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Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Tuesday 22 March 2022

Session 6



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Scottish Parliament

Tuesday 22 March 2022

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

Time for Reflection

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

The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Mr Antoni Pia, youth development worker, Tullochan.

Mr Antoni Pia (Youth Development Worker, Tullochan): Presiding Officer, thank you for inviting me to address Parliament.

My name is Antoni Pia and I work for a great organisation called Tullochan. Based in West Dunbartonshire, Tullochan is a youth development charity that supports people aged seven to 25 through a range of programmes in primary and secondary schools. We also have a training academy that helps young people to work towards positive destinations.

I have worked for Tullochan for five years. In the past, as a young person, I attended Tullochan sessions in school and, when I left school, I received employability and personal development support from Tullochan. As someone who struggled really badly with anxiety, I never thought that I would work in such a role or become the person that I am today—much more outgoing and confident when speaking to others. It is an amazing place to work, and I love helping young people who face the same barriers that I did when I was growing up, and seeing them improve with my help.

I recognise the important role that organisations such as Tullochan play in the lives of young people, especially now that we are coming out of the pandemic. Now more than ever, young people need support to cope with the increase in mental health issues such as social anxiety, which have been made worse by long periods of isolation.

Our Tullochan training academy helps young people aged 16 to 25 who have left school and need guidance to take their next steps forward. At the training academy, we support young people to push themselves out of their comfort zones, build their resilience, work on their confidence and take ownership of their development. We deliver programmes such as our creative communities

sessions, which help young people to develop their creative and practical skills, and our personal development and employability sessions, which help young people to prepare for work and gain the skills that are needed for employment. Young people also gain vital work experience through placements in our social enterprise ventures The Design House and The Common Good cafe.

Overall, third sector organisations such as Tullochan provide safe and supportive environments where young people can mix with others, develop skills to overcome barriers and take positive steps forward with their lives, which is important for young people in West Dunbartonshire and across Scotland—now more than ever. [Applause.]

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Antoni.

David Hill

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): All of us in Parliament are shocked and deeply saddened at the sudden loss of our colleague, David Hill, who died on Saturday while representing the Parliament, playing rugby in Dublin. I invite Jamie Greene to say a few words.

14:03

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Friends and colleagues, we politicians like to speak, but this is one speech that I would rather not be making. The news of the sudden passing of our friend and colleague, David Hill, came as a shock to every one of us, but the outpouring of messages of condolence has also been overwhelming. I hope that reading the many messages of kindness from across the political spectrum and watching today's proceedings bring some comfort to his family.

David Ross Hardie Hill was born on 17 April 1991. He passed away on Saturday afternoon, doing what he loved—playing rugby with his friends. David was a people person and a true gentleman. He was kind, generous, respected and well liked. He was a friend to all, and our thoughts are with not only his family but those close friends who were enjoying his company on that rugby trip to Ireland. It is a trip that I joined him on just a few years ago, so I know how much fun and camaraderie they will all have shared this weekend.

It might be a cliché, but David really was one of the genuinely nice guys of this world. He was a huge rugby fan and was one of the founding members of this Parliament's rugby team. As it so often does, sport brings together people with differences of opinion and views, and it forges unlikely friendships and alliances.

David played scrum half for the Parliament, the Dumfries Saints and the University of Dundee rugby club. He followed our Scottish national team with passion both as a season ticket holder at Murrayfield and away on trips to England, Ireland and Italy, cheering them on in their wins and defeats with equal passion.

David was a bagpiper. I did not know that when I first met him. I recall once telling him that I was never overly fond of the bagpipes. "I am sure you are most excellent," I said. He smiled back wryly and politely, in his usual way, thinking plenty but saying nothing.

David was an enthusiastic golfer and a Manchester United fan, but politics was his passion. He attended St Michael's primary school

and St Joseph's college in Dumfries, and went to the University of Dundee to study politics and international relations.

Since graduating, David has been a stalwart of the Scottish Conservative Party for almost a decade. He campaigned with, organised and helped with the better together campaign in the referendum. He was a campaigner with David Mundell. During the most recent Scottish Parliament election, he was part of the team of our party leader, Douglas Ross, driving him around from place to place, then donning his blue jacket with a leaflet bundle in one hand and probably tweeting and taking pictures with the other.

David was head of office for many years for Tom Mason, one of our retired MSPs. He helped Annie Wells when she was short of staff and Sandesh Gulhane when he first joined us.

Most recently, David was my head of office, taking over from another good egg, Andrew Brown. We often spend more time with our staff here than we do with our families and friends. I am sure that my endless team WhatsApp messages drove David to utter distraction, but he never—ever—once complained.

Our staff are always there for us. They shield, support and humour us, and they do so with the sort of humility and patience that I can only aspire to. We cannot do the job that we do without them—I know that that is a story that will be familiar to all members in the chamber.

Our grief is not unique, and our thoughts and prayers are with David's family: his father, Rodger; his mother, Sharon; his step-parents, Lesley and Gordon; his siblings, Alex and Georgia; and his two nephews, Freddie and Hunter. They were all special to him, and he to them.

I take great comfort in the words of David's father, who I spoke to on Saturday, in our first exchange after learning the awful news. Rodger said:

"David was living his best life."

Is that not the highest accolade or aspiration for any of us? He was taken from us living his best life and doing what he loved with people he loved.

When I arrived at my desk this morning, I found that some kind soul had placed a vase of daffodils on David's desk. They are a visual reminder that the gloom of winter does and will pass. I pray that the passage of time will ease the pain of those who are grieving today.

When we applaud David in response to the remarks that are spoken today, let us applaud each and every one of our own respective teams, too.

David's legacy will be his passion for crossing political boundaries and divisions with no motivation other than simply to be kind. That is a lesson that we could all learn. Let us be kind and friendly to one another, as David was to us. Let us all be a little more like David as we go about our business.

We will all miss him dearly. [*Applause.*]

Business Motion

14:09

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-03732, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out revisions to this week's business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following revision to the programme of business for Tuesday 22 March 2022—

after

followed by Topical Questions

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Complex Care – Out-of-area Placements and Delayed Discharge

after

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill

insert

followed by Approval of SSIs

(b) that the Social Security (Residence Requirements) (Ukraine) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2022 [draft] be considered by the Parliament

(c) the following revision to the programme of business for Wednesday 23 March 2022—

after

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Covid Recovery and Parliamentary Business;
Net Zero, Energy and Transport

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Ferguson Marine Update

delete

5.10 pm Decision Time

insert

5.40 pm Decision Time

(d) the following revision to the programme of business for Thursday 24 March 2022—

after

followed by Ministerial Statement: A Retail Strategy for Scotland

insert

followed by Ministerial Statement: Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26

after

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Tackling
Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26

insert

followed by Legislative Consent Motion: Building
Safety Bill (UK Legislation)—[George
Adam]

Motion agreed to.

Topical Question Time

14:09

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is topical question time. In order to get in as many members as possible, I would be grateful for short and succinct questions and answers.

Serious Violent Offenders (Prevention of Change of Name)

1. **Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** I thank Jamie Greene for his words about our friend and colleague, David Hill.

To ask the Scottish Government whether there are any measures in place to prevent serious violent offenders from changing their names. (S6T-00613)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown): On behalf of the entire Scottish National Party group, I ask Jamie Greene to accept our sincere condolences for the tragic and untimely death of David Hill, not least from me, as a fellow graduate of the University of Dundee.

Registered sex offenders are already obliged by law to notify the police of any change of name. Sex offender notification requirements apply to an individual, irrespective of the name that they use.

Multi-agency public protection arrangements—known as MAPPAs—provide a robust statutory framework for management of high-risk offenders in the community. Under those arrangements, the responsible authorities—which are the police, health boards, the Scottish Prison Service and local authorities—work together to assess and manage the risks that are posed by those individuals. Agencies can use a range of safeguards, including surveillance, electronic tagging, curfews, sexual offence prevention orders and other civil orders that are intended to reduce the risk of sexual harm. MAPPAs documentation includes recording of any aliases.

Police Scotland's domestic abuse disclosure scheme has helped to safeguard those who have been suffering from, or are at risk of, domestic abuse. By the fifth anniversary of the operation of the scheme in 2020, more than 8,400 requests had been made to the scheme and 4,536 people had been told that their current partner had a violent or abusive past.

Russell Findlay: We know that at least 36 registered sex offenders have legally changed their names and have told the police. There will be others whom we do not know about. Every single one of those people poses a potential danger to

the public—not least to women and children. Does the cabinet secretary think that it is right that predators can deceive the public by hiding their identities in that way?

Keith Brown: I repeat the point: registered sex offenders are already obliged by law to notify the police of any change of name, and sex offender notification requirements apply to an individual irrespective of the name that they use.

There are a number of other checks. I have mentioned one that they are obliged to follow. There are checks that can be attached to a sexual offences prevention order that limit a person's ability to use social media. The disclosure scheme that is used by the police—which was previously known as Clare's law—has been in use for five years and has helped more than 4,000 people, as I said. Disclosure Scotland also carries out checks.

So, a number of checks can be made in relation to the matter. Russell Findlay will be pleased—or, to some extent, reassured—to know that, of all the main crime groups, sexual offences have the lowest reconviction rate. I am more than happy to discuss potential improvements to the system with any member.

Russell Findlay: The consequences of the loophole are catastrophic. Rapist Jason Graham changed his name to Jason Evans. He then raped and murdered Esther Brown. Scott Storey murdered his partner, changed his name to Scott Stewart and attacked another woman.

Allowing violent criminals to change their names enables them to hide in our communities and it puts people at risk. Will the cabinet secretary give a clear commitment to close that loophole?

Keith Brown: That suggestion requires serious thought, in line with the provisions that are already in place, not all of which the member will be aware of. I have mentioned a number of them. Substantial checks are made. It is always the case that a person might refuse to follow those checks, but the police, social workers and others who work in the area monitor sex offenders' activities. A range of checks are currently undertaken.

The landscape is complex. If Russell Findlay—or any other member—is able to identify what he calls a loophole, or to suggest some improvement of the system, I am more than happy to discuss that. We should all want to improve the safety of our communities.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): What steps are being taken, through the new "Vision for Justice in Scotland", to protect victims from serious crime?

Keith Brown: As the convener of the Criminal Justice Committee, Audrey Nicoll will know that

violence in any form clearly has no place in our vision for a just, safe and resilient Scotland. She will also be aware that, in the vision, we take a public health approach that seeks to tackle violence through prevention and early intervention, in order to reduce the numbers of victims and of people reoffending, and to help to build safer communities.

Since 2008, we have invested more than £24 million in violence prevention activities. That includes the work of the violence reduction unit and Medics Against Violence, as well as delivery of programmes such as the mentors in violence prevention scheme; No Knives, Better Lives; and our hospital navigator service. Audrey Nicoll's question allows me to point out that we want, of course, to ensure that we do not have victims in the first place, which is why violence prevention is how we should try to tackle the issue. However, we need to ensure that, when a person is convicted of such a crime, we have the maximum possible protection in place for our communities.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): The case of Scott Storey, who was out on licence after committing murder, and who had changed his name, is a prime example of the need to constantly review our law. The cabinet secretary mentioned Clare's law and the domestic violence disclosure scheme, which requires women to make an inquiry.

Could the cabinet secretary clarify today, or in writing to me, whether it is an offence not to disclose a new relationship? There is a requirement for people to tell their social worker, but is it an offence not to do so? Should that be reviewed? Should there also, perhaps, be a review of Clare's law to consider whether to allow police officers to directly inform women who find themselves in a relationship with an ex-offender?

Keith Brown: On that last question, I have already said in response to the initial question that I am happy to discuss the issues and to consider what improvements can be made.

On the first part of Pauline McNeill's question, she will appreciate that not disclosing that information is very often a breach of conditions. I would have to check whether that would equate to an illegal or criminal act. However, it would certainly be a breach of conditions in many cases, and might result in a person being taken back into custody. I am happy to write to her with more information on that.

Ferry Staff (Job Losses at Cairnryan)

2. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with DP World and P&O Ferries regarding the

loss of jobs for ferry staff working out of Cairnryan. (S6T-00610)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth):

The First Minister and I met the P&O chief executive officer, Peter Hebblethwaite, on Thursday 17 March. The First Minister spoke in the strongest of terms about the appalling manner in which decisions had been taken by P&O, including the method that was used to communicate the redundancies to staff. P&O's behaviour last week reflected industrial practices that have no place in the modern workplace, and the reputational damage that such action will have might well have lasting consequences for the company.

The Scottish Government believes that there must be meaningful dialogue between employers and employees and trade unions to ensure that employees are treated fairly, which clearly has not been the case with P&O. Although employment law is a reserved matter, we will use our fair work policy to promote fair work practices across the labour market in Scotland, and we are already providing support to employees who are affected by redundancy through our PACE—partnership action for continuing employment—programme.

Separately, the Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise is representing the Scottish Government at the world expo in Dubai this week and we are endeavouring to organise a discussion with DP World at a senior level so that Mr McKee can record the Scottish Government's serious concerns about P&O's course of action and its conduct in confirming the redundancies.

On behalf of every part of the Scottish Government, I want to be absolutely clear that, in the fairer Scotland that we are committed to creating, there is no place for companies treating their employees as P&O has done. Unless and until such companies change how they behave towards their employees, they will find it very hard to get support in any form from the Scottish Government now or in the future.

Katy Clark: Is the minister aware that safety concerns have been raised previously in relation to seafarer fatigue on P&O ferries in a report by Professor Andy Smith of Cardiff University? Given that the new crew will be working even longer shifts and as much as a seven-day week for a continuous eight weeks, will the minister ask for an urgent meeting with the safety regulator, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency?

Jenny Gilruth: I am not sighted on the specific report that Katy Clark highlights, but I am absolutely committed to raising some of the safety concerns that she has raised today.

Katy Clark will recognise some of the challenges that we, as a Government, face because

employment law is reserved. Nonetheless, it is important that we work with the United Kingdom Government. P&O workers absolutely deserve to know that the UK Government is leaving no stone unturned, but, equally, it is important that ministers have an open dialogue. That has not yet happened, although I know that officials have been in discussions since last Thursday. Additionally, I appreciate that the situation is moving fast. We do not yet have clarity on the number of jobs that will be impacted in Scotland. When we get that granular detail, we will be able to provide more support.

On Katy Clark's specific question on safety concerns and any undercutting of, for example, staff terms and conditions, I would seek to ensure that fair work practices were adopted by P&O.

Katy Clark: The new crew will be employed by International Fleet Management, which was incorporated only last month, in Malta. Given the concerns about whether the ships are safe to sail, I ask that the trade unions attend any meetings with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Jenny Gilruth: I will be happy to work with the trade unions on that suggestion from Katy Clark. I wrote to the general secretary of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers on Friday of last week, following the announcement on Thursday, and I responded yesterday to a request from the Scottish Trades Union Congress to meet with it and the unions.

After topical question time, I will meet the RMT. Later today, I will meet Nautilus, which I understand is the lead union on this. I am happy to do so and to continue that further engagement with trade unions.

Throughout the process, it has been of concern not only that employees were ignored in the consultation about the redundancies that did not happen but that the trade unions were entirely frozen out of the process. I will endeavour to take that up with the trade unions later today, and I will be happy to update Ms Clark on the outcome of those meetings.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): The P&O Ferries service and the neighbouring Stena Line service to Northern Ireland not only provide many jobs locally but make a significant contribution to the economy of Scotland. Regardless of the poor actions of the operator, does the minister recognise the importance of that link? What options will the Scottish Government commit to exploring, especially on connectivity to the port, to ensure its long-term viability?

Jenny Gilruth: I recognise the vital importance of the link to the region that Brian Whittle represents. Normal capacity on both Stena Line and P&O services runs at around 55 to 56 per

cent and increases to 80 per cent on Fridays. Stena Line has put on an extra sailing—that was on Friday—and there does not appear to be any immediate issue with capacity, although that is being monitored. I am also aware that supermarkets are, understandably, pressing for prioritisation of fresh and frozen produce, and I know that the Secretary of State for Transport—yesterday, I think—referenced the deployment of a third vessel, which will benefit supermarkets. That came into effect from today.

I very much recognise the strategic importance of that route, and we will continue to work with P&O to ensure that the route is up and running again. P&O needs to engage better with the Scottish Government and to recognise the importance of that route to the local communities in Cairnryan and Larne. I will be happy to take that up with P&O.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank the minister for taking questions on what is, as she has said, a very fast-moving situation. Cairnryan is, indeed, a busy port, not just providing connectivity to Northern Ireland but also now serving as Scotland's gateway to the European Union and Ireland. The route providers, P&O and Stena Line, carry a lot of freight, especially for supermarkets, but also provide the carriage of livestock. Will the minister therefore outline what the Government is doing to address and minimise the disruption?

Jenny Gilruth: As Emma Harper knows, the Irish Sea routes are of strategic importance to Scotland, as we heard from Brian Whittle, bringing vital supplies to supermarkets and other businesses. We are determined to do all that we can to protect those routes, as well as protecting the jobs and conditions of everyone who is employed on those ferries. We have been in daily contact with the local Stena Line and P&O teams at Cairnryan since the situation began, last Thursday, to monitor capacity and those developing issues, and that has assisted our UK Government counterparts—for example, in agreeing with Stena Line that the third vessel, which I mentioned in response to Mr Whittle, will enter service. That happened yesterday evening.

In addition, transport officials are liaising with the local resilience partnerships and working with the ports teams to ensure that the road network around the ports remains fully operational. We will continue to monitor the position and hold open the potential to introduce operations staff and the use of the Castle Kennedy facility as a contingency measure.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Tomorrow, along with the local community and trade unions from across Scotland, I will protest outside P&O Ferries in Cairnryan, standing

shoulder to shoulder with those workers, who have been treated with such contempt by P&O. I urge colleagues to join the workers, if they can, in Cairnryan at 12 o'clock to fight any job cuts but also to send a clear signal that we need to end fire and rehire once and for all—because, if that can happen at P&O, it can happen anywhere.

There was no justification for P&O's actions, but, when there are job losses in Wigtownshire, people too often have to leave the area to find alternative work because the poor transport infrastructure means that there are limited local opportunities. Will the transport minister meet the neighbouring ferry operator, Stena Line, and the local action groups to discuss their concern about the transport infrastructure and the urgent need to make improvements to the A75 and A77, to attract more jobs into that often forgotten part of Scotland?

Jenny Gilruth: At the end of his question, Colin Smyth raised a specific point about meeting Stena Line and local action groups. I am meeting Stena Line later this week, so I am happy to take that action forward.

Colin Smyth also raised a specific point about the A75 and A77. He will know that there are a number of recommendations in the strategic transport projects review 2 that relate to those roads, and STPR2 is open for public consultation until later this month.

Colin Smyth raised a point about trade union engagement, and I have alluded to some of the engagement that I have undertaken on the matter. As I said in my response to Ms Clark, I will meet trade unions after topical question time, and I will be happy to give Mr Smyth an update on any action arising from those meetings. It is hugely important that our trade union partners are engaged in the process.

I recognise some of the wider transport infrastructure challenges in his region that Colin Smyth spoke about. I would be more than happy to meet Stena to discuss those, as I am doing later this week, and to update Mr Smyth on the outcome of that meeting.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): How P&O has treated its employees—not just those in Cairnryan, but those at English ports, too—is shocking. As this is a United Kingdom-wide matter, with a mix of reserved and devolved interests, can the minister assure us that UK ministers are involving devolved ministers fully in discussions and its handling?

Jenny Gilruth: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ministers discussed the situation with the rural affairs secretary, Mairi Gougeon, and other devolved ministers on Monday, but there has not been any contact with the UK transport secretary since the situation

began to develop last week—although I appreciate that it is a very fast-moving situation.

There has been useful communication at official level, with Scottish officials involved in daily four-nations calls, for example, and we are being kept updated on UK Government considerations and actions through that channel. However, as the member alludes, the matter involves a pretty complex mix of reserved and devolved powers and interests, so I would welcome the engagement that she asks about. To that effect, I will write to Grant Shapps, seeking an urgent meeting.

As I alluded to, last week, I wrote to trade unions to confirm our support, and I will meet them later today.

More broadly, it does not seem acceptable that, when we have a situation such as this, involving a business with interests and employees all over the UK, devolved ministers are not invited to be actively involved and engaged. I am aware that ministers in Northern Ireland have sought assurances on the matter. I am very keen to work with the UK Government on this, and that solidarity in itself would send an important message to the workers.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): As we have heard, the port at Cairnryan provided a lot to the local community. What assessment has the Government made, or will it make, of the impact that the decision might have locally? What support will be provided to those workers and communities in the wake of this absolutely appalling decision?

Jenny Gilruth: We do not yet have clarity on the number of jobs in Scotland that we are talking about. Until we have that detail, we will not be able to analyse the impact on the local community. However, Carol Mochan raises an important point that officials will, absolutely, take forward.

The primary support that we have been able to provide thus far has been redundancy support through PACE for employees who have been affected. Looking to the longer term, I am absolutely committed to working with, for example, local authority partners to see what more we might be able to do in this endeavour.

Until we get that granular detail from P&O, we will not be able to provide the analysis that Carol Mochan seeks. We will continue to work with P&O to establish that.

I return to the original point about the way in which the situation has come about. P&O should not have behaved in the manner in which it did; it should have engaged with the trade unions and its employees. If it had done that, we would not have arrived at the situation in which we find ourselves today, and the employees would not have found

themselves in such difficult circumstances. It should not have been like this.

I assure the member that that analysis will be undertaken as soon as we have that granular detail from P&O.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes topical question time.

Complex Care (Out-of-area Placements and Delayed Discharge)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a statement by Kevin Stewart on complex care: out-of-area placements and delayed discharge. The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:30

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): I want to start by making clear my position, and that of the Scottish Government, on this matter. It is completely unacceptable that people with learning disabilities and more complex needs spend any longer in hospital than is medically necessary. For every day that is spent in hospital, the person loses part of their connection with their community, family and friends.

Everyone has the right to a home and an independent life. Scotland is not protecting the rights of people with learning disabilities and complex needs if we have to keep people in hospital when they should be living at home or in a homely environment, with the right support.

That is an absolute priority for me and it is why I am pleased to have the opportunity today to update Parliament on the action that the Scottish Government is taking to make change.

Members might be aware that, earlier this month, I welcomed the publication of the report, "Coming Home Implementation". The report was drafted by the working group on complex care and delayed discharge, which the Scottish Government established to look into delayed discharge and out-of-area placement in relation to people with complex needs.

The report sets out a clear vision that by March 2024 out-of-area residential placements and inappropriate hospital stays should be greatly reduced. Ultimately, we want to be in a position in which out-of-area residential placements are made only through individual or family choices and people are in hospital only for as long as they require assessment and treatment.

The report sets out a number of key recommendations, which I will ensure are taken forward at speed. Implementing the recommendations is an essential next step in improving the care and support that people with learning disabilities receive in Scotland.

The report highlighted that one of the biggest challenges is to do with visibility and

accountability: too often, people end up hidden in the current reporting and coding system. I want to ensure that people are visible in the data and that we move to an approach in which we use data to drive person-centred responses.

The Government will work with experts in the field, including individuals with lived experience, clinicians, social workers, commissioners and providers, to develop and establish a national register for people who are currently admitted to hospital-based assessment and treatment units; living in an unsuitable or inappropriate out-of-area placement; or at risk of placement breakdown.

The register will highlight, to local and national Government, individuals who need dedicated and focused attention to ensure that they are receiving support that works for them. It will improve monitoring at local and national levels and support local areas to effectively measure their progress on reducing delayed discharges and out-of-area placements.

Improved data will provide rich intelligence about how we can continue to work to improve people's lives and best meet people's needs. That is something that, internationally, countries struggle to get right. I want Scotland to lead the way on providing suitable and appropriate care in the community for people with complex care needs.

The register will be supported with new bespoke guidance, which will be written collaboratively with professionals and experts who specialise in complex care, to ensure that local areas have the right information and guidance to help in such complex cases. The guidance will ensure that we take a consistent approach across Scotland, to end the postcode lottery of provision. It will also ensure that the register remains dynamic and is regularly updated to provide live information on people's current circumstances, so that services can respond rapidly and effectively. That will provide the basis for a new national standard to make sure that everyone in Scotland is treated fairly and equally.

To further support swift and effective action, a national support panel will bring together sector expertise to provide an open, collaborative forum that can troubleshoot individual cases in partnership with local areas. The panel will assess progress against the register, identify those who are in most need of bespoke interventions and discuss cases directly with the staff involved to provide advice and support to progress action to return the individual home.

The expertise that will be available via the panel will, for example, help pool resources across local areas, share existing good practice and solutions,

and provide additional advice about staffing, training and suitable providers.

Alongside that work, there will be a national peer support network that will provide support to local areas with the planning and delivery of services for individuals with particularly complex care needs. That network of sector experts from commissioning, clinical, provider and lived-experience backgrounds will also be available to offer support and advice in an informal way to any areas that seek additional help and guidance. That is in the spirit of building on best practice and allowing space for innovative and bespoke solutions to be explored and created.

Delivering successfully on the recommendations that are set out in the report will require a high level of collaborative and partnership working. Indeed, I am already aware that colleagues in partner organisations, such as the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, share my ambition for delayed discharge and out-of-area placements to be tackled as a matter of priority. Delivering the recommendations in the report will accelerate the momentum towards making meaningful change in how we care for people with complex care needs.

We are starting from a strong position, as there is strong desire in the sector to work collaboratively to make progress on the issue. Enable Scotland and the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities have both welcomed the report's publication, with Enable calling it a

"landmark moment for the human rights of people who have learning disability in Scotland".

While I have detailed the next steps that the Scottish Government will take, that work builds on action that is already under way to address the issue of inappropriate out-of-area placements and delayed discharge of people with complex needs. I would like to highlight some of that action.

In 2021, the Government provided an additional £20 million to integration authorities across Scotland when we distributed the new community living change fund. That money is available to integration authorities for use now, and I expect integration authorities to be utilising that spend to drive the redesign of services for people with learning disabilities and complex care needs in the here and now. We must not be complacent about the urgent need to provide appropriate local care and services for all individuals.

That is complemented by our wider package of dedicated work to address the inequalities that are faced by autistic people and people with learning disabilities. In March 2021, the Scottish Government published our "Learning/Intellectual Disability and Autism: Towards Transformation" plan, which looks at the actions that are needed to

shape supports, services and attitudes across the whole life to ensure that the human rights of autistic people and people with learning disabilities are respected, protected and empowered so that they can live their lives in the same way that everyone else can.

Members may already be aware of the Scottish Government's commitment to introduce in Parliament a learning disability, autism and neurodiversity bill, to strengthen and uphold rights. That bill will include provision for a learning disabilities, autism and neurodiversity commissioner, who will act as an independent advocate to ensure that people can secure the protections of those rights.

Members will also be aware of our commitment to bring a new human rights bill to Parliament, as part of the process of taking forward the 30 progressive, bold and ambitious recommendations by the national task force for human rights leadership. That bill will provide a new human rights framework for Scotland, which will incorporate into Scots law—as far as is possible within devolved competence—four United Nations human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

I expect the measures that I have set out to deliver improved community-based support for people with complex care needs and a significant reduction in delayed discharge and out-of-area placements by March 2024. I am confident that members across the floor will support those actions as we work collectively to ensure that people with complex care needs are cared for appropriately across Scotland. I commit to update members on progress with this important issue and on the immediate measures that we are taking to provide local areas with additional tools, new guidance and support so that they can implement the best solutions possible locally to ensure that we do our level best for people right across our country.

The Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I would be grateful if members who wish to ask a question were to press their request-to-speak button now.

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): In 2015, the former health secretary, Shona Robison, said that the Scottish Government would eradicate delayed discharge in a year. Seven years later, the Scottish Government is creating a register while patients are suffering.

As a junior doctor, I had a patient suffer for eight months while they were waiting in hospital to be moved because of complex needs. He suffered

multiple hospital-acquired infections and was distraught because he could not sleep in the hospital environment.

After seven years, the Scottish Government either does not know the extent of the problem or has ignored it, which is worse. How confident is the minister that the register will be in place by March 2024 and that cases will be greatly reduced? Why has there been a shift in ambition from eradicating delayed discharge to greatly reducing it? Does that mean that the Scottish Government accepts that it is unable to deal with the problem?

Kevin Stewart: The Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities jointly recognise that we need to make progress in this area. That is why we have agreed to take forward at pace the actions highlighted in the report.

Mr Gulhane is right to point out that, in some regards and over the piece, when it comes to learning disabilities, we have not got this right. That is one of the reasons why we will implement all the recommendations in the report at pace, as I have said. Beyond that, we will eradicate the postcode lotteries that exist in certain parts of the country not only by ensuring that the recommendations are implemented but through our plans for the national care service, which aims to eradicate those postcode lotteries and bring in high-quality care standards for all across the board.

It is essential that we get this right for people with learning disabilities and autism, and people who are neurodiverse. As I have said, I am more than happy to work across the Parliament to get this right. I know that Mr O’Kane, who is on the Labour front bench, is the new co-convenor of the cross-party group on learning disabilities, and I am more than willing to engage and collaborate with groups across the Parliament so that we can do our best for people across the country.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement, and I agree that it is completely unacceptable that people who have learning disabilities and complex needs are still being forced to live far away from home or are stuck in hospital. Indeed, the situation has been described by people who have learning disabilities and their families as a human rights scandal.

Action has been too slow and the situation has worsened. I pay tribute to organisations such as Enable Scotland and the Scottish Commission for People with Learning Disabilities for the campaigning on these issues that they have undertaken for many years, and for recently launching the #MyOwnFrontDoor campaign, which has called for delivery on five key actions.

I note that the minister has announced that the recommendation to deliver a national register, national support panel and specialist peer network will be implemented, but the #MyOwnFrontDoor campaign has also called for the closure of assessment and treatment units, an end to the practice of sending Scottish citizens out of the country, and the immediate implementation of a community-first principle in the support of adults and children in Scotland who have a learning disability, ending the commissioning of multibed units. How does the minister intend to make the swift progress in those areas that the campaign has called for—that is, by next year, rather than the 2024 timescale that he set out?

Specifically on delayed discharge, we know that more than 120,000 bed days were occupied in 2020-21 for code 9 reasons. That works out at 34 per cent of all bed days. Many of those people died while they were in hospital, not in their own community. What direct and swift action will be taken to ensure that people who have learning disabilities can live in their community with those whom they love, where they have every right to be?

Kevin Stewart: There was a lot in there and I may not be able to cover it all in this short period of time. What I do not cover, I will write to Mr O’Kane about.

First, Mr O’Kane asked about assessment and treatment units. I know that some people have called for a moratorium on their use, and I fully agree that they should not be places where folk with learning disabilities have long stays. However, they have a use as places for short-term placements for assessment and treatment, where appropriate. We should recognise that, but also fully recognise that they are not places where people should be living for a long time.

I recognise Mr O’Kane’s call for swifter action and a faster timescale, but we have to be realistic and to get this absolutely right. I want to move at pace, but I do not want to set unachievable targets. I am sure that other folk feel likewise. I want to see quick change, but I have to persuade partners that that change must happen at pace. I want to see the investment that we have put in utilised quickly, and I want to see the right places for people established across the country.

Mr O’Kane talked about multibed units. I have seen one integration authority use the term “multibed unit” of late; I do not want to see that again. We must provide folks with homes. That may be a shared home when that is appropriate and when people and their families want that, and I am sure that many of us in the chamber could give examples of where that works. We must get away from institutionalisation and the institutional language that is still used by a small minority of

people in the country. That is unacceptable, and we will do our best to make sure that that culture changes dramatically over the next period of time.

The Presiding Officer: There is a lot of interest in the statement. I would be grateful if we could shorten questions and responses.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The minister mentioned the community living change fund. Can he expand on the steps that will be taken to ensure that best practice is adhered to in the design of community-based support for people with complex needs, so that we can end the postcode lottery for access to high-quality services in rural areas such as Dumfries and Galloway and more widely across Scotland?

Kevin Stewart: There is best practice out there and we must ensure that it is exported, but I am not convinced that that is happening to the degree that it should be. Emma Harper is right to talk about postcode lotteries: in many places, person-centred services work well for people, their families and communities, but that is not so much the case in other areas. In relation to our mission to move forward, we must ensure that that best practice is in place. The guidance and standards that we set should help to eradicate postcode lotteries, so that we do our best for everyone, no matter where they stay in Scotland.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Today's statement confirms that, since 2018, the Government has failed to make meaningful progress towards properly supporting those with learning disabilities to live independently in their community. I listened closely to what the minister said to Mr O'Kane. Will he look seriously at calls for an end to the construction of further multibed units for those with learning disabilities, and does he agree with Enable Scotland—I heard what he said—that such units are sadly no longer part of the solution and in many instances could now be perpetuating the problem?

Kevin Stewart: Let me make it clear if I didn't make it clear enough in my answer to Paul O'Kane: I do not want any of the money that we are investing to be put into multibed units, and I do not want the use of the terminology "multibed units". We should be creating homes for people, and we will lay that out very clearly in the guidance.

I have already said that there are homes out there in which there are a number of tenants. Residents are quite happy with those homes and the support that is provided. I would not class those homes as "multibed units", and I hope that nobody else would, because they are homes.

I say to anyone who thinks that they can go back to the same old that that will not happen, and

that will be spelled out very clearly in the guidance.

Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): One of the visions of the "Coming Home Implementation" report is that

"all adults with complex needs have choice and control over the care and support that they receive."

As the new adult disability payment rolls out this week, what effect does the minister foresee there will be on the ability of adults with complex needs to have that choice and control?

We talk about making the approach person centred. What support is being given to people with complex needs to access the census? Why is it important that they do so?

Kevin Stewart: I will have to write to Ms Martin about the census aspect of her question—and I will do so—as I do not have the detail of that to hand.

The adult disability payment is designed to make things as straightforward as possible. We will always start from a position of trust when it comes to that payment, and it will, of course, have dignity, fairness and respect at its heart.

However, getting the income and support right for folks with a learning disability is not just about the adult disability payment. We should also ensure that folks are able to access self-directed support when that is required. We are updating the guidance on self-directed support to make it easier for folks to access that support, which has often been difficult in some parts of the country. We are doing our level best to ensure that the guidance is clear and that the maximum number of people can access that support.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Ending out-of-area placements was the priority six years ago, in 2016. "Coming Home: A Report on Out-of-Area Placements and Delayed Discharge for People with Learning Disabilities and Complex Needs" was published in 2018. It is disappointing that, after all these years, there has been so little improvement in respect of out-of-area placements.

For the past six years, I have been trying to help families in Helensburgh and Lomond to have their loved ones living closer to home—not hundreds of miles away. The key constraint has been the lack of suitable supported accommodation. There was not one single mention of housing in the minister's statement. What specific action will be taken, and when, to improve provision of supported accommodation in local authority areas, so that the practice of out-of-area placements can finally end?

Kevin Stewart: The £20 million of support should be helpful to integration authorities in

ensuring that the right housing is put in place. That £20 million should be backed by the substantial amounts of money that local authorities have through the resource planning assumptions for the Government's housing programme.

I have had regular discussions with Shona Robison since I took over my post and, as Ms Baillie knows, I have quite an interest in housing. Local authorities should be using their strategic housing investment plans and their housing need and demand assessments to look carefully at what is required in their areas and to lever in the investment that is needed to bring folk back to their places.

When I was in the Aberdeen City Council administration, we made a major effort to bring folk home from out-of-authority placements, and we made some real gains. That was in the days before there was the amount of housing money that is available now.

The issue is not beyond the wit of anyone. We need to ensure that folk work in tandem to get it right for people throughout our country.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): The report says that

"One of the main barriers is a lack of visibility of the population of people with learning disabilities."

Can the minister set out how individuals' and their families' lived experience of complex care needs will be factored into the creation of a new national care service?

Kevin Stewart: Ms Dunbar recognises that in everything that we do in the work and in the formation of the national care service, we must ensure that the voices of lived experience are at the heart of it all.

Many of the stakeholders whom we are talking about today, and the people who represent them, were involved in the review that Derek Feeley conducted and the subsequent consultation. They include PAMIS—the Profound and Multiple Impairment Service—Enable Scotland and others. We are maintaining all those links as we ensure that the national care service moves forward.

We have to ensure that that the voices of folks with complex needs, and the voices of their families and carers, are heard. We will ensure that there is close collaboration as we move forward and co-design the national care service.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I commend Enable Scotland's efforts to highlight cases of people who have lived in hospital for years or have been offered a care placement miles from home. The Scottish Government is now promising

"a significant reduction in delayed discharge and out-of-area placements by March 2024",

but it has been declaring that that is a priority for years. Let me get this straight: the new plan is to continue routinely breaching people's rights for yet another two years. Why is it taking the Scottish Government so long to make the critical changes?

Kevin Stewart: As I have said—I have made no bones about it today—the situation is not good enough and has persisted for too long. However, we will build on the recommendations of the working group, which has put in a lot of work. Beyond that, we will improve data through the register, which will allow us to track much better what is happening to people. That will enable us to ensure that we take the steps that are necessary in order to get it right, when we are not doing well. As I have said, that is backed by the £20 million resource that we have put in. We will continue to look at that, as we move forward.

The key point is that we all need to work together. I do not have all the levers of power, so we need integration authorities, local authorities and others to work together to get it right for people. I am very pleased by how the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has interacted during the process. I think that we are in a better place now than we have ever been. For me, it is a priority to ensure that we get this absolutely right. I have a record, in a council context, of bringing folk back from out-of-authority placements; I want to do it on a national basis.

The Presiding Officer: I appreciate that the minister is keen to give full and comprehensive responses, but we are getting very tight for time.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): It is my impression that of all the tens of thousands of people who, over the past 22 years, have in one way or another sought help from me as a constituency MSP, those who face the longest, most painful and gruelling struggle are parents and families whose children have profound special needs, whether in childhood, adulthood or both.

Does the minister recognise that, in the Highlands and Islands, there are simply not enough specialist facilities to provide appropriate care and that, in some cases, children should be referred to specialist facilities out of the area?

My concern is that such decisions, whether they are taken for children by the council or for adults by the NHS, are often subject to financial pressure, which is often perceived by parents to trump clinical and human considerations. Will the minister review the system of finance so that neither councils nor health boards need to decline placements for financial reasons? Does he agree that that should never happen?

Kevin Stewart: Mr Ewing has been very vocal on the issue on a number of occasions—and rightly so. I know that he always stands up for his constituents.

The national panel must examine the systemic challenges that exist—they are geographical challenges, in some cases—and we need to get better at sharing expertise. Beyond that, we need to lay out what our expectations are very clearly in the guidance.

We also need to bring about some cultural change. In some regards, it is about cost—but not money. Sometimes it costs a hell of a lot to put folk into and to take them out of local authority placements, which is not right, but the human cost of doing so is also sometimes great. We must ensure that when folks are taking decisions it is not the short-term financial cost that is looked at, but the human cost of not getting it right. In the past, we have sometimes made mistakes on out-of-authority placements. I will give an example from my time in Aberdeen City Council.

The Presiding Officer: Could you do so very briefly, minister?

Kevin Stewart: Yes. Folk were sent to Devon and Cornwall, which was not right for their families, not right for the people themselves and certainly not right for the public purse.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): The “Coming Home Implementation” report states:

“Everyone should understand their rights, and be fully supported to take part in developing policy and practices which affect their lives.”

We have heard from families that they were not aware of what rights they had when their loved ones were placed outside their area. What action is the Scottish Government taking to improve rights awareness among people who have learning disabilities and complex care needs, and among their families and carers?

Kevin Stewart: We need to ensure that everybody’s human rights are upheld. We have a job of work to do in terms of ensuring that everybody knows what their rights are. I spoke in my statement about our plans to embed human rights in legislation; we will do that.

Beyond that, we need to do much better on advocacy; we need, as we move forward, to ensure that folks have the right to obtain advocacy and the right advice. There is more work to do on that, and it will be done.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I, too, refer to the report, which says:

“The framework is also designed to ensure that the needs of people with learning disabilities and their families drive the local commissioning strategy”.

That is quite official language. For all the families who are on the front line, what—in plain speak—does that mean and how will it be achieved?

Kevin Stewart: In all that we are doing in social care at the moment, I want, quite simply, the voices of people with lived experience to help to shape services, as we move forward. In the case of the national care service and the proposed community health and social care boards, that means that folks with lived experience will sit at the table and have a vote on how things go. Since coming into this job, I have talked to many folk with learning disabilities and their families, and they feel that they are not listened to enough. We need to do much more, so we will.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): The minister’s statement rightly points out that improved data is needed to quantify and measure work to improve people’s lives—especially people with complex needs who are lost and tied up in hospital. The register will make some progress towards that, but it is concerning that work has not already been undertaken to join up support and care for vulnerable individuals.

Of the people whose release from hospital was delayed by three days or more in December, a quarter were people with complex needs and learning disabilities. Is there a case for expedited progress and real action, rather than more promises? Such promises have noble ambitions, but no instinct for delivery.

Kevin Stewart: I thought that I made it clear in my statement that I want to move at pace and to get this absolutely right for all the folks in our country with learning disabilities, for all their loved ones and for their carers. As we move at pace, I am more than willing to come back to Parliament regularly to update colleagues on how we are progressing with all that.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the ministerial statement. There will be a short pause before the next item of business.

Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-03704, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button or to place an R in the chat function now or as soon as possible.

15:06

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): Scotland began its journey to becoming a good food nation in 2014 with the publication of our national food and drink policy, which first set down the Government's ambition to turn Scotland into a country where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in and benefit from the food that they produce, buy, cook, serve and eat each day.

From 2015 to 2017, the Scottish food commission, which was made up of 16 members, considered how to achieve that ambition. Its interim and final reports helped to set out the steps that led to the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. I thank all those members and all the people and organisations that responded to earlier Government consultations and engagement. I particularly thank my predecessors Richard Lochhead and Fergus Ewing for guiding the work and enabling us to reach today's milestone.

In a good food nation, everyone in Scotland has access to and the means to afford the healthy and nutritious food that they need, and diet-related diseases such as heart disease and diabetes are in decline. That vision sees the people of Scotland taking a keen interest in their food, knowing what constitutes good food, valuing it and seeking it out whenever they can. The environmental impact of food consumption is managed for the benefit of everyone in Scotland. Our vision sees food producers and companies continuing to be a thriving feature of the economy and sees them as places where people want to work.

Over the past seven years, we have moved from wanting to become a good food nation to being a good food nation, through a range of activities relating to health, knowledge, the environment, the economy and social justice. Examples include supporting the roll-out of the Soil Association's food for life programme.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): The minister just said that Scotland has moved to being a good food nation, but how does that equate with the fact that Scotland is the second-most obese country in the world, after the USA,

and that we are the unhealthiest nation in Europe? We have not moved forward at all, have we?

Mairi Gougeon: We certainly have moved forward but, as I will set out, the bill will provide a framework to underpin the work that we are doing and which we will undertake in the future. As with a lot of other things, we know that there is still a long way to go and that there are challenges that we need to get to grips with and tackle.

Before the intervention, I mentioned examples of work that we have done to become a good food nation.

As I said, we have supported the role of the Soil Association's food for life programme, which ensures that more local food finds its way on to school dinner plates and that children eat more healthy and nutritious food. We provide grants to people who grow their own food in community gardens, which provide a healthy source of food locally and a focus for community events and education.

We continue to tackle the suffering that is caused by food insecurity. This financial year, we have provided around £2.5 billion to low-income households, including £56 million for free school meal alternatives during school holidays, £70 million in flexible local responses to food and financial insecurity, and more than £100 million for the third sector.

We are also working with the private sector. The Scottish Government and the food industry work together through Scotland Food & Drink, which is a unique partnership that facilitates our working side by side. We have supported industry to reformulate high-calorie foods and drinks in order to improve the nation's health, to create regional food ambassadors and to resource regional food groups and events. Those and numerous other initiatives can be found in the latest update of our good food nation programme of measures, which is published on the Scottish Government's website. The programme will now be underpinned by the measures in the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, which will enable us to build momentum as we improve people's lives through the food that they grow, buy and eat.

With the bill, we are taking the next steps on the good food nation journey. It will underpin the good work that we are already doing in law and act as the foundation on which we build our good food nation. I thank the members of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee for their report and their work in gathering evidence on the bill at stage 1. I will cover some of their conclusions and recommendations in the debate, but I will also provide a full response to the report before stage 2.

I also thank everyone who responded to the call for evidence—they did so passionately and with a wealth of knowledge of the food system.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The committee expected a proper response to the report at stage 1, and we were disappointed that we did not get it. We kept our side of the bargain by keeping to the Scottish Government's timetable, but we got scant response. That is disappointing.

Mairi Gougeon: I hope that the member appreciates that it is only fair that I give the report and all the work that has gone into it full and due consideration, which I am undertaking. As I just said, I will be issuing my response to the committee prior to stage 2.

All the views and ideas have been and are being considered carefully during the bill process. At the heart of the bill is the requirement on the Scottish Government and key public authorities to draft, consult on, publish and keep under review good food nation plans. The scope of those plans is intended to be broad and ambitious. Through the good food nation plan, the Government will be obliged to set out clearly for the public the outcomes that we aim to achieve in food-related issues, the policies that we intend to put in place and, critically, the metrics on which our progress can be measured.

Scottish ministers will also be obliged to consider how the good food nation plan relates to specific functions that they carry out, which will further enhance our joined-up approach to food policy. The bill creates similar obligations on local authorities and health boards, which will lead to greater coherence of food policy at national and local levels.

I want the good food nation plans to really deliver for our nation's social and economic wellbeing, education, the environment, people's health and economic development. For that reason, I completely agree with the RAINE Committee's view that consultation on our good food nation plans must be as wide, inclusive and participatory as possible. It is only through involving others, particularly those whose voices are too easy to ignore and who can benefit the most from change, that we will achieve important changes to our food system and food culture.

One of the key issues that was raised and debated during stage 1 concerned the right to food and how best to incorporate that into law. We are committed to doing that, and in the co-operation agreement with the Scottish Greens, we set out not only the intention but how we will achieve it. The Scottish Government intends to bring together a raft of rights under upcoming human rights legislation. That legislation will incorporate into

Scots law the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes the right to adequate food. I am pleased that the committee supports that approach.

A recurring theme in written and oral evidence was the need for scrutiny throughout the development of the good food nation plans. I agree. I acknowledge the committee's call in its stage 1 report for a greater role for the Scottish Parliament in scrutinising the good food nation plans and the committee's specific recommendations on how to achieve that. As part of the next stages of the bill process, I will consider how best to enhance relevant provisions.

Another key issue was oversight, with some contributors calling for a stand-alone food commission to oversee the delivery of good food nation plans. As the committee recognises, views are mixed on the merits or otherwise of establishing a new statutory body, what its duties might be and whether new or existing organisations would be best placed to carry out such work.

As part of our shared policy programme with the Scottish Green Party, we committed to considering the need for a statutory body such as a food commission. That issue was widely deliberated on during the stage 1 process, and I am carefully considering the committee's conclusions and recommendations on oversight.

I turn to the question of outcomes and targets. The stage 1 process gathered a wide range of opinions and views from stakeholders. Some called for the inclusion of detailed targets in the bill, others wanted to see more high-level objectives and many called for a statement of intent or some incorporation of the vision in the bill.

The Scottish Government has already set food and nutrition-related targets such as reducing food waste by 33 per cent by 2025 and aiming to halve childhood obesity by 2030. We have also taken action to reflect the need to meet such targets, such as publishing guidance on healthy eating in schools to improve the nutritional quality of school food.

I agree with the committee, which did not recommend that targets be included in the bill.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Mairi Gougeon: Not at this point.

However, I note that members concluded that the Government should consider how we might better reflect our high-level objectives in the bill. I will undertake to do that.

I look forward to the debate and hearing members' contributions. If there is one thing on which we in this chamber can all agree, it is surely the importance of food in our lives, and of having healthy, sustainably and locally produced food more available to all in Scotland, with people appreciating the role and significance of having good food and being a good food nation.

I am proud to move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, cabinet secretary. I advise members that we are quite tight for time, so interventions will probably have to be accommodated into speaking slots.

I call Beatrice Wishart to speak on behalf of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee. You have around nine minutes, Ms Wishart.

15:16

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am pleased to speak to the committee's stage 1 report on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill this afternoon, although I am not pleased that the reason that I am doing so, rather than the convener, is due to his absence from Parliament. We wish him well and a speedy recovery.

I thank everyone who was involved in the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee's stage 1 inquiry. The committee was able to draw on a wealth of quality evidence to inform its conclusions, and members were encouraged by the passion and expertise of those advocating for change in the food system.

Before I discuss the substance of the committee's report, I put on record my disappointment that the Government has not provided a more detailed written response to inform the debate today. I look forward to receiving a detailed response to the committee's recommendations prior to stage 2.

The Government describes the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill as framework legislation. The bill creates a framework by placing a duty on Scottish ministers and certain relevant authorities—local authorities and health boards—to produce good food nation plans. The plans are the primary vehicle for driving forward the objectives, indicators and policies that the Government and those relevant authorities want to employ in pursuit of their ambition for Scotland to become a good food nation.

The Government has, since 2009, published a range of position papers setting out its ambitions for a good food nation. The expectation of many

stakeholders was that the bill would consolidate the existing strands of policy and set out a clear vision for the Scottish food system. Around two thirds of respondents to the committee's call for views felt that the bill should be clearer on its purpose and outcomes, and many stakeholders raised serious concerns about a lack of ambition for the legislation.

The Scottish Human Rights Commission, for example, argued:

"It is disappointing that the Bill is not framed in terms of the ambition to achieve a just transition to a fair, healthy and sustainable food system, and does not require that food plans set out the steps that will be taken to eradicate hunger and progressively realise the rights to food, health, equality, and a healthy environment."

When the committee raised the lack of ambition in the bill with the cabinet secretary, she said that she was aware of such concerns but emphasised that it was the plans that should set out the ambition, due to the framework nature of the legislation. Although the committee was, to some degree, reassured by those comments, we nonetheless conclude that, for the bill to be effective, the Government should clearly articulate the wider ambitions in the plan when it is published for consultation and laid before Parliament.

In helping to drive the wider ambition, the committee explored whether targets or more detailed outcomes should be included in the bill, and we took a lot of evidence from stakeholders on that. Many thought that targets or outcomes should be included in the bill, but many disagreed. It is a complex issue, not least because different people interpret and understand targets and outcomes to mean different things. Although we agree that it would not be helpful to include numerical targets in the bill, the committee was more persuaded that the bill would benefit from some high-level objectives, reflecting the broad vision and ambitions for a good food nation. Therefore, we urge the Scottish Government to give further thought to the inclusion of high-level objectives in the bill at stage 2 and, in particular, to whether section 1(5) should be widened to include other policy outcomes.

The oversight of and accountability for the national good food nation policy and plans was a central theme in the evidence that we received. As drafted, the bill's oversight mechanism is the requirement to lay all national plans in the Scottish Parliament and to lay a progress report every five years. We took a lot of evidence that questioned whether those provisions were sufficient. There was broad agreement across the majority of responses to the committee's call for views that the bill should provide for an oversight function beyond the reporting and review mechanisms in sections 5 and 6. Accordingly, the committee

recommends that the bill be amended at stage 2 to strengthen the oversight function.

The committee heard a range of views about what the oversight function should look like and who should be tasked with it. We heard support for the oversight function being incorporated into an existing body, as well as support for a new body being established, with a range of suggestions as to what sort of body that should be. Committee members agree that we are not in a position to make a clear recommendation on that.

We note the Scottish Government's long-standing position that a new oversight body is not required but that it is currently considering that under the terms of the Bute house agreement. We asked the Scottish Government to update the Parliament on its thinking in advance of the stage 1 debate. We note with concern that that consideration is in its early stages, as the committee assumes that any oversight role that is deemed necessary should be provided for through the bill.

The committee notes that the bill does not provide the Parliament with a formal role in approving those plans. We recommend, therefore, that the bill be amended at stage 2 to give the Parliament a greater role, requiring Scottish Parliament approval of the plans after they have been laid to ensure that they align with stakeholder expectations and drive the transformational change that we want in the food system.

A number of stakeholders argued that the bill should either incorporate or align with a right to food. The committee wanted to understand whether the bill is the appropriate legislative vehicle for such a right or, as the First Minister has outlined under the Bute house agreement, a right to adequate food should be incorporated into wider human rights legislation. The committee was persuaded that the proposed wider human rights legislation is the best means of providing for a right to food and that it would be unhelpful to have the right singled out and excluded from the proposed human rights legislation.

Sections 2 and 8 of the bill provide for a consultation on the draft good food nation plans. The committee recognises that, if the national plan is to be effective, it must draw on the experiences of everyone using and working in the Scottish food system. We heard compelling evidence, from organisations such as the Food Train, Obesity Action Scotland and the Food Foundation, of the need for a comprehensive and wide-ranging consultation. The committee firmly believes that any consultation that is undertaken by Scottish ministers on the draft national good food nation plan must be as wide, inclusive and participatory as possible. The committee agrees with the

evidence that it received that the consultation methods that are used should be tailored to each specific audience and that one size will not fit all. Therefore, we welcome the commitments that the cabinet secretary and her officials have made that the Scottish Government's approach to the consultation will be as open, accessible and inclusive as possible.

As I have mentioned, the bill requires relevant authorities to publish a good food nation plan. That places a similar requirement on relevant authorities to those that are placed on Scottish ministers by section 1 of the bill, although there is no requirement for relevant authorities' reports to be laid in the Scottish Parliament.

In evidence, it was clear that, although some local authorities embraced the good food nation vision some time ago, other authorities are at an earlier stage of their good food nation journey. Therefore, the committee considers it essential that those authorities have access to information and advice to support the development of their plans, and we called on the Scottish Government to set out in its response to our report how it intends to provide such information and advice.

Sections 4 and 10 of the bill provide that Scottish ministers and relevant authorities must "have regard to" their good food nation plans when exercising specified functions. Those functions are to be set out in subordinate legislation. The committee believes that sections 4 and 10 are key to the effectiveness of the plans. We agree that it is regrettable that a draft list of all the specified functions was not available to inform parliamentary scrutiny, although we welcome the cabinet secretary's confirmation that the list will be included in the consultation on the draft national plan.

The committee homed in on one particular aspect of section 4, which was the provision for subordinate legislation setting out the specified functions to be considered by Parliament under the negative procedure. Officials told us that that procedure was chosen because the subordinate legislation would be likely to include a long list and would not meet the usual criteria for the affirmative procedure. The committee agrees that the decision about which of the Scottish ministers' functions should be exercised with regard to good food nation plans should meet the criteria for the affirmative procedure and that Parliament should have a stronger role in scrutinising those "specified functions". Accordingly, we recommend that any regulations made under section 4 should be subject to the affirmative procedure.

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

Beatrice Wishart: I had something to say about the financial memorandum costs. Suffice it to say that the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill offers a real opportunity to transform Scotland's relationship with food. If the plans are to drive that transformational culture change, they must be robust, with clear objectives, adequate resources and effective oversight and accountability mechanisms. National and localised plans must also work together coherently and must complement existing and future policy initiatives.

15:26

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The Scottish National Party is finally introducing its promised Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, six years late, after having promised it in its 2016 and 2021 manifestos.

We are all very proud of what Scotland produces. We export £6.3 billion-worth of food and drink annually, but we must do more to promote our produce at home.

I tuned in to Radio 4's "The Food Programme" recently to listen to a piece on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. It highlighted why we are here debating the legislation today. Scotland has been branded the sick man of Europe because of our diet, with people regularly eating calorie-dense, nutrient-deficient foodstuffs and 66 per cent of our adult population estimated to be obese. According to current trends, by 2035 more than 480,000 people in Scotland will be living with diabetes. It is estimated that around 6.7 per cent of men and 4.2 per cent of women are living with chronic heart disease. We must urgently reverse those trends. It is therefore important that the bill has a purpose clause setting out the Government's intentions.

The Scottish Food Coalition and others believe that we all have a right to food and that that right should be included in the bill. I am yet to be convinced that the cabinet secretary has addressed that. It will be interesting to see how the Bute house agreement reflects that intention in relation to forthcoming human rights legislation.

We have heard responses to the draft bill from a range of stakeholders. I thank them for their valuable input. Stakeholders have high expectations of the bill, and it is therefore incumbent on me and my colleagues in the RAINE Committee to ensure that we get this right.

The bill has been welcomed by many, but some say that it simply does not go far enough. We support the bill at stage 1. However, given the wealth of evidence and consideration in the RAINE Committee's report, substantial revisions are required to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

First and foremost, there is an expectation that local authorities will need significant resources to deliver the good food nation plan. It was noted that the financial memorandum—which Beatrice Wishart did not have time to talk about—lacks detail in relation to the costs that are likely to fall to relevant authorities. If local authorities are expected to shoulder the weight of responsibility, the Government must recognise that its support should include access to information and advice to support the development of the plans, as well as financial resources.

I want to touch on the point of importance, which is reflected in the RAINE Committee's report, that the bill should take account of the high-level objectives. In short, that is about the link between Scottish Government policy and the broad vision and ambitions for the good food nation policy.

I do not have time to touch on all the issues today, and I hope that my colleagues in the Scottish Conservatives and other colleagues on the RAINE Committee will cover other aspects. However, I want to say that farmers and food producers should be at the heart of Scottish procurement in order to support jobs, the environment, skills development and social impacts across Scotland.

Dave McKay of the Soil Association made the connection between food and farming clear when he said:

"We want to see our government join the dots between the interconnected climate, nature and dietary health crises."

We all know that local multipliers mean that money that local authorities spend will be returned to the local economy and will have wide-ranging benefits and cost savings for local authorities. However, there is still a disconnect between local producers and the food that is served in hospitals, schools and prisons.

Locavore, which is a Scottish company, has made great strides in supplying local vegetables that are grown on three sites within 10 miles of Glasgow city centre. That is a good example. The committee heard from Mark Hunter of East Ayrshire Council that the local authority has very good links with the food sector in its area.

If we can get a good food education programme in schools, we can support the health agenda and, obviously, the economic development of our local community. Furthermore, there is an appreciation and understanding that a whole-food system, from gate to plate and back, is needed. We understand that, although several public sector organisations want to support local procurement, the budget constrains them, which means that it is simply not possible for them to do that. The Government must address that, and I would like to see more

detail in the financial memorandum to reflect that point.

As I said, food education is vital. As noted in the committee's stage 1 report,

"there are several social factors impacting people's ability to source, purchase, cook and consume 'good' food. These issues range from transport infrastructure to income, knowledge, and the skills to prepare healthy meals."

It should be noted that a third of respondents to the consultation mentioned education. We have also heard from the acclaimed "Great British Menu" chef Gary Maclean, who has said that we are failing to educate the next generation about food and food preparation. He says that it goes back to the fact that those life skills have not been passed down from parents to kids for three or four generations. That is exactly why we need the bill to deliver.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Does the member not recognise that poverty is as big a driver of food inequality as anything else?

Rachael Hamilton: Of course it is a driver. However, when I posted about education on my Twitter account, Mr Fairlie, you said that you fully supported that, so I am surprised that you are not stating that you will get right behind—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair, please, Ms Hamilton.

Rachael Hamilton: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

You Can Cook, which is based in Peebles in the Borders, offers classes, demonstrations, talks and workshops on food and health-related issues all over Scotland. It has found that half of Scottish children from urban areas think that oranges grow in Scotland and that 70 per cent think that cotton comes from sheep. I have long championed food and countryside education. It is vital that we use the bill to educate people on the importance of good local food and how to reduce food waste.

I will move on because time is short. There must be effective oversight of the good food nation policy and accountability for the statutory good food nation plans. Scottish Environment LINK said in its submission on the bill that the lack of an oversight function

"means that a vital piece of the jigsaw is missing"

and that that

"risks the effectiveness of this legislation in driving the changes that are urgently needed".

The Scottish Conservatives agree, as does the committee, that the current oversight provisions in the bill—the requirement to lay all national plans in the Scottish Parliament and to lay a progress report every five years—are insufficient. We will

seek to address that at stage 2 with a view to strengthening the oversight function and to providing accountability to Parliament. Furthermore, many stakeholders, including Nourish Scotland and Obesity Action Scotland agree that there is a need for an oversight body. I ask the cabinet secretary for urgent clarity on whether the Scottish Government intends to designate one.

We support the bill at stage 1, but we believe that it is fundamentally lacking in the provisions that are required.

I will end with a quote from Professor Mary Brennan:

"there is great commitment to moving the needle in the right direction, improving our health, social and economic outcomes, and playing our part in improving our environmental outcomes. With careful management, with collaboration and co-creation between the national and local levels and public bodies, and with clarity of purpose on the direction of travel, delivery is possible."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee*, 19 January 2022; c 8-9.]

We will seek to strengthen the bill during stage 2.

15:35

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank the committee for its extensive gathering of evidence to inform its stage 1 report. Like the committee, Labour is happy to support the principles of the bill at stage 1, but we believe that it needs to be significantly strengthened.

I begin by paying tribute to the members of the Scottish Food Coalition—the trade unions and charities in the diverse alliance of civil society in Scotland, which has come together to fight for food justice. It recognises that, in a country with so much fine food and drink, plenty of land, plenty of sea and plenty of talented producers, there is no reason why we should not have plenty of good food for everyone. However, the reality is that too many people in Scotland are still going hungry or are reliant on food banks in order to eat. In the food and drink sector, far too many people are employed in jobs that are insecure and poorly paid. Too many agricultural practices continue to be incentivised by a Government support system despite their negative impact on our climate and wildlife—yet too many of our farmers and fishers cannot make a decent living.

Jim Fairlie: I simply do not understand the member saying that the farming system is continuing to degrade our countryside, given that there are numerous schemes to help us protect the environment, including the European Union policies that the Government is continuing with.

Colin Smyth: If Mr Fairlie thinks that the current scheme is so perfect, I do not understand why the

Government has promised to bring forward legislation to change it, when it is failing to deliver—[*Interruption.*] I think that Mr Fairlie wants to keep having a debate. I am happy to do so. I think that changes are needed; so does his Government.

The members of the food coalition recognise that our food policies are not perfect and that we need to find a better and fairer way to feed ourselves that does not damage our people or our environment. The Parliament has an opportunity to recognise that as well, but only if we get the bill right.

I recognise that we have come a long way—somewhat slowly—since the publication in 2014 of the national food and drink policy. I recall being told by ministers when I was first elected that we did not really need legislation to become a good food nation and, time and again, I have had voted down motion after motion calling for the right to food to be enshrined in law. However, thanks to the tenacity and unity of purpose of members of the food coalition and many others, we now have a bill and, at least, the promise of the right to food.

However, it is clear that the bill does not go far enough. What should be an historic opportunity to transform Scotland's food system, and to reduce food insecurity by ensuring that everyone has access to healthy and sustainable food, is in danger of being a missed opportunity. It is the political equivalent of standing in front of an open goal and belting the ball over the bar from six yards. The Government says that it is a framework bill, but it is an empty frame without a vision. Labour is clear: that vision, the purpose of the bill, should ultimately be to enable the right to food—and the bill should say that. As the United Nations special rapporteur, Professor Michael Fakhri, told the committee, when giving evidence on 28 February,

“If the good food bill is strengthened and infused with human rights commitments, Scotland will stand out as one of the leading nations that seek to promote and realise the right to food for its people”.

That view is shared by the overwhelming majority who gave evidence to the committee. In its written submission, the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland said that it was

“disappointed that the Bill did not take this opportunity to embed the right to food into Scots Law.”

Although it acknowledged that the Government has said that it wants to embed that right within wider human rights legislation, it went on to say:

“that is no reason not to start now”

and indicate

“how seriously Scotland takes both the right to food and human rights.”

Scottish Labour believes that the bill should be unambiguous in its purpose to ultimately enable the right to food. We will work with the Government on how best to achieve that. We support the widespread calls to amend the bill in five key areas: to define its purpose; to have clear and measurable objectives; to establish an independent food commission; to strengthen the parliamentary scrutiny process; and to ensure that ministers have a duty to act in accordance with a national good food nation plan, rather than simply having regard to it. I hope that the Government will work with all parties to enable those amendments, because I believe that we can show unity behind a strong bill.

One challenge is the fact that the Government has not published a response to the committee's stage 1 report, so we are not yet clear what amendments it will bring forward in the very short time between stage 1 and stage 2. If the Government does not bring forward amendments in those five areas, Labour will do so.

I will take each of those areas in turn. Like the overwhelming majority of respondents to the committee, we believe that the bill should have a purpose clause, which should include giving practical effect to the right to food. As WWF said in its written submission, the bill

“should establish high-level policy principles and objectives for ... Scotland's food system, providing the overarching framework for what a Good Food Nation means in practice.”

It is encouraging that the committee has urged the Scottish Government to include high-level objectives at stage 2, but we believe that it should go further—they should not only be in the bill, but be measurable.

In evidence to the committee on 26 January, the Trussell Trust highlighted that child poverty targets were put in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, which focused the sector on a unified goal and maintained momentum. Does anybody seriously think that the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 should not have had a measurable commitment to net zero by 2045? Why should we not show the same ambition and have clear legally binding targets when it comes to tackling food poverty or childhood obesity?

The bill needs to set a clear direction for future policy. Voluntary Health Scotland said in its written submission that the bill

“should establish high-level policy principles and objectives for fixing Scotland's food system”,

and that that should

“inform and underpin all future food-related legislation and policy—including but not limited to the ... Agriculture Bill,

the Circular Economy Bill, the Environment Bill and future public health measures on food.”

That important point was also made by RSPB and OneKind, which rightly highlighted that animal welfare should be prioritised in the bill and future policy.

Labour shares the view that the bill should provide a more comprehensive oversight function. As Scottish Environment LINK argued in its written submission, the lack of an oversight function

“means that a vital piece of the jigsaw is missing”.

We support the call from the Scottish Food Coalition for an independent Scottish food commission. In its evidence to the committee on 19 January, it highlighted the example of the Scottish Land Commission. The view that the role should be undertaken by a new body was also backed by the Scottish Human Rights Commission, which made the valid point in its written evidence that allocating the role to an existing body

“is likely to underestimate the scale of work involved and the specialisms required to deliver it.”

The way in which the bill is scrutinised by Parliament needs to be clear. We believe that the national good food nation plan should ultimately require the approval of Parliament.

We share the view that the well-worn legislative phrase requiring ministers to “have regard to” their own national good food nation plan should be replaced with “act in accordance with”.

For far too long, too many people in Scotland have lacked adequate access to food, exposing the gross inequalities that we face today. In a nation that provides so much outstanding food and drink, it really is to our shame that many children in Scotland still go to bed hungry.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude now.

Colin Smyth: We have a long way to go to make sure that the bill is a bold good food nation bill, but we support its principles and we will work with the Government and all parties to deliver the changes that are needed.

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

15:43

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill is the first piece of legislation that I have been involved in, and I thank the committee clerks and my fellow committee members for their hard work and dedication to this vitally important issue.

We took evidence from organisations from Shetland to Argyll and Bute, and from Zero Waste Scotland to the Scottish Food Coalition. That evidence will support a bill that will take Scotland further along the road to becoming a good food nation by creating a national plan and requiring plans to be created by public bodies. As Jayne Jones of Argyll and Bute Council said,

“We are already on that journey—we are not at the very beginning of it. We need to recognise the progress that we have already made, but the good food nation agenda gives us the opportunity to do more.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee*, 9 February 2022; c 43.]

Food and cuisine are important to me. My culinary journey has been a bit of a winding road. I went from turning down good Scottish puddings covered in custard at school to looking forward to them when at a freezing filming location, and from only eating haddock smothered in ketchup as a child to enjoying fish of every variety as my top food choice. Personally, I am pleased that the Scottish Government has the vision of Scotland being a good food nation where it is normal for Scots to love their food and know what constitutes good food.

We took evidence from Robin Gourlay, who helped to develop “Recipe for Success” when he was at East Ayrshire Council. He said:

“If you look at the work of Scotland Food & Drink, other industry bodies, our colleagues working in health and those working in climate, you see that there is a consensus to do something better with food.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee*, 19 January 2022; c 6.]

There is also a consensus that those who serve and sell food—from schools to hospitals, and from retailers to restaurants—should serve and sell the best. One of my staff members recalls with pleasure the lunches that he and his friends enjoyed when Dunoon grammar school upped its game and began to provide food that was both nutritious and delicious. He reflects on how the meals were especially important to youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The Scottish Government invested £5 million in food education projects between 2010 and 2017. There we see public policy improving the lives and health of vulnerable individuals. That is the next part of the vision for Scotland as a good food nation: that everyone in Scotland has easy access to the healthy and nutritious food that they need.

Food not only feeds the body but enriches our lives in other ways. It is a way of bringing people together, from Burns suppers to the food that is served at Sikh gurdwaras. However, for all too many children, home cooking is a ready meal served in front of the television.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Jenni Minto: I will not.

Serving attractive food in schools and other institutions will allow us to offer many more people the opportunity of eating together and sharing food, united by the joy of good food.

Through good food nation plans, the connection between food and health will help to reduce diet-related diseases and support people who have long-term conditions. Two weeks ago, I visited the recently opened dialysis unit in Rothesay, on the Isle of Bute, where I met a patient who receives dialysis three times a week. Until the unit opened, he had to travel to Inverclyde. He told me about the difference that having his dialysis close to home has made: he has time to prepare his evening meal so that it is ready when he returns from his treatment and he does not have to eat a microwaved meal. He is eating healthier food and he is happier.

In evidence, the committee heard stark figures from Iain Gulland, of Zero Waste Scotland, on food's environmental impact. An area larger than China is used to grow food that is never eaten; 1 billion hungry people in the world could be fed on less than a quarter of the food that is wasted in the United Kingdom, the United States and Europe; and, in hospitality and food services in Scotland, the equivalent of 106 million meals—that is one in every six meals—is discarded every year.

Iain Gulland concluded by saying that Scottish households need support to end food waste and recycle as much as possible. Wasting food is wasting water, energy and resources. The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill should be an enabler for such support.

Scottish producers ensure that what they produce is increasingly healthy and environmentally sound. Professor Mary Brennan of the Scottish Food Coalition told the committee:

“A good food nation produces food that does as little harm as possible to the environment. It produces and consumes food that is produced to the highest welfare and wellbeing standards. It looks after its natural resources: the animals, fish, watercourses and marine environments that are central to our existence.”—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee*, 19 January 2022; c 8.]

Shopping for tempting food can and should be an enjoyable experience, but it becomes a misery for people if most of what they can see is too expensive and they and their loved ones must do without. However, minimum wage levels, the cost of heating homes and the increase in national insurance are subjects for different debates. Today, we can continue to put Scotland on a course that will make school meals, hospital meals

and all foods that are served by public bodies support the health and wellbeing of our nation.

Serving the right food can improve our communities and our environment. Sourcing local ingredients sustainably supports local economies, cuts food miles and helps us on the road to net zero carbon emissions—and, in this complex and turbulent time in world history, increasing food self-sufficiency makes strategic sense.

If we are to do all of that, we need to support Scottish producers in ways that enable them to provide quality ingredients at prices that people can afford. And what producers we have! In my constituency, we have small and medium-sized enterprises that are coffee roasters; tea growers; dairy, beef and lamb farmers; ice cream producers; vegan cheese makers; and fish and shellfish fishers. That is not to forget the folk with gardens and allotments who grow their own fruit and veg.

Professor Michael Fakhri, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, provided a statement to the committee by video. He said:

“Covid-19 has laid bare the inequalities and underlying issues in every country's food system. In this context, your good food nation bill is a timely and exemplary response to address deep-rooted challenges.”

I support the motion.

15:49

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con):

The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill touches several different policy areas. Today, I will focus my comments on the bill's potential for driving progress on sustainable agriculture and the wider environment.

Where the bill can do the most good is in helping farmers to answer the question, “How do we produce more food while using fewer resources?” That is the problem that we face in a world in which the population is rising but the resources are dwindling. Coming up with solutions gives Scotland the opportunity to lead the world in sustainable food production.

To do that, we need a better idea of the wider impact that food production has on society, the economy, the environment and people's wellbeing. Such an approach, which is being championed by NFU Scotland, would let us build a picture of the food value chain that includes the condition of local supply chains, the effect that imports are having and, ultimately, how we ensure food security. Given that we have just come through a pandemic in which just-in-time supply chains were stretched and food security was, at times, a genuine concern for some, those are issues that the bill should put front and centre. Alongside that,

farmers should be recognised as being part of the solution by creating a more circular food production system that helps to restore nature, protect wildlife and fight climate change.

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): I invite the member to reflect on his point about food security, given that it is his party, in government in the UK, that is signing post-Brexit trade deals that Scottish farmers have warned will bring down standards for food and the environment and undermine their business. How does that support food security?

Maurice Golden: I am quite surprised by that intervention, because every part of the UK is set to benefit from those trade agreements. In 2020, Scotland exported £126 million-worth of beverages to Australia, and the trade deal with Australia will remove tariffs of up to 5 per cent on Scotch whisky. New Zealand lamb was already quota free before the trade deal with New Zealand. I hope that that answers the minister's question.

Mairi Gougeon: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Maurice Golden: No. I need to make progress. I understand why Ms McAllan did not ask me about tackling climate change—because the Scottish Government has failed to meet its emissions targets for three years in a row.

The obvious starting point is to make farms more efficient, because more efficient farms are more sustainable farms. To do that, we need to reduce waste—for example, by reducing discharges through the use of precision fertiliser and slurry operations or closed nutrient loops to prevent nutrient loss.

Fertiliser is an especially big challenge right now, with the war in Ukraine having sent the price skyrocketing—the cost of nitrogen is nudging £1,000 per tonne. The effects of that are already being seen, with farmers being persuaded to adopt regenerative practices, where possible. As well as environmental benefits, such as that of boosting biodiversity, there is the potential for financial savings. Regenerative farming is able to deliver both.

Of course, no system is 100 per cent efficient. There will always be waste, but we should look to generate value from that waste by building new revenue streams for farmers, creating jobs and reducing environmental impacts. The James Hutton Institute has been doing important work on that—it has been looking at how farm wastes and co-products can be used to produce, for example, bioplastics. That process has the potential to displace fossil fuels, with the associated emissions savings in turn supporting the aim of businesses to decarbonise their supply chains.

However, help is needed to make such solutions work. I am pleased to say that the Scottish Conservatives were ahead of the curve on that. For the past several years, we have called for direct financial and technical support for farmers to install new equipment and upgrade infrastructure. We would further assist food producers through our Scotland first strategy, by encouraging public services to use local food, where possible, which would shorten supply chains, help to improve animal welfare and reduce environmental impacts, in turn promoting good Scottish fare and helping to support more than 150,000 people in the food and drink sector supply chain.

Unfortunately, the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, as it is currently drafted, simply does not cover any of that in sufficient detail. We hear about public bodies producing their own good food nation plans but without knowing exactly what will be in them. Equally, there are no high-level targets or outcomes to guide individual plans. Those points are highlighted by the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee. I appreciate the cabinet secretary's assurance that some of the detail will be found in the individual plans, but they need direction to support national objectives, especially environmental progress, which seems to be an obvious link to the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. That is just not happening.

Scottish Environment LINK says that the bill is "significantly lacking, particularly from an environmental perspective"

while Nourish Scotland warns that it

"is lacking in ambition and purpose."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee*, 26 January 2022; c 2.]

Let me be clear. I want to see food production improved, farmers supported and our environment protected. We all do. The draft bill is too weak to do that. That must be resolved at stage 2 if we are going to build a good food nation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Willie Coffey, who joins us remotely, to be followed by Rhoda Grant. You have up to six minutes, Mr Coffey.

15:55

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of the bill and about the committee's detailed scrutiny and report at stage 1.

The aims of the bill are fairly straightforward: to produce good food nation plans and to have regard to those plans when exercising other functions. I particularly enjoyed reading the section of the committee's report on exactly what "have

regard to” means, but I will talk about that later, if I get the opportunity.

The principles behind the bill are a natural consequence of Scotland’s having an excellent world-class reputation for producing high-quality food. Taking that a step further by creating local food plans is world leading. It is nice to think that other nations look to Scotland to lead on how to become a good food nation. That expectation will certainly have been enhanced by the committee’s diligence in scrutinising the Government’s proposals. We can see that clearly if we read the report. I am pleased to see that the bill also received the unanimous support of the committee—albeit with a number of recommendations to strengthen it.

It is quite an aim to ask the nation to embrace a good food nation plan and to ask that we all take pride in the food that we produce, buy, cook and, ultimately, enjoy every day. As ever, the tests of success will be whether the legislation will be easily adopted across a country that is as diverse as Scotland, and how effective it will be in meeting the aims. There was some good discussion in the committee about how that could be done.

The Government describes the bill as a framework bill, so the committee looked in detail at whether the bill itself should include targets and outcomes. From what I have read, I know that a number of targets were offered during evidence, but the committee took the reasonable view that it is not appropriate to include targets in a framework bill, especially when the key driver will be the development of local good food plans across the country, varied though they will no doubt be.

One big issue that came up was the duty of oversight, and where it should lie. From the discussion of the subject in the report, it is clear that the proposals to lay the national plans in Parliament and to make five-yearly progress reports are thought to be insufficient. It is also fair to say that there was no agreement about whether a new body should provide that oversight, or whether the duty could be placed on an existing body. I would be grateful to the committee members who will speak in the debate if they would clarify that point; it looks as though some work remains to be done on that part of the bill.

One aspect of the bill that took me by surprise was the proposal that there be a statutory right to food. I was genuinely pleased to read that, of course. The question whether to incorporate that within the bill or within human rights legislation also caused quite a bit of discussion. From what I can see, the committee supported the proposal’s being contained in human rights legislation, but with strong references to that right being clear within the bill. Again, I commend the committee for exploring the important matter of a person’s right

to an adequate standard of living, with food clearly being a key part of that.

I return briefly to the debate on what “have regard to” actually means. The bill asks ministers to have regard to the national good food nation plan when exercising other duties. Discussion seemed to centre on what that actually means. That there should be demonstration by evidence that the plan is part of wider consideration is how I read that, but I think that it would be a wise move on my part to leave it to other members to explain that more fully.

I am grateful to colleagues in East Ayrshire Council who reminded the committee that some authorities are already on the good food nation journey, and that the council is recognised as one of the leading authorities in Scotland when it comes to farming, food production and celebrating good food. There are more than 1,000 small and medium-sized food and drink businesses across Ayrshire. East Ayrshire Council is leading the local economic partnership’s food and drink workstream, and is, as part of the Ayrshire growth deal, developing a centre of excellence to support the industry. That work was led in its early days by Robin Gourlay, who was mentioned by Jenni Minto.

Like many other members, I am extremely proud of the quality of produce that comes from my part of the world—Ayrshire, which has the finest milk, dairy products and quality beef on offer, and which gave its name to the curing process for the bacon products that are enjoyed by so many people in Parliament and across the world.

Lastly, please let us remember that it will not be too long before our famous Ayrshire tatties will be on the market.

With that, Presiding Officer, I commend the committee for its excellent work. I look forward to hearing members’ contributions.

16:01

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):

We are rightly proud of Scottish produce, but our food system has huge disconnects; long food chains often leave producers distant from their customers and it is often middlemen who reap the profit. I will focus on the human right to food and why it should be at the heart of the bill.

The Co-operative Party tells us that 81 per cent of Scots support the right to food being enshrined in Scots law. It is a Government’s first responsibility to ensure that its citizens’ needs are met, and the most basic of those needs is food. We cannot be a good food nation when so many people go hungry and are malnourished.

Too often, the people who produce our food are among those who do not have access to it. The Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union surveyed its members last year and found that 40 per cent of respondents had gone hungry at some point during the pandemic because they could not afford food. Those are people who go out to work to provide our food, but their pay is not sufficient for them to buy it. They are not alone; that is commonplace throughout our food industry. Food prices are subject to rampant inflation, with the price of some staples having increased by as much as 45 per cent in the past year. The war in Ukraine is unlikely to make that situation any better.

It is time for the Scottish Government to get a grip. Plans and fancy words do not feed people: we need action. The right to food should be at the heart of the bill, and with it should be a body that is charged with delivering that right, because it cannot be delivered by the free market.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Rhoda Grant: I have a lot to cover. I am sorry.

The idea of a commission is not new; we have several commissions and committees that oversee, advise on and report on progress in other areas, including climate change and poverty. As Colin Smyth said, the Scottish Food Coalition argued for a commission at committee. It asked for a body like the Scottish Land Commission that would advise Government and other public bodies on drawing up their food plans. That body would also assess those plans and their implementation and would report to Parliament on the progress that is being made towards Scotland becoming a good food nation. Many others, including the Scottish Human Rights Commission, have argued for such an independent body.

Enshrining the right to food in a human rights bill will not change anything, because it is a right that we already have, but many people cannot exercise it. The challenge is to give people access to that right and to make it a reality. We face a cost of living crisis that is only going to get worse, but the Government is missing an opportunity to make a real difference to people's lives. This is not just about hunger and how it dehumanises people; it is also about the personal cost to people and the cost to society. Dealing with health inequalities that are caused by malnutrition costs us all dear: prevention must be the better way.

The issue is more complex than being simply financial, although affordability plays a huge part. We know that supermarkets are not normally situated in deprived communities. People who live in deprived communities are often left to depend on more expensive smaller shops, and people on

limited incomes cannot afford a large food shop to be delivered to their door.

The matter is also about the inability to access food. An older person might have had their driving licence revoked, or might not be physically fit enough to go shopping. Older people are also less likely to book a shopping delivery online. There has been an increase in the number of older people being admitted to hospital underweight and malnourished.

Brian Whittle: Will the member take an intervention?

Rhoda Grant: I am sorry, but I am really short of time.

What does that say about us as a society? We are a rich country, but we are seeing the return of diseases and conditions that are related to malnutrition and an increase in obesity. We all know that processed food is cheaper than good-quality food: compare the price of pie, beans and chips with that of a roast dinner. Processed food is loaded with unhealthy fats and sugar, but it is affordable to people who are on low incomes, and that stores up problems for the future.

My colleague Elaine Smith consulted on a proposed right to food bill, which won support in Parliament. Because the Government parties wanted to kick the proposal into the long grass, I, similarly, had to consult—so I have.

My wish is that the right to food and a commission to oversee its implementation will be included in the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. In that way, it would have maximum effect. The Scottish Government could then stand proud of world-leading legislation. I urge it to include those things. If it does, it will have my party's support. If it does not, I will introduce a bill, and the Government will have to look the hungry people in Scotland in the eye when it votes that bill down. The Government will need to explain, from its position of privilege, why it cannot afford our citizens the basic human right to food.

I hope that the Scottish Government will reflect on that and ensure that all our citizens can exercise their right to food, and that we can all enjoy Scotland's wonderful produce.

16:07

Karen Adam (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill could play a crucial role in setting the direction of travel towards a fair, healthy and sustainable food system in Scotland. World-leading legislation that establishes the core purpose of the food system in law, with accompanying systems of governance that ensure progress and accountability, can

catalyse a transformation in how our food system works.

That has been the aim and objective of the work that I have experienced as a member of the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee. By taking a whole-system approach, the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill creates a revolutionary framework that ensures that people's fundamental human rights and the integrity of our ecological home are promoted today and into the future.

The cost of living crisis has created a growing situation in which food is at the heart of some of our biggest challenges in this country. In the committee, we discussed food insecurity. That brought back forgotten memories of just how creative my own family would have to be, not out of choice but out of necessity. I spent time living in a food-insecure home, and I remember the innovative methods that I would use to make a small amount of food stretch a long way to feed my entire family. People simply cannot afford what they cannot afford.

To our nation's detriment, the most affordable foods are often the ones that are high in salts and natural carbohydrate sugars—particularly long-life canned and packet goods, which are needed to stock food banks. That creates a whole host of societal and cultural issues that feed into the direct link between poverty and poor health outcomes. The implementation of the bill could contribute towards combating that.

I hope that, through our work, we have swept aside the rhetoric of the past around education as a silver bullet. The arguments about obesity being a consequence of ignorance are long gone. I recall many pieces of evidence—from evidence on inequality and ill health to evidence on ecological damage—that shed light on a food system with a sense of injustice that the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill will address.

Not least now, in the context of doing what we can, when we can to protect our people in Scotland who are reeling from an escalating cost of living crisis and to mitigate that, we are seeing people who are, maybe for the first time, being priced out of a decent diet, are reliant on food banks and are suffering the consequences of malnutrition and food insecurity.

Engaging with this piece of work has been, and will be, invaluable. The legislation, supported by existing rights and fleshed out as the cost of living crisis grows, will—it has to—make progress. Whole generations are growing up hungry, children's educational attainment is being affected, opportunities are being denied and potential is not being realised.

It would be true to say that in the Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee's deliberations, attention has been paid to setting targets in the legislation. However, part of the problem is what targets actually mean in this context. The bill should not be led by the nose by a focus on targets but led and delivered holistically. I will explain why.

The roll-out of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill can be led by looking at the positive impact of our changing culture around food. That wraparound approach provides flexibility and vision in how performance is measured, and a path that does not focus on targets, which could otherwise restrict and narrow our performance outcomes. The here today, gone tomorrow targets that become meaningless in a rapidly changing landscape will not assist the path of the bill into practice and becoming part of lived experience.

People who are experiencing food poverty are concerned not about targets but about actual performance and their personal reality of easy access to good food. Facilitating a more holistic approach in the bill underpins the work that is already being done and gives it a legislative basis. Parents are going out to work without having eaten enough because they have given up meals so that their children can eat—what an indictment that is of our political and economic system. That must change and the bill addresses that.

As we now know only too well in our contemporary context, the social, economic and political landscape can change dramatically, as it may do in the coming months. In asking what could be used as markers for outcomes from the law, we must not fall into the trap of having targets become the focus, rather than driving forward a fundamental culture change.

We must value the people who work to produce and process food, as well as the farm animals, wildlife and natural resources that enable us to eat well. We need a just transition to a food system that is founded on the principles of social and environmental justice, and the bill will provide that.

We need local authorities to play their part in supporting that change in ways that drive forward a cultural movement in our nation towards getting back to growers, which can be supported by including allotments and community gardens in planning decisions. Growing supports our environment and our mental health objectives, and it can provide therapy and community bonding for young and old alike. In particular, it also provides green spaces for people to enjoy, and we saw how important that was during the pandemic.

To enable us to imagine a nation of good food that we can all support, the framework bill includes a vision of a country where we appreciate and can

take part in the process of farm to fork, boat to bowl and propagation to our plate.

16:13

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):

There are numerous reasons why it is a privilege to live in Scotland, but there are three worth mentioning in the context of this debate: the unique splendour of our landscapes, in particular on days like today when it is not raining; the abundance of our natural resources; and our capacity to produce world-class food. Colin Smyth made some interesting points about the potential that we have in that regard.

Good food is a very large part of being able to live well. It should go without saying, therefore, that we must harness everything in our power to ensure that it is accessible to all. Without good food, there is no access to good health, a strong economy or a strong sense of wellbeing.

Members know only too well that, over the years, I have, in general, been pretty hostile towards national plans of any sort, because past experience with plans in this place has not been encouraging. Too many national plans have been overlaid with too much bureaucracy and too many burdens on stakeholder groups, and with artificial targets, and we have ended up in situations in which people are told by the state what to do rather than taking responsibility themselves.

Before I comment on this particular plan, I will concentrate on three themes in the bill that I believe can be the focus for the desired aim: namely, to ensure that Scotland is a world leader when it comes to good food. These three themes are the availability of food, its production and its preparation.

First, the question of availability is not just about the supply of food but about how pricing affects consumer demand and the related elasticities within that demand. All too often, people tell us that good food will always be more expensive, but that is a myth—it is simply not true. Indeed, some of the best and most wholesome food is actually the cheapest.

Take homemade soup, for example, on which I have heard Mr Fairlie speak during the election campaign and in the chamber since. That is made with quality vegetables that we have in our local shops and on our farms. Willie Coffey made a point about the traditional Scottish dish of mince and tatties. That dish can be as good as any when it comes to quality food and it is a lot cheaper than a fish supper or a pizza carry-out. So, too, with a myriad of straightforward recipes.

Dr Allan: I bow to no one in my respect for mince and tatties. However, given what the

member said about making a bowl of soup, does she recognise that, in many communities in Scotland, accessing a shop that sells fresh vegetables is no simple task?

Liz Smith: I absolutely do and I am coming to that point, going back again to some suggestions that Mr Fairlie has made in the past. Mr Allan is quite right, but it is not just about accessing the food but about knowing what to do when it comes to making the soup. That is an important point as well. The education that is involved is crucial. I do not often agree with Mr Fairlie in the chamber, as everybody knows, but he has made a very strong point in the past about young people in schools needing to know what they have to do. That is a very important part of the curriculum for educating our young people, as, indeed, is knowing how to avoid waste.

I am obviously not a farmer in any sense, but I live in the farming communities in Perthshire and I am in awe of what they manage to do, often against the elements and in very difficult circumstances. It is true that they have had their difficulties with Brexit and Covid and have not had their troubles to seek, but they also have some big asks of us.

Top of the list for farmers, quite rightly, is that they want us to buy local. That includes local authorities and other institutions doing their bit when it comes to procurement. As Rachael Hamilton said, the Scottish Conservatives have been calling for that for a very long time. That procurement is vital, not just to harness the best of our local areas but to support jobs and the related rural industries. If the bill is to be effective, facilitating that local procurement is a key component.

Another important issue is the culture that surrounds the preparation of the food. Far too often these days, mealtimes are squeezed, and there are two problems in that. It often means that poorer-quality food is being served—Karen Adam made that very sensible point—and it certainly means that quality family time around the dinner table is reduced. Personally, I think that the French have a lot to teach us in trying to address that issue, because in France food is very much seen as a national treasure. We need to do an awful lot more to imbue exactly the same culture across Scotland.

Therefore, quite a bit of creating a good food nation is about attitudinal changes and we in the chamber know from various other policy initiatives that changing attitudes and behaviour is not easy. However, I do not think that we should sit back and say that we will not try, because the committee has come up with some very interesting suggestions about what the basket of indicators has to be, as opposed to the targets. That is a

very important part of the recommendations in the committee's report.

I will finish by saying that Beatrice Wishart, speaking on behalf of the committee, raised some very interesting points about the procedures that the committee will have to recommend to Parliament to ensure that we go about the legislation in absolutely the right way to deliver what the intention is, rather than getting wound up in some legislation that will not be very effective.

16:19

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): It is not often that I agree with Liz Smith, but there was much in her speech that I absolutely agree with.

I will take you on a wee history lesson of my involvement with this whole debate, Presiding Officer. In 1995, the Aberdeen *Evening Express* reported on a chip shop in Stonehaven that was selling Mars Bars deep fried in batter during the school holidays, which were specially targeted at children. It was a novelty story that was picked up by press across the country and around the world. One newspaper described the place as "Scotland's Craziest Takeaway", and the story became synonymous with obesity, ill health and a high-fat diet, which did nothing to enhance the already poor reputation of Scotland's appreciation of and relationship with food.

The irony is that, as we have said, Scotland's larder is world renowned and has been for generations. Lamb, beef, venison, salmon, shellfish, whisky, potatoes, haggis and neeps—the world knew all about our well-loved home produce, and yet we still had the reputation of being the sick man of Europe, with a very unhealthy relationship with alcohol and fatty, obesity-inducing foods.

Brian Whittle: Does Mr Fairlie agree that we must look at planning and at where we put fast-food outlets? Should we allow burger vans, for example, to be anywhere close to our schools? We must encourage our children to take up school meals.

Jim Fairlie: Absolutely—I called for that when I was outside Parliament and I completely agree.

The situation did not add up, and someone had to take the initiative to change the attitude that we had and to address the obesity challenges. Hungry for success—a national nutritional standards programme for schools—was launched in 2003 in a bid to tackle the highest level of obesity in Europe. That was a significant step forward, and then came the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007, which remains the overarching legislation on food

provision and a whole-school approach to promoting health and wellbeing.

The regulations were reviewed in 2017, and they were revised again in 2021, so that schools now take account of health and wellbeing in planning. We introduced universal free school meals in primary schools to promote social justice. That is a vital service as the cost of living crisis that we are facing takes hold.

I have spoken before about my experience of working with Perth high school to help it to develop as a health-promoting school. We set up a programme to give young people access to and participation in whole-food-chain processes from growing to preparing, cooking and then selling. What those young people got out of that was life skills and an introduction to a vibrant and exciting industry, with the possibility of developing a career for themselves.

My involvement at that level with my children's school was mainly down to a changing attitude and culture around food across schools and local authorities. That was driven by various governmental initiatives and in particular by the 2009 national food and drink policy for Scotland. That was a landmark piece of work from Richard Lochhead—it was the first of its kind in Europe. I do not have time to quote what he said then.

In 2009, Robin Gourlay chaired the national food and drink policy public sector working group, which was aimed at creating new opportunities for food and drink SMEs and at achieving better public procurement by public sector organisations. His success in East Ayrshire meant that he was the right person to chair the group, which looked at how we could put the talk into action.

The report that Robin Gourlay authored was—aptly—called "Walking the Talk—Getting Government Right". It introduced integrating sustainable development and accounting for the social, economic and environmental value of food in awarding contracts, as well as the social return on investment. They were two vital elements in driving the move away from considering pence per meal to delivering wider value for money across society. That is a crucial difference in changing attitudes to the real value of food in public procurement.

Seeing the whole picture, from legislation in this place to working with it in the field—if members will pardon the pun—has been of huge value and emphasises to me why we need to get this right. Our global reputation for quality food is fabulous; our imagery and marketing have been superb.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Jim Fairlie: I am sorry—I do not have time.

The Scotch Whisky Association was undoubtedly a front runner, and others are learning from it. The Scottish Government's genius incorporation of Scotland Food & Drink as the collaborative lynchpin for the whole food industry, under the stewardship of James Withers, has been a massive success. Scotland's reputation for quality places to eat out is growing, and I am very proud to say that it is led by my brother's restaurant at Gleneagles, which is still the only two-Michelin-star restaurant in Scotland.

Appreciation of our home-grown and local food offering has grown massively. I am proud of my small role in establishing Scotland's first farmers market, which led to an explosion across the country of farmers markets, farm shops and local food delivery businesses. Creating the connection between growers, farmers, fishers, producers and consumers has been pivotal in getting us to where we are now.

Equally, our street food culture has grown exponentially. Small artisan traders are getting out there and cooking fabulous-tasting and locally sourced top-quality foods. That is a world away from when I started festival catering; organisers now recognise that quality food is something to be proud of and is an important element of any event.

I mention all that to emphasise that we are on a journey that we have been on for a long time and in which we have made great strides and improvements. There is a danger in the debate of dismissing all that has gone before without recognising its value and—importantly—its lessons.

We have come an extremely long way in a relatively short period of time, but there is much more to do, which is where the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill comes in. The requirement in the bill to set out a plan has been criticised for lacking ambition, being too narrow, not having targets and missing an opportunity. I disagree, because those claims miss the fundamental point of what has already been achieved. The bill is the next stage in embedding and boosting all that good work. It is a framework bill that will focus the minds of those in the public sector to ensure that every aspect of their thinking has regard to food and its role in every function of their operation. Across all their departments, local authorities will have to take cognisance of all those aspects and include them in their thinking.

The bill strengthens the levers for change and continues the cultural shift that Scotland has been making for more than two decades. When we look back in five years, we will be able to measure that success with improved health, economic development and the cultural shifts that we witness in everyday life, and how much closer we are to becoming a good food nation.

16:25

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Getting food right in Scotland will play a crucial role in our country's wellbeing. The Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill is not only about what is on our plates, but about every single activity that puts the food on to that plate and what happens when the scraps are scraped off and the plate is washed.

Food entwines many systems. It engages thousands of people in sectors from soil science to food growing and harvesting, fishing and farming, through to cooking and serving, preparing and packaging, and delivery and retail. It involves us all, because we all buy and eat food. Food is at the centre of our lives. We must recognise that the way in which we produce, procure and value good food can help us to take massive strides in our response to the climate and nature emergencies, our health and education crises, and our growing food insecurity and mental ill health challenges. That is why the Scottish Greens ensured that there were commitments in the Bute house agreement to support better procurement and organic farming.

As Jim Fairlie outlined, for years, countless people and organisations across Scotland have been pushing for a good food nation bill, because, until now, we have not been doing a great job of providing genuinely nutritious food for people. We need the bill to help us all to do better. The bill can be strengthened at stage 2.

In its response to the RAINE Committee's report, the 45-organisation-strong Scottish Food Coalition states that the bill

"must be strengthened as it currently has no clear goals, principles or direction, and minimal mechanisms for participation and accountability."

The majority of people who gave evidence to the committee agreed that the bill needs more detail, clearer ambition, clarity of vision, outcomes and levers for change.

I will highlight key areas in which public bodies can be supported to develop and deliver on strong good food nation plans and signal to the private sector the clear change in direction that we must make. First, a purpose statement at the start of the bill would make clear the direction in which Scottish food policy should be heading. Anna Taylor, the chief independent adviser on England's national food strategy, who gave evidence to the committee, called for a statement that sets out the benefits that a good food nation will bring to people, animals and our environment, and

"the role that we want food to play in society and our lives."—[*Official Report, Rural Affairs, Islands and Natural Environment Committee*, 26 January 2022; c 18.]

Stakeholders have suggested that the statement could be underpinned by a list of high-level objectives, as we have heard discussed already, and a set of outcomes, such as addressing the environmental impact of food production and the level of food insecurity in society. Just like the outcomes in the Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, those would function as guide rails to ensure that the plans all move us towards the same shared vision of a good food nation while leaving room for different policy approaches to get there, as is appropriate for different regions.

One necessary outcome that I will highlight is increasing the share of local food that is procured by public bodies. That is reflected in commitments in the Bute house agreement, which we will now deliver. Supporting Scottish producers and supply chains through public procurement is essential for increasing food security, which is becoming ever more critical, as shown by the war in Ukraine. It will also boost our health and local economies, and protect our climate and nature. Support must be put in place to enable local authorities to pull that important lever.

In evidence, people highlighted the need to provide advice and guidance to the public and private sectors, to benchmark and measure progress, and to involve citizens, food workers and stakeholder groups in inclusive processes, in order to develop informed and effective food policy.

An independent oversight body could play an important role, and several stakeholders have called for a Scottish food commission with a role and remit similar to that of the Scottish Land Commission. Others have used the comparison of the United Kingdom Climate Change Committee, which is a purpose-built, cross-cutting body with expertise in all aspects of climate change. We need a body with such wide-ranging expertise for food, because that is another cross-cutting issue. I am grateful that the cabinet secretary has indicated that she is considering such an oversight body.

Finally, we heard from several stakeholders interesting arguments that the bill should recognise the proposed right to food. I am pleased that that crucial right is expected to be incorporated soon into Scots law, through the Scottish Government's human rights bill.

I trust that I have expressed the urgency for Scotland to become a good food nation. We all have a lot on our plates, but we must use the opportunity to strengthen this vital bill, to ensure that the good food nation plans and policies serve up the outcomes that we all know that we need for our health, our food security and our planet.

16:31

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. As many members know, I come from a background in the food business, and the issue of good food is close to my heart.

I commend the work of the committee in examining the bill and allowing us now to debate its merits. The aims of the bill, as stated in its policy memorandum, sound very noble. They include a commitment to Scotland producing, selling and eating good food, a decline in dietary diseases, and the encouragement of healthy and environmentally sound food production. However, what we have before us lacks significant detail, even when we take into consideration the fact that it is a framework bill.

As the committee's report notes, Scottish ministers have admitted that they did not have to legislate in order to create good food plans for Scotland but did so because they wanted to give the plans "teeth". We are left to wonder why the ways in which the good food nation plans might bite are not made clearer in the bill.

I agree with the Scottish Food Coalition's assessment that there should, at the very least, be a purpose on the face of the bill. That purpose should enshrine the right to food as one of its first principles because, when it comes to good food, surely all else must flow from that. That becomes even more relevant given the cost of living crisis that people now face, but there could be so much more.

The Scottish Food Coalition also suggests including in the bill objectives that are based around the UN's sustainable development goals.

We could enshrine and protect Scotland's place as a fair trade nation in the bill, which would ensure that we consider sustainable development across the world when we import the food that we cannot grow ourselves. The fact that there is no such vision in the bill before us feels like a missed opportunity.

There is also a wider point about the Scottish Government's legislative agenda. The cross-party group on international development last week heard about the prospect of a wellbeing and sustainable development bill, which was also promised in the Scottish National Party manifesto at the last election. Apparently, that bill is intended to enshrine policy coherence on sustainable development in the Scottish Government's legislative and regulatory approaches to governing. Why, then, are the principles of wellbeing and sustainable development not reflected in this bill? Will it have to be amended by the other bill? It is for all of us in the Parliament to foresee those problems and deal with them at later

stages, but I worry that it shows a lack of joined-up thinking in the Scottish Government's approach to the frameworks that it seeks to build.

We must ensure that framework bills provide adequate room for the Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Government's plans. As several respondents to the consultation on the bill have noted, that is another aspect that is sorely lacking from what we see in front of us. It was only a few weeks ago that many of us here were criticising the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020 and the reliance on common frameworks that shut this Parliament out of decision making on matters of great importance to Scotland. We should not accept another framework being created that shuts the Parliament out of decisions and only adds to executive power. That must be dealt with in later stages.

My assessment is that the principles behind the bill are admirable but it is held back by a lack of imagination regarding the good that it could do and by a lack of avenues for scrutiny when it comes to the involvement of the Parliament. If we agree to the motion today, we should take with us a determination to repair those issues at the later stages of the bill.

On that basis, I will vote in favour of the general principles of the bill.

16:37

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests.

Scotland is a nation with excellent food. With the right frameworks in place, we can take full advantage of that. Scotland can become a good food nation in which everyone takes pride and pleasure in, and benefits from, the food that they produce, buy, cook and eat every day.

I welcome the introduction of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill and support everything that it sets out to do. As an overarching framework bill, it will not only underpin the work that the Scottish Government is already doing but put the good food nation plans on a legislative footing and ensure that we maximise the benefits of our natural larder.

There are obvious health benefits—both physical and mental—of eating and having access to good food. Moves towards more sustainable and local products will benefit the environment with lower food miles and will sustain and create more local jobs. That is why it is important that there is a duty on ministers to consider all those factors, as set out in section 1.

Food is a huge industry, and East Kilbride is home to many food sector businesses—some

local and some global. We have a long-standing tradition of dairy businesses around East Kilbride, which is still the case today. Thorntonhall Farmhouse Ice Cream is a family business that keeps its own dairy cows, milks them and makes excellent, fresh ice cream. McQueens Dairies delivers fresh milk and other products, all of which are sourced from a farmer-owned co-operative.

One of the dangers of unhealthy food and eating lots of it is the salt content. LoSalt, which is based in East Kilbride, is helping to tackle that through its low-sodium products.

Many public services such as hospitals, schools and nurseries provide food; the meals there are arguably some of the most important. The bill will expand on work to improve the nutritional content of food from public kitchens, as well as to increase the use of locally sourced and produced foods, which are important steps in creating a good food nation.

Good procurement is key to that. The Supplier Development Programme does great work and I encourage small businesses in East Kilbride, and across Scotland, to do the development programme's free training in tendering. Councils and other public sector agencies take out large food contracts for schools, care homes, hospitals and cafes. Big companies with dedicated tendering officers have the means to bid for multimillion-pound contracts and to sort the necessary logistics. Small businesses can struggle to bid for large contracts and often rely on subcontracted opportunities.

Without good supply chain visibility, it is difficult to see local benefits or know the source of the different food products that are being supplied.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member accept an intervention?

Collette Stevenson: No, I still have a lot to get through.

Beef, for example, might be frozen and come from the other side of the world, or it might have been sourced a mile down the road. Large companies sometimes cite commercial sensitivity and refuse to divulge details of subcontractors. I would like to see supply chain visibility increased, whether that is by promotion and encouragement or through guidance or legislation. That is vital so that politicians, policy makers, businesses and customers can see where food comes from, consider the jobs that are being created and supported locally and see the community benefit that comes from those large contracts.

The proposed community wealth building bill will develop procurement practices to support local economies, including small businesses. It will also encourage school canteens to use more locally

produced food. As a nation, we are sometimes not the best at taking advantage of our natural larder. I believe that Scots should eat more indigenous food. That would boost our economy and help to support a good food nation.

As the cabinet secretary knows, I have a constituency interest in lowland deer management. Venison is a local, sustainable, healthy food. However, as things are now, it is not a protein that many people can afford to eat much of. The high cost perhaps reflects the long path to process venison. My discussions with deer managers suggest that that cost could be reduced drastically by the right support and a more localised approach. I hope that, with improved procurement and a bigger focus on local food, we will see some benefits on that front.

I support the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. It provides a framework to ensure that Scots from every walk of life can benefit from and take pride in the food that they produce, buy, cook, serve and eat every day.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. I call Mercedes Villalba to wind up on behalf of Scottish Labour.

16:42

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I have just knocked over and spilled a whole glass of water. However, now I can get started.

I thank my colleagues on the committee and everyone who contributed the evidence that helped the committee produce its report.

It is clear that there is broad support across the country and within Parliament for the principles that underlie the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill. That is important because, as the cost of living crisis deepens and more people across Scotland are faced with the reality of food insecurity, transformative change within our food system is long overdue.

The food insecurity that so many now face is not only being driven by the current cost of living crisis; it has been allowed to develop because of political choices made in the past decade. Our Governments have chosen not to tackle low pay, insecure work or inadequate social security provision.

The bill gives us an opportunity to transform our food system and to take action to end food poverty in Scotland. It is clear that, in order to do so, it must be strengthened in a number of areas. As we heard from Rachael Hamilton, the idea of using the bill to incorporate the right to food in Scots law was repeatedly raised throughout the committee's evidence sessions. That has been called for by

campaigners such as the Scottish Food Coalition and the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union. Those campaigners are rightly concerned that, as it stands, the bill lacks a clear purpose and will do little to bring effect to the right to food, even if that is introduced in future human rights legislation.

The general secretary of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union, Sarah Woolley, expressed that concern when she said:

"no 'Good Food Nation' Bill in 2022 can be taken seriously without a statutory commitment to deliver a right to food."

I hope that, ahead of stage 2, the Scottish Government will reflect on the need for the bill to be given a clearer purpose. As Colin Smyth outlined, and as suggested by campaigners, that could be achieved through the introduction of a purpose clause to make it clear that the bill will give effect to the right to food.

The bill also needs high-level objectives that will help to guide implementation and measure the success of the good food nation plans. Earlier, we heard from Karen Adam that people who are living in food poverty do not care about targets; they care about actual outcomes. That might be true, but without the targets we have no way to mandate and measure the change that we need.

As the bill stands, there is no requirement for good food nation plans to have objectives and indicators in relation to the wider food system. That means that there is no mandate to support sustainable agriculture, to improve animal welfare or to enhance pay and conditions in food supply chains, and it means that there are no indicators that could be used to measure the success of good food nation plans. If we are serious about transforming Scotland into a good food nation, which I think we all are, we must take a system-wide approach to food policy that addresses those issues.

We heard earlier from Ariane Burgess about calls from campaigners for a purpose-built cross-cutting Scottish food commission. Like them, I believe that there is a role for a statutory oversight body to monitor the development and implementation of good food nation plans. As Rhoda Grant highlighted, such an independent oversight body could not only provide scrutiny of good food nation plans but contribute to their development through actions such as research support.

The body could also improve accountability by supporting Parliament in its scrutiny of the national good food nation plan and of the Scottish Government's overall progress towards delivering a good food nation. Back in August, the Scottish Government recognised that there might be a role for such an oversight body to monitor the delivery

of good food nation plans, so I hope that it will now think again about including proposals for such a body ahead of stage 2.

Although Labour supports the principles that underpin the bill, we believe that it is clear that it should be strengthened. The bill should be given a clear purpose to give effect to a right to food; it should include high-level objectives and indicators to help with the development of good food nation plans and to measure their success; and it should provide for a statutory independent oversight body. The Scottish Government has a political choice to make. Will it push forward with an empty framework, or will it work with campaigners and across the parties to create a bill that is fit to bring about the transformational system change that our nation needs?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Brian Whittle to wind up on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

16:48

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. As many in the chamber will know, I have pushed long and wearily in this place for the Government to introduce a good food nation bill, through all the false dawns and promises as the Government kicked the can down the road for years. It is a hugely important piece of legislation with potentially significant impacts across all portfolios and all of society.

The bill was introduced against the backdrop of Scotland being the unhealthiest nation in Europe and the second-most obese country in the world after the USA, as well as having many other poor health indicators. I have to tell the cabinet secretary that the situation is worse than it was seven years ago, so I am not sure how she can claim that, over the past seven years, we have become a good food nation. It would be interesting to see the evidence for that.

We are in that situation despite the fact that our farmers produce some of the highest-quality food in the world. The Scottish Government has a target to reduce childhood obesity by 50 per cent by 2030, but there is no mention of that in the bill and no route to achieving that target. The bill should at least acknowledge that food will have a bearing on that target.

The impacts of getting it right are many. Given that adult health outcomes are developed in the early years, there are obvious health links to making sure that our children have access to the highest-quality locally produced food. That applies at the pre-school stage, where the introduction of a level playing field for the roll-out of the 1,140 hours of funded early learning should include

funding for healthy meals. However, we know that the private, voluntary and independent sector is being squeezed by the current Scottish Government deal, which will inevitably put pressure on nurseries in that sector in delivering quality food.

Our free school meals should most definitely be locally sourced and of the highest nutritional standard. We should be encouraging that uptake of school meals. On that, as I said in an intervention, we need to look at the planning of where we put fast food outlets and whether we allow things such as burger vans outside schools.

On education, as Liz Smith rightly pointed out—this is such an important point—learning about good nutrition is key, because it leads to good learning and to closing the attainment gap. To link to that, who would have thought that both Liz Smith and I would agree with Jim Fairlie in this chamber? That is the end of his political career. He called for more education in schools about the value of food, and for a health, wellbeing and environment provision in the bill. We agree—so how about supporting our rural economy with local procurement policies, as demonstrated by East Ayrshire Council, which sits at having about 75 per cent local procurement of food in schools?

Five years ago, I did a study on where local council, school and hospital food came from, and the results were as astounding as they were damning. Only 16 per cent of food that was procured into the Scottish Government's central Scotland Excel contract came from Scotland, with the quality of food in some areas, especially our main cities, being particularly poor. That points to what Rachael Hamilton said about the fact that the Scottish diet has become calorie dense and nutritionally poor.

Maurice Golden, that guru of the circular economy, spoke knowledgeably about our opportunity to develop a sustainable food economy and decarbonise our food supply. We need to reduce the miles that our food has to travel for processing and consumption. That can only benefit the environment.

While we are on the subject, targeting food waste should surely have been put into the bill. After all, we throw away about a third of our food, all the while debating how we tackle food poverty. If food waste were a country, it would be the third-biggest emitter of greenhouse gas—after China and the USA. As Jenni Minto pointed out, we would require an area the size of China to produce all the food that we discard. There is no mention of that in the bill.

In bringing forward the bill, the Scottish Government has avoided all the real issues that it should address. Instead, it is more smoke and

mirrors, and unicorns and rainbows. It is the Scottish Government saying that it wants councils to come up with a plan, all the while making sure that there is nothing to be measured against. Where is the financial memorandum for support to our local authorities?

The bill should have a clear purpose. It should link food production with processing, procurement and the reduction of food waste, ensure that adequate and culturally acceptable food is consumed sustainably, and preserve access to food for future generations. It should contain not only clear targets but a route for getting there and a way to measure progress against those targets.

Jim Fairlie: How is it possible to legislate for how people eat and how culture can be changed?

Brian Whittle: We can create an environment in which we encourage our children to eat school meals and in which—[*Interruption.*] We have to legislate and create a framework that allows that to happen.

The Scottish Government is really good at setting world-leading targets without any practical way of achieving them. However, I say to Mr Fairlie that, in this instance, it has not even bothered to do that.

Jim Fairlie: Will the member take another intervention?

Brian Whittle: No; I do not have time.

The Scottish Food Coalition is damning in its briefing on the bill, saying that it has

“no clear goals, principles or direction”

and minimal mechanisms for participation and accountability.

Not only is the bill years late in being introduced; it is a shadow of what it could and should be. Somehow, it has made its way through the Scottish Government machine, been trampled on, kicked about and reduced to next to nothing. What an opportunity has been missed.

The Scottish Government has a lot of work to do before the bill has any real meaning. No wonder it insists on marking its own homework; if anyone else did it, it would be lucky to get an F. The debate has exposed the Scottish Government's need to get back to the drawing board, do the job that it is supposed to do, and produce a bill that is worthy of the title.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Mairi Gougeon, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands, to wind up on behalf of the Scottish Government, for up to eight minutes.

16:54

Mairi Gougeon: I thank all members who have taken part in the debate. Food is fundamental to the lives of all of us. It touches us across society and across Government. That can be seen from the breadth of organisations and interests that gave evidence to the committee and from the sheer range of issues that have been raised during the debate.

As I mentioned at the start of the debate, Scotland has been on a good food journey for many years. We have taken many important steps in improving people's lives through food policy, from tackling issues around health and diet to addressing food's environmental impact. The bill is not intended to be the culmination of that journey; it is the next important step on it. Jim Fairlie made that point well in his speech. We cannot dismiss the work that has led us here or forget what has come before.

The bill ensures that the Government can be held to account by everyone who is affected by food policy decisions, through the creation of new and innovative national and local food plans.

So many different issues have been raised today, and I will try to cover as many as I can in my closing speech. One is food security, which Jenni Minto and Maurice Golden touched on. The horrific events that we have watched unfold in Ukraine over the past few weeks have brought that issue into sharp focus. As a Government, we have recognised the importance of our primary producers in food production, which is why food production is one of the key pillars that we set out in our vision for agriculture, why our good food nation ambitions and local food strategy are mentioned in the vision, and why we have committed to continuing to support our food producers.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Mairi Gougeon: Not at the moment.

We live in a country that is plentiful in terms of what we produce. We often talk about the fantastic natural larder that we have. However, we heard powerful interventions from Karen Adam and Rhoda Grant about the food insecurity and levels of ill health and malnutrition that people face in spite of that. When I was going through the evidence, one thing that shocked me was food waste—Brian Whittle touched on it in his speech. I was shocked by the statistics that the committee heard from Zero Waste Scotland when it gave evidence about the sheer amount of food that we see going to waste in this country.

We produce so much good food. How do we make that accessible? How do we reduce food

waste? How do we build a food system that works, that is fair to our farmers and crofters, that is connected through short supply chains and that better connects people to their food and where it comes from?

Rachael Hamilton: We heard from SNP back benchers about the need to shorten supply chains to ensure that smaller producers get a look-in and can be successful in the procurement process. Does the cabinet secretary support a wholesale reform of procurement in Scotland?

Mairi Gougeon: We are looking at issues in relation to shortening supply chains, which I will touch on, and we are also considering them through our draft local food strategy.

I will try to address some of the questions that I set out. The bill not only will underpin what we are doing on food policy but will give us the extra tools that we need to maintain momentum and increase the synergy between national and local food policies. The bill is important in helping us to effect the changes that we need to see in our food culture and how we think about food and in the food that we choose to eat. That can be achieved only through long-term planning that links Government with other public bodies such as local authorities and health boards.

I will touch on some of the other issues that were raised today. The right to food is a topic on which strong feelings were expressed. When they gave evidence, some stakeholders, such as Food Train, expressed their disappointment that a delay to incorporating the right to food is a delay in protecting human rights, whereas others, such as Nourish Scotland, said that the right to food needs to be incorporated as soon as possible, while they also understood the reasons for including it in a broader human rights bill.

I absolutely agree that the right to food should be incorporated into Scots law. I do not think that there is any disagreement on that in the chamber. However, as I noted in evidence, given that human rights are indivisible, including the right to adequate food in the human rights bill will provide the best opportunity to address those complex interrelationships, and it will avoid our taking a fragmented approach to the incorporation of human rights.

Incorporation is something that we have committed to. Although the right to adequate food will be put into law as part of future legislation in the current parliamentary session, the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill presents us with the opportunity to make access to healthy, local and nutritious food a reality for all the people of Scotland.

I will touch on a couple of other points that were raised in the debate. Beatrice Wishart made a point about the role of local authorities.

Rhoda Grant: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Mairi Gougeon: I will not take an intervention at the moment. I need to make progress.

Beatrice Wishart said that local authorities are at different stages in their development of food policy, and she asked what more we can do to assist them. I assure her that we are giving further consideration to how we can help. We will continue to work closely with local authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, including on finance, which was mentioned in the committee.

Brian Whittle, Maurice Golden and other members talked about targets. I understand why there are calls for the inclusion of targets in the bill. The question was discussed extensively during the committee's evidence sessions. Stakeholders, including the Scottish Food Coalition and the Royal College of Nursing Scotland, among many others, gave examples of targets that they would like to see in the bill. Each proposed food policy target is important, but we firmly believe that the best place for such targets is in our plans, following widespread and inclusive consultation with all stakeholders. The good food nation agenda covers a broad range of policy areas, each of which potentially contributes a basket of targets, which could never all be adequately captured in the bill.

Brian Whittle: Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Mairi Gougeon: Not at the moment.

Limiting ourselves to a subset of specific targets would risk good food nation plans focusing narrowly on those targets, to the detriment of other food policy ambitions. That concern was articulated in evidence to the committee. If targets become the focus, the wider ambitions suffer—that point was well articulated by Karen Adam. We also need to retain the flexibility to amend and update targets as we progress, which could not happen easily if there was a need constantly to update primary legislation.

Members asked about parliamentary scrutiny. Linked to the discussion about oversight is the role that the Parliament can play—Beatrice Wishart and other members highlighted that point. I absolutely appreciate the importance of the Parliament's role in providing scrutiny, and I have taken on board the committee's recommendations in that regard. I am actively considering how to enhance the role that the Parliament will play in

the development and scrutiny of the national good food nation plan.

Members talked about a food commission. Let me respond to the question of whether a new statutory body should be set up in the context of good food nation plans. A wide range of views was expressed in response to the committee's call for evidence and during the stage 1 evidence sessions. Some organisations, such as the Scottish Food Coalition, made it clear that there must be independent oversight. Others, such as COSLA, do not think that a new body is required to oversee the implementation of the bill.

The evidence that was given to the committee included a range of views on the pros and cons of a new body and its governance and functions, but there was no general agreement on the need for such a body. We committed, as part of the Bute house agreement, to considering the need for a statutory body such as a food commission, and we are considering all the available options for providing the oversight role to deliver the provisions in the bill.

In its first year, the Scottish food commission published an interim report that refreshed the vision of a good food nation. That vision still holds true today. It sits at the heart of the premise of the bill, and it will be reflected in the high-level objectives that the national and local plans will seek to deliver.

One key ambition that is set out is hard to legislate for.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I must ask you to close, cabinet secretary.

Mairi Gougeon: Other countries are looking to Scotland to learn how to become a good food nation. There is already intense international interest in what Scotland is doing. It was a privilege to have the UN special rapporteur on the right to food give evidence on our bill and its proposals. People are excited by the scale of our ambition and our willingness to legislate to achieve it—something that few nations have done.

I look forward to the next stage of the bill and to our continuing to co-operate and collaborate during stages 2 and 3, so that we arrive at a final bill of which we can all be proud. As we turn our vision into reality, we can hope that other countries will look to Scotland to learn how to become a good food nation.

I invite members to approve the general principles of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motions.

I ask Ben Macpherson to speak to and move motion S6M-03722, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

17:04

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): In response to the shocking and developing situation in Ukraine, the Scottish Government continues to take urgent steps to resettle people who are fleeing here.

The Home Office has announced the creation of new schemes through which Ukrainian people may come to the United Kingdom to settle: the Ukraine family scheme, which allows people who live in the UK and who have family in Ukraine to bring family members to the UK to settle; and the homes for Ukraine scheme, which allows individuals, charities, community groups and businesses in the UK to support a Ukrainian person to come here.

Normally, many forms of social security assistance have eligibility restrictions on people who are subject to immigration control. However, people who come from Ukraine will not be subject to immigration control, which means that they will not be affected by any such restrictions.

Moreover, the immigration restrictions are not the only obstacle that people arriving from Ukraine, including those who already have the right of abode in the UK, would normally face. Yesterday, the Department for Work and Pensions laid emergency regulations, which come into force today, that seek to exempt such individuals from two remaining obstacles to immediate eligibility for social security assistance: the habitual residence test and the past presence test.

Those tests appear in UK and Scottish social security legislation. Application of them, each of which requires an individual to have spent a certain amount of time in the UK in order to establish their eligibility, would be likely to stop individuals who are arriving from Ukraine being able to claim support until they had been here for up to six months. The DWP regulations seek to disapply those tests for people in specified groups who arrive from Ukraine. If the regulations are agreed to, they will enable such people to access social security benefits from day 1. I commend UK ministers for their actions in that regard.

The regulations that are before Parliament include mirroring modifications to devolved social security legislation. The amendments will be made

to UK benefits that are delivered under agency agreement in Scotland, and to regulations that have been made under the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. In addition, we are making, in the same instrument, equivalent amendments to the regulations on council tax reduction entitlement.

I appreciate that Parliament has not had its usual opportunity for full scrutiny of the regulations, and I am aware that that is far from ideal. However, the pace at which the legislation has had to be developed in order to meet the necessary timescales means that normal scrutiny is simply not possible, in this case. I hope that Parliament empathises, given the situation and the circumstances.

I am grateful to the Scottish Commission on Social Security for working with Scottish Government officials to help them to introduce this urgent legislation in the shortest possible time. It is commendable that Scottish Government officials also worked at pace with UK Government officials.

Scotland is a welcoming country, and it wants to be so for new arrivals from Ukraine. I hope that colleagues will agree that the instrument that is before them is necessary so that we can ensure that people who arrive from Ukraine, who are fleeing situations that we cannot even imagine, can access crucial social security support on their arrival in Scotland.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Residence Requirements) (Ukraine) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

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

The next item of business is a Parliamentary Bureau motion on approval of another SSI. I ask Clare Haughey to move motion S6M-03688.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2022 [draft] be approved.—[Clare Haughey]

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

The next item of business is consideration of four more Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the bureau, to move motions S6M-03736, S6M-03737, S6M-03738 and S6M-03741, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus Act 2020 (Alteration of Expiry Date) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/40) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus (Scotland) Acts (Amendment of Expiry Dates) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Directions by Local Authorities) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 5) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/74) be approved.—[George Adam]

The Presiding Officer: I call Brian Whittle. Can you confirm that you will speak to motions S6M-03736 to S6M-03738?

17:08

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): That is correct, Presiding Officer. I will speak to oppose the motions, on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

At the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, my colleague Murdo Fraser and I had the opportunity to question the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, on why the Scottish Government was pushing forward with its plans to extend emergency powers. It is fair to say that we did not get any satisfactory answers. When he was asked, John Swinney could not tell me of any advantage that would have been gained if the Scottish Government had had the powers in question at the start of the pandemic.

We must remember that, at that time, when it was asked to do so, Parliament acted quickly to scrutinise the Scottish Government's plans and to pass the emergency legislation. I suggest that, with the hybrid technology that has been deployed, we would now be able to do that even more quickly. Therefore, the question must be this: why is the Scottish Government trying to bypass Parliament?

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Does Brian Whittle accept that one of the answers that we got at committee was that the number of people who are in hospital with Covid is exceptionally high, and that this is not a good time to reduce the Government's powers?

Brian Whittle: John Mason is a member of the committee and knows that, according to answers that were given there, although many people are in hospital, the severity of their condition is low, and the number of deaths is low.

I go back to the point—[*Interruption.*] I go back to the point that Parliament can make legislation extremely quickly. The majority of the rules are not in law—they are just guidance. Given that we know that the public adheres quite strictly to public health guidance, it is our view that we should proceed to address Covid through public health

guidance rather than by extending extraordinary and emergency powers by another six months, as the instruments seek to do.

We recognise that some aspects of the instruments will be beneficial, such as the provision to allow nurses rather than doctors to administer vaccines. However, given the fact that we cannot amend statutory instruments and must accept or reject them as a whole, and given the extent of the emergency powers that the Scottish Government seeks to extend, we must reject the motions. After all, all that we are asking is that Parliament has the opportunity to scrutinise legislation before it comes into being, as is Parliament's responsibility. As we have come to expect, however, the Scottish Government is not comfortable with scrutiny, and there is no need for the extension that is being requested. I ask Parliament to reject the motions.

17:11

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

On scrutiny, I regularly appear in front of the COVID-19 Recovery Committee to explain the necessary measures that the Government has been having to take in these extraordinary circumstances. I will happily appear in front of the committee any time that the committee wishes to see me so that it can scrutinise what I say and so that I can answer any questions that the committee wishes to put to me.

I answer faithfully the questions that Mr Whittle and his colleagues put to me in committee. I cannot be responsible for the fact that Mr Whittle does not like the answers that I give him. I faithfully attend that committee to give answers on behalf of the Government.

Brian Whittle: In that case, will Mr Swinney answer the question that I asked him at the COVID-19 Recovery Committee? How would we have benefited if the powers had been in place prior to the pandemic? Mr Swinney did not answer that question at committee.

John Swinney: That is a pretty fundamental issue, and it will affect the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill that the Parliament will scrutinise fully in the normal parliamentary process. It relates to whether we have a statute book that is capable of addressing emergency circumstances such as we have faced. In the past, the United Kingdom Parliament has legislated for England and Wales to have statutory powers to—
[*Interruption.*]

Mr Whittle is muttering from the sidelines that this is not the same thing—it is exactly the same thing.

The UK Parliament has legislated for powers that can be exercised by ministers in an emergency such as a pandemic. We did not have those powers in Scotland; we had to legislate for them in a great hurry at the start of the pandemic. The Government—Parliament having considered the legislation—is asking that we extend some limited provisions for six months. Parliament can consider the full legislation.

There are motions on four sets of regulations before Parliament today. I will not rehearse all the details in them. However, if they are not passed today, local authorities will not be able to make the wider public health interventions that they have been using to deal with the pandemic at local level, because the interventions are in the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Directions by Local Authorities) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2022.

Also, if we do not extend the deadlines for the regulations tonight, we will lose our ability to maintain in place the arrangements for face coverings. As Mr Mason has just pointed out when he asked about hospital cases, more than 2,000 people are in hospital with Covid. We have never had so many people in hospital during the pandemic.

We need to continue to address the gravity of the situation. There are measures that the Government will remove as a consequence of the regulations, which is consistent with what we say in the strategic framework—that we will not retain any of the powers or responsibilities for a moment longer than is necessary. I therefore invite Parliament to support the motions on the statutory instruments at decision time. They are essential to ensuring that we have in place the public health protections to deal with the continuing severe situation with Covid. It is the duty of Parliament to ensure that we have a properly considered legislative framework that can address that situation.

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

Decision Time

17:15

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that motion S6M-03704, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, on the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03722, in the name of Ben Macpherson, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Residence Requirements) (Ukraine) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03688, in the name of Clare Haughey, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exclusions and Exceptions) (Scotland) Amendment Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03736, in the name of George Adam, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

There will be a short technical suspension to allow members to access the digital voting system.

17:16

Meeting suspended.

17:22

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on motion S6M-03736, in the name of George Adam, on approval of an SSI. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is now closed.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Unfortunately, I did not vote, as the system crashed. I would have voted no.

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

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My system failed. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Stewart. 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)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 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)
 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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 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)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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-03736, in the name of George Adam, is: For 65, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus Act 2020 (Alteration of Expiry Date) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/40) be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03737, in the name of George Adam, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)

McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-03737, in the name of George Adam, is: For 87, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus (Scotland) Acts (Amendment of Expiry Dates) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03738, in the name of George Adam, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

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)
 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)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (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)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 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-03738, in the name of George Adam, is: For 64, Against 52, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (Directions by Local Authorities) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03741, in the name of George Adam, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (Requirements) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 5) Regulations 2022 (SSI 2022/74) be approved.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Scottish Tourism Month 2022

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-02970, in the name of Evelyn Tweed, on Scottish tourism month 2022. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. As ever, I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak button or place an R in the chat function.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that March is Scottish Tourism Month; understands that the aim of this is to engage, connect and inspire all of Scotland's tourism businesses and organisations, as well as celebrate what it sees as the enormous contribution that tourism makes to Scotland; considers that the sector has been severely impacted over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic; understands what it sees as the importance of tourism to a sustainable recovery, with the sector reportedly worth £11.5 billion pre-pandemic and accounting for 8.5% of jobs in Scotland; welcomes the opportunities that the industry provides to people, places, businesses and communities by, it considers, acting as a stimulus for entrepreneurialism and investment, the benefits of which it believes spread far beyond tourism; further believes tourism to be a force for good across the country, enriching the economy, communities and environment; commends what it sees as Scottish tourism's significant contribution toward Scotland's profile on the world stage; considers that tourism can also play an important part in promoting wellness, particularly as people emerge from long periods of isolation brought about by the pandemic, and notes the view that it will take investment, support and time for the industry to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels.

17:34

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): I am delighted to lead this debate on Scottish tourism month—a month when our nation's tourism industry comes together to host events under the Scottish tourism banner. I thank all members who will contribute to the debate.

The aim of Scottish tourism month, which is co-ordinated by the Scottish Tourism Alliance, is to engage, connect and inspire all of Scotland's tourism industry. It celebrates the enormous contribution that tourism makes to Scotland's economy and is an opportunity to showcase what our country has to offer both domestic and international visitors.

After two long, hard years, this is a critical time for tourism, and a focus is required to address some of the issues that the sector faces while declaring Scotland open for business. After all, Scotland may be a wee nation, but there is nothing small about our offer. Scotland boasts big, beautiful landscapes, with 30,000 lochs, 282 Munros and around 3,000 castles. Our incredible food and drink is of the highest quality and is world

renowned, even if the more squeamish tourists may think twice about trying haggis.

As Scotland celebrates the year of stories in 2022, we enjoy stories and poetry of centuries of Scottish history, filled with epic battles and equally epic romances. Every year, millions of visitors enjoy our cities and towns, which are bursting with culture, talent and creativity. We should remember that Edinburgh festival fringe is still the largest arts festival in the world. Scotland has something to offer everyone, no matter the season or the weather. As Billy Connolly once said,

"There are two seasons in Scotland: June and winter."

I promise that the weather does get a little warmer in the summer.

Brand Scotland is one of the strongest national identities in the world. In recent years, thanks to the success of popular shows such as "Outlander", tourism has boomed at historic sites such as Doune castle, which has seen visitor numbers rise by 200 per cent. Scottish tourism is an economic and social powerhouse. It creates wealth, jobs and social benefits in every part of the country, while enhancing the wellbeing of our holidaymakers.

Spending by visitors in Scotland generates approximately £11.5 billion of economic activity for the wider Scottish supply chain. It directly contributes around £6 billion to Scottish gross domestic product, and 8.5 per cent of all businesses in Scotland are related to tourism. Tourism is a driving force for providing the jobs of today and tomorrow. For every £60,000 that is spent by visitors, a new job is created in Scotland.

In 2019, in Forth valley alone, there were 683,000 overnight visits, 8.1 million day visits and a spend of £328 million. However, during the pandemic, this strong and iconic sector arguably took a bigger hit than most. A VisitScotland survey in 2020 found that 99 per cent of businesses had experienced cancellations, a decline in bookings or fewer visitors. Many of those businesses experienced losses of up to £50,000, and for some, losses were substantially higher. By the end of 2020, more than a third of Scottish businesses overall reported to VisitScotland that they did worse than expected when they reopened in early autumn, although one in four did better.

To say that it has been a dark and worrying time for our tourism industry would be an understatement. However, it is always darkest before the dawn. With the confident strides that we are making out of Covid, there are encouraging signs of what lies ahead. In my constituency, bed and breakfasts on the eastern shores of Loch Lomond have advised that visitors are booking up very early for the year ahead, and in numbers; Stirling castle is developing exciting plans for the new season and is seeing visitors returning; and

last year, Go Ape in Aberfoyle had one of its busiest years on record. Their hope is that, with the world becoming ever more conscious of its carbon footprint, the staycation trend is here to stay.

For me, the Scottish staycations that I shared with my family were a silver lining of the pandemic. We even had one in my own constituency during one of the lockdowns, which was absolutely fantastic. We had some of our best holidays ever. Scotland truly is a beautiful, amazing and welcoming place and—a wee plug—if you have not been to Stirlingshire, please come and see us soon. We need to ensure that we capitalise on our staycation offer in order to boost our economies and see for ourselves what a wonderful country we live in and what it has to offer.

Trade is returning, but any growth in tourism must be sustainable. Parts of rural Scotland in particular have become bucket-list destinations, which brings with it significant challenges around labour, housing for staff, infrastructure and connectivity. We must work together to seek solutions to those issues and ensure that our tourism sector is viable, sustainable and thriving for the future. Scotland is throwing open its doors to allow our vitally important tourism industry to flourish once more. My message today is simple: Scotland is open for business and we cannot wait to see you.

17:41

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): I thank Evelyn Tweed for bringing the debate to the chamber. It comes at an important time for the tourism industry in Scotland, as we slowly begin to emerge from two years of restrictions as a result of Covid.

To say that our tourism industry took a hammering during Covid is a huge understatement, but the signs are that it is recovering slowly, as we move into spring and—we hope—into a warm and welcoming summer. Evelyn Tweed's motion, which is supported by many members in the Parliament, recognises the huge difficulties that are faced by the industry. However, it also applauds the wonderful efforts of the sector to get back on its feet, in particular by promoting wellness, which can play an important part in reversing the sense of isolation that we all felt during the darkest days of the pandemic.

Was it not the worst feeling not to be able to go out: to travel somewhere to our favourite spot in Scotland to spend a day or so, to enjoy a break, helping the local economy at the same time, or to make that trip to the sun that so many enjoy? I recall that the nearest that I got was to visit the Waterside hotel in Seamill with my partner, when

travel was permitted only inside our own health board area. The restrictions were well enforced, but the welcome that we got from the staff was pretty special. We could tell that they were genuinely delighted that we had made the effort to come.

What has definitely emerged from the pandemic experience is that many more people have begun to enjoy walking more than ever before. They have been enjoying their local countryside, including hill walks and the wonderful beach walks in Ayrshire, which were featured on television by Kate Humble as she walked Ayrshire's coastal path routes, taking in Culzean, Dunure and Greenan castles. New tourism offerings might do well to recognise that and try to incorporate some of those experiences for people as they broaden their horizons and expectations for leisure breaks in the future.

I look forward to hearing members championing their local areas and what they have to offer. Of course, I am no different in promoting that wonderful part of Scotland, Ayrshire. We have some of the world's finest golf courses; the greatest food to offer; and spectacular beaches and castles along the coast and in my constituency, with the amazing Dean, Rowallan and Craufurdland castles all offering something unique for visitors, as well as our historic Loudoun Hill. We also lay claim to Scotland's big three—Wallace, Bruce and Burns—and the heritage that is associated with those three giants of Scottish history can literally be felt and touched throughout Ayrshire.

How should those offerings change after Covid? I mentioned that people are doing things differently and having different experiences that they might want to retain, such as walking and cycling, and taking part in urban walks and storytelling, bringing our town's historical past to life, combined with flexible booking and the ability to mix and match those experiences to get the best value and make the best use of their leisure time. We might want to retain some of the measures that were put in place to help protect people. By that I mean still providing safe spaces for people and their families, who might value that and enjoy the space and security that that delivers.

The industry in Scotland will recover, and it will develop its offering to people from far and wide once again, always focusing on quality. It will need to innovate to reach out to new markets and new experiences that people may now want to be included when they come to Scotland. I am certain that the industry will go from strength to strength in the coming year.

I once again offer my congratulations to my colleague Evelyn Tweed on securing the debate. I

am looking forward to the rest of the contributions from other members.

17:45

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): I thank Evelyn Tweed for bringing the motion to the chamber for debate.

I note the immense efforts made by Scotland's tourism sector over the past two years. Many businesses have struggled. They have had to cope with an ever-shifting landscape of restrictions and some have gone under, sadly, over the course of the pandemic. The sector is a backbone of the Scottish economy, and it requires our support. Accordingly, I urge every MSP to learn about their local attractions this week, to give them some support and to encourage people to visit. After all, if our representatives are not enthusiastic about visiting, why would anybody else be?

Evelyn Tweed: Will the member take an intervention?

Sharon Dowey: Not at the moment.

Tourism has a vital role to play in Scotland's recovery—that is without doubt. Scotland was on a roll prior to the pandemic, with a 33 per cent increase in visits between 2018 and 2019 and a 37 per cent increase in spend by tourists. Much of that tourism was domestic. In fact, 37 per cent of all overnight stays were undertaken by visitors from Scotland. The United Kingdom market still greatly outweighs the overseas market, with more than a third of visits to Scotland coming from English, Welsh and Northern Irish visitors. Those figures will only have risen during the years of the staycation. A key priority now should be to retain those visitors, ensuring that Scotland remains competitive against cheap flights abroad and winter sun.

Investments such as that in the mountain biking centre in Innerleithen, which was announced recently, are an encouraging development. With hill walking, mountain biking and kayaking, active tourism is a major market upon which Scotland has an infinite capacity to capitalise. That is down to both Scotland's Governments. After all, visitors often tie in a visit to Scotland with visits to other UK nations. As we go forward, it is really important to retain the active tourism market and to encourage repeat visits. That is why it is reassuring to see the UK Government and the Scottish Government working together through the Borderlands deal. The £19 million that has just been invested in Caerlee mill is a great example of how Westminster and Holyrood can work together to deliver world-class facilities. The new centre will not only bring together companies and athletes from around the world, but build upon the success of the world mountain biking championship in Fort

William and create a great local facility for the people of Peeblesshire.

Scotland's festivals are returning, which is a welcome boost for the tourism sector. Having met many of their representatives over the past months, I have seen how hard things have been for them, and it is great to see how excited they are about their festivals returning. Not only are those festivals important parts of the regional economy; they have a major role to play in bringing culture to parts of Scotland beyond the traditional heartlands of Glasgow and Edinburgh. Events such as the Boswell book festival, the Spectra festival of light in Aberdeen and the Doune the Rabbit Hole festival in Cardross, as well as culinary celebrations such as Taste of Shetland, all attract visitors and fuel rural economies.

Local authorities have a big job to do here. Many of them do excellent work with tight budgets, but that is precisely the problem. Arts and culture fuel a huge chunk of Scottish tourism, yet those budgets are being cut by nearly every council in every corner of Scotland. The issue lies with local government funding. Councils simply need more support from central Government. Without a serious intervention, many more events and festivals may suffer.

Once again, I urge all members to get behind their local events and tourism businesses as much as they can.

17:49

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): It goes without saying—although I will say it—that businesses that depend directly on tourists, or indirectly, as suppliers or through tourist footfall, have had a tough time over the past two years. Thank goodness for Government support here and through the UK furlough scheme, which let at least some of those businesses keep ticking.

Covid also had an upside, as folk travelled close to home rather than take flight—literally. Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale boast much to attract, from the National Mining Museum in Newtongrange to the small independent museum in Melrose, the Trimontium, which narrates the story of the nearby Roman settlement and the spread of the Romans across Scotland—they even reached the Isle of Skye; I do not know whether they reached Orkney, but I will check that out for you, Presiding Officer.

Then there is Abbotsford, the eclectic home of Sir Walter Scott, also near Melrose. Incidentally, in the armoury there, the shield for the Scott family is on the wall right next to the family shield for the

Grahame family—and that is Grahame with an E; members can read into that what they like.

Galashiels is now the location of the great tapestry of Scotland and—something that I like a bit better—a wonderful statue of the charismatic Robert Coltart, who devised Coulter’s candy and the famous jingle,

“Ally bally, ally bally bee”,

which I think was the first advertising jingle ever to be developed. I think that that is more interesting.

Most of those attractions can be reached by travelling along the Borders railway. This is where I repeat my call for integrated ticketing for train journeys and bus day tickets, with discounted entry to tourist attractions.

For someone of an energetic frame of mind, there is ample scope to cycle many of the dedicated routes or to have a go at mountain biking on the trails at Innerleithen and Glentress, which have been mentioned—although they are only partially open just now, due to storm damage. Borders Buses lets people know—literally, as it says on the buses, “The bus you can take your bike on”—that they can take their bikes when they travel.

For the hyperactive, the Pentland hills are there for the taking, although—mind—people should treat them thar hills and the livestock with respect.

For someone who likes people gazing, taking a seat outside a local pub or hotel on Peebles High Street or Penicuik precinct and taking their time over a glass of wine or coffee—or perhaps both—will get them going.

At this time of year, someone who wants to admire rhododendrons and azaleas—that is my gig—should take a ramble through Dawyck or Kailzie gardens. After that, they could pamper themselves and deal with their aches and pains at nearby, award-winning Stobo castle.

That was my little tour of the tourist attractions in the Borders. My constituency is a hidden gem, a stone’s throw—or a short bus or train journey—from here, our capital city. I invite all members to visit some of the attractions that I mentioned, to see for themselves. I especially invite the minister, because I want to educate him about the benefits of the Borders and Midlothian.

My hope is that the staycations of recent months become a habit. Whether we are talking about a day out or a weekend away, all the wee local shops, businesses, hotels, pubs and B and Bs benefit. With this week’s weather, what more could we ask? Sunburn is not good for our skin, we will not lose our luggage and we will be doing our bit for the local economy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Grahame. Your invitation to Stobo is surely in the post.

I call Paul McLennan, to be followed by Claire Baker.

17:53

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank Evelyn Tweed for securing this evening’s debate.

I am kind of disappointed that none of our colleagues from the Labour Party is in the chamber and that only one colleague from the Conservative Party is left here. I want to put that on the record—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr McLennan, I have called Claire Baker to speak next. She will be joining us remotely.

Paul McLennan: I apologise.

As co-convenor of the cross-party group on tourism, I am delighted to speak in the debate. East Lothian is a tourism hot spot with a spectacular history and landscape. According to the “East Lothian Visitor Survey 2021”, tourism generates £280 million a year for the local economy and accounts for 10 per cent of the jobs in our area.

As well as bringing economic benefits, tourism plays a key part in maintaining wellbeing and good mental health and providing educational opportunities.

As part of Scottish tourism month, I visited the Scottish Seabird Centre, which enables visitors to engage with coastal wildlife, observe birds on the Bass Rock and enhance their learning. If members have not had a chance to take a boat to the Bass Rock, I urge them please to do so in the next few months.

The Bass Rock is home to more than 150,000 northern gannets at the peak of the season, which makes it the world’s largest colony of those birds. If members have not seen it, they should do so because it is a spectacular sight. The gannets spend most of the year on the Bass Rock, arriving in late February and leaving about the end of October, when they set out on their long journey down to the west coast of Africa.

Golf tourism is also huge in East Lothian, with Gullane and North Berwick attracting visitors from around the globe. We also have Muirfield golf club, Archerfield golf club and the Renaissance golf club, among others that have hosted Scottish and British open championships. Recently, four of the East Lothian courses between Gullane and North Berwick were listed in the top 100 golf courses in Great Britain and Ireland.

Alongside golf, there are regular visitors to the coast for water sports such as surfing and to the wonderful Foxlake Adventures facility just outside Dunbar. Of course, East Lothian is also home to the National Museum of Flight on the UK's best-preserved second world war airfield, which is home to Concorde and another 50 aircraft. We are also blessed with the wonders of Tantallon castle among others.

Tourism plays a key part in our local economy. Restrictions and changing behaviour have meant that the industry has struggled across East Lothian and Scotland over the past couple of years. There have also been struggles in the sector because of Brexit. Labour shortages are hitting the sector extremely hard at the moment.

In its briefing for the debate, UKHospitality stated that the taxation regime imposed on hospitality is an unfair burden on businesses. We have to raise that point. UKHospitality has argued for a reduction in VAT for hospitality businesses. Tourism businesses need the UK Treasury to retain the VAT rate at 12.5 per cent. The Scottish Government and the Parliament have supported that as well. We will wait and see what the Chancellor of the Exchequer says in his statement tomorrow, but let us hope that the UK Government will do that.

Only last week, the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions said that tourism venues were struggling to cope with the lack of overseas visitors. Let us hope that that changes this summer. In the past couple of years, people have been avoiding indoor venues and tourist attractions as well as avoiding international travel. Now that restrictions have eased again, I hope that the situation will continue to improve this summer.

The Covid-19 business support and continuity tourism fund has been important. Through that, VisitScotland was allocated nearly £29 million, with £9 million going to tourism businesses. That went down particularly well with the Scottish Tourism Alliance.

Last week, I attended a lunch hosted by the Scottish Tourism Alliance. The sector has been through a hard time, but the businesses and organisations represented at the event were very positive and enthusiastic about the future. Connectivity was a word that I heard many times, not only in the sense of travel but with reference to the various sectors in the industry working together.

Sectors such as our leading visitor attractions, our conference facilities such as the Edinburgh International Conference Centre and the Scottish Event Campus, which are attracting business tourism, and our growing agritourism offering,

which has the ambition of doubling the sector's value to £1 billion, all work well together, and we need to harness that. Alongside the area attracting visitors to our wondrous scenery and attracting day visitors, our events industry is also growing.

We can all play our part in helping our tourism industry to recover from the pandemic. The benefits from the industry are endless. I join members in supporting our tourism industry and championing the successful businesses that we have throughout Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Claire Baker, who joins us remotely.

17:57

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I apologise that I cannot be in the chamber this afternoon.

I thank Evelyn Tweed for securing the debate. Over the years, the Scottish Parliament has engaged with Scottish tourism month, often with a debate like this. It can be a time for members to highlight their regions, encourage visitors and celebrate local businesses and festivals. However this year, although members might wish to do that, we have to recognise and respond to the significant challenges that tourism has faced during the pandemic and the uncertain and long road to recovery that the industry faces.

We saw a degree of recovery for the sector last summer as UK visitors increased and people holidayed at home. However, although restrictions are easing and there is potential for growth, that activity did not compensate for the losses experienced and the coming months will be challenging.

Last week, it was a pleasure to attend the Scottish tourism month business leaders lunch. The speeches at that event were focused on recovery and were positive about the sector's contribution to our economy, jobs and community investment, but there were also words of caution and concern. The impact of leaving the European Union and ending freedom of movement is contributing to labour shortages in certain areas, including tourism and hospitality. Combined with the pandemic, which led to many people returning home, that means that there is an acute shortage of workers.

The Economy and Fair Work Committee has recently undertaken work on supply chains. Just as the supply chains appeared to be starting to ease as global trade recovered from the pandemic, the war in Ukraine—which we are all watching with horror and about which we are all experiencing uncertainty and unrest—began to contribute to rising costs, which all businesses and

households have to deal with. It also threatens food security, and that has the potential to impact on our food and drink sector, which is integral to tourism. Although some of those pressures appear far away from us just now, the situation is unpredictable.

In the face of that turmoil, the Scottish tourism sector is trying to reopen and recover, but most experts do not expect a full recovery until 2024 or later. The sector has relied on overseas visitors because, although UK tourists are good news and were crucial to sustaining the sector during the pandemic, they do not typically spend as much as overseas visitors or stay as long. Travel restrictions are easing, but the pandemic is still active around the globe. The Economist Intelligence Unit predicts “a shaky recovery” for tourism and says:

“Tourism has endured a terrible pandemic, and the bad news is that 2022 will only bring a partial recovery. Borders are reopening, but international travel will still be difficult. Compliance with climate-change regulations, as well as higher fuel prices and wages, will also push up air-travel costs in 2022.”

As well as concluding that the Scottish Government’s support for Prestwick airport

“ensured there is not a level playing field across airports in Scotland”,

yesterday’s “Airports in Scotland” report from the Scottish Affairs Committee argues that differing Covid travel rules to other parts of the UK damaged the financial stability of Scottish airports, and calls for a UK recovery plan for airports.

The Scottish tourism recovery task force was established to provide a strategic approach to recovery that would take the lead from business. Although phase 1 of the recovery plan was funded, there is as yet no financial support for the delivery of phase 2 and, although the Government agrees with the importance of phase 2, that was not included in the 2022-23 budget. The Economy and Fair Work Committee has expressed concerns over the lack of financial support and is urging the Government to explore other options for support.

I asked the First Minister about that at the recent Conveners Group meeting. She emphasised the importance of confidence for the recovery of the sector, but it also needs investment. There needs to be a recognition of the supply chain businesses that are connected to tourism. If a large hotel chain is facing financial difficulties, that impacts on its laundry service, catering suppliers, taxi firms and tour operators. The self-catering sector, which is still concerned about the impact of new regulations, must be valued as a generator of local businesses, because they are all interdependent.

The spring statement is due tomorrow, and UK Hospitality and others in the sector are calling on the chancellor to continue with the VAT cut. To increase VAT at this point risks nipping the shoots of recovery in the bud and, as other costs rise, we all need to do all we can to support a future for Scottish tourism.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final speaker in the open debate is Emma Harper.

18:02

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Evelyn Tweed on securing the debate and I welcome the opportunity to speak.

The pandemic has been awful for us all and it has hit the tourism industry very hard. I thank the Scottish Government for the financial support that has been provided so far. In addition to Scottish tourism month’s aims to “engage, connect and inspire”, it is really important for our tourism industry to aim for recovery, rebirth and renewal.

As a representative of Scotland’s bonniest regions, the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway in the south of Scotland, I am proud to shine a light on the south. The beautiful scenery and the world-class food and drink are fantastic, and the outdoor pursuits and our enormous contribution to Scotland’s national environment are really important.

The Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway have something for everyone, including forest and family holidays, historic abbeys and castles, distilleries, cycle trails, water sports and spa retreats, as my colleague Christine Grahame also mentioned. With miles of stunning coastline, rolling hills and beautiful forest, there is no better place to escape to, and history lovers can follow in the footsteps of Robert the Bruce, Walter Scott and our national bard Robert Burns.

People can also explore the many wonderful ruined abbeys that are dotted all across South Scotland, from Sweetheart abbey to the world-famous Melrose abbey. The south of Scotland also boasts some great gardens, such as Logan botanic garden. Located on the south-western tip of Scotland, it is warmed by the gulf stream and is a place of tropical beauty, with many plants that normally grow in antipodean countries.

We now have world-class whisky, gin and rum distilleries as well, including Annandale, Bladnoch, Crafty, Ninefold, Oro, Borders, Selkirk, Dark Art and the Moffat distillery, which is still under construction.

As part of the Queen’s platinum jubilee celebrations, Dumfries has applied to be recognised as a city. When Perth, Stirling and

Inverness received city status, they went from strength to strength—economically, socially and culturally—and attracted people and lots of new investment to their areas. If Dumfries receives city status, the town and our whole region could benefit similarly. The south really is Scotland's adventure playground.

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): Will Emma Harper join me in applauding the great work that is being done in South Ayrshire Council with the launch of the Destination South Ayrshire tourism website?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will give Emma Harper time back for the intervention.

Emma Harper: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I thank Siobhian Brown for raising that issue. I am aware of what has been launched in South Ayrshire, and I welcome it. I thank her for making that intervention so that we can highlight that.

In addition to the cycle routes at Glentress, which Christine Grahame talked about, there are other 7stanes cycle routes in Dumfries and Galloway and the Borders. The award-winning 7stanes mountain biking trails provide among the best mountain biking that is available in Scotland.

We have the southern upland way, which is Scotland's only official coast-to-coast long-distance footpath, and which runs from the Atlantic Ocean to the North Sea—from Portpatrick on the west coast to Cove on the east coast—and we have the Galloway international dark sky park, which has been named a gold-tier park as a result of its breathtaking and rare stargazing conditions. We also have the Galloway and southern Ayrshire United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization biosphere, which is the first UNESCO biosphere in Scotland and part of a family of 700 biospheres around the world.

Those are all fantastic resources. They really help to put South Scotland on the map, and they are all hugely important to Scotland's economy. However, more can be done.

Stranraer Water Sports Association is involved in the development of Stranraer waterfront. Loch Ryan is a beautiful and peaceful loch, and there are huge opportunities in its potential for tourism development.

I pay tribute to the work of the South of Scotland Destination Alliance, South of Scotland Enterprise, VisitScotland Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders Council and the many organisations that work to promote tourism across the south, and I ask the minister to commit to do all he can to ensure that South Scotland is promoted as a world-class tourism destination as we recover from the pandemic.

18:07

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): I congratulate Evelyn Tweed on securing what has been an excellent debate. Indeed, the theme of “engage, connect and inspire” is apt for the contributions to the debate. They have all been engaging, they have all connected us with a sense of place in the various locations around Scotland, and they have certainly all been inspiring.

Evelyn Tweed was absolutely right to speak about brand Scotland and to recognise Scottish tourism as an “economic and social powerhouse”. In my later remarks, I will touch on some of the economic support that the Government has been providing. However, Evelyn Tweed was also absolutely correct to raise sustainability issues.

I draw the Parliament's attention to the support that has been provided, including our £15.2 million rural tourism infrastructure fund. Sixty-six projects have been awarded funding since 2018. There is also the work that the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy is undertaking in leading the visitor management steering group, and there was the recent announcement of an additional £3.9 million to support more than 200 new countryside ranger posts in this summer season. I am sure that that will be very welcome.

I will try to touch on as many members' contributions as possible.

Paul McLennan and Willie Coffey spoke about wellness and reminded us of the very challenging experiences and the lack of opportunities that we all faced when restrictions were in place during the pandemic. Evelyn Tweed eloquently described some of her experiences of tourism and staycations in her area. I think that we all welcome the opportunity to travel a bit further afield now.

Mr Coffey spoke about some of the attractions in his area. I will give him Bruce and Burns but, as the MSP for Elderslie, I am not going to cede ground as far as William Wallace is concerned.

Christine Grahame gave us a fantastic tour of her constituency. I very much look forward to being further educated by her in due course.

Christine Grahame rose—

Tom Arthur: I am certainly happy to give way to Christine Grahame. I feel that I am about to be educated.

Christine Grahame: It is fatal to turn around and look at me, because I will intervene.

I invite the minister to liaise with the Minister for Transport to pursue integrated ticketing for trains, buses and local attractions. I am going to bang on about that until something happens. While he and

his Cabinet colleagues are at it, I invite them to trial that across the Borders to see how good it is.

Tom Arthur: I will ensure that Ms Grahame's request is suitably conveyed to the Minister for Transport. I very much look forward to visiting Ