minister has just said, the Scottish Government has committed £580 million to fund new ferries and port investments over the next five years. The soon-to-be-deployed MV Loch Frisa is the most recent example of the Scottish Government's strong commitment to our islands. Given the fragile nature of many island communities and their dependence on ferries, does the First Minister share my view that Labour's scaremongering on the future of ferry services is extremely unhelpful at a time when the Scottish Government is taking positive steps to

combat the trend of depopulation in many Scottish islands?

The First Minister: I absolutely agree with Jenni Minto that it is unhelpful for anybody to erroneously speculate about the future of our ferry services. That does a disservice not only to island communities but to the crews and staff at CalMac, who have strived to deliver lifeline services throughout the pandemic in challenging circumstances. I take the opportunity to thank them for all their efforts.

As I said in my previous answer, we fully recognise the need to invest properly to support the lifeline ferry network, and that is underlined by the commitment, to which I have already referred, of £580 million as part of the infrastructure investment plan. As has just been noted, that includes the purchase of the MV Loch Frisa. It will also support two new vessels for Islay, infrastructure on the Skye triangle and many other important projects.

Air Pollution

6. Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister how the Scottish Government is working with local authorities to reduce air pollution. (S6F-00755)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Our new air quality strategy, which was published last year, sets out a series of actions to reduce air pollution over the next five years. We work closely with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and with local authorities on the delivery of those actions and provide £2 million per year in direct support.

We are also introducing low-emission zones in Scotland's four largest cities, supported by £3.8 million of direct funding. An additional £9.9 million is available in this financial year for businesses, public transport and those in the cities who are affected and are most in need. In addition, we have a £500 million funding commitment to active travel over the next five years and we are committed to reducing motor vehicle kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030.

Ross Greer: The First Minister will be aware of the recent Friends of the Earth Scotland report showing how far we have to go to protect public health from air pollution. East Dunbartonshire Council in my region actually intends to remove the air quality management area covering Drymen Road in Bearsden, which includes Bearsden primary school. That is on the basis of disputable conclusions about air quality improving in recent years—that is, during periods of lockdown.

Scottish air pollution limits are based on guidance published by the World Health Organization in 2005, but updated WHO guidance published last year explained why limits have to be

far, far lower to protect people from harm. Even now, Bearsden's air quality management area is recording air pollution at three times the WHO's new recommended limit.

Will the Scottish Government delay consenting to the removal of any air quality management areas while it considers whether to adapt air pollution limits to better reflect the WHO's expert advice?

The First Minister: Before I come on to the particular, important, local issue, let me deal again with the general point. The number of monitoring sites exceeding air quality objectives in Scotland is reducing. Targets are being met across the vast majority of Scotland, although there are some pollution hotspots in some of our cities and town centres, and we work closely with local authorities and other partners to address them as quickly as possible. Of course, the commitment to low-emission zones in the four largest cities is an important part of that.

The Scottish Government will await East Dunbartonshire Council's formal application to revoke the Bearsden air quality management area, should that be forthcoming, before making any final decision. I can assure Ross Greer that any decision that falls to us to take will be very carefully considered, and all the relevant data and advice will be taken into account. Of course, should revocation take place—I emphasise the word "should"; that is hypothetical—we would expect the council to continue air quality monitoring in the area and to continue implementing the measures set out in the Bearsden air quality action plan.

Gambling (Women)

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): A recent report identified that thousands of women in Scotland could be at risk of gambling harm. That has been exacerbated during the pandemic. Gambling can have a serious detrimental effect on families, and on individuals psychologically and physically. What can the Scottish Government do to support those women and end the stigma attached to gambling, which can prevent them from seeking the urgent support that they require?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): This is an important issue. In the past, there have been complications around the devolved/reserved split of responsibilities on gambling. Nevertheless, the Scottish Government will consider any action that we can reasonably take, and we will consider the report very carefully.

Gambling can be a very damaging addiction and I note the findings about women in particular being affected by it. We will consider the report carefully

and consider what further actions we can take, and once we have had the opportunity to do that, I will ask the relevant minister to update the member accordingly.

Transvaginal Mesh

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Despite the pain and suffering that we know has been felt by many who have had surgical transvaginal mesh implants, on 25 January, the Scottish Government signed a deal with mesh providers to provide more mesh surgery for the next 24 months, at a cost of £3.5 million. Given that we know the extent of post-operative problems with mesh, is the First Minister aware of whether any alternatives, such as natural tissue repair, are offered? Given the experiences of mesh campaigners, will she commit to an independent review of all mesh use in Scotland, so that we can better understand the scale of what seems to be an increasing problem?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): This is a really important issue and one that the Government has been working hard on, in a range of different ways, with, of course, the contribution of MSPs from parties across this chamber, to try to deal with mesh's impact on women. If Carol Mochan will allow me, I will study the detail of her question and come back to her in writing, in case I do not deal with all the aspects of it in this answer.

Of course, all surgical transvaginal mesh procedures have been suspended at the moment. The position introduced by Jeane Freeman stands. Recently, this Parliament has legislated to help deal with some of the impact, and we will continue to take all possible steps. Just before the pandemic, I, along with Jeane Freeman and the then chief medical officer, Catherine Calderwood, met two groups of women, for lengthy periods, to hear directly from them. This Government is determined to take the action necessary to alleviate that impact and learn lessons as we go forward.

Long Covid (Support)

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Today, the Office for National Statistics confirmed that 100,000 Scots are living with long Covid. However, an answer to a parliamentary question that I received last week said—astonishingly—that fewer than 1 per cent of those people have been referred to Scotland's long Covid support service, which is the principal Government-funded service for long Covid sufferers. I know that Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland, which delivers that service, is desperate to help more sufferers, but the Government has yet to instruct the care pathways that will see

people referred to it. Will the First Minister intervene and sort that out?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): There is no need to intervene, because that work is being taken forward. People with long Covid will be receiving support at different levels and in different parts of the national health service—for example, many people will be receiving support from their general practitioner. It is right that support is provided on a holistic basis.

On additional action, the £10 million long Covid support fund is targeted specifically at areas where additional resource is needed and where it can have the biggest impact for people who need additional care and support. The NHS national services division is currently establishing a strategic network to help to identify those areas and to support the delivery of the framework that we outlined in the approach paper that we published recently. We have also launched a long Covid information platform on NHS Inform to help people to manage their symptoms and to help to ensure that people know about the support that is available to them.

We will need to continue to develop that approach for a long time, given the nature of long Covid, and to look at different ways—obviously, first and foremost, within the national health service, but also outwith it—that people with long Covid can be properly supported.

Coastal Communities

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-02692, in the name of Ariane Burgess, on revitalising coastal communities. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises what it sees as the importance of restoring Scotland's coastal environment to tackle the climate and nature emergencies; considers that nature restoration presents economic opportunities for coastal communities; believes that communities must be at the heart of nature restoration and the stewardship of their environment; commends the work of the Coastal Communities Network, which consists of 19 community groups across Scotland, and which, it understands, works to preserve and protect the marine environment and to promote sustainable economic activity, based on this natural asset; celebrates, in particular, the community-led seagrass and oyster bed restoration at Loch Craignish, and recognises the potential for further community-led nature restoration across Scotland's coastlines.

12:48

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): When did members last enjoy a native oyster? Oysters are seen as a luxury, but native oysters were once called "the poor man's food". During the industrial revolution, millions of them were harvested to feed urban populations and Scotland's coast boasted large oyster fisheries. Oyster scalps in the Firth of Forth covered an area larger than Edinburgh. However, overexploitation led to declining stocks and the complete destruction of many oyster beds. Now, no living oysters remain in the Firth of Forth and communities along our coastline have lost a once-plentiful food supply. Those communities have also lost the natural flood defences that oyster beds once provided by protecting shorelines from erosion, tides and storm surges.

That is not the only problem that coastal communities face, of course. For decades, they have struggled as a result of a lack of investment and people leaving to find work. One industry that provides jobs is finfish aquaculture, but it is not without controversy. The sector is dominated by a small number of companies, many of which are based outside Scotland, and which often give jobs to those whom they already employ, rather than creating new jobs for local people. Further, the figures for aquaculture jobs include those that involve dealing with the industry's harmful effects, such as working at the pit in North Uist where huge numbers of dead, diseased salmon are dumped.

Would it not be better if young people in coastal communities had a wider range of jobs available to

them, including jobs that promote wellbeing and nature, if they could work for community-based businesses that shared profits for community benefit and for Scotland's coastal waters to be recognised for their contribution to our environment and biodiversity. We can make that a reality. We can support coastal businesses and activities that promote wellbeing, such as wild swimming, recreational diving and responsible tourism. Domestic tourism to coastal locations generates £391 million for the Scottish economy every year, and nature-based tourism provides 39,000 jobs, but destinations become less attractive if there are large fish farms, if water quality is poor, or marine life less diverse.

It is crucial to invest in nature restoration and research in the inshore environment. Many respected organisations are already doing that, but there is also a rising wave of community-led projects that are producing tangible, positive outcomes. The Seawilding project at Loch Craignish aims to restore 1 million native oysters over the next five years; it has created six jobs and is working with six local primary schools, five universities and around 60 volunteers. There is now high demand for its training, creating the potential to expand the model across coastal and island communities. The South Skye Seas Initiative set up a community seagrass monitoring project to feed data to NatureScot in order to improve local protection measures for priority marine features.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the member join me in congratulating the community in Stranraer, which has successfully held two oyster festivals? In 2019, the festival was visited by 17,000 people. Stranraer, at Loch Ryan, has the very last remaining natural native oyster beds. I declare an interest as the champion for oyster beds and I look forward to the community's festival in 2022.

Ariane Burgess: I absolutely join the member in celebrating the community; it is great to hear about its work.

The Community Association of Lochs and Sounds native oyster project in Lochaline generated strong interest from the community, so CAOLAS worked with the community council to put the marine environment at the heart of Morvern's community action plan.

The Coastal Communities Network consists of 19 wonderful groups, such as those that I have mentioned, that are all striving to improve the health of their coastal environments and open up possibilities for more community-controlled sustainable fishing. I am committed to championing them. Their projects benefit communities by strengthening relationships, providing skills and jobs and protecting homes and

infrastructure. In addition, they benefit nature and help to address climate change by protecting blue carbon that is locked up in our coastal environments. They also benefit the economy—a US study found that each dollar that was invested in a coastal restoration project resulted in a return of more than \$15.

I am proud that Greens are helping to deliver the £55 million nature restoration fund, yet more is needed to build those projects. The small team at Seawilding spends most of its time on fundraising for small pots of money that do not cover the lifetime of its projects. Community groups, community councils and local councillors are sometimes excluded from marine planning groups such as the Clyde Marine Planning Partnership, which can lead to tensions and a disconnect between communities and planners.

Coastal community groups want swifter action from Marine Scotland in designing new marine protected areas where the evidence calls for it, and stronger protection for fisheries management measures for existing MPAs. I look forward to the Government consulting on capping fishing activities in inshore waters. Fishers should be involved in the evidence-gathering process by using remote electronic monitoring on vessels, and we must deliver a just transition by supporting them to move from dredging or trawling to forms of lower-impact fishing. We could start by establishing a knowledge-sharing programme to enable Scottish fishers to learn from their Norwegian counterparts, who have successfully adapted to a new framework for managing coastal waters on an ecosystem basis. That has resulted in vibrant recovered fisheries that provide more jobs than dredging could.

The New Economics Foundation found that allowing United Kingdom fish stocks to return to healthy levels would create an additional £268 million in gross economic benefit and almost 5,000 new jobs. Coastal communities need good jobs but it does not have to be a trade-off: communities, fishers and nature are interdependent.

Local communities are already working in support of nature by restoring and regenerating our coasts and seas, but they need support, so let us invest in, enable and revitalise our coastal communities. If we do so, the positive effects will ripple out.

12:55

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I congratulate Ariane Burgess on securing debating time on this important topic.

Nineteen community groups across Scotland form the Coastal Communities Network Scotland.

Two are located in my constituency. The most recently established one, Fairlie Coastal Trust, has already made valuable contributions to community-based initiatives, including to the Wild Oysters Project, under which 1,300 native oysters were returned to the waters of the Firth of Clyde. Native oysters, the populations of which have declined by 95 per cent due to human activity, help to restore healthy, resilient coastal waters in the Clyde and across Scotland by filtering pollutants from the sea and acting as an important habitat for marine wildlife, as we already heard from Ariane Burgess.

In December 2020, I led my own debate in the chamber inspired by the second coastal community group in my constituency, the Community of Arran Seabed Trust—COAST—and the fantastic work that it did in campaigning for, and supporting the establishment of, Scotland's first no-take zone in Lamlash Bay back in 2008.

The no-take zone has already clearly demonstrated that marine protection has not only ecological but great socioeconomic benefits. The area is now a nursery for juvenile fish, particularly cod, while lobsters and scallops in the zone produce six times more eggs than those outside it, thus allowing stocks of fish and shellfish in the waters around the zone to replenish. That has helped to win support from local fishers, many of whom were initially worried about losing a fishing ground and opposed the setting up of the no-take zone. Arran residents and businesses also deem the research undertaken in Lamlash Bay to be important to the local economy, as it creates and sustains employment in not only fisheries but the ecotourism sector.

The success of the project, following 13 years of campaigning, is well documented. Sea bed habitats have, in half the time anticipated, sprung up again in an area that was previously described as virtually a marine desert. Crucially, carbon-absorbing seaweeds have also returned to the sea bed. That is something on which we must focus in our fight against global warming. Much of the media coverage about the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—concentrated on green carbon stores such as the Amazon or the Congo basin forest when, in fact, oceans act as the greatest buffer for the climate system, storing 93 per cent of Earth's carbon dioxide.

Scotland is a nation almost surrounded by sea and its marine environment stores more carbon than the terrestrial environment. We must now act to protect blue carbon habitats and stores to ensure that they do not become sources of carbon emissions, as Scotland's damaged peatlands have in recent decades. Restoration work to help return peatlands to a healthy condition and prevent

carbon from escaping has been undertaken by the Scottish Government and continues. More must also be done to protect and enhance Scotland's blue carbon stores.

It is welcome that, in last year's shared policy programme, the Scottish Government specifically committed to restoring marine habitats in Scotland's inshore waters in recognition of the fact that those waters contain valuable blue carbon hot spots. In particular, I am delighted that the Scottish Government will add to the existing marine protection area network by designating a suite of highly protected marine areas covering at least 10 per cent of our seas by 2026. My understanding is that the highly protected marine areas will go beyond no-take zones by providing for the strict control or exclusion of all human activities, not just fishing.

The economic opportunities that are associated with restoring coastal environments are particularly vital, considering that Scotland's coastal communities tend to lag behind inland areas and have some of the worst levels of economic and social deprivation in the country. The three towns area in my constituency is no exception to that phenomenon. I am hopeful that the Scottish Government's plans to restore coastal environments will present sustainable economic opportunities to communities in Scotland's seaside towns and dovetail well with marine regeneration work that is to take place in Ardrossan through direct Scottish Government investment and the Ayrshire growth deal.

I again highlight the important work done by the Coastal Communities Network, including Fairlie Coastal Trust and the Community of Arran Seabed Trust. The important role played by Scotland's living coastal and marine habitats and the geological sediments that cover Scotland's sea floor has for too long been underestimated, but I am optimistic that the actions that the Scottish Government is now taking to restore marine habitats in our inshore waters will greatly benefit our climate, as well as the socioeconomic opportunities of coastal communities.

12:59

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Ariane Burgess on bringing the debate to the chamber. As a fellow Highlands and Islands MSP, she will know that our region's relationship with our seas is long, often complex and sometimes difficult. Standing as they do in the way of communication, travel and interaction, our seas have at times been an obstacle to be overcome. However, as Ariane Burgess suggested and highlighted, our coasts have also been a vital source of food, trade, employment and leisure since the earliest times.

Around a fifth of Scotland's population, including me, live within 1km of the coast, which shapes the communities around it. It is because of the significance of our coastline to Scotland as a whole that work to preserve and revitalise coastal communities—with an emphasis on the preservation of our environmental heritage—is so pressing.

The challenge for those coastal communities is to find a balance between the coast as an essential working resource and as a habitat that merits preservation. Our impact must be sustainable because, when we look at climate change and ecological damage, our coasts are on the front line. Even subtle changes in the environment can have a considerable impact on plant and animal life. Coastal erosion can act as a wrecking ball and have an enormous impact on the communities nearby, most notably by increasing flooding and other risks.

Although inaction has its costs, poor-quality management can create enduring problems, too. Local communities are often best placed to find and balance the solutions and priorities that are most necessary to them. Public bodies, whether they are local authorities or national-level groups like NatureScot, are at their best when they work closely with the communities that they serve. Those communities also need to be sustainable. It is by recognising the human element—those who have, for generations, worked the sea—that we find a need to ensure that it can continue to be a valued resource.

Travelling home to Orkney, I pass the now deserted island of Stroma in the Pentland Firth. A hundred years ago, it had nearly 300 inhabitants, but it is now just an island of sheep and abandoned houses—a community lost.

Looking forward, inshore fisheries will remain an important part of our coastal economy, and working with that sector will be a key part of driving change forward.

Decades of oil and gas extraction have brought benefits to a number of coastal communities in my region—particularly Orkney and Shetland—so a credible, fair transition away from oil and gas will be essential. That is well understood by those communities, but it will need the support of Government at all levels.

Above all, our coasts can work for us, and they must play a key role in any sustainable economic transition. Their potential contribution to renewable energy—from offshore wind and marine energy to projects to harness hydrogen power and so much more—will be essential if we are to manage that process of change effectively. Give those communities the tools and they will thrive. All the while, if managed appropriately, the sea will

remain the world's biggest carbon capture and storage facility.

I appreciate that there has been a renewed interest in our coasts. The motion commends the work of the Coastal Communities Network, an organisation that is composed of community groups that are heavily concentrated in our region. The individual and collective work of those bodies has been impressive.

I am sure that the minister will have something to say about the Scottish Government's efforts through mechanisms such as the nature restoration fund. I was also pleased to hear Scotland Office minister, Iain Stewart, speak yesterday about the role of coastal communities in the UK Government's levelling-up agenda, including support for sustaining and repurposing ports and harbours, and additional backing to improve the long-term prospects of our fishing industry.

Working sustainably with our seas is deeply embedded in the traditions of my region. Today, we recognise communities that are taking up that mantle.

Our coast is a great asset for us and, on a note of optimism, much of it is in good condition and materially better off than a generation ago. However, more can be achieved and new challenges are on the horizon. Change must happen, and Government and communities must play an active and collaborative role in that process.

13:04

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Ariane Burgess for bringing the debate to the chamber.

Across the UK, we are deeply fortunate to live on a spectacular and unique island furnished with an incredible coastline that, for centuries, has provided us with food, employment and leisure. The environmental wealth that is present across Scotland's coast is abundant and, without it, our entire culture would be altogether different. I am immensely thankful for that and, from speaking to my constituents, I know that it is perhaps the thing that they love most about the South Scotland region.

However, in order to maintain that environmental wealth, we have to begin to see the coast as a delicate ecosystem with varied needs and challenges, from erosion to the loss of seagrass. We need a thriving coastline to preserve not just the local environment, but the environment of our whole country. That is a weighty responsibility, and I am sure that all of us in the chamber take it very seriously.

Whether it is the work that is mentioned in the motion or the efforts to reintroduce oysters to the Firth of Clyde in my region, every step requires diligent planning and the encouraging of new generations to understand that the coast is a natural resource that we must protect. Part of doing that requires making our coastal communities economically prosperous. That will serve as a strong foundation from which further environmental work can be done. The decline in fishing in so many of Scotland's coastal communities has broken our economic link with the shore and, with that, poverty has followed.

South Scotland is home to some of our country's most beautiful and vibrant coastal communities—communities that for many decades were holiday resorts and getaways for families from across Scotland. The way that people travel and take holidays might have changed over time, but for many of those brilliant towns and villages, income from tourism is vital to their continued prosperity. That tourism must be encouraged and incentivised in a sustainable way, and I hope that one of the few advantages of Covid has been that the public has been shown just how wonderful a time they can have at home, on the cliffs and beaches of my region and many others across Scotland.

With that tourism, however, comes increased pollution and, in particular, littering. The South Ayrshire clean-up campaign picked up one million pieces of litter last year alone, with a great deal of it being found in coastal towns, including Ayr, Prestwick and Troon. Much of that litter ends up on beaches and, inevitably, in the sea, where it continues the cycle and is often deposited elsewhere. That is on top of the sewage that is pumped into the sea, creating further ecological problems for wildlife that is often already struggling. Birds and marine life in particular are adversely affected by such build-up and, over time, it leads to loss of habitat, food sources and, inevitably, life.

As Ariane Burgess's motion details, a key facet of solving the problem is to provide volunteers and organisations with the means to set up community-led nature restoration projects that are both economically viable and environmentally sustainable. Only when that happens will we be able to much more directly tackle pollution and environmental decline. That cannot be entirely top-down, but the private companies that create so much pollution must be held financially responsible. Without that financial support, it is left to well-meaning groups that are reliant on very limited fundraising and the good will of volunteers. The Government and big business must do more.

Our coastline is one of Scotland's greatest natural assets. It is home to all manner of flora and

fauna, and for many people it is also the place that they are from and where they have raised their families. During this parliamentary session, I would like to see a much greater emphasis placed on the key role that such areas play in our nation and, as such, I reiterate my gratitude to Ariane Burgess for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

13:08

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I, too, congratulate Ariane Burgess on securing a debate on the importance of Scotland's coastal environment. The diversity of the contributions today emphasises that importance.

The local authority area of Argyll and Bute has a coastline longer than that of France, and almost 80 per cent of its population live within 1km of the coast. The natural asset that is the sea is integral to how communities the length and breadth of Argyll and Bute live, work and play.

In his 1703 journal, "A description of the western islands of Scotland", Martin Martin told of the Leòdhasach water spirit Seonaidh. Each year, one of the community would wade into the sea carrying a cup full of ale and would cry:

"Seonaidh, I give thee this cup of ale, hoping that thou wilt be so good as to send us plenty of seaware for enriching our ground during the coming year".

"Seaware" was seaweed, an organic and sustainable fertiliser.

Now, 320 years later, we face the challenge of sustainably supporting our coastal communities and ensuring that we are

"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs",

as the United Nations definition of sustainability states.

As I researched for this speech and spoke to people in Argyll and Bute, one consistent piece of advice kept coming up—"Look to Norway." Our two countries have many similarities, but the one that struck me as relevant to this debate is that both Scotland and Norway have extensive ocean areas—in both cases, six times greater than our land mass.

The Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment says:

"The seabed and water are biological treasure troves that we will both protect and harvest in a sustainable manner".

Norway effectively manages its marine areas while also ensuring that the environment is looked after. That is based on knowledge. Researchers across different disciplines are involved in preparing a scientific basis for the management plans. We are

doing that in Scotland, but we should be mainstreaming it.

Here are a couple of examples of how Argyll and Bute is contributing to that work. The Scottish Association for Marine Science has been working for healthy oceans since 1884. It studies the processes that drive the marine system, to understand how our coastal environment responds to ever-increasing man-made pressures. When I visited SAMS in November last year, it was about to launch a robotic device to measure the ocean's temperature from Scotland to Iceland. Knowledge like that can help to develop a sustainable blue economy for the benefit of people without degrading the sea's health and productivity.

SAMS also works with community groups such as South West Mull and Iona Development and, together, they have created a 6-hectare sugar kelp farm at Aird Fada. Seaweed farming is a growing global industry and seaweed is in high demand for a multitude of uses from culinary to agricultural and bio-plastics to cosmetics.

As mentioned in the motion, Seawilding on Loch Craignish is working with all stakeholders to improve the health of the loch, to increase biodiversity and generate green jobs, and to aid community welfare and wellbeing. People who have lived and worked by the sea for generations need to be listened to. Communities must be at the heart of nature restoration and the stewardship of their environment.

At this point, I want to mention the Clyde cod box. On the one hand, I represent the fishers whose livelihoods were being negatively impacted; on the other hand, I recognise that we have a duty to ensure that our seas are sustainable. It is a complex issue that needs balance and needs fishers, environmentalists and scientists to work together.

I am pleased that the Scottish Government has listened and acted on the concerns that were raised, and that a revised Scottish statutory instrument has been laid before Parliament. I, of course, made representations on behalf of my constituents and their interests. A proportionate way forward has been found. I recognise that not everyone is 100 per cent happy with the decision, but I am pleased that the Scottish Government has agreed to continue to work closely with local stakeholders to ensure that the policy meets its intent.

We should be looking to the strengths of coastal communities to help to solve the problems, rather than trying to solve them centrally. As Seawilding says, the sea belongs to all of us.

13:12

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Ariane Burgess for lodging her motion and providing this welcome opportunity to discuss the challenges and the opportunities that there are for our coastal communities.

I have the privilege of representing the south of Scotland and its many stunning coastal towns and villages including Loch Ryan. As we have heard, Loch Ryan is home to Scotland's only remaining natural oyster beds. I make no apology for giving yet another plug to the annual Stranraer oyster festival. Sadly, it has been missing for the past three years, but I hope that it will return in 2022.

Many of our coastal communities are under threat from the climate and nature emergencies that we face. The recent storms hit many of those communities hard and exposed their fragility. The research from the Government's dynamic coast project was stark. Rising sea levels and coastal erosion will put £1.2 billion-worth of Scotland's infrastructure at risk by 2050. At least £20 billion-worth of assets—road, rail and residential properties—lie within 50m of our coast. Crucially, nature protects some £14.5 billion-worth of those assets, with the research highlighting that natural defences such as sand dunes protect three times the value of roads, railways and buildings that sea walls protect. Investment in that nature-based solution is therefore essential.

We should not fall into the trap of not recognising that supporting and investing in other forms of coastal defences is hugely important to those communities. I have seen the work of organisations such as the Carsethorn Community Development Group on the Solway coast, which carried out a remarkable rescue job to give residents peace of mind by building new rock sea defences after years of storm damage had eroded the coastline and put homes at risk.

As the motion highlights, it is often the communities themselves that are at the heart of the work to protect coastal towns and villages, whether through natural defences or otherwise. I add my thanks for the work of the Coastal Communities Network and its 19 community groups across Scotland, including the Berwickshire Marine Reserve in the South Scotland region. That community-led voluntary organisation has taken part in collaborative research projects with the Blue Marine Foundation and has developed a virtual visitor centre to encourage sustainability, engagement and inclusivity.

The Berwickshire Marine Reserve sits in a protected area, which means that fishers cannot use towed gear, trawls, dredgers or nets to catch fish, ensuring that there is minimum damage to

other marine life. The group works closely with local fishers to promote sustainability and responsible fishing. It is an example of how community-led conservation can help to protect local biodiversity, while working alongside the promotion of a commercial, sustainable fishing industry that has played such an important role in shaping the community over the decades.

We need to do an awful lot more to promote sustainable fishing. It is an area on which the recent SNP-Green coalition agreement does not go far enough. The agreement does not say anything about ending overfishing or incentivising sustainable fishing. It says nothing about the wasteful practice of discarding. Overfishing and discarding have both resulted in declining fish populations and fishing jobs, and they are at odds with the rising demand for sustainable sea food. There is also no mention of reforming quota so that marine and fish resources are no longer in the hands of a few individuals and companies but are instead reformed and given to those who can best deliver the environmental, economic and social outcomes that we want to see.

The Scottish Government did not take up the opportunity to deliver a Scottish fisheries act, which would have allowed Scotland more control over the framework for negotiations, and has instead opted to rely on the UK Fisheries Act 2020. Even so, the decisions on fisheries management in Scotland still rest with the Scottish ministers. It is the Scottish Government's responsibility to provide the foundations that are needed for the fishing industry to operate sustainably and in a way that meets its fullest potential. Achieving that is a crucial part of protecting and preserving our precious marine environment and promoting the sustainable economic future that we all want for our coastal communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Alasdair Allan joins us remotely.

13:17

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I thank Ariane Burgess for bringing this important debate to the chamber.

As others have said, here in Scotland we are fortunate to enjoy a wealth of diverse coastlines that are rich in both natural resources and natural environment. Our coastal communities from Stranraer to Stornoway and beyond face an array of unique challenges, including the protection of the land and sea around them.

The beaches of the Hebrides are renowned for their crystal-clear waters and clean white sand but, as we have heard, unfortunately, we still face significant challenges when it comes to protecting

those marine environments from litter and pollution. Issues such as lack of affordable housing, insufficient transport links and depopulation continue to threaten the resilience of our island communities against the backdrop of the climate and nature emergencies.

I was recently contacted by a constituent on the Isle of Lewis who is deeply concerned about the erosion of an embankment that previously safeguarded the foreshore adjacent to his village. Over the past 10 years, the embankment has gradually been eroded, leading to a situation that is described by a council engineer as “critical”. If no action is taken to protect what remains of the embankment, the inland area forming part of the machair—a type of low-lying fertile land that is unique to the west coast of Scotland—risks becoming permanently under water.

Coastal erosion is just one thing that will endanger our coastal communities in the future—and it is clearly having a detrimental impact already. It is just one of the many difficulties that we need to urgently address to preserve and protect our coastlines and the communities who live by them. The Coastal Communities Network provides an important platform for communication and support between the residents of coastal locations across Scotland. I share its belief that coastal communities themselves are best placed to harness the most effective long-term solutions for the sustainable management of the seas around them. The management of our seas must include input from all local stakeholders, not least those who make their living from marine resources. Our marine environment must be protected while continuing to play its part in the diverse local economies of our coastal areas.

Representing the Coastal Communities Network in my constituency is the organisation Clean Coast Outer Hebrides, which has been working tirelessly since its formation in 2018 to tackle the plastic waste that, sadly, washes up on our many beautiful beaches. Collaborating with the local authority, schools, community organisations and individuals, it organises beach cleans that engage local communities in its work and raise awareness of the importance of marine conservation, with a focus on educating and involving younger people in particular.

That spirit of collaboration is essential in local communities and across the network of coastal communities, as well as at local and national Government levels, in order to best protect and conserve our marine environment for the generations to come. As I have said, it is important that the economic resilience of our coastal communities is fully considered in any and all policy. The voices of people in the fishing industry

must be listened to as fishers continue to adapt their practices to become more sustainable.

The restoration and sustainable development of our coastal areas should be community focused and community led, building on the on-going work of organisations such as those in the Coastal Communities Network, in order for us to play our part in tackling the climate and nature emergencies.

13:21

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): I thank Ariane Burgess for her important motion and all members who have contributed to the debate.

The Scottish Government’s vision for the marine environment is that it should be clean, healthy, safe, productive and diverse, and that it should be managed to meet the long-term needs of nature and people. That includes managing our seas sustainably to protect their rich biological diversity and to ensure that our marine ecosystems continue to provide economic, social and wider benefits for people, industry and society.

There is agreement across the chamber on that point. Ariane Burgess pointed out the multiple co-benefits of a healthy, thriving ecosystem, be that in the provision of protein, flood defences, ecotourism or good local jobs. Finlay Carson drew that point out with regard to the Stranraer festival.

Colin Smyth and Alasdair Allan were right to mention the importance of natural defences. Carol Mochan reminded us of the wonderful holiday opportunities that we are so lucky to have in our maritime nation. As we contemplate and consider what we need to do at home, Jenni Minto provided characteristically sage advice to lift our eyes and consider how friends around the world deal with these matters.

The consensus that has been on show in the debate is very welcome, because it is more essential than ever that we look after Scotland’s coasts and waters so that they can continue to help us for generations to come.

Scotland’s marine assessment was published in December 2020. It showed that Scotland still has a long way to go to achieve good environmental status. We own up to that and we have made clear that, as a Government, we see biodiversity loss as a challenge to be tackled on a par with the climate crisis. In the face of the dual crises, we are redoubling our efforts to protect species and restore nature across Scotland, working closely with community organisations. We are working across the board to achieve that.

As part of our 2021-22 programme for government, we committed to developing a blue

economy vision for managing Scotland's marine environment and supporting coastal communities. It will provide a clear framework for decisions about the use of Scotland's marine environment and support wider ambitions on net zero and biodiversity, recognising—crucially—the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental outcomes.

As an example of that interconnectedness, the future fisheries management strategy forms one of the cornerstones of our blue economy approach. It sets out a vision for Scotland to be a world-class fishing nation, delivering responsible and sustainable fisheries management that provides access to high-protein, low-carbon food. I point Colin Smyth to the management strategy in regard to his comments on sustainability.

We know that, if we are to meet the challenge of nature restoration and make the most of the opportunities that it presents, we will require to make ambitious moves at local level and to work with those who are best placed to understand needs and to deliver on such actions. That is why we are pioneering actions led by coastal communities. In November, I had the pleasure of meeting the Coastal Communities Network, which is key to this approach by providing an invaluable connection to coastal communities and their unique knowledge and expertise.

I am glad that Ms Burgess's motion highlights the restoration projects at Loch Craignish, as they are an important example of how communities can make a difference to their local area. As well as being an essential part of our marine biodiversity, blue carbon habitats have a key role to play globally in climate change adaptation and mitigation, and they provide a range of goods and services that underpin the natural resources of our seas.

With funding from the Scottish Government's biodiversity challenge fund, which one of my colleagues mentioned, and in partnership with Project Seagrass and the Scottish Association for Marine Science, the community charity Seawilding, which has also been highlighted in the debate, is delivering Scotland's first community-led seagrass restoration project. Seawilding provides a unique model for restoration projects by bringing together the local community, providing opportunities to learn about marine science, conservation and climate change and, crucially, sharing expertise to enable other restoration projects to flourish.

I also want to mention our marine protected areas. Many habitats that are protected in the MPA network capture and store blue carbon. In response to Ariane Burgess, I want to make it clear that we are committed to putting in place remaining management measures by 2024 to

protect marine features in MPAs, which will allow the recovery or the natural restoration of these habitats by removing the major pressures that affect them.

In addition, we have just launched a public consultation on the permanent designation of the Red Rocks and Longay MPA. That new site was initially identified following the gathering of evidence by citizen scientists and will protect a nationally important nursery area for the critically endangered flapper skate. I am proud of the Scottish Government's nimble and speedy approach to protecting that vital habitat.

We will go further still. As my colleague Kenneth Gibson has mentioned, we have committed to designating at least 10 per cent of Scotland's seas—both inshore and offshore waters—as highly protected marine areas by 2026. HPMAs will greatly enhance the existing MPA network by providing an additional level of marine protection—and I just want to confirm that they will exclude all extractive, destructive or depositional activities and allow other activities to be carried out only at non-damaging levels. It represents a major advance in conserving our marine biodiversity and will place Scotland at the very forefront of international efforts. We will, of course, pursue it in close consultation and collaboration with coastal communities and other sea users, including fishers.

As well as developing world-leading protected areas, the Scottish Government is supporting grass-roots action through the nature restoration fund. The fund, which will work across Scotland creating new green jobs, reinvigorating local communities and reinforcing Scotland's green recovery, is part of a £500 million investment in our natural environment.

I am conscious of the time, Presiding Officer, so in conclusion the Government continues to be committed to tackling the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change while supporting our coastal communities and the important socioeconomic developments that we wish to see there.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. I suspend the meeting until 2.15 this afternoon.

13:28

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs and Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. I remind colleagues that Covid-related measures are still in place and that face masks should be worn while moving around the chamber and the wider Holyrood campus.

The next item of business is portfolio question time. On this occasion, the portfolio is rural affairs and islands. As ever, any member who wishes to ask a supplementary should request to do so during the relevant question. There is a lot of interest in this afternoon's questions, so I would be grateful for brief questions from members and, as far as possible, brief answers from the ministerial team.

Food (Country of Origin Indication)

1. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to a recent survey, which found that 65 per cent of those asked preferred to see the national flag of Scotland on their food. (S6O-00708)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish brand, whether it is the saltire or a Scottish label, is a key provenance mark and a signal of quality. It is no surprise that people in Scotland recognise that and are proudly enjoying our world-class produce. Through our local food strategy and the development of our sustainably Scottish brand, they will have even more opportunities to access food that is produced locally and to be confident that it is produced to rigorous environmental standards.

Bill Kidd: To assuage any worries on behalf of some members of the Parliament, I point out that the national flag will be on the label, not on the food itself.

In recent weeks, the United Kingdom Government has moved closer to allowing gene-edited crops. Does the cabinet secretary share my view that the identity of Scotland's world-class produce must be protected from any action in that regard that threatens its brand reputation and provenance?

Mairi Gougeon: I am aware of the UK Government's plans to change English regulations to enable the use of gene-editing technologies. Scotland's policy on genetically modified organisms has not changed. We remain opposed

to the use of genetic modification in farming, to protect the clean, green brand of Scotland's £15 billion food and drink industry.

I am also aware of the current debate around novel genomic techniques and how those relate to existing GM legislation, and of the on-going consideration of that at European Union level. The Scottish Government's policy is to remain aligned with the EU, where practicable, and we are closely monitoring the EU's position on the issue. We will continue to engage with the Governments of the UK, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure that devolved competences are respected in charting our future direction.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The Scottish Conservatives are proud to support the Scottish dairy industry. Embarrassingly, the Scottish Government's milk and healthy snack scheme has been branded unlawful by Lord Braid. That is yet another example of the Scottish National Party letting down rural Scotland. Small Scottish dairies are being impacted because childminders who are in receipt of funding through the scheme are forced to source Scottish milk from larger suppliers. Why is the SNP letting down small Scottish milk producers?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That question's link to the original question was very tenuous. If there is anything that you wish to add, cabinet secretary, please do so.

Mairi Gougeon: Obviously, we are committed to supporting our producers in Scotland. I would be happy to contact the member on the specific issue that she raised and to provide her with further information.

Fish Catching and Processing Sectors

2. **Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government how it will support the fishing industry to grow to meet any increased capacity within the catching and processing sectors. (S6O-00709)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government is supporting the seafood sector through the marine fund Scotland. To date, around £13 million has been awarded across a range of projects, including supporting young fishers to enter the sea fisheries industry, vessel refurbishment and new, more sustainable fishing gear. That is in addition to the £40 million that we provided under the European maritime and fisheries fund to support an innovative and competitive sector, which also helped to build capacity.

Clearly, we would like to continue supporting the sector, but the United Kingdom Government has

cut the funding that is available to Scotland now that we have left the European Union. Instead of the £62 million that we should be getting, we are now receiving only £14 million, which clearly limits our ability to provide as much support as we did in the past and would wish to in the future.

Paul Sweeney: Scotland is the biggest fishing nation in the UK, yet five wealthy families control a third of Scottish fishing quotas and have minority investments in companies that hold a further 11 per cent. Therefore, almost half of the entire Scottish fishing quota is held by just five families. Does the minister agree that that concentration of private ownership of a natural common asset is completely unacceptable in the long run?

Mairi Gougeon: We have undertaken an analysis of that and of quota distribution in Scotland. When we did that in 2016, it demonstrated that there was a diversity of ownership. That is in contrast to the situation in England, where the separation of small-scale and large-scale vessels is more pronounced.

The headline figure suggesting that access to fishing opportunities is very limited is misleading. The reality is that holders of pelagic quotas appear to own huge shares because of the number of quota units they have, but they actually hold very little in terms of other species. That significantly distorts any representation of holdings across all fish stocks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a number of supplementary questions. I plead again for brief questions and responses.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): There is huge potential in the fishing communities around the Scottish coast, but that needs joined-up thinking. We need investment in neutral science and work within the environment that allows good management as well as permitting fishing businesses to plan development.

Sadly, last week, two young Scottish skippers revealed that they are now re-evaluating a long-term career in the wake of the embarrassing boorach surrounding the Clyde cod closure announcement.

What plans does the cabinet secretary have to promote stability, co-management, capacity building and, most importantly, trust in order to deliver sustainability and investment in the fishing industry?

Mairi Gougeon: The course of action that we have taken since the closure was announced is the right one. We have listened to our stakeholders. We got scientists, fishers and environmental organisations together to try to chart a way forward. That is how we should continue to work when we deal with such vital

issues. I do not know whether the member would prefer us not to have listened and taken action on the back of the information that we received and the discussion that we had with our stakeholders.

I believe that the position that we have taken is the right one. We are keen to work with our stakeholders as we move forward and look to introduce measures such as highly protected marine areas.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Questions and answers will have to be a bit briefer.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Since its introduction, the annual closure of the Clyde spawning ground has included exemptions to allow nephrops trawlers and creels and scallop dredgers to continue to fish. However, there will be no exemptions to the imminent Clyde closure from 14 February to 30 April because exemptions did not lead to fish stock recovery. Will the cabinet secretary tell us what positive impact she anticipates that the albeit temporary closure will have on future fish stocks?

Mairi Gougeon: Stocks have so far shown very little sign of recovery under the previous measures. That is why the measures that we announced to increase protection are required. The scientific evidence that we have shows that spawning cod can be disturbed by any fishing gear that operates within 10m of the sea bed. Because fishing methods such as trawling, dredging and creeling, which were allowed under the previous exemptions, all operate within 10m of the sea bed, removing those methods will significantly reduce the likelihood of spawning cod being disturbed.

During the closure, we will increase monitoring of activity and catches to assess, in particular, whether and where cod are being caught outside the closure area and whether they are mature enough to spawn. We intend to hold a meeting with stakeholders at the end of the 2022 closure to reflect on the effectiveness and practicality of the revised closures.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The chief executive of Seafood Scotland recently said that the United Kingdom Government's post-Brexit immigration policy is preventing new people from coming into Scotland's seafood workforce and that, as a result of that, an average of 20 to 25 per cent of vacancies throughout the industry are left unfilled, particularly on fishing vessels and in processing facilities. Does the cabinet secretary share my view that a Scottish visa is greatly needed to support the fishing and seafood sectors?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please answer as briefly as possible.

Mairi Gougeon: I do, but the UK Government has, unfortunately, dismissed our proposals for a 24-month visa for all sectors to mitigate the crisis of acute labour shortages. It has ignored calls from businesses to create appropriate migration routes for vital workers to come to Scotland. Its short-sighted fixation with restricting migration is devastating our businesses and communities.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Several of my constituents have been denied support through the marine fund for new entrants because of arbitrary grant criteria. Those are young people who are looking to invest in the modern Shetland fleet and to become the next generation of fishers. Will the minister commit to reviewing the criteria, and will she consider those applications anew in order to help future fishing capacity and to match the ambition of young fishers?

Mairi Gougeon: This is the first year of operation of the marine fund Scotland. We will, of course, monitor and review the fund as we look to establish it in future years. We will consider the issues that the member raises.

Geographical Indication Scheme

3. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its position on the effectiveness in Scotland of the United Kingdom geographical indication scheme, which replaced the European Union protected geographical indication scheme. (S6O-00710)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Scotland's GIs, including Scotch beef, Scotch lamb and Scotch whisky, are rightfully world renowned for their quality and provenance, and they deserve protection from imitation. The UK scheme mirrors the EU scheme. All existing GIs from both the UK and the EU were recorded on the UK register from January last year and they continue to be recognised in the EU. New applicants can apply for protection through the UK scheme. The Scottish Government continues to support our applicants and work with the UK Government to ensure that the scheme continues to benefit our producers.

Emma Harper: I agree with the cabinet secretary that Scotland's produce is internationally renowned. Figures show that total food and drink exports to the EU in 2019 were worth around £2.6 billion to Scotland, but, in the first nine months of 2021, Scotland's exports to the EU were 12.1 per cent lower than in 2019. In addition, the industry bodies have shared their concerns that the new UK GI scheme—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question.

Emma Harper: —provides inferior legal protection. Does the cabinet secretary share my view that Brexit has not provided a single benefit to rural communities? Will she outline what communication the Scottish Government has had with the UK Government and industry regarding the seemingly inferior UK GI scheme?

Mairi Gougeon: I agree with the member. We already know that there are going to be more barriers to our exporters and importers along the line. Only this week, the UK Government extolled the benefits of Brexit in a publication that, curiously, omitted the damning figures that Emma Harper has highlighted.

We have supported our food and drink sector to the tune of £10 million over the course of the past couple of years, in order to mitigate the effects that Brexit and Covid have had on the sector and the communities that it supports. In the meantime, of course, the UK Government continues to talk in a way that is pie in the sky, instead of tackling the real issues that have been brought about by its calamitous Brexit policy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I encourage members to look at the questions that they are intending to pose and cut them back if they think that they are not going to fall into the bracket of brevity.

Agriculture (New Entrants)

4. **Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how it is supporting new entrants into agriculture. (S6O-00711)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): We are supporting new entrants to agriculture through the Farm Advisory Service, the Scottish Land Matching Service, the farming opportunities for new entrants group and direct payments. I am also exploring options to further develop support for new entrants in line with our manifesto commitment.

Murdo Fraser: There is currently a serious issue in rural Scotland with soaring land prices, which is mainly driven by corporate entities buying up large tracts of property for the planting of trees in order to meet environmental obligations. Encouraging tree planting is clearly good for tackling climate change, but that has the effect of taking marginal land that could be used for food production out of agricultural use. It is also making it harder for new entrants to agriculture to either purchase land or expand holdings. Is the Scottish Government aware of that issue? Does it have any concerns about what is going on?

Mairi Gougeon: I thank the member for raising that really important point. The issue has been raised directly with me by NFU Scotland, and I and

the Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform had a meeting with its president and vice-president to talk it over. I highlight to members that the Scottish Land Commission was tasked with undertaking an urgent piece of work to examine the issue and look into it in more detail. We are currently awaiting the outcome of that.

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The recently published Women in Agriculture research report highlights the unique challenges that key workers—women in agriculture—continue to face. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is vital to the future of our rural communities that we support women who are new entrants to the agricultural sector in a way that addresses those challenges?

Mairi Gougeon: Absolutely. I want to see more women like those in Banffshire and Buchan having the opportunity to develop their skills, their talents and their careers. Supporting a new generation of women into agriculture will ensure its long-term sustainability. That is why, in addition to the new entrant support that is available through the Farm Advisory Service, we have committed £300,000 in the current financial year and £400,000 in the next financial year to bring about some practical solutions to support women, including through the wider roll-out of the be your best self personal development training, the pilot of agricultural business skills training and SkillSeeder, which is a skill sharing app to encourage greater participation in rural and land-based training. During the current session of Parliament, we will double the Women in Agriculture funding to £600,000.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Emma Roddick joins us online. I ask her to be brief.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): On Saturday, the NFU president referred to post-Brexit trade deals, saying:

“My greatest fear was that we would be used as a pawn in trade deals and effectively that is what’s happened.”

Does the cabinet secretary share my view that a more prudent question might be: when will the UK Government stop discouraging new entrants to agriculture by undermining the industry with what Ms Batters described as

“really bad trade deals for the UK”?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Be as brief as possible, cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: Yes. I share the views that Minette Batters expressed, and I have repeatedly expressed my significant concerns to the United Kingdom Government on the impact of post-Brexit trade deals on Scotland’s agricultural sector. Farmers and crofters continue to be undermined and undercut by the UK Government, which has shown little care for the future of the Scottish rural

economy. The UK Government’s actions are damaging the attractiveness of the sector to new entrants.

Although the Scottish Government has not been afforded a meaningful role in trade negotiations—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is enough, cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: —we will continue to press for full involvement.

Allotments and Community Garden Spaces (Edinburgh)

5. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what support it will provide to help increase the numbers of allotments and community garden spaces available in Edinburgh. (S6O-00712)

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): Allotments and their provision are the responsibility of local authorities. That is set out in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. However, since 2012, the Scottish Government has allocated more than £1.4 million to directly support and increase the land that is available for community growing.

More widely, our £50 million vacant and derelict land investment programme supports a variety of community regeneration projects, and our Scottish land fund, with a budget of £10 million, supports communities in taking ownership of land and buildings, which can include the provision of allotments.

Miles Briggs: Clearly, those things are not having the desired effect in the capital. In Edinburgh, people’s average wait for access to an allotment is more than eight years; in East Lothian, it stands at more than 15 years. Currently, 4,259 people in the capital are waiting for an allotment. Will the minister agree to my request to take forward a national allotment viability study, with all Government agencies looking at what potential land they could use to develop allotments and community growing spaces?

Màiri McAllan: I am aware of the concerns in Edinburgh. I know that 1,900 allotment plots and 69 community growing projects are managed by the City of Edinburgh Council. I am also aware that the pandemic had the effect both of encouraging people to take up allotments and of making that a very crowded landscape. However, as I said in my initial answer, and for more specificity on the point that was raised, I direct the member to the City of Edinburgh Council, whose statutory responsibility allotments in Edinburgh are.

Young Farmers (North East Scotland)

6. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding support for young farmers in the north-east to support and promote good mental health and wellbeing. (S6O-00713)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government takes mental health and wellbeing seriously. That is why, last year, we launched the communities mental health and wellbeing fund. We will continue to support those who are supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all farmers throughout Scotland, including young farmers in the north-east.

During this financial year, we gave a total of £450,000 to the Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution, the National Rural Mental Health Forum and Support in Mind Scotland, specifically to support the mental health of our rural communities. Officials are actively engaging with the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs board and chief executive to discuss potential projects, including mental health support for young farmers. Those initial discussions are on-going.

Maggie Chapman: Farming has the poorest safety record of any occupation in the United Kingdom and a higher than expected suicide rate. Last year, the Farm Safety Foundation's research found that 92 per cent of Scotland's farmers who are under 40 say that mental health is one of the biggest hidden problems that they face, and the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution's big farming survey revealed that more than one third of farmers are "probably" or "possibly" depressed. Financial uncertainty about the replacement of funding for European Union farm payments, powerful supermarkets' dictating of challenging prices, and poor connectivity are just some of the contributing factors. What more can we do to ensure that we support farmers as part of strong, resilient and connected communities in our rural areas?

Mairi Gougeon: I want to address quite a few points in that but, first and foremost, I highlight the likes of organisations such as the RSABI and the important work that it does. If people have concerns, I urge them to contact the RSABI. The Minister for Environment and Land Reform and I met it last week and heard about some of the cases that it has been involved in. We recognise that there is serious concern, especially given the huge costs that everybody faces at the moment—in agriculture, that can be seen in the increase in the price of fertilisers and energy, and all those other issues. We can therefore only anticipate that some of the current problems will get worse.

Again, I am happy to write to the member to provide more details about the organisations that can provide such help and support. I also highlight that we have tried to give as much certainty as possible to our farmers and crofters, through some of the payments that we have delivered and the commitments that we have made on the rates of payments that we will be making over this parliamentary term, and through the schemes that we have announced recently, such as the less favoured area support scheme, which has started.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Tess White has a supplementary on the theme of mental health.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): More than one farmer a week dies by suicide in the United Kingdom, and the suicide rate among vets is at least three times that of the general population. Given the particular mental health challenges faced by the agriculture-related professions, does the Scottish Government have any plans to explore more widely the underreporting of mental ill-health in rural areas?

Mairi Gougeon: We of course want to get to grips with the issue as much as possible and understand its scale. The member touched on an important point about our vets. I have had recent meetings with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and the British Veterinary Association to discuss the issues that they are seeing and experiencing. Of course, we are committed to tackling the issue as best we can and I am happy to get back to the member with further information.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): Pig farmers in the north-east have had a particularly challenging time, which has affected their mental health. How has the Scottish Government's pig producers hardship support scheme been helping them?

Mairi Gougeon: Last year, I was delighted to launch the pig producers hardship support scheme, which was worth £715,000. As the member rightly highlights, the sector is one of those that have been most impacted. The scheme supported farmers who were affected by the temporary closure of the abattoir in Brechin last year and the subsequent suspension of its China export licence. We have recently announced that we will extend that scheme, recognising the support that pig producers need. We are providing additional financial support, worth more than £680,000, to pig producers at a time when they need it most, and we are encouraging all those who are eligible for the funding to apply for it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Michelle Thomson joins us remotely.

Agriculture (Support)

7. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support the agricultural sector receives in Scotland, and how this compares with the rest of the United Kingdom. (S6O-00714)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The 2022-23 budget provides £680 million in on-going agricultural support, including direct payments, the Scottish rural development programme and agricultural transformation. Agriculture is devolved and it is for each part of the UK to develop policies for its own circumstances, although we are not unhindered by the very real threats that we face from the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, the subsidy control regime, and the lack of replacement European Union funding.

An example is our commitment to support those farming and crofting in constrained areas. We commenced less favoured area support scheme 2021 payments last month, and by 31 January 2022, more than 9,000 businesses had been paid £46.8 million.

Michelle Thomson: I welcome the LFASS funding that was announced this week, and the support that it provides to farmers operating in some of the most challenging parts of the country.

The cabinet secretary will be aware of the Tories' insistence on including agricultural support in the Subsidy Control Bill, despite no other state or country in the world taking similar measures. How might that impact Scotland's ability to support its farmers to meet our needs and interests?

Mairi Gougeon: We have serious concerns about the Subsidy Control Bill, not least because it risks constraining our ability to develop in future policies that are specifically tailored to meet the challenges faced by Scottish farmers and crofters. LFASS is an excellent example of that, because it provides central income support to farming businesses in remote and constrained rural areas, of which Scotland has significantly more than other parts of the UK, yet that support would not be compatible with the principles that have been set out in schedule 1 to the bill.

My officials and I continue to raise our concerns about the potential impact of the bill on Scottish agriculture at every available opportunity. We are not suggesting for one minute that agricultural subsidies be completely exempt from any form of subsidy control but, as the member highlighted, they are already subject to specific controls and requirements under the Agreement on Agriculture, and they will remain so, to meet our World Trade Organization obligations.

Fox Hunting (Ban)

8. Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will consider a complete ban on fox hunting. (S6O-00715)

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): As we set out in our 2021 programme for government, we will introduce a bill during this parliamentary year to strengthen the law relating to the use of dogs to hunt foxes and other wild animals, as well as introducing other measures, such as preventing trail hunting.

Paul O'Kane: Of course, the bill has been beset by multiple delays, so it is welcome to hear that there is a commitment again in this parliamentary session.

Along with complaints in my region, we have heard that a hunt in Kelso, where a dog was taking down a fox, has been reported to the police. Will the minister consider including in the bill a complete ban, without a licensing scheme for hunting with packs of dogs, which could act as a new loophole and has been raised as an issue of concern by campaign groups?

Màiri McAllan: I am aware of the on-going investigation, which I will not comment on, for obvious reasons.

I agree that the act of chasing and killing a mammal with a dog for sport or otherwise has no place in modern Scotland. I am seeking to close loopholes that exist which allow that already illegal activity to persist, and my aim is to do that in a way that ensures the greatest possible animal welfare while facilitating legitimate control in very limited circumstances.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I know that the Scottish Government takes seriously animal welfare standards for both wild and domesticated animals. However, it is also very clear that foxes can do real damage to livestock and livelihoods. Does the minister appreciate the need to maintain a balance that allows farmers, smallholders and rural businesses to retain the ability to control foxes when they are pests?

Màiri McAllan: I absolutely appreciate the need for farmers to retain the ability to control foxes, and I am very aware that foxes can cause significant harm to livestock. It is important that land managers have access to control measures that are efficient and humane. As we have previously set out, we are not seeking to implement a ban on predator control; we are looking to tighten the legislation to reduce the occasions when a pack of dogs can chase or kill foxes or other wild animals accidentally or otherwise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions. I thank members and the ministerial team for their co-operation in getting through a fair number of questions.

Cost of Living

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-03042, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on the cost of living.

14:42

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I declare an interest as an honorary vice-president of Energy Action Scotland.

Today, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets lifted the cap on energy prices again. The previous increase added £139 to bills; there will now be an extra £700 to pay. Energy bills have, in effect, doubled in the space of a few months. People who are on fixed incomes, people in insecure jobs, people on low pay and elderly people have plunged into debt or face a choice between heating or eating.

Currently, 613,000 households are in fuel poverty. That figure could rise threefold, to 1.8 million households in Scotland alone. If that is not serious enough, Scots face increases across a range of other household bills, all at a time when incomes are stagnant and simply not keeping pace with those increases. That will devastate family finances, as people stare down the barrel of a cost of living crisis caused by inflation, which is running at a 30-year high, rises in interest rates, rising national insurance contributions, which are increasing by 10 per cent in April, rising council tax, inflation-busting rises in water rates, and massive rises in food bills, which everybody sees on their supermarket shelves. There is no doubt about the scale of the crisis and the real struggle that Scots will face.

Faced with the prospect of increasing poverty and warnings from organisations such as Energy Action Scotland that some people will die as a consequence, it is incumbent on Governments to act. Let me be clear: I expect both the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government to set aside their customary differences and work together to protect people from the crisis.

The Scottish Government has the power to help, whether that is through putting more income in people's pockets or reviewing some of the charges that it is responsible for. Doing nothing is not an option. The Scottish National Party's amendment is therefore genuinely disappointing. Simply saying how much it is already doing is breathtakingly complacent. People are facing a doubling of their energy bills and a huge cost of living crisis.

I will give the Government one example of how it can help. Water bills are set for an inflation-busting rise of almost 10 per cent and households

will be paying hundreds of pounds more. That comes at a time when Scottish Water is sitting on at least £400 million in reserves, and possibly as much as £700 million in reserves when one considers its subsidiary companies. Those reserves are taxpayers' money. We should not forget that the SNP tried, until it was rumbled, to remove the single person's discount from water bills a couple of years ago. The SNP was warned about the impact of the latest rises but, given the chance to do things differently and actually help people and be on their side, SNP members stick their fingers in their ears and do nothing.

Aside from reviewing the increased charges for which it is responsible, the Scottish Government can increase the amount that it gives to help with heating. It has all the powers that it needs to do so; it simply requires political will. Yesterday, I, like many others, watched in disbelief as the SNP suggested that we could cut the bottoms off school doors to help with ventilation. I kid you not—that Alice in Wonderland approach is what passes for policy thinking from the SNP. Next, perhaps, it will suggest that we burn the cut-offs from those doors to heat our homes. To be frank, the people of Scotland deserve better than that. They deserve a Government that is on their side; that does not use the constitution as an excuse for inaction; and that protects their interest when times are tough.

I turn to the Conservatives. I point out as gently as I can that the Tory amendment is not factually correct, because Rishi Sunak has actually frozen some personal allowances. That aside, let me be the first to welcome anything that puts money in people's pockets. To be frank, however, the Tories' approach is wholly inadequate. Giving energy companies loans simply lands bill payers with the cost at a later date, and with prices set to rise again in six months' time, it will do nothing to resolve the crisis. The council tax rebate is worth about £150 per household, which is less than a quarter of what is required.

The big difference between Labour and the Tories and the SNP, which are joined at the hip on this issue, is that Labour would raise the money now through a windfall tax on North Sea oil and gas profits and on the higher-than-expected VAT receipts and oil and gas revenues.

For the SNP to join the Tories to reject that approach and deny the Scottish people immediate help and support on the scale that is required is, to be frank, shameful. SNP members should hang their heads in shame. The SNP and the Tories have demonstrated whose side they are on. They are on the side of multinational oil companies that are making profits of £27,000 a minute—that is right: £27,000 a minute, which is more than some people earn in a year—rather than being on the side of hard-pressed Scots who are staring down

the barrel of a cost of living crisis that is the worst in my memory.

Under Labour's fully costed plans, every single Scottish household would get £200 towards the cost of their spiralling energy bills. For the 800,000 households that are hardest hit, the support would be £600, and it would apply to those both on and off the grid.

Every single penny of the £290 million in funding consequential for the Scottish Government from the United Kingdom Government must go into the pockets of people who need urgent help. Will the SNP bring proposals to the chamber next week to outline how it will distribute the money? That cannot wait.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Jackie Baillie: There can be no excuses, no inaction and no hiding behind the constitution—the SNP must act, and act now, in the interests of the people of Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to move the motion, Ms Baillie.

Jackie Baillie: I move,

That the Parliament recognises the pressure being placed on household finances across Scotland due to rising inflation, increasing food and fuel prices, and high energy bills; considers that this will be exacerbated by the increase to National Insurance, the likely hike to the energy price cap in April 2022, and the rises in Scotland to rail fares and water charges, which it calls on the Scottish Government to review and defer; supports the calls for the UK Government to cut VAT on home energy bills for 12 months; endorses proposals to save most households around £200 on bills using that VAT cut and smoothing the costs of supplier failure, as well as to provide extra targeted support to those who need it most, including pensioners and low earners, by expanding and increasing the Warm Home Discount, giving those households an additional £400 off energy bills, and agrees that this should be paid for by a one-off windfall tax on increased oil and gas profits.

14:49

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): This is an important and timely debate, as hundreds of thousands of families and households across Scotland are facing very challenging financial circumstances as a result of rising costs and high inflation. As we have seen reported in today's news, the Bank of England has said that UK households must now prepare for the biggest fall in living standards since records on the subject began three decades ago, and for the worst pay erosion since 1990.

We have also had Ofgem's announcement today that households face an eye-watering 54 per cent increase in their energy bills. That is a real hammer blow to customers in Scotland and

throughout the UK. Analysis estimates that that price cap increase could move around 200,000 further households in Scotland alone into fuel poverty and around 235,000 households that were already fuel poor could move into extreme fuel poverty. That sits within a wider context of increasing pressures on household costs. We are in a cost of living crisis that calls for immediate action.

From April, workers and businesses throughout the country will have the added pressure of a rise in national insurance contributions—a policy that was announced without prior notice or consultation with the devolved Administrations. Of course, we are told that that hike is to pay for the national health service, despite the fact that we were told that Brexit would deliver £350 million a week towards the NHS. We recognise the added need for health and social care funding, but the UK's decision to raise that by taxing workers rather than wealth is a missed opportunity.

On top of that, the Bank of England has announced that interest rates will be raised by 0.5 per cent, inflation will surpass 7 per cent and gross domestic product forecasts will be slashed, leaving Scottish taxpayers to experience the worst living standard decline of the past few decades.

Powers relating to the energy markets remain reserved to the UK Government—I wish that Jackie Baillie had borne that in mind when she made her attack on the SNP and Green Government. Therefore, the UK Government must act urgently to address the crisis. The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport and the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government have written more than once to the UK Government to reiterate the need for urgent action and has offered a series of proposals to support energy consumers, including targeted direct support. We await a response from the UK Government over and above what it has said today.

The tax levers to help hard-pressed households are also reserved to the UK Government. They include the power to vary VAT rates on consumer bills in the short term. I am sorry to hear that the UK Government appears to have ruled that out today as well, despite the fact that Boris Johnson said that Brexit would give him the opportunity to cut VAT rates. The rates that apply to the provision of energy-efficient materials and the retrofitting of buildings could also be cut, which would contribute to long-term bills being reduced. The Scottish Government has called for action on that and continues to do so, including urging the UK Government to reconsider the decision not to reduce VAT on energy bills.

For our part, the Scottish Government is very committed to supporting people in Scotland,

especially those who are on low incomes. We are already using all powers and resources available to us to support people in Scotland, including through energy efficiency investment, Home Energy Scotland advice, support on housing costs, welfare, debt advice services, the child winter heating assistance, the money talk team service, which is now up and running, and support to address food insecurity.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): The minister says that the Scottish Government is doing what it can, but a number of issues have been raised, including by Citizens Advice Scotland, on the Government's proposed fuel poverty strategy. CAS has said that the strategy does not go far enough and does not put enough money in people's pockets. Support such as the child winter heating assistance is available only to some families with disabled children and not others. Will the Government address the poverty that those families experience by addressing the eligibility for that assistance?

Richard Lochhead: As the First Minister said, discussions are going on with the UK Government about the consequential from its announcements, and that money will be earmarked to help the people who are most affected.

On fuel poverty, in November, we put in place a £41 million winter support fund to ease the strain on low-income households. That includes £10 million of funding that is available to help people who are struggling with heating costs this winter. Our council tax reduction scheme currently supports more than 470,000 households. In addition, by doubling the Scottish child payment to £20 per week, we anticipate lifting 40,000 children out of poverty from the 430,000 who are eligible for support.

We are carefully assessing the mitigation measures that the UK Government announced today and how they will be applied in Scotland. However, the £200 rebate that has been announced is to be paid back—it is just a loan—and will not address the medium to long-term issues, never mind the short-term issues. It comes in the context of an increase in bills of nearly £700, so £200 goes nowhere near far enough.

As I draw to a close, we should all take a moment to consider what it means to be forced to choose between heat and food in this day and age in this country. We are in the middle of a cost of living crisis. We are seeing hikes in tax, the cost of Brexit and a UK Government cut to universal credit recipients' income; the list goes on and on. It is important that we work together to address the very real cost of living crisis that the people of Scotland face at the moment.

I move amendment S6M-03042.2, to leave out from “the rises” to end and insert:

“notes these are related to reserved powers; supports the Scottish Government’s calls for the UK Government to take urgent action on a package of measures to address home energy bills; welcomes the significant action that the Scottish Government has taken to reduce the cost of living through measures including the introduction of free bus travel to under-22s, the increased water charges reduction scheme discount, the introduction, extension and doubling of the Scottish Child Payment, the more than £2.5 billion invested in support for low-income households, and the increase in free childcare, and agrees that further power in the hands of the Parliament would enable it to address the cost of living, energy prices, and minimum wage levels.”

14:55

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I acknowledge that this is a very serious issue for many families who see their household bills going in only one direction, at the same time as they try to cope with all the other challenges of the pandemic, which is far from over. Today, that anxiety has been heightened with the news of the increase in the energy price cap.

I also acknowledge concerns about the national insurance rise, which I will come back to in a minute. In addition, I acknowledge anxieties about world markets and increasing political tensions between Russia and the Ukraine, which have potentially serious implications for energy costs and supply chains.

When we drill down into the detail of the inflation statistics, it is clear that producers and suppliers that are involved in international trade are telling us that much of the current level of inflation is a direct result of rising shipping and wholesale gas costs. Those involved in UK business tell us that it is also a result of shortages in labour markets. There are inflation issues in other countries: in Germany, inflation is up to 4.9 per cent; in America, it is up to 7 per cent; in France, it is up to 3.3 per cent; and there is underlying energy inflation in the eurozone, which is now averaging out at 28 per cent.

We know that the cost of the pandemic is well over £400 billion. We know that 6 million people are on NHS waiting lists and, whether we like it or not, we need to go ahead with the national insurance increase to pay directly into health and social care budgets. It is never popular to raise tax and I am not going to argue that the national insurance increase will not be painful but, when the decision was made some time ago, there was a reluctant acceptance that, in order to deal with the waiting lists and NHS crisis, that rise was necessary.

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants’ Rights (Patrick Harvie): I understand that those who instinctively

like low-tax policies sometimes have to make an effort to come to terms with the need for such a rise. Why were the Conservatives able to come to terms with the need for an NI hike, which will be regressive, but were not able to come to terms with the need for more progressive income tax, which we have already implemented in Scotland—the five-band system that places the expectation on those with the broadest shoulders?

Liz Smith: I thank Mr Harvie for that intervention, but it is all about economic growth, which his party is not terribly keen on. Scottish Fiscal Commission statistics show that there is a huge issue in relation to Scotland’s income tax revenues, which is one of the key issues around income tax policy—hence the Conservative Party’s view on that.

I also hear that VAT on fuel bills should be scrapped, but that is not the best way of assisting those who are most in need, because it is not a progressive measure. It would reduce bills by just 5 per cent and would cost the Treasury billions of pounds. I have also heard claims, including from Jackie Baillie this afternoon, that there should be windfall taxes on oil and gas profits, similar to the Gordon Brown windfall tax on privatised utilities in 1997. However, if we look abroad to other countries such as Spain, those taxes have had only very limited success. The companies in question are owned by us all through pension funds—

Jackie Baillie: Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I will just finish this point, Ms Baillie.

The companies in question are owned by us all through pension funds and insurance firms, and they have to be attractive to new investment.

Windfall taxes risk a reduction in output and therefore an increase in prices for consumers. We should not forget that £100 billion of investment is needed to secure future power generation. In short, the energy experts are telling us that we need to increase energy supply and reduce the demand, and a windfall tax would do the opposite.

I will give way to Jackie Baillie.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to be winding up, Ms Smith, instead of taking interventions. Be as brief as possible, Ms Baillie.

Jackie Baillie: I will be very quick. Will Liz Smith at least acknowledge that it was Margaret Thatcher who first put a windfall tax on oil and gas?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: While acknowledging that or not, please start winding up, Ms Smith.

Liz Smith: I can very much acknowledge Gordon Brown's failure on a windfall tax. On that point, I am happy to conclude my remarks.

I move amendment S6M-03042.1, to leave out from "and defer" to end and insert:

"... believes that the Scottish Government should deliver a fair settlement to local government to avoid households being hit with council tax increases in April; welcomes UK Government action to increase the Living Wage, raise the Personal Allowance, reduce unemployment and freeze Fuel Duty, and calls on both of Scotland's governments to take further action to support individuals and families at this difficult time."

15:00

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am very pleased to rise for my party to speak in favour of the incredibly important motion on a matter that is impacting families up and down the country. I thank Jackie Baillie for using time from the Labour Party's parliamentary debating time to bring it before us.

Presiding Officer, you would be hard pressed at the moment to go more than a day or so without hearing about the rising cost of food and soaring fuel and energy prices. As we have heard many times this afternoon, we are already living through a cost of living crisis that is hitting families and individuals hard, and from all directions.

The consumer price index shows that the cost of food and drink has been climbing every year, and is up significantly from January 2020. The UK's biggest supermarket chain, Tesco, has already said that its prices could be set to rise by 5 per cent, and poverty campaigners have highlighted finding that foods such as rice and pasta—which are staples—have risen by as much as 340 per cent in some locations.

That is against a backdrop of skyrocketing energy costs. Just today, as we have also heard several times, the energy regulator Ofgem has announced that the price cap will rise by £693 on average, which will cause the bill of the average customer to rise to up to £1,971. It will be worse for pre-paying customers. That is not to mention the rising cost of fuel, rent and taxes, as all the while wages stagnate. Inflation will this year reach its highest level in 30 years. The painful reality is that the people who are on the lowest incomes are feeling the impact most acutely.

All that has taken its toll. Citizens Advice Scotland has found that a third of Scots—I repeat, a third—are worried about being able to pay for food and other essentials. That means that parents will be facing the anxiety of not being able to provide for their children, and that some pensioners will be anxious about not being able to heat their homes.

In this Parliament, we have a sacred duty to recognise the challenges that our constituents are facing and to act on their behalf to mitigate them. Therefore, I am pleased to support the spirit and the proposals that are contained in Jackie Baillie's motion, including the proposal on the warm homes discount; my party has been calling for it to be doubled and to be extended to all those who are in receipt of universal credit.

Liberal Democrats also want the national insurance tax hike to be scrapped, which would save families hundreds of pounds a year. Our plans also include forcing broadband providers to offer vulnerable customers cheaper deals through social tariffs, which would benefit up to 8 million households and save them up to £270 each, every year.

The Scottish Government often talks a good game when it comes to tackling those issues, but when push comes to shove, it has been found wanting. With its latest budget, it will heap on more misery with yet more cuts to local authorities, which will force council tax increases and cuts to the services that people rely on most, just when Scots are at their lowest financial ebb.

My party recognises that the impacts of poverty and hunger can be wide reaching. Studies have shown that they can be major factors in preventing children from achieving their potential.

We also support an enhanced carers allowance in Scotland and are calling for an immediate UK-wide uplift of £1,000 for a year.

In recounting her own story, the journalist and anti-poverty campaigner Jack Monroe paints a very bleak picture of the choices that far too many people in our society face:

"After you've cut back everything else, food is the last to go. I didn't mind putting an extra jumper on if I had food in the fridge. It was the point where I had an extra jumper on and no food in the fridge that I realised things had gone"

terribly "badly wrong."

In this day and age, no one in this country should have to make such a choice, but with the cost of living crisis, we find that all too many will.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We move to the open debate.

15:04

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): It is great privilege to be able to contribute to the debate on the cost of living crisis, which is undoubtedly the single most important issue that millions of families across the country face.

With Ofgem's announcement today that the energy price cap is set to rise by 54 per cent—meaning that families could be hammered with an

extra £700 on top of their existing energy bills—we have to consider that this is actually an emergency debate, because people are desperately worried. They are worried about their income, their job security and their ever-increasing bills that will suffocate and snuff out what little disposable income they have left. They are concerned about putting the heating on, putting food on the table and ensuring that they can keep a roof over their families' heads. Frankly, they are baffled by just how little people in positions of power are doing to help them through what is likely to be the worst cost of living crisis in living memory.

Although the lack of action from Government at all levels is unforgivable, it is nothing when compared with deliberate and calculated actions such as cutting the universal credit uplift at this time, and placing on unemployed people ridiculous four-week deadlines to secure a job. That callousness will push millions into more poverty and destitution. In Glasgow alone, more than 80,000 people are in receipt of universal credit. To put that into context, that number could have filled Celtic park last night with 20,000 people still left outside it. We should be in no doubt that families will suffer tremendous hardship because of that single decision.

As someone with lived experience of being on universal credit, I find it sickening and cowardly that the richest man ever to have sat in the House of Commons—the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak—thinks that the decision is in some way acceptable. Already one in four children in Scotland lives in poverty. Are we really going to stand here and tell ourselves that those decisions will not make that intolerable situation worse?

We know that the price of energy is skyrocketing, but so, too, are the costs of other necessities. Just last week, the *Daily Record* reported an increase of nearly 20 per cent on the price of a weekly food shop from the price in January last year. Nationally, food and drink prices were 4.2 per cent higher in the year to December 2021.

How do we fix the situation? I have no doubt that we will hear the usual musings from Conservative members about a strong economy and low taxation stimulating growth, and about how getting people into work is their best route out of poverty. However, when we look at the reality, rather than listen to the rhetoric, we see that what they say would be outrageous, were it not so risible.

We saw that yesterday, in the debate on the Scottish rate resolution. We continually heard Conservative MSPs talking about how Scotland is the highest-taxed part of the UK, while the Conservatives are simultaneously hiking national insurance and putting more pressure on hard-

working families. That hike in national insurance will raise an estimated £12 billion. Is not it ironic that that will not even cover the £10 billion that has been wasted on personal protective equipment and the £4 billion-worth of fraudulent applications for public funds that have been written off by the Treasury in recent weeks?

Fundamentally, we need to ask what we can do to help people right now. Labour's motion outlines what we believe would alleviate some of the pressures on families. On energy costs, we would cut VAT for 12 months and we would implement a windfall tax on companies that are seeing increased oil and gas profits. That would offset virtually all the increase in energy prices that it is speculated will come this year, and it would help 9 million families across the UK. The chancellor has offered just £150 in October and a £200 loan, which will not help at all because it will have to be paid back. Today, Shell reported its highest quarterly profits in eight years, so a windfall tax seems to be a small price for it to pay. That windfall tax would allow the Government to save families around £200 on their energy costs alone.

We need to go much further. I like to think that our approach is something that all members in the chamber could support as a baseline. I am confident that we all agree that we need to help people now. We cannot continue along the same track, pushing people further into poverty because the Government is simply too scared to put its money where its mouth is.

15:08

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): One issue that is not listed in the motion is the failure of successive UK Governments in management of the economy. That is of fundamental relevance in a debate about the cost of living crisis and the people who will bear the brunt of it, many of whom are pensioners. I go back to Harold Wilson devaluing the pound in the 1960s and to Tony Benn trashing alternative green energy wave power in favour of nuclear power—although he later recanted.

As for oil and gas, the UK Government sold it off cheap to international companies and only Shetland negotiated benefits for itself. Norway launched its own national company and now also leads in green energy. The oil off Scotland's shores was squandered by successive UK Governments. In 2020, Norway's sovereign wealth fund was worth £923 billion—£170,000 for every Norwegian—and in that same year it gained £8 billion in value. That is some rainy-day fund.

The UK has no oil fund. Zilch. The banks' collapse in 2008 led to the creature called

quantitative easing—otherwise known as printing money. That cash was supposed to trickle down to us, but instead it flooded to those who have substantial assets—the people who are already wealthy.

Then, Covid came along. The UK Government has had to write off more than £9 billion that was spent on useless personal protective equipment contracts, which were often divvied out to Tory pals.

The UK Government was already borrowing; now it has to borrow more. The UK national debt now stands at more than 100 per cent of GDP—in other words, we are up to our ears in debt and, with interest charges, the debt is increasing hourly. Norway is the polar opposite. It does not have to borrow. It was able to ride out the banks' collapse, Covid and even spiralling energy costs by introducing a universal scheme to help consumers. Norway had the cash—unlike the Tory Government, which is simply deferring some costs that we will pay for later.

That is the context: squandering our assets and embedding inequalities in our society, in which for decades the rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer. That matters. Pensioner poverty is not new. Women whose working lives have often been interrupted by motherhood and caring responsibilities do not even receive the measly basic pension.

Liz Smith: Will the member take an intervention?

Christine Grahame: I have only a very short time.

In my time in the Scottish Parliament—more than 20 years—the pension credit system has failed constantly, with 40 per cent of the people who are entitled to it not claiming it because of the system's complexities. However, that pension credit opens the door to other benefits, including a free TV licence for people over 75—but only if they are on pension credit. What a tawdry act it was to remove universal pensioner access to the free licence during the pandemic, when pensioners were isolated in their homes.

The hiking of energy costs impacts on those who are less mobile and confined indoors, many of whom are pensioners. Food prices are rising, which is a nightmare for pensioners on fixed incomes for whom food is often more costly because they are purchasing for one.

The Scottish Government is trying to mitigate that, but I am often disappointed by Labour because they seem to just go along with mitigating Tory policies. I want those policies to be radically reformed, which cannot be done in London. It must be done here in Edinburgh, where we have

the skills, experience and social democratic values to run the economy—not ruin it—to invest in our natural resources and to distribute them through a fair tax system that recognises that we judge a nation by how it treats its more vulnerable and elderly people. To Paul Sweeney, I say this. That means one thing only: independence, with straightforward competence over Scotland's economy and just distribution of our wealth.

15:12

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): It might be worth noting that Norway's national debt is forecast to be more than \$200 billion in 2026.

I appreciate Labour's use of its time today to debate a significant issue that should be at the top of the agenda of every member in the chamber. The cost of living touches households across Scotland—I am sure that we have all been looking at it with concern over recent months.

We are all emerging from a pandemic that was unprecedented in its scope and reach. We know all too well that our society is more fragile and less resilient than it once was. Although should recognise the role that the UK furlough scheme has played—by providing a level of stability for hundreds of thousands of families across Scotland—in preventing some of the worst possible outcomes in terms of jobs and the economy, for many households, budgets are already strained.

It remains a particularly worrying time for families to be faced with surging energy bills, and rises in other areas, too—all while public services are being stretched as never before. As other members have mentioned, the most pronounced element of that has been the jolt in the cost of wholesale gas globally. We should not underestimate the reliance that we still have on gas: it heats the vast majority of British homes and it continues to provide a very significant proportion of our electricity, although we have moved away from more polluting alternatives, such as coal.

We often speak of energy security, but the reality is that we are a net gas importer and remain at the whim of fluctuations in the global market. Sensible predictions suggest that wholesale costs might remain high for the next two years.

Those are undoubtedly major challenges, and although we can identify the problems, the solutions are less clear. The question of cutting VAT on home energy bills is finely balanced, compared with other interventions. As Liz Smith highlighted, last month the Institute for Fiscal Studies noted that that policy would give average households back less than a fifth of the annual

increase in costs and could bring with it unintended consequences.

Jackie Baillie: Does Jamie Halcro Johnston not recall, as I do, that Boris Johnson promised that he would do that?

Jamie Halcro Johnston: I do. I am just coming to that, actually.

That is, of course, not a conclusive argument against the policy. The chancellor has today announced proposals to smooth price fluctuations over longer periods. I note that approaches such as that are addressed in the Labour motion.

On a wider scale, little progress has been made, sadly, towards diversifying domestic heat supplies. We are still scratching the surface of moving homes from fossil fuel dependence to renewable heat. My region, the Highlands and Islands, has long faced issues around high fuel costs. We have a considerably higher than average number of properties that are not connected to mains gas and are reliant on oil and liquefied petroleum gas tanks, or electricity, at higher cost.

Households that are already spending a larger proportion of their incomes on energy, whether through low income or higher energy costs, will be hardest hit by the cost increase. For people in that position, particularly many people in the northern isles, where fuel poverty rates are higher, it is particularly galling to be surrounded by wind turbines but to see no benefit in their bills.

Although we must consider the people who will be hardest hit by energy costs, we should also look at other areas. The Scottish Government's budget for next year is currently going through Parliament. Earlier today, I questioned the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth on the Government's approach to the local government financial settlement. While ministers have, yet again, been busy patting themselves on the back for reducing the levels of their cuts to already stretched council finances, there is still the likelihood that many local authorities will address the cuts with council tax rises in order to keep services running.

Higher costs have hit transport at all levels. That is another area in which the Highlands and Islands, like many remote and rural parts of Scotland, will feel the pinch. When local public transport options such as bus routes are lost, people are forced to drive, with all the additional costs that that incurs.

On an issue that is of particular relevance to my region, I note that at the end of last year the Scottish Government decided that interisland ferries would not be covered by the young persons travel scheme.

The Presiding Officer: I ask you to conclude, please.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: That means that, although a young person on the mainland can travel from Berwickshire to Caithness for free, a young person in Orkney or Shetland, whether travelling for education or work, will still be liable for any ferry fares that made up part of their journey.

The Presiding Officer: I have to ask you to conclude there, Mr Halcro Johnston. We are very tight for time this afternoon.

15:17

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank the Labour Party for securing the debate. It is worth reminding members and the people of Scotland of the comments of the former Labour chancellor, Alistair Darling, who said that his cuts would have been "deeper and tougher" than Thatcher's. We cannot let the population forget that austerity started under Labour, but it has been turbocharged by the Tories since they have been in power, particularly when they were in power with the Liberal Democrats in the Cameron-Clegg coalition.

The debate is timely given the announcement of the energy price cap increasing by £693 for direct debit customers and by £708 for pre-paid meter customers. Many people on pre-paid meters have them for a reason and many of those customers are among the lowest paid in society.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation analysis warns that the energy price cap rise will "devastate" the UK's poorest families, who will spend

"on average 18 per cent of their income after housing costs on energy bills after April",

and the UK charity National Energy Action estimates that 6 million UK households will be living in fuel poverty by April, which is a 50 per cent increase from 2021.

At first glance, today's announcement by the Tory Government of a £200 loan and £150 for some council tax payers in England does not go anywhere near enough to help the many people who are already struggling and having to choose between heating and eating. Energy costs are going up, fuel costs are going up, food prices are going up, clothing costs are going up and national insurance is going up. While the Tories in Westminster are busy getting bevvied on their suitcases of booze in Boris's gaff and Liz Truss spends half a million pounds on a flight to Australia, many people across the UK are struggling to survive.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Following the announcement this morning that there are likely to

be Barnett consequentials, where does the member think that those consequentials should be spent by the Scottish Government?

Stuart McMillan: We first have to see the details of the consequentials. We have heard what the First Minister said. I do not know whether Jamie Halcro Johnston was listening during First Minister's question time, but she answered that question.

The people of England also have to pay prescription charges at £9.35 a time and they pay for their tuition fees. Clearly, the out-of-touch Tories care little about the cost of living crisis and more about saving their own skins at the next UK election.

Inflation is sitting at 5.4 per cent, which is the highest that it has been for 30 years, and some economists expect it to hit 7 per cent this year. The UK already has the worst levels of poverty and inequality in north-west Europe and the highest levels of in-work poverty this century.

A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that around two thirds, or 68 per cent, of working-age adults in poverty in the UK live in a household where at least one adult is in work. That figure has never been higher. I believe that work is a route out of poverty, but when someone is in work and on poverty pay, how can they get themselves out of poverty? That is something that the Tories really do not understand. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development data shows that, in nearly every year of the 21st century, poverty rates in the UK have been worse than those in nearly every country neighbouring the UK in north-west Europe.

The pandemic has played a part in rising costs, but so, too, has Brexit. The chaos and confusion caused by Boris and his Brexiteers at the expense of the normal person in our communities are there for all to see.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: I am concluding.

This year, the Office for Budget Responsibility estimated that only two fifths of the damage to be caused by Brexit has been inflicted so far, with every person facing a cost of around £1,200.

I back the Scottish Government amendment.

15:21

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Scottish households are facing profound financial challenges. We must address those directly, demanding accountability from where decision-making power on energy lies and seeking

to tackle the foundational causes of inequality, while acknowledging why we are in this position.

The crisis is a product of several factors. We have a UK Government that is taking more and giving less, as we have seen in its decisions on national insurance and universal credit. That pushes many into fuel and food poverty and stifles our businesses.

Westminster has failed oil and gas workers and energy customers, and further destabilised our climate with its refusal to support shifts away from volatile fossil fuel markets. In the process, it has also wasted our money, as can be seen in the £400 million that it spent on the abandoned green deal scheme, which supported only 1 per cent of households and delivered significantly fewer measures than any previous scheme. Its withdrawal of support for renewables, especially onshore wind, and comprehensive insulation schemes should be a cause of shame.

We must do everything in our power to minimise the impacts of the crisis on Scottish homes and livelihoods by disinvesting scarce public money from unsustainable industries and greenwashing initiatives. We must not prolong the extraction of fossil fuels while ignoring the fact that big oil and gas companies shift the detriments of market volatility on to workers. Instead, we have the potential to demonstrate how the just transition to local energy systems as part of a green new deal can reduce poverty and inequality.

Those innovations would see significant revenue generation that we could use to support households and businesses while reducing the cost of domestic energy use, but unfortunately they are still restricted by the UK Government's socially and environmentally regressive policy regime.

We also need to make sure that the support that is available, such as the Scottish welfare fund, is as accessible as possible, as Citizens Advice Scotland and others have highlighted.

It is clear that Scotland is moving towards a more distributive fiscal policy, as we see in our decision to make bus travel free for young people, the doubling of the child payment and so on. The actions that we see from Westminster will only allow the gap between rich and poor to grow.

South of the border, where big decisions about Scotland's energy system are made, home insulation schemes are failing without consequence. In the past year, 90 per cent of energy bill increases have been due to the rising price of gas. The only way to cut the cost of energy is to end our dependence on gas and break the relationship between gas prices and fuel bills, but Westminster refuses to do that. That reflects the general failures of Westminster to

protect vulnerable homes and livelihoods from predatory and exploitative business practices, and from its own defective fiscal policy. All this happens as Covid-19 and its impacts continue to weigh heavy on many Scots who lost income and loved ones.

The Scottish Government's resource spending review must mitigate the crisis rather than exacerbating it in any way. It will, of course, involve trade-offs—Scotland's fiscal constraints demand such trade-offs—but the very least that the most vulnerable in our society deserve is for public money to be spent in a way that delivers sustainable and affordable outcomes for them.

There has been consistent denial from Westminster when we demand accountability for the crippling cost of living crisis. Let us not forget David Cameron's desire to

"get rid of all the green crap".

That has added £2.5 billion—yes, £2.5 billion—to UK energy bills. It seems that those in the Government at Westminster care only about things that make massive profits for their pals.

Denials and disinterest will not help anyone. We need a concerted and palpable intervention. If the UK Government is incapable of meeting, or unwilling to meet, the urgent needs of households and businesses in Scotland, it must give us the powers that we need to deliver the necessary interventions ourselves.

15:25

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I speak in support of the motion in Jackie Baillie's name.

All across Scotland, people are feeling the growing strain of the cost of living going up. People are facing unthinkable choices, and it is clear that people's physical and mental health is deteriorating as a result. That is a consequence of a perfect storm of different factors, from the rises in taxation to the increase in food prices. The sad reality is that the situation is only set to worsen, with some analysts pointing to inflation reaching beyond 6 per cent. Furthermore, we know that the true cost of inflation will be even higher for those who already have the least.

In response, what people in Scotland need is their two Governments standing up for people, but what they have is their Governments letting them down. Although I accept that the growing cost of gas is a global issue, in Scotland we are experiencing the consequences of more than 10 years of the Conservatives' failed energy policy, which has left us uniquely exposed. The Tories failed to properly regulate our energy market, which led to dozens of energy companies going bust, with all of us having to foot the bill. The

dithering and the incompetence have created an energy price crisis that is being felt by everyone.

However, the blame for the rise in energy costs does not lie solely at the feet of the Tories. The SNP's record on energy is also one of U-turns and a failure to deliver. It has failed on the delivery of a public energy company and it has failed to harness Scotland's renewables potential. Now, it has sold off, on the cheap, the right to profit from Scotland's energy transition to multinational corporations with dubious human rights records. The people of Scotland should know that the current crisis happened on the watch of both Governments, with the Tories and the SNP having failed to meet the vast potential of Scottish and British renewables and other forms of energy.

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

Paul O'Kane: I would like to make some progress.

The SNP has also presided over the development of a low-wage economy in Scotland, which means that Scottish households are more exposed to the cost of living crisis. Many of the factors that are driving Scotland's labour shortages and low growth in wages predated the pandemic and have gone unaddressed by the SNP for years.

As if to add insult to injury, the rise in prices can also be seen in the growing cost of public transport, with the increase in the cost of ScotRail tickets. That is just another example of the continued mismanagement of our country's transport, which is adding to the cost of living for hard-working people.

All of that undoubtedly paints an incredibly bleak picture for Scots all over the country, with failures across both Governments. However, it does not have to be that way. There are solutions to alleviate the pain of the crisis. Both here in this place and at the UK level, Labour has a plan to make life easier for people. To address the immediate crisis, Labour would bring in fully funded measures now to reduce the expected price rise in April, which would save most households around £200 or more. Labour has also called for VAT on domestic energy bills to be cut for 12 months from April 2022, which would save an average household around £89. That could be achieved through our proposed one-off windfall tax on the increased profits of oil and gas companies.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Paul O'Kane: I am in my final minute.

Labour members would use the power of the Parliament to top up winter fuel payments. That is a choice that we would make.

The situation is stark. Charities, advice and rights organisations and now our churches and religious groups are pointing out the devastating impact of hikes in energy prices and the cost of living on the poorest in our society. Indeed, just today, the Catholic Parliamentary Office said:

“These aren’t luxuries, they are the basics.”

We are talking about decent things that people should expect to have.

It is clear that the Tories and the SNP have failed people across the country and that it is Labour that offers a real alternative and which has the ideas to address the crisis.

15:29

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Like everyone in the chamber, I know only too well that growing numbers of people are feeling the financial pinch as household bills continue to rise. As we have already heard, food prices and energy costs are rising fast. Today’s announcement by Ofgem that the energy price cap will increase from 1 April for approximately 22 million customers, resulting in an increase to bills of around £700, is very concerning.

The chancellor has today announced a £9 billion package of support that will ease the pain. Around £290 million of that support will be available in Scotland. I urge the Scottish Government to use every single penny to address this crisis.

To compound the situation, many households also fear huge hikes in their council tax bills as a direct result of insufficient funding by the Scottish Government in its budget.

Although cost of living hikes affect everyone, I want to highlight the plight of those living in rural communities such as those in my constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries. People in rural and remote communities are among the hardest hit, through no fault of their own but often as a result of Scottish Government policies that fail to address, or even to appreciate, the challenges of living in a rural area.

Many Scottish households, including many in Dumfries and Galloway, experience the low-wage economy. Many are employed in agriculture, forestry or the hospitality sector and a growing number work in food and drink or retail—sectors that have not, historically, attracted good wages.

Set against that, food prices in village and community shops are considerably higher than those paid for the same items in supermarkets in towns and cities. I stress that that is not a criticism of those running small rural retail businesses, who provide a lifeline service in often difficult circumstances. They are trying to make a living for

themselves and strive to keep their shelves well stocked with the widest range of goods. More often than not, elderly residents and young families have no choice and must rely on rural stores, inevitably paying higher prices than their urban cousins have to pay.

Some rural shops, including one in Palnackie in my constituency, were told by one national wholesaler that they would have to spend £1,000 to have stock delivered. That is a worrying move that could force many out of business. The wholesaler said that it had to enforce the policy because of higher fuel costs, smaller margins on many retail goods and the fear that it would lose money on deliveries. It is a vicious circle.

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): Will the member give way?

Finlay Carson: I am afraid that I must carry on.

Rural communities are penalised by poor public transport links, something that the SNP has failed to address in its 15 years in power. In Galloway, we are seeing fare hikes and cuts to railway services. Many rely on public buses to go to the shops or to get to work in nearby towns. As we emerge from the pandemic, we are still seeing inadequate services. Many under-22s in my region will look on in envy as their urban cousins enjoy free bus travel—the youngest in my constituency would simply like to see a bus. That policy widens the gap between rural and urban. Where was the rural proofing in that policy?

Even those fortunate enough to have a car are hard hit at the pumps, despite the welcome freeze on fuel duty, as prices in rural garages are considerably higher than those on town and city forecourts.

People living in rural and remote communities are paying a hefty price—whether for food or fuel—just to keep going. Many do not have broadband services because of the disastrous R100 roll-out; even those who do often have to look at more expensive packages just to get a consistent connection.

Rural fuel poverty is one of the biggest problems. Energy Action Scotland has already highlighted the particular difficulties faced by people in rural areas. They experience higher fuel costs, lack of access to the mains gas grid, higher prices for delivered heating oil and gas and challenging housing stock. There is also a difficulty—

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Mr Carson.

Finlay Carson: Presiding Officer, it is scandalous that consumers in rural areas often

pay higher prices than others pay for the same product in urban areas.

Energy efficiency support must be delivered—

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude there, Mr Carson.

15:34

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): What we got from that is that the Tories are clearly opposed to free bus passes for people under the age of 22.

The cost of living crisis is happening against a backdrop of supply chain disruption during the pandemic, and it is compounded by UK policies such as Brexit and the short-sighted closure of gas storage facilities—which, of course, began under the last Labour Government—making the UK more vulnerable to volatile gas price rises.

Stephen Kerr: Is the vulnerability that Kenny Gibson speaks of helped in any way by his party's attitude to nuclear? What about the investment possibilities for communities in Scotland where nuclear power has been a feature of the local economy?

Kenneth Gibson: It is a bit of a jump to go from the utter failure of the Conservative Government to have enough storage facilities for gas to talking about the future of the nuclear industry, to be honest. If we went along with the costs of Hinkley Point, energy prices would increase dramatically compared with what people are paying just now. Mr Kerr may shake his head, but his inability to accept and face up to the facts says more about him than it does about the issue that we are debating.

The energy price cap, we now know from a decision that was rushed out this morning to further deflect from the Prime Minister's myriad travails, will rise from an average of £1,277 to £1,970, which is a 54 per cent rise. Taking into account the £135 rise from £1,142 in the autumn, that represents a 72.5 per cent jump in a single year. Huge numbers of people will find themselves plunged into fuel poverty as household incomes fail to keep up with inflation through wage rises, and the Tory decision to abandon its manifesto commitment to the triple lock will cause severe hardship to our pensioners, who are already among the poorest in Europe relative to earnings.

It is very disheartening that many families now face the problem of increasing debt. Demand for credit card lending jumped by 41.5 per cent in the last few months of 2021, while demand for other unsecured credit and buy-now-pay-later products rose by 37.5 per cent, highlighting the desperate situation that many families are in.

When Christine Grahame talked about Norway, I seemed to recall Jamie Halcro Johnston talking about Norway's debt, so I had a wee look at that. The figures are 42 per cent of GDP in Norway and 105 per cent of GDP in the UK, so I do not think that he wants to go down that road.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation said that the forthcoming national insurance hike "adds insult to injury" for low-income households, including the 2 million that are already reeling from the £1,040-a-year ending of the universal credit uplift. Meanwhile, inflation continues to rise and it has now climbed higher than in the eurozone that the Tories were so desperate to abandon.

Over the past eight years, the Scottish Government has spent more than £1 billion tackling fuel poverty. However, for as long as energy pricing and obligations are reserved to the UK Government, Scotland will continue to have to allocate substantial amounts of already restricted budgets to mitigate the effects of harsh Tory policies, having to introduce things such as the £41 million winter support fund and implement progressive policies to benefit low-paid families.

Unlike some people in the Labour Party, we in the SNP care deeply about low-paid families. Rachel Reeves MP, the shadow chancellor, told *The Guardian*:

"We don't want to be seen, and we're not, the party to represent those who are out of work".

The SNP believes that everyone should be represented. We believe that we should have the powers in this Parliament to be able to assist everyone.

On oil windfall taxes, what happened last time there was a windfall tax? There was a 10-year drop in investment that cost myriad jobs to the Scottish and indeed UK economies. Labour sees such taxes as a cash cow. Of course, the matter was debated just last week. Why not look at excessive profits of all companies, as the First Minister suggested? Why just oil and gas? We should actually—

The Presiding Officer: I ask you to conclude, Mr Gibson.

Kenneth Gibson: I will say just one last thing in conclusion, Presiding Officer, because I did take a lengthy intervention. [*Interruption.*] Under Labour's watch, oil prices rose—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson—

Kenneth Gibson: —from \$12 dollars to nearly \$100 a barrel.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson—

Kenneth Gibson: What did they do with that money?

The Presiding Officer: Mr Gibson, it is your choice whether to take an intervention. Doing so does not mean that you can continue beyond your time. Thank you.

We move to the winding-up speeches.

15:39

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I am still a councillor at Aberdeen City Council.

It has been an interesting debate. I note that a similar debate happened in the House of Commons this week on a similar motion from Labour. I want to focus initially on the proposal in Labour's motion that a windfall tax be imposed on the oil and gas industry. It is sad to see Labour now being so disconnected from the north-east. It has a significant history in the city of Aberdeen, but it seems to have turned its back on the region, just like the SNP has. It is now completely disconnected from the energy industry and its workers. A windfall tax on the industry would impact those workers most severely.

We cannot simply change a tax regime with a flick of the pen—that is unfair on our industries and causes instability and uncertainty in the marketplace. When investment is under threat, those companies fail to create jobs and invest in the north-east. It is my constituents who will suffer; it is the 100,000 Scots who are directly employed by the energy sector who will suffer; and it is their cost of living that will be affected when they have uncertainty about their employment. The SNP-Green coalition is threatening their jobs in the north-east, and now the Labour Party has joined in and is doing the same.

This week, my colleague Andrew Bowie made the point in the House of Commons that

"oil and gas prices fluctuate wildly. Gas may be sitting at near record prices today and oil may be sitting at \$88 a barrel right now ... but tomorrow that might all change. It is grossly incompetent, naive, inept ... and totally ignorant to base a policy around the price of oil and gas."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 1 February 2022; Vol 708, c225.]

He is absolutely correct.

To turn to other matters, the cost of living crisis that we face is probably the biggest issue that we have to deal with as we recover from the pandemic. The SNP-Green amendment is nothing if not predictable. It takes no responsibility and offers nothing new. "Give us more powers," it says. The SNP and Greens do not need more powers in order to fund local government correctly; they just need to value it and treat it as a partner. As Finlay Carson pointed out, there is a huge risk of increased council tax bills, due to the real-terms

cut of £251 million to local government. That will be a real burden to families across Scotland, and that is entirely the fault of the devolved Government. I hope that the devolved Government will pass on in full to our local authorities all the consequential from the UK Government's announcement today of a reduction in council tax bills in England. They do not need more powers in order to invest in our future workforce and give the people in it the skills to have a well-paid job and improve our economy's productivity.

More and increased taxes are not going to solve the cost of living crisis. Increases to the living wage, raising the personal allowance, reducing unemployment and creating well-paid jobs will do that. We have heard today that the UK Government is taking action. The Scottish Government needs to do that, too, as Jackie Baillie pointed out in her contribution.

We have heard other interesting contributions. We heard from Christine Grahame, who said that there was no debt in Norway; that has since been corrected by Kenny Gibson. Once again, the SNP has somehow moved a debate on the cost of living back to the topic of independence. I have news for Christine Grahame: if she thinks that things are bad now, independence would bring austerity max, which would affect the poorest in our society.

We also heard from Stuart McMillan, who brought up the issue of spending being wasted. The £700,000 that is being spent on civil service planning for an independence referendum is money that is wasted. What about the rusting ferries with painted-on windows? Surely that is another huge waste of money.

In conclusion, Presiding Officer, I support the amendment that has been lodged by Liz Smith—to build our economy, increase employment, support the north-east, and recover from the pandemic.

15:43

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): Clearly, members disagree on a wide range of issues, but I hope that we can agree that Labour colleagues are right to bring the topic to the chamber in some of their debating time. As many members of all parties have recognised, it is the crisis of our age. The cost of living crisis will be profound. It is already growing and is likely to continue to grow, and it will impact on people in critically important ways and on a huge scale.

Jackie Baillie opened the debate by saying that she seeks action from both Governments. We agree. She said that she does not want a Government that uses the constitution as an excuse not to act. I support independence, but I

agree: I would not want to be part of a Government that uses that as an excuse not to act. She said that blaming the UK Government is not enough, while acknowledging that it has responsibility for a wide range of issues. We agree. However, she then seemed to object to the fact that the Government amendment sets out the wide range of actions that we are taking using devolved powers.

The cost of living crisis relates to energy, of course, and that is particularly sharp at the moment. However, it is about far more than energy. The Scottish Government is not only investing but giving the clear confidence that we will be regulating to ensure greater investment in energy efficiency and reducing demand for energy. Given that the spike in wholesale gas prices is the dominant factor now, it is clear that reducing our energy consumption has to be a critical part.

Liz Smith rose—

Jackie Baillie: Will the minister take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I saw Liz Smith first; I will try to take Jackie Baillie if there is time later.

Liz Smith: What confidence does Patrick Harvie believe the Green-SNP Scottish Government is giving to workers in the north-east of Scotland?

Patrick Harvie: I have spoken to many workers in the north-east of Scotland who recognise that fossil fuels are not the future of their communities, our economy or our planet, and they want a Government that will invest in the just transition, which is what we are doing.

If we are going to achieve the reduction in people's energy costs, energy efficiency, demand reduction and zero-emissions heating have to be part of it.

The issue is about far more than energy. We have the Scottish child payment, which was introduced, then expanded, then doubled, in contrast to the UK cut to universal credit. We have invested in free school meals; in tuition for higher education, so as to not burden young people with the cost; in free prescriptions; in other measures to cut the costs of the school day; and in increased funded childcare. Council tax is lower in Scotland than it is elsewhere in the UK, and we have a council tax reduction scheme. We spend significant amounts of money from the Scottish Government budget to mitigate the deeply harmful impact of UK social security policies.

Jackie Baillie: The amendment from the SNP Government will provide very cold comfort for people who are struggling now. The minister is in danger of missing the point. The issue is not what the Government has done before; it is what extra it

will do now, because people are in a worse position, and they are looking to both Governments to help them out.

Patrick Harvie: We have a great deal more to come. As well as the introduction of free bus travel for under-22s, which has only just come in and which will protect routes in rural areas that are vulnerable to cuts by private market operators, we will be implementing the fair fares review, to look at rebalancing the cost of getting about.

We will be introducing rent controls, as well as protection against evictions during the costly winter months. We are committed to the progressive taxation system that we have in Scotland, in contrast with calls from Conservative colleagues—which were made again only yesterday—for tax cuts for higher earners.

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude.

Patrick Harvie: There is also a great deal that we need the UK Government to do. We have a clear focus on taking every action that we can with devolved powers. The just transition away from fossil fuels has to be critical in achieving that. This Government is committed to taking that action with every lever that we have at our disposal.

The Presiding Officer: I call Pam Duncan-Glancy to wind up the debate.

15:47

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I will try to address much of what I have heard today.

The cost of living crisis is not just a concept; it is a reality for too many people who are becoming increasingly unable to make ends meet and who are not able to afford rent, travel, food, energy or clothes—the basic components of a decent standard of living. As my colleague Paul Sweeney noted, this is an emergency.

We have known for some time that without further action—and fast—the Government will fall short of the child poverty targets that the Parliament set in law. We must acknowledge that, although the overarching levels of poverty among children are far too high in general, they are even higher among the six priority groups that the Scottish Government identified: lone-parent families; families with someone who is disabled; families that have three or more children; families that have a child under one; families with young mothers; and black and minority ethnic families.

It is not just poverty among children that we must look at. I could fill a day talking about the poverty and inequality faced by unpaid carers and the disproportionate impact that unpaid work, the pandemic and the gender pay gap have on the ability of women and their families to escape

poverty and the cost of living crisis, but, given my limited time today, I refer members to the previous speeches that I have made in the chamber.

The poverty and inequality that are being exacerbated by the cost of fuel and food continue to rise, meaning that bills that people were already struggling to pay are increasing even further. No one should be facing having to choose between heating their home or putting food on the table. On that point, I agree with my colleague Stuart McMillan, but I gently suggest that, if he is committed to ending in-work poverty, the SNP should start by using the powers of the Parliament to address the fact that 61 per cent of children in poverty are living in working households.

Our motion asks the Scottish Government to support the measures that have been announced by the Labour Party, which would offer protection from the energy hikes that have been announced today. That would save most households £200. We would also target extra support to squeezed middle and low-income families, including pensioners, to take £600 off their bills.

We asked SNP MPs to support our policy proposals through a one-off windfall tax, but they refused. This morning, the First Minister said that she supported windfall tax calls. Therefore, I wonder why her MPs refused to vote for a windfall tax. Richard Lochhead noted that some of the powers are reserved. He is right. I look to the SNP and Green members and ask why people in Scotland are sending their colleagues to Westminster only for them not to vote on such a significant issue, to improve the lives of people in Scotland. No matter what members' views on the Westminster Parliament are, the reality is that, right now, the SNP is sending MPs to the House of Commons on behalf of the people of Scotland, and people expect them to make decisions in their best interests. SNP MPs across the country have failed to do that duty this week.

In every general election, the SNP stands on a platform that says that it is stronger for Scotland. This week, the SNP refused to vote for a policy that, today, the First Minister said that she would support. We cannot afford to let the Tory Government off the hook in that way. We must use every vote that we have in the House of Commons and all the people power in that room to hold the Tory Government to account.

We want to give families security in the short term by keeping bills down, not for luxuries but for essentials, as my colleague Paul O'Kane has said. We also want to offer security in the long term. People are falling from one crisis to the next in Scotland. We see that in the repeat applications to the Scottish welfare fund.

The SNP's solution to the cost of living crisis has been to offer stopgaps, one-off handouts and little bits of support. When it comes to long-term systemic change, the SNP is simply not willing to take the action that is needed. It says that today's crisis can be solved with yesterday's policies. However, the situation has moved on.

The Tories' response, of course, has been to end essential universal credit, so we cannot trust them either. Tackling the cost of living crisis must go hand in hand with action to address structural inequality and poverty. The UK Government cannot be trusted on that or much else right now. It protects its own time and again.

The Scottish Government is not doing nearly enough either. It has the means and the power, but it lacks the motivation. I ask the Government to have some humility, to recognise its own failings and to challenge.

I am afraid that I must challenge Christine Grahame on two things that she said. On the notion of economic competence, I urge her to look at the black hole in the Scottish Fiscal Commission's forecasts on social security and its downward revision of the tax take due to the Scottish Government's failure to create jobs and the building of a low-wage economy in Scotland. On the suggestion about Scottish Labour mitigating Tory policy, I make no apologies for wanting to use all the powers of the Scottish Parliament to protect people in Scotland. However, we do not simply have aspirations to mitigate bad Tory decisions; we aspire to replace them and make better ones.

This week, the Poverty and Inequality Commission, which is a body that is governed by the Scottish Government, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and anti-poverty organisations have warned that the Government needs to do more. It cannot go on ignoring them. The Government must take action now to reduce housing costs by controlling rents, insulating homes and saving families on-going heating costs. It must regulate bus companies to ensure that fares are affordable and freeze rail fares. It could ensure that work pays by using all the powers of procurement and end zero-hours contracts.

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: It could secure a living wage for those in the public sector and, of course, pay social care workers £15 an hour.

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Ms Duncan-Glancy.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Under the SNP, poverty has continued to rise. I remind Mr Gibson that that is in contrast to the fact that, under a Labour

Government and the Labour Party's watch, things were very different.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I support the motion in Jackie Baillie's name.

ScotRail

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I remind members of the Covid-related measures that 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 debate on motion S6M-03044, in the name of Neil Bibby, on a people's ScotRail.

15:54

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): After 25 years in the private sector, ScotRail will finally return to public hands on 31 March. Scottish Labour welcomes the return of ScotRail to public ownership. We called for that. We supported that in the Parliament and we long campaigned for it alongside passengers, trade unions and the Scottish Co-operative Party. I remind members why: it was to strengthen accountability, to reinvest profits back into services and to make public transport a true public service again.

The Scottish National Party had no choice but to bring ScotRail back into public ownership after the abject failure of the Abellio deal. The deal that the SNP heralded as "world leading" was a flop, and years of delays, cancellations and overcrowding were simply unacceptable. However, the SNP and Greens now have a choice. We have a new transport minister in Jenny Gilruth, and with a new minister comes the chance to adopt a new approach—a clean break with the past year, in which Scottish Government actions were running counter to its rhetoric. We saw unprecedented industrial unrest, a 3.8 per cent fare hike and proposals to shut ticket office desks, and there was no commitment from the Scottish Government to restore services to pre-pandemic levels this year.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Would the member accept that, before Covid, 77 per cent of the seats on trains were empty? Does he not think that that needs to be addressed?

Neil Bibby: We need more seats on trains, particularly given the potential need for social distancing.

While ministers make grand statements about the importance of tackling climate change, bringing about modal shift and reducing car use, they are failing to build back our railways. Today, the Government can vote with Scottish Labour and set out a new path to give the workforce assurances and certainty; to reject the cuts agenda; and to aspire to better for Scotland's passengers. Disappointingly, however, it appears from the Government amendment that there will

be no change in approach from the failures of the past few months. If anything, the Government is doubling down; its lengthy amendment is notable as much for what it does not say as for what it does.

Members have already heard today about the soaring cost of living. This is the wrong time to impose the biggest fare hike in a decade. A 3.8 per cent increase is hard to justify at any time, but it cannot possibly be justified now, especially when services are being diminished.

Last year, ScotRail opened a consultation on its May 2022 timetable, in which it intended to cut 300 rail services per day in comparison with pre-pandemic levels. Today, the Government amendment welcomes the restoration of 25 services,

“following the recent consultation on timetable changes”.

That would have been news to the Parliament, until ScotRail emailed us at 2.37 this afternoon with details of its new timetable. Far from increasing services, the timetable represents a cut to one in 10 services in comparison with pre-pandemic levels. It proposes 2,150 daily services in comparison with 2,400 before, which is a cut of 250; and 590,000 seats per day in comparison with 640,000 before, which is a cut of 50,000. I have no doubt that we will hear a lot of spin from the Government, but those are the facts and the inconvenient truth that it will want to ignore. The Government is confirming today that the new ScotRail will start with a vastly diminished timetable. That is wrong for passengers and for the climate, and it is wrong for SNP and Green MSPs to endorse those cuts today.

Scottish Labour is also calling for a new approach to industrial relations. Rail workers literally kept Scotland moving during the pandemic and they deserve our thanks, yet the Government amendment would delete our call for compulsory redundancies to be ruled out. That is in stark contrast to the current franchise agreement, which includes a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies throughout the lifetime of the franchise contract.

As the minister will know, there is no agreement from the workforce that the general public sector pay policy should apply to the rail sector at all. Forcing it on the workforce is regarded as an attempt to enforce pay restraint, and as an attack on free collective bargaining. Not even the Conservatives did away with free collective bargaining between unions and the operator of last resort when the east coast franchise came back in-house. To do it now makes a mockery of the SNP's claim that the culture of ScotRail Trains Ltd will be founded on fair work. I hope that the minister will think again and reset industrial

relations on our railways, because her amendment is a recipe for industrial unrest and avoidable disruption to passengers.

Scotland's railway must be modern, but modernisation must not be used as an excuse for cuts and closures. Staff who work in booking offices do much more than sell tickets: they give advice to passengers, assist disabled passengers and make our railway more accessible. Often, station toilets and lifts are in operation only when staff are at the station. Staff grit station platforms on cold mornings, deter antisocial behaviour and are a presence that makes the railway safe, which is a concern for many, especially women who travel alone. From helping one of my constituents deal with a diabetic shock to recently saving someone's life at Dalmuir station, staff go above and beyond. We should never underestimate the importance of our front-line staff.

ScotRail's rush to close ticket offices, reduce their hours or close buildings entirely cannot go unchallenged. The Parliament should reject those cuts and closures.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Will Neil Bibby give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is about to conclude.

Neil Bibby: I would gladly have given way.

Our railways need new leadership. The decisions that the Government makes now will have an enormous bearing on ScotRail's future. We are asking the Government and the Parliament as a whole for clarity on the way forward. Members should reject the agenda of service cuts, condemn rising fares, rule out compulsory redundancies and back collective bargaining. Let us work together to achieve a fully staffed, world-class ScotRail under public control.

I move,

That the Parliament welcomes the return of ScotRail to the public sector; considers the new public sector operator to be critical in securing modal shift and affordable, accessible and reliable rail services for Scotland's passengers; condemns, therefore, the current plans for ticket office cuts and closures, service reductions, and the recent 3.8% increase in fares, which undermine progress towards net zero, modal shift and service improvement; considers that the new ScotRail, which will be under public ownership, must provide well-staffed, world-class services, and calls on the Scottish Government to rule out compulsory redundancies or any dilution of collective bargaining under the new operator, and further calls on the Scottish Government to reject tickets office cuts and closures and set out a timetable for restoring overall ScotRail services to pre-pandemic levels.

16:01

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): I welcome the opportunity to debate the future of

Scotland's railway. That future will have a new beginning on 1 April when ScotRail passenger services come into Scottish Government control. The debate is Labour Party business, but I am really keen to listen to the views of members across the chamber. Next week, I will update Parliament with further detail and I look forward to meeting our rail unions.

The mobilisation of ScotRail Trains Ltd gives us a real opportunity to rebuild following the pandemic. I know that we all value the importance of reliable and efficient rail services that connect the communities that we represent, give access to jobs, training and education and drive tourism. Rail is vital not only to our economic recovery, but to meeting our net zero commitments.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The current budget cuts nearly £80 million from rail maintenance and renewal. What impact will that have on the efficiency of the rail service?

Jenny Gilruth: I believe that Mr Kerr's party voted against the budget. Setting that aside, I do not accept the point that he made. The Government has made record investment in our railways and intends to take them into public ownership, something that the Conservatives have consistently voted against.

I will take some time to talk about our rail workers, who are absolutely essential in the transition into public ownership. The contribution that they made during the pandemic was invaluable: they made sure that our essential workers could get to where they needed to be and kept our country going. I extend my sincere thanks to them.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Does the minister recognise that many ScotRail workers are concerned that the protections that they currently have against compulsory redundancy might be under jeopardy with the move towards the public ownership of ScotRail? What reassurances can she give on that?

Jenny Gilruth: The Government has always respected collective bargaining. However, I am sure that members will respect the fact that the chamber is not the place where such negotiations should take place. As I said, I will meet the rail unions next week and I look forward to those discussions.

It was clear even before the pandemic that some ScotRail services were significantly underused. Some off-peak services ran virtually empty. That is not an effective use of our finances and it has a negative impact on our environment. At the height of Covid, revenue dropped to less than 10 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. Nearly half of rail passengers have now returned to

ScotRail services, which is good. However, travel patterns and purchasing habits are changing.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Jenny Gilruth: I would like to make progress.

With more people working from home, weekends are now the busiest times for rail travel, so returning to pre-pandemic timetables makes little sense. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that ScotRail announced this afternoon that, from May this year, 150 more services will be added, compared with December last year. That equates to around 2,150 daily services, a move that I hope members will welcome.

Throughout the pandemic, to ensure that services continued to run, to give employment security for staff and to cover operating costs, the Government provided more than £500 million of additional funding to our franchises via emergency measures agreements. Those measures were extended and are now in place until the end of February. Overall, funding for our franchises has been, on average, over three times more than would have been expected had revenues not been so severely impacted.

Neil Bibby: I recognise the role that the minister played in the Levenmouth rail campaign to reopen that part of the railway. I recognise and welcome what she said about rail recovery being absolutely key, but I am concerned that we are hearing very much the same lines that we heard from the previous transport minister about digging in on those cuts. Will the minister please take another look at those cuts? They will really affect passengers and our rail services across Scotland.

Jenny Gilruth: I am not digging in on anything—I am setting out the Government's view. However, when I meet ScotRail next Tuesday, I will raise some of the concerns around timetable changes and ticket office closures, and I hope that that gives Neil Bibby some reassurance on that point.

The recent fares increase is an example of where the Government has had to make difficult decisions. We know that any fare increase is unwelcome for passengers, but the changes that are being implemented this year are absolutely essential to our wider recovery plans.

I give members an undertaking that I am in listening mode as we move forward with our ambitious plans to bring ScotRail into public ownership. Our trade unions will be pivotal in that endeavour and I very much look forward to working with them and meeting them next week.

Delivering Scotland's railways back into public ownership will not be without challenge, but I am absolutely determined to ensure a seamless

transition that delivers for passengers and our railway workers.

I move amendment S6M-03044.3, to leave out from “condemns” to end and insert:

“notes the vital role that ScotRail staff and workers will play in delivering these new services and thanks them for all that they have done to keep rail services running throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; welcomes that staff will transfer with their current terms and conditions, will benefit from public sector pay policy, and that any pay deals already agreed for 2022-23 will be honoured; further welcomes the investment by the Scottish Government to decarbonise and expand Scotland’s railways, including £1 billion to electrify 441 kilometres of track and improve infrastructure, benefiting more than 35 million passenger journeys across Scotland each year, a record £4.85 billion allocated, including ongoing electrification and decarbonisation, over £9 billion of investment by the Scottish Government since 2007 helping to reconnect 14 communities to the rail network, with five more to be reconnected in the next three years, and over £555 million to sustain services and jobs throughout the pandemic; laments that the Scottish Labour Party joined with the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party to vote against a draft Scottish budget for 2022-23, which increased expenditure and investment in Scotland’s rail services; welcomes that rail fares in Scotland are still on average 20% lower than across the rest of Great Britain, and that, from May, there will be 150 more rail services than have been running since December 2021, with 25 services being reintroduced following the recent consultation on timetable changes; recognises that there has been widespread public and stakeholder interest in the ScotRail consultation on ticket office availability, but notes that the consultation only closed on 2 February 2022 and responses are therefore still to be reviewed; further notes that the fair fares review will explore what more can be done to ensure that fares across all modes of public transport are equitable and sustainable; agrees that the culture of ScotRail Trains Ltd will be founded on fair work; recognises the key role that a publicly owned and controlled rail service will play in the future to help transform Scotland’s economy, to cut emissions from transport, deliver on the climate change targets and create a fairer, greener Scotland, and calls for the full devolution of rail from the UK Parliament, including Network Rail, in order to operate a wholly publicly owned, fully integrated rail network in Scotland.”

16:06

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I will start by doing something that I should have done previously, which is to welcome Jenny Gilruth to her new role. I had thought that she had made a promising start by giving some very straight answers to questions in the chamber but, today, she has hunkered down somewhat. However, she says that she is in listening mode, so I will take her at her word.

I thank Labour for bringing this important debate to the chamber. We are at an important junction for the rail industry. It is a fork in the line where we can either do better or have more of the same. The problem is that we do not know where we are heading, because we have had no vision from the Scottish Government. Whether members would

like a nationalised rail industry or not, we do not know what that is going to mean. We do know that there will be cuts in services and ticket offices and that Abellio has been doing the SNP’s dirty work by preparing the ground for all that.

On the subject of ticket offices, in my region alone, East Kilbride station will lose up to five hours a day; Airdrie, which is a busy station, will have five hours cut from Monday to Saturday; and the office in Cumbernauld, another big town, will be open for only 90 minutes a day, Monday to Thursday, and not at all on Friday.

Jenny Gilruth: Does Mr Simpson accept that the way in which people buy their train tickets in 2022 has changed compared with 30 years ago? The last time a consultation was undertaken on that was 30 years ago. Surely things have changed since 1992.

Graham Simpson: Things have changed a lot since 1992, but, as was outlined earlier, the need for personal service has not changed; we require that in some stations.

We need to get back to some sort of normality and end the emergency timetable. We say no to the 300 service cuts that are coming down the line, although it would seem that there will now be a mere 250 cuts. We have to get rid of the temporary timetables.

Fares have been going up, but services are being cut. If we want to get people back on the train, we need fares to go down, not up. Stephen Kerr will talk about that.

Mr Kerr is actually on the same page as Mick Lynch of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. Mr Lynch says the following, and Mr Kerr would no doubt agree:

“We already have a cost-of-living crisis and now there is a climate cost to latest Scottish rail fare hikes which will deter people from using rail, especially when we know the price of using rail has risen ... four times more quickly than the cost of petrol in the last decade.”

He is right.

In the Scottish Government’s most recent budget, it has cut almost £100 million from vital rail infrastructure. I mentioned East Kilbride earlier; that line is bearing the brunt of those costs.

We need to increase the number of staff in stations and ticket offices. We need to expand the ticket office network. Those two things were contained in the vision, the only vision that we have had so far—and that was prepared by the rail unions. I am pleased to hear that the minister will be talking to the unions next week, because we need to repair industrial relations on our railways. They have been shattered, and they need to be fixed in order for us to move on.

16:14

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Had the amendment in my name been chosen this afternoon, it would have called on the Scottish Government to expand eligibility for railcards, so that everyone is eligible to get the benefit of rail discounts and is encouraged to take climate-friendly transport. That would be based on the model that already exists throughout London and the south-east, and would mean that everyone would be eligible to get one third off the price of rail travel. Scottish Liberal Democrats also propose a 50 per cent concession for those who already qualify for railcards. That would slash the cost of rail travel for passengers and encourage people to ditch their cars, which would reduce emissions and tip the balance in favour of climate-friendly transport. I will say more about reducing emissions in rural, remote and island areas, which do not have that option, a little later.

With Abellio's ScotRail contract coming to an end this March, we have the opportunity to revisit the approach that is taken on rail fares and discounts. Of course, we also await the Scottish Government's fair fares review, but it is clear from the recent news headlines and the debate that was held earlier today that we must do all that we can to tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

Families and businesses are being hit from every angle by rising prices, so it is hard to take the SNP-Green Government's commitment to decarbonisation seriously when the cost of the most environmentally friendly form of mass transportation increases every year. Indeed, an eye-watering fare increase of 3.8 per cent last month was the biggest hike in the past 10 years. There seems to be a clear lack of vision on the climate emergency.

Scotland's transport emissions are stubbornly high and are unchanged since the 1990s. One way that we can tackle that is by getting people out of cars and on to our railways and public transport, but that will not happen if costs to passengers add up. It is not just costs to passengers that will be an obstacle to reducing emissions; a reduction in services will be, too. How can we expect passengers to seriously consider rail travel if it is unlikely that there will be a consistent service on their usual routes? As we begin to resume some form of normal life, we need to ensure that commuters do not find it easier to use their cars than travel by rail.

I turn to rural, remote and island areas, such as my constituency, Shetland. Hopping on a train is not an option in an islander's day-to-day life. If you ask a Shetlander where their nearest train station is, do not be surprised to hear them answer "Bergen". Extending programmes such as the under-22s bus concession to include free ferry

travel, however, would not only be equitable but would encourage young people into the habit of ditching cars in favour of public transport—if that transport is properly connected—which would further reduce emissions.

Scottish Liberal Democrats want to give people new hope for the climate emergency. We all know that we must act fast before it is too late. We want to see an efficient and green rail network that gives everyone railcard discounts instead of ever-increasing prices. We need to make sure that rural bus services are more accessible and that they tie in with rail timetables.

I urge the Scottish Government to up its efforts to open or reopen rail connections to the communities that are crying out for them, such as Newburgh, while upgrades to the far north line and dualling of the Highland mainline would benefit rural communities in the north of Scotland. That is a serious, ambitious and credible proposal for boosting rail travel. It would be good for our environment and good for our economy, too.

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

16:14

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

I welcome the minister to her new post and ask her, as she takes it up, to take a fresh look at the glaring inconsistencies in the Government's transport policy. It is no good going to the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow, boasting of a

"world-leading commitment to cut greenhouse gas emissions"—[*Official Report*, 13 January 2022; c 57.]

while savaging the greenest form of public transport that we have. It is no good coming to Parliament to unveil route maps that are aimed at "driving down car use" if, at the same time, public transport alternatives are being decimated.

On the very same day that the SNP and Greens announced their co-operation agreement for a "fairer" and "greener" Scotland, ScotRail announced a plan to axe 300 train services a day—not temporarily but permanently. On the very same day that the previous transport minister stood up in Parliament to defend those public transport cuts, the rest of the world was marking world car free day. You couldn't make it up!

Our message to the new Minister for Transport is simple: it is that there is still time. There is still time to listen to the RMT, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, the Transport Salaried Staffs Association and Unite the union, who tell us that our railways, in public

ownership and run for passengers not profit, are part of the solution to the climate crisis, not part of the problem. There is still time for the minister to understand that there is something profoundly unethical about Abellio conducting a consultation for a service that in less than 60 days' time it will no longer run. No wonder people think that it is being paid to do the Scottish Government's dirty work for it.

Last month, the First Minister came to Parliament to defend the plans to cut ticket offices and jobs at 117 stations across Scotland. She declared that

"the ticket process is now automated"—[*Official Report*, 20 January 2022; c 24.]

and that that was "modernisation". In the region that I represent, that "modernisation" means that there is a 30 per cent cut in cover at Airdrie, Falkirk Grahamston and Polmont, a 50 per cent cut at Coatbridge, a 60 per cent cut at Shotts and a 78 per cent cut at Cumbernauld.

On the question of automation, the RMT has just surveyed its members. This is what one of them wrote:

"Station staff are first responders. We are the safety net for vulnerable people. We are first aiders. We are there for disabled assists. We are there for disruptions. We are there for young girls who get harassed on our platforms. We are there for cleaning and ensuring that the station is a safe environment. We do not just sell tickets."

The removal of staff from our railway stations will not only deter passengers; it will also deny them. So, has the plan been equality-proofed? What about elderly passengers, women passengers travelling alone at night and people with learning disabilities? Do they not deserve a good-quality public transport service that is accessible to them?

I close by quoting the minister herself on the subject of the Levenmouth rail link. We were told that

"it will bring jobs; it will bring investment; and it will widen the horizons of the next generation."—[*Official Report*, 27 September 2017; c 77.]

The cuts to Scotland's rail services that are being defended by a Government that she is now part of will cost jobs, drive out investment and narrow the horizons of the next generation. In that same speech to Parliament, the minister quoted Jimmy Reid, who said:

"whoever takes the important economic decisions in society ipso facto determines the social priorities of that society."

He was right, so now that the minister is in power she should take that advice, reverse the cuts, change the Government's priorities, save those jobs and invest in Scotland's railways.

16:19

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): I welcome Jenny Gilruth to what I think is her first debate as the transport minister and offer her my congratulations.

The motion opens by welcoming the return of ScotRail to the public sector. I hope that speakers from the Labour Party will recognise that it is the SNP Government that has brought what we can of the rail system back into public ownership before they reel off criticisms of the Scottish Government for running a railway that we do not yet have full charge of.

There are major challenges facing the railways as we come out of the pandemic: the impact of Covid on public transport has been massive. It will take time for usage to return to pre-pandemic levels. Throughout the pandemic, the Scottish Government has supported rail franchises with more than £1 billion, including £450 million of additional funding through the emergency measures agreements. However, that level of funding is not sustainable in the longer term. I think that everyone would accept that.

The motion talks of fare increases, but does not mention that, on average, ScotRail fares are 20 per cent cheaper than those across the rest of the UK. The motion talks about jobs, but it does not acknowledge that employment in Scotland's railways is the highest it has been since devolution. Despite some failings by the private companies running our trains in the past, the Scottish Government's track record of directing improvements and investment in the railway network stands up to scrutiny.

Graham Simpson: Could the member tell us what improvements he wants to see under a nationalised ScotRail?

Jim Fairlie: I do not work in railways, so I will leave the improvements to the railway sector and the people who actually know what that they are talking about. I am quite sure that the minister just said that she is meeting the unions next week. Is that not so, minister?

Since 2007, under the SNP, the Scottish Government has invested more than £9 billion in rail infrastructure in Scotland. The last decade has seen an investment of around £1 billion in some 441km of track electrification and associated infrastructure improvements, directly benefiting more than 35 million passenger journeys across Scotland each year.

Communities across Scotland have been reconnected to the railway network and in the next three years, more will follow. I would like to see the names of some of the places in my constituency added to that list. I represent one of

the largest constituencies by geographic size and yet we have only one station: Gleneagles.

In my constituency, the old station buildings at Blackford have given way to a new freight terminal, taking Highland Spring's bottled water distribution off the road. I congratulate Highland Spring on taking the action in the face of the climate emergency.

Perth station is in the Deputy First Minister's constituency but is very important to my constituents. The Tay cities deal has committed £50 million towards a Perth bus and rail interchange, which will help to make those vital transport links and create a much more streamlined experience for customers with ongoing connections.

Having mentioned the Tay cities deal, I cannot really let the Tory members off the hook by failing to remind the chamber of the missing millions—

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Jim Fairlie: Yes, I will.

Finlay Carson: A few short months ago, the previous transport minister inadvertently misled Parliament by suggesting that the number of trains to Stranraer was going up when in fact it was going down. Can the member explain how we get more people on to trains when they are cutting services and putting up fares, even above the price of petrol? How can we get more people on the trains?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Fairlie, you have 30 seconds left.

Jim Fairlie: The initial understanding and expectation was for equal funding from both the Scottish and Westminster Governments—£200 million each—[*Laughter.*] If Mr Carson's intervention had been on the fact that the Conservative Government was £50 million short, I would have taken his intervention seriously.

In city region deals across Scotland, the Scottish Government has committed more than the UK Government. Across the five city region deals, the UK Government has come up short by £410 million—that is another cost of the union right there.

Stations were not always so scarce in my constituency. As in many parts of the country, there are station roads in towns and villages that have not seen a train in my lifetime, near enough. Apparently, there was even a station in Muirton, which was set up to serve Muirton park, St Johnstone's old football ground. It was only used on match days.

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

Jim Fairlie: Yes, I can do that.

The task of renewing and improving Scotland's railways would be an awful lot easier if the whole rail network infrastructure, including signals, tunnels and bridges, were still in the hands of the UK Government. I want to see Network Rail becoming fully accountable in Scotland. Do the Labour members agree?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Fairlie. I call Stephen Kerr to be followed by Audrey Nicoll. We have no time in hand and any interventions must be absorbed in the member's time.

16:24

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to be able to speak in this debate as a friend of the RMT union—a new guise, in which I rejoice.

Discussion about improving the accessibility of trains is of critical importance for Scotland if we are to meet our net zero commitments. Last week, during First Minister's questions, I highlighted the outrageous cost that the people of Falkirk face in using Scotland's trains. I remind the chamber of those figures: for someone who travels from Falkirk to Edinburgh and back every day of the working week, it costs £72.50, while for someone travelling from Falkirk to Glasgow and back every day of the working week, it costs £85.50.

In the First Minister's answer to my question, she made a pledge to the people of Scotland that her Government would make rail fares as affordable as possible. The following day, the First Minister's answer became a pledge that was splashed across the front page of the *Metro* newspaper, which was no doubt the handiwork of the dozens of media spin types that the First Minister has at her disposal. I look forward in the weeks and months ahead to hearing the Government's plans to make rail fares as affordable as possible. By the way, in plain English, that means, in many instances, cutting the fares, so we look forward to hearing about the Government's plan to cut fares and get more people to use the trains.

We must make it easier for people to buy tickets. We must improve parking facilities at train stations, as well as integrating bus services. We must increase the number of train services that are provided. We must reopen closed railway stations, which is a commitment that was in the Scottish Conservative manifesto in 2021. In short, we have many steps to take until we can say that Scotland's trains are fully accessible.

There is not one solution to address all those problems. There are many strands to the solution

and I will highlight one of them, which would be the introduction of an Oyster card scheme in Scotland. Plans to do so with the introduction of a Saltire card were previously announced by the SNP, but recycling and reheating announcements is what the SNP does so well with its dozens of media types in the ministerial towers.

In 2012, the then Deputy First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said:

“The Saltire Card will be a hugely exciting development for transport in Scotland and will help us achieve a truly world-class public transport network. It will make it easier, more attractive and possibly cheaper for people to get around using public transport and will help further connect our cities.”

That was in 2012. The Oyster card has been used in London since 2003. It is hardly unproven technology, yet here we are in 2022—10 years later—and the SNP has failed to introduce it. It is another occasion on which eyes have been taken off the ball.

What is stopping the Government? It can be done. We know that because, at COP26, delegates were given Oyster-like cards to enable free access to travel around Glasgow on trains, subway and buses. COP26 delegates were privileged enough to get those cards. Perhaps the minister will explain why the people of Scotland do not merit the same privilege to such a service. There is no excuse.

The SNP and Labour portray bringing the rail operator back into public ownership as the answer to solve all the problems of the rail network, but it is not. Problems of cost, investment and ticketing will remain no matter who operates the railway. There are many problems to solve that require innovation, creativity and accountability. We need more services, we need better connectivity between different forms of public transport and we need to reopen lines. The railway being back in full public ownership, it is now the SNP Government's responsibility to ensure that all of that and more is delivered. It has taken the responsibility to be the train operator and it must now deliver on its commitments.

No doubt, true to form, the SNP will seek to deflect blame and attention as it has done in almost every other area of public policy. Scotland's railways are now the Government's responsibility and taking the railways back into public ownership has simply reinforced—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, will you please conclude?

Stephen Kerr: The buck stops with the minister.

16:28

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Like other colleagues, I welcome Jenny Gilruth to her new role.

Rail connectivity is a lifeline for the north-east, ensuring travel to and from education, employment, leisure activities, specialist medical treatment and so on. Members know that the north-east hosts an energy sector that has contributed more than £330 billion and counting to UK tax coffers. Railways have been pivotal in that achievement.

The causal factors impacting our railways over the years are complex. The pandemic hit services hard and made the financial climate extremely difficult.

The return of rail services to public ownership is welcome and an opportunity to get serious about addressing many of the challenges.

The SNP amendment outlines the record £4.85 billion investment by the Scottish Government to decarbonise and expand Scotland's railways, including on-going electrification and decarbonisation.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am hearing Audrey Nicoll describing the rail issues in her north-east constituency. Does she agree that we need to focus on rural areas, including those south of the central belt and in my South Scotland region?

Audrey Nicoll: I absolutely agree. Coming from a provincial and rural area, I think that it is absolutely vital that the investment in and plans for rolling stock and infrastructure and the route to net zero extend to rural areas, in particular.

Liam Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Audrey Nicoll: I will move on, if the member does not mind.

That investment is also vital to getting people back on trains and making rail a travel option of choice.

Circling back to the north-east, progress is already being made at Aberdeen railway station where an £8 million refurbishment is under way. Last year, Kintore railway station reopened, and the North East of Scotland Transport Partnership is scoping the reopening of two small stations in my constituency. The Aberdeen hydrogen hub is an innovative opportunity that could, in time, expand production to connect to larger volume use of hydrogen for rail transport.

Recent Friends of the Earth research on nitrogen dioxide levels put Wellington Road in my constituency as the 11th most polluted road in

Scotland, so the need to decarbonise our railways and get folk out of cars is pressing.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Audrey Nicoll: I will not; thank you.

Last September, in a debate on ScotRail led by Neil Bibby, the transport minister stated that our rail plans included rail becoming a go-to for freight. I would be interested to hear from the minister more detail about that, and the prominence that it will be given going forward.

Turning to the workforce, in preparing for today, I asked a very good friend, a train driver, for his thoughts. He highlighted the absolute professionalism of staff who, at the height of the pandemic, dealt with challenging members of the public unwilling to wear face masks. They went above and beyond. He described how ScotRail adapted well in providing greater areas for staff and was excellent at updating Government messaging through emails and social media. Staff remaining on full pay was also of huge importance. Hearing that, I urge the unions to get around the table with the management team to negotiate arrangements that will bring reassurance and stability for staff during a period of change.

On the long-term role of rail in our transport infrastructure, my friend welcomed the progress on electrification, and the potential role of hydrogen in rail travel.

The principle that publicly-run organisations, free from the motivation of profit, can deliver exceptional services, was exemplified during the pandemic by the NHS and emergency services. The Scottish Government's commitments to our transport network demonstrate that there is much planned to ensure that ScotRail will provide a quality service to Scotland's passengers, and I will be closely monitoring progress.

16:33

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I welcome the focus of this afternoon's debate, because it is clear that we need a reset and relaunch of all public transport if we are to meet climate targets. This has been a great week for the bus, with the launch of free travel for under-22s at last and the promise of increased funding to protect bus services as they come through the pandemic. I also look forward to the launch of the community bus fund to take more bus services under municipal public ownership.

However, we need to take that same transformative approach to rail as we recover from the pandemic. A people's ScotRail must respond to the needs of current and future passengers while retaining, valuing and investing in its

workforce. The concerns that rail unions, passengers and other have expressed about timetable changes, ticket office closures and the fear of redundancy underline the fact that the Government and the new minister have work to do to build confidence that a genuine people's ScotRail will emerge in the months to come.

Let me be clear that I share many of those concerns. However, although there is much in Labour's motion that I agree with, it looks backwards to the pre-Covid world when we should be looking forwards to the services and timetables that will be needed to get more people out of private cars and on to the railway.

Our vision is for better services, electrified routes, new lines, accessible stations, better pay and conditions for workers, improved ticketing and fair fares. That does not mean that there should be no changes to the way in which rail services are run, but it does mean that any financial savings must be reinvested back into rail services and the workforce that is needed to run them, rather than being stripped out of the rail system.

Graham Simpson: Will the member give way?

Mark Ruskell: I do not have time.

Planning for that transformation means listening to passengers and workers, and ensuring that their voices are heard, including at board level. It is clear that ScotRail and previous operators have not run meaningful consultations on service delivery for many years. The most recent ticket office assessment was in 1991, and I do not think that there has been a national timetable review in living memory. The consultations that have taken place over the past months have been badly managed. The decision to conduct a massive consultation on timetabling during a pandemic, when passenger trends were deeply uncertain, was clearly flawed.

Last September, I ran an online town hall event on the timetable review for my constituents. Their concerns were very clear. Passengers were angry about the removal of direct services from Kirkcaldy to Perth and the increased waiting time for connections at Ladybank, which was a particular concern for old and vulnerable people and women. Passengers were also angry about the proposed dramatic increase in journey times from Perth to Edinburgh, especially when ScotRail representatives suggested at the meeting that rail could never compete against cars using the Queensferry crossing.

I welcome the fact that ScotRail has backed down on those damaging changes. I also congratulate the hundreds of my constituents who joined our campaigning action to help to make the case and force change. Let us see that as an early win for people power that can set the tone for a

people's ScotRail that listens to the needs of passengers and to the workers on our railway.

However, there is still more to do, including retaining customer-facing staff in stations and ensuring that the commitment that the minister has given that there will be no compulsory redundancies is carried over in full to the new contracts.

The issues with ScotRail will not disappear overnight. There is serious work to be done to make a people's railway a reality, and that means recognising the challenges that we face and working hard to resolve them.

16:37

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I congratulate Jenny Gilruth on her appointment—I hope that she brings fresh eyes to this crucial debate—and I declare an interest as a member of the RMT parliamentary group.

At last, we have public ownership of our rail services in sight—it will happen in the very near future. We should grasp the opportunity to reverse poor services and high fares, to modernise our ticketing system and to renew the relationships with the workforce. It would be a real test for any Government, but it is a particular test for the current Scottish Government to show that it has the energy and the ambition to bring about a better rail service.

In no way is Labour looking back. We are highlighting the realities of the present situation. We must have a confident and satisfied workforce on which we can rely, and we must address the present realities and talk about the future.

Why does it matter who runs our railway? I believe that it matters because public ownership is the best way to ensure the strongest accountability and to have a train service that is run in the interests of ordinary travellers who need the reliable and affordable service that many members have talked about. After all, it is a public service.

To address John Mason's question about why there are empty seats on trains, which he seems to raise at every opportunity, maybe that is because some people cannot afford to get on a train in the first place. There are many people with whom I have common cause when it comes to the affordability of train travel. It is a central issue for a publicly run service that ordinary workers should be able to afford to get on the train in the first place. Why is the importance of that to a thriving economy not understood?

Glasgow, which John Mason and I represent, has the largest urban rail network outwith London, which was created to serve commuters going to work. However, it is now time for Glasgow, as the

driver of the west of Scotland economy, to have more investment.

I must put on record my disappointment with the proposal for the Clyde metro, which appears to be extremely vague. It is up to 35 years away, and there is not even a commitment to the first phase of it: the airport link, which would form a vital component of the commuter link to Paisley. It is disappointing for Glaswegians that there are no concrete plans on the table. I say to the minister that the people of Glasgow will not be fooled by the pretence that the Clyde metro is something real. If the metro really exists, I want to see the Government put its money where its mouth is.

I agree with Stephen Kerr that it is not enough to say that services should be run under public control; we must show that we can run a better service. I have discussed that with ASLEF. I support the union's view that staff should be paid for working unsociable hours. Many trips are made by car on Sundays. That is because people often do not have the choice of using a rail service on Sundays. If we are serious about getting people out of cars, we must think about improving the service.

Since 2009, the cost of a ticket has risen faster than wages. The cost of a UK train journey is now so high that we pay five times more, as a proportion of our salaries, than our European neighbours. I had a look today at the ScotRail website and found that a day ticket from Glasgow to Edinburgh costs £31.50. For someone on the living wage, that represents half of their daily wage. That is totally unacceptable. Jim Fairlie said that Scotland has cheaper fares than the rest of the UK. That may be true for some comparisons, but not for the biggest service. That is an absolute outrage. A part-time worker who wants to work in Edinburgh has absolutely no chance of survival, because they would not be able to afford those fares.

We need a publicly run service that is invested in with public money. We need to get the public behind that and we need to deliver it in the lifetime of this Parliament.

16:41

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To connect our communities, and because of our commitment to a net zero future, rail travel must become an ever more important mode of transport. We have heard many laudable commitments from Labour and SNP members. My concern is that there is little detail about how that will be paid for. The SNP amendment paints a picture of a rail network so perfect that it would not look out of place in an episode of "Thomas the Tank Engine".

Let us not sugar coat this. The Scottish Government is taking over a rail network at an extremely challenging time. I am sure that the SNP will return to that point when it inevitably follows its usual path and fails to meet the commitments that it is making today. That said, there is no reason why Scotland's rail network should not recover and thrive, with the right approach. However, the SNP's track record on taking private businesses into public ownership is less than stellar. One only has to consider ferries and airports to understand that point.

The Scottish Government is taking over the rail network at a time when passenger numbers have crashed because of Covid, costs are rising and the network is showing its age. I listened to the minister's contribution. I apologise if I picked her up wrongly, and she can take me up on this, but she seemed to indicate that rail routes and services had been cut because they were not full. If that is the criterion for putting on services, many rural areas will end up without a rail link. If that is the case, it does not align well with the Scottish Government's aim to reduce road miles. That is hardly a net zero policy.

I highlight the route from Ayr to Stranraer as an example. It is an unelectrified single-track rail link that does not even stop at Scotland's busiest port, Cairnryan. Investment in that route would provide a great opportunity to take freight off the dangerous A77 road link, which is a point that has been made time and again for many years and amid many promises from the SNP. The latest iteration of the strategic transport projects review 2 document makes it obvious that the can is still being kicked well down the road. Once again, that hardly helps us to meet our net zero targets.

Several years ago, the Ayr Station hotel, which sits on that route, started collapsing into Ayr station, temporarily closing the route south of Ayr. That situation remains unresolved. Millions of pounds continue to be drained from the public purse to keep the building wrapped up while no decision is made on its future. That issue was already in the Scottish Government's inbox, and will become a problem that the Government must solve following nationalisation. The SNP has allowed our railways to fall into a poor state. The Scottish Government is taking on a big task.

We are being sold a vision of a world-leading modern rail network with high wages, increased passenger numbers and increased investment in rail links and trains, along with lower rail fares. We would whole-heartedly applaud all of that if it was ever to come to fruition. As ever with this Government, we hear world-leading targets and ambitions, but there is no route to get to those goals and no indication of how they will be paid for.

Forgive me, Presiding Officer, if I do not get overexcited about the impending nationalisation of ScotRail, which we are told will solve our significant rail issues. Regrettably, having heard so many ambitious plans from the SNP Government that have sunk without a trace, I see little to give me confidence that this latest takeover will result in anything different.

The SNP Government has control of a ferry company that is all at sea, unlike its boats, and an airport that it will not allow to take off. It is surely only a matter of time before our new nationalised train operator goes off the rails. How on earth will Scotland ever get anywhere under the SNP Government?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Clare Adamson is joining us remotely.

16:45

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I come to this debate agreeing with much of the thrust of the Labour motion. I too, welcome the return of ScotRail to the public sector. Our public transport system should be just that—public. The current franchising system is not fit for purpose. Passengers across the UK have suffered from unreliable services and an infamously confusing pricing system. That has been caused by a diffuse network of private operators who are motivated by profit and devoid of real accountability or transparency. The return of ScotRail to public ownership is therefore a significant step. I note that, despite the tone of Labour members' contributions thus far, it is one that successive Labour Governments at both the UK and Scottish levels failed to take.

Any country that is serious about meeting the challenges of the climate emergency must be serious about public transport. The notorious Beeching report in the 1960s—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Adamson, will you stop for a second, please? There is far too much chattering going on. Let us have the courtesy of listening to Ms Adamson. Thank you.

Please resume, Ms Adamson.

Clare Adamson: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

The notorious Beeching report in the 1960s—which was commissioned by the Tories, with many proposals being implemented by subsequent Labour Governments—underestimated the social value of rail services. Decades on, we are faced with the environmental fall-out of those sweeping closures. The urgency of reinvesting in low-carbon transport has never been more apparent, so I question why those on the Labour benches continue to oppose Scotland having full control over rail services.

In government, Labour kept ScotRail in private hands. In opposition, it refuses to call for full powers over rail services including Network Rail—powers that would give us a truly integrated public rail service that was accountable to this Parliament and the people of Scotland. Furthermore, Labour offers no serious proposals for how we would pay for its demands without those powers while operating within our fixed budget.

Meanwhile, the SNP Government has demonstrated that it is serious about public transport and low-carbon travel. Our party's record in Government is noted in our amendment for posterity, but it bears repeating for my colleagues on the Opposition benches. The amendment mentions

“£1 billion to electrify 441 kilometres of track and improve infrastructure, benefiting more than 35 million passenger journeys across Scotland each year, a record £4.85 billion allocated, including ongoing electrification and decarbonisation, over £9 billion of investment by the Scottish Government since 2007 helping to reconnect 14 communities to the rail network, with five more to be reconnected in the next three years, and over £555 million to sustain services and jobs throughout the pandemic”.

Those things are supporting the heroic efforts of our rail workers in these unprecedented times.

My Motherwell and Wishaw constituency is benefiting from Government funding. Significant Scottish Government investment has gone into upgrading Motherwell train station. The redevelopment will see a transport hub created in the town, which will be a huge boon to the local economy and will attract wider investment. I also welcome the development of Cleland station in the previous session of Parliament and the introduction of disability access there.

Investment goes wider than rail. The SNP Government has been a champion of active travel, with investment going into active travel projects across North Lanarkshire, including in Craigneuk, in my area. In conjunction with the Scottish Government, we have our own active travel strategy and prioritisation with the aid of Government capital funding, working with North Lanarkshire Council to deliver. There have been fantastic initiatives such as socialtrack, which has reclaimed a derelict site in Wishaw, turned it into a pump track and encouraged active travel across the area.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Adamson, will you please conclude?

Clare Adamson: I look forward to the Scottish Government implementing its strategy for the railways.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:50

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): There is much in the Labour motion with which we can agree—not least, as Brian Whittle pointed out, the pivotal role that rail must play in the drive towards modal shift and net zero. The motion is right to demand the swift return to full services, because, as Richard Leonard said, it is simply not credible to talk about encouraging people back on to the railway—not only in pre-pandemic numbers, but in volumes that signal modal shift—in the context of ticket office cuts and closures, service reductions and the increase in fares.

That is where the folly of the SNP amendment is laid bare. As Stephen Kerr said, change of ownership does not of itself drive improvement. The SNP has spent years berating the current workforce, the management and, latterly, the unions on their stewardship of Scotland's railway, yet even it acknowledges, in its amendment, that the transfer to a new company means that pretty much the same people whom they have spent years unfairly traducing will be running it thereafter. The key difference now, as has been pointed out, is that it will be under the ownership of a Government that, as a trepidatious Scottish public is well aware, also owns the ferries and Prestwick airport.

However, I think that something far more sinister is going on. As Graham Simpson pointed out, we have never seen a coherent plan for investment and improvement. Brian Whittle asked how we will pay for it. The SNP has maintained a Delphic silence on that.

Presiding Officer, as I have pointed out many times in this chamber, it boils down to three choices. First, taxes could be increased and any higher take could be hypothecated to the railway. That is not going to happen.

Secondly, other portfolio budgets, such as health and education, could be cannibalised. Thankfully, that is not going to happen—in fact, the reverse is already happening, with cuts in this year's budget of nearly £100 million to funding that supports the costs of maintenance, safe operation and renewal. Strangely, Clare Adamson omitted that from her self-congratulation.

Thirdly, the railway budget could be cannibalised from within, and that is exactly what the Government is doing. As we heard yesterday from the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, we can forget about reducing journey times between Aberdeen and the central belt by 20 minutes; we can forget the promise to dual at Usan; and we can forget any new lines in the north-east. Instead, the Government will reprofile railway funds—by cutting ticket office hours to reduce the overhead; cutting staffing to

reduce the wage bill; cutting services to reduce the running and engineering costs; ramping up fares to squeeze more from a smaller passenger base; and, as I discovered last week, winding back from the intercity service provision and class 43 sets—which I am surprised and disappointed that Audrey Nicoll forgot to mention in her speech.

Presiding Officer, that is classic SNP. The public wanted a publicly owned railway. “Right,” said Nicola. “Make it happen. Get the votes in the bag and worry about paying for it later. Oh, and get Abellio to do all the dirty work on its way out.” That hammering of services, staff and the public is the result. The Government is a shameless shower of charlatans, shunting ScotRail into the sidings. The Scottish Conservatives will never get on board with that.

16:54

Jenny Gilruth: Since taking on the transport portfolio nine days ago, I have discovered that there are strong emotions when it comes to rail. That is as it should be. As Neil Bibby and others alluded to during the debate, given my involvement in the Levenmouth rail campaign I know just how important our railways are to our communities. They are important to our economy, our social interactions and, increasingly, the future of our environment.

Beatrice Wishart spoke about the importance of modal change. She was absolutely correct on that point, with regard to our ambitious targets on climate change. She also made a point about the under-22s free bus travel scheme and how we might look to pivot that towards ferries, too. I mentioned in response to her parliamentary question yesterday that I am taking that up with officials.

I will respond to some other points that were raised in the debate. Graham Simpson spoke of the need for a personal service at train stations; I agree with him. ScotRail has considered antisocial behaviour and access, for example, and it made changes to its consultation as a result. I will meet ScotRail next Tuesday; I undertake to raise that matter with it.

However, I have to say, as the first female transport minister in 20 years, that I do not need lessons from Graham Simpson or Richard Leonard about the need to protect women’s safety on public transport. It is a serious issue in itself and it should not be hemmed on the edge of this afternoon’s debate.

It is worth reminding Parliament that it is solely because of actions that have been taken by this Government that ScotRail’s services will be in the public sector. As Pauline McNeill said, it is vital

that we run a public service that meets the needs of the travelling public.

Finlay Carson: Will decreasing services and increasing rail fares increase or decrease the number of people accessing the train service?

Jenny Gilruth: Finlay Carson has heard today that ScotRail is increasing services back to the level that they were at in December 2021, so what he said is completely incorrect. *[Interruption.]* I want to make some progress.

Compulsory redundancies have been raised by a number of members today. I want to put on the record that this Government has always respected collective bargaining. However, I am sure, as I have mentioned to members, that the chamber is not the place for those negotiations to take place. I look forward very much to meeting the unions next week.

Neil Bibby: The Parliament chamber is, however, the place where we should hear what Government policy is. Is it the Government’s policy that there should be no compulsory redundancies in the new ScotRail operation?

Jenny Gilruth: I recognise that the new body, ScotRail Trains Ltd, will not have in place an existing agreement on there being no compulsory redundancies, but I expect negotiations on that as part of the public sector pay policy discussions. It is right, of course, that rail unions express their views on public sector pay policy. I look forward very much to meeting them next week, as I have said.

We cannot return to the past, as some people here might wish. We must face the new reality of the future and embrace the challenges in a measured, responsible, affordable and inclusive manner. That is our focus. Together with a railway that responds positively to change, that approach will ensure a successful future for our railway services, which is what we all—passengers, staff and supporters—want.

Before closing, I will take a moment to remember someone. Colin Reed was the stationmaster at Markinch station. Sadly, he passed away last March. During the pandemic, he put up a note in the station offering to phone elderly or isolated passengers, and leaving them his number. He was always available with a joke or a handy tip: the code is “Eskbank”, for those who know. Colin is fondly remembered in Markinch, and his public service is a lesson to us all about just how important the coming months will be for Scotland’s railways. For the ticket conductors, train drivers, and folks who work in stations the length and breadth of the country, and for the people whom we in Parliament all serve, on 1 April, this Government will deliver a publicly

owned railway for the benefit of all the people of Scotland.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I call Colin Smyth to wind up the debate.

16:58

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I add my welcome to Jenny Gilruth in her new role as transport minister and pass on my best wishes to her predecessor, Graeme Dey. When I was Labour's transport spokesperson, a trade union official once said to me, "Transport's a great portfolio. It makes you in Opposition, but it breaks you in Government. No one ever wrote to the transport minister to thank them for their train running on time." He went on to say, "Don't worry—you're probably not going to be transport minister." [*Laughter.*] I genuinely hope that the role does not break the minister, because fixing Scotland's broken transport is too important to our communities. I wish Jenny Gilruth well.

Although we have a new minister, the amendment in her name is, sadly, the same old tired lines that we have heard before. I genuinely hope that Jenny Gilruth will lead a break from the lack of ambition for Scotland's railways that has plagued this Government for 15 years.

We need to put rail at the heart of our fight back against climate change, and we need to deliver modal shift, as Richard Leonard rightly said, and not just continue to manage rail's decline. It beggars belief that, just months after COP26, the Scottish Government's last act for its failed ScotRail franchise is to herald the biggest hike in rail fares for a decade, the biggest cut in ticket offices, and the biggest cut in rail services since devolution. Let us be in no doubt that we are, despite the minister's spin, talking about a massive cut in services.

It is amazing that although the SNP's amendment was lodged before ScotRail published the outcome of its timetable review, it managed to quote the review. However, that means that we have confirmation in the amendment that the SNP and the Greens support there being 250 fewer services a day than there were before the pandemic. If that is "an early win", as Mark Ruskell described it, God help us if we had lost that particular consultation. Is 90,000 fewer trains per year really the height of the Greens' ambition? Is that what they mean by "building back better"? With car travel returning to above pre-pandemic levels, the Greens have thrown in the towel when it comes to getting back to pre-pandemic levels of train services—never mind growing them.

We need to use every power that we have to increase passenger numbers, and we will not do that and get people back on our trains by taking

trains away. We do not yet know what demand will be when we emerge from the pandemic, but we know that, if we drive down the frequency of services, we will drive down passenger numbers even further.

As Pauline McNeill highlighted, there has been no effort from the Government to make rail more attractive after the pandemic. Fares have rocketed by more than 50 per cent under the SNP; passengers were hit by another hike in ticket prices just a few weeks ago.

John Mason: If Colin Smyth wants lower fares and more services, how does the money add up? Where will the finances come from?

Colin Smyth: I do not want to break the news to Mr Mason, but there will not be any income or passengers when the train is taken away.

The hike is coming at a time when passengers face a cost of living crisis. If only the Government was as quick to carry out its long-promised rail fares review as it was to back a review of cuts in services. There is now also another damaging cut to our ticket offices. Richard Leonard spoke passionately about that.

The minister was right to say that women's safety at railway stations is important. Therefore, let us debate that issue and ticket offices, in Government time. The Government never calls a debate on the future of our railways.

It is little wonder that our trade unions have come together to launch the biggest-ever campaign against the SNP-Green coalition's cuts. It will not have escaped their attention that the minister would not only remove from Labour's motion a commitment to there being no compulsory redundancies, but has refused to rule them out three times today.

In contrast, Labour stands with our trade unions. Rail workers are key workers who deserve our thanks for keeping Scotland moving during the pandemic—not threats of job losses or threats to cut pay and conditions. We also stand with Scotland's rail passengers, who have suffered enough.

One SNP MSP after another has highlighted that ScotRail will come under public ownership under the Government. I support public ownership. I lodged not one, but two motions in Parliament that would have brought our trains back under public control long before now, but SNP MSPs voted both down.

Let us be clear. As Neil Bibby said, the only reason why the SNP is now backing Labour's long-standing calls for public ownership is that its Abellio franchise was such a failure. We should remember when the SNP handed the keys of Scotland's trains to the Dutch firm Abellio. It said

that the service would be world leading. It was. There were world-leading delays, world-leading cancellations and world-leading fare hikes.

If the SNP and the Greens are so much in favour of public ownership, why do they still refuse to end the private Caledonian Sleeper franchise? When will that come under public ownership? Green voters and members must be really proud that their sell-out MSPs would rather stand shoulder to shoulder with Serco than shoulder to shoulder with the RMT, ASLEF or the Transport Salaried Staffs Association.

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Mr Smyth.

Colin Smyth: Today, the Parliament can stand shoulder to shoulder with our trade unions. We can say no to the SNP cuts to rail services, no to the SNP-Green fare hikes, no to the SNP-Green ticket office cuts, but yes to Labour's motion and a people's ScotRail that delivers for Scotland's passengers.

Decision Time

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Richard Lochhead is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liz Smith will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-03042.2, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03042, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on cost of living, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:04

Meeting suspended.

17:09

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Richard Lochhead is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Liz Smith will fall.

The question is, that amendment S6M-03042.2, in the name of Richard Lochhead, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03042, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on cost of living, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app stopped and I could not vote. I would have voted no.

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

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): [*Inaudible.*] I would have voted no.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-03042.2, in the name of Richard Lochhead, is: For 68, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment in the name of Liz Smith therefore falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-03042, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on cost of living, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

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 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
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 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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)
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 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
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Against

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 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)
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 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-03042, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on cost of living, as amended, is: For 69, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the pressure being placed on household finances across Scotland due to rising inflation, increasing food and fuel prices, and high energy bills; considers that this will be exacerbated by the increase to National Insurance, the likely hike to the energy price cap in April 2022, and notes these are related to reserved powers; supports the Scottish Government's calls for the UK Government to take urgent action on a package of measures to address home energy bills; welcomes the significant action that the Scottish Government has taken to reduce the cost of living through measures including the introduction of free bus travel to under-22s, the increased water charges reduction scheme discount, the introduction, extension and doubling of the Scottish Child Payment, the more than £2.5 billion invested in support for low-income

households, and the increase in free childcare, and agrees that further power in the hands of the Parliament would enable it to address the cost of living, energy prices, and minimum wage levels.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-03044.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03044, in the name of Neil Bibby, on a people's ScotRail, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 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)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the vote on amendment S6M-03044.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, is: For 68, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-03044.1, in the name of Graham Simpson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-03044, in the name of Neil Bibby, on a people's ScotRail, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My system logged out. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr O'Kane. I 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)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 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)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (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)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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 vote on amendment S6M-03044.1, in the name of Graham Simpson, is: For 53, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-03044, in the name of Neil Bibby, on a people's ScotRail, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (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)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (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)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 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)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 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)
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Meeting closed at 17:23.

The Presiding Officer: The result of the vote on motion S6M-03044, in the name of Neil Bibby, on a people's ScotRail, as amended, is: For 67, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the return of ScotRail to the public sector; considers the new public sector operator to be critical in securing modal shift and affordable, accessible and reliable rail services for Scotland's passengers; notes the vital role that ScotRail staff and workers will play in delivering these new services and thanks them for all that they have done to keep rail services running throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; welcomes that staff will transfer with their current terms and conditions, will benefit from public sector pay policy, and that any pay deals already agreed for 2022-23 will be honoured; further welcomes the investment by the Scottish Government to decarbonise and expand Scotland's railways, including £1 billion to electrify 441 kilometres of track and improve infrastructure, benefiting more than 35 million passenger journeys across Scotland each year, a record £4.85 billion allocated, including ongoing electrification and decarbonisation, over £9 billion of investment by the Scottish Government since 2007 helping to reconnect 14 communities to the rail network, with five more to be reconnected in the next three years, and over £555 million to sustain services and jobs throughout the pandemic; laments that the Scottish Labour Party joined with the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party to vote against a draft Scottish budget for 2022-23, which increased expenditure and investment in Scotland's rail services; welcomes that rail fares in Scotland are still on average 20% lower than across the rest of Great Britain, and that, from May, there will be 150 more rail services than have been running since December 2021, with 25 services being reintroduced following the recent consultation on timetable changes; recognises that there has been widespread public and stakeholder interest in the ScotRail consultation on ticket office availability, but notes that the consultation only closed on 2 February 2022 and responses are therefore still to be reviewed; further notes that the fair fares review will explore what more can be done to ensure that fares across all modes of public transport are equitable and sustainable; agrees that the culture of ScotRail Trains Ltd will be founded on fair work; recognises the key role that a publicly owned and controlled rail service will play in the future to help transform Scotland's economy, to cut emissions from transport, deliver on the climate change targets and create a fairer, greener Scotland, and calls for the full devolution of rail from the UK Parliament, including Network Rail, in order to operate a wholly publicly owned, fully integrated rail network in Scotland.

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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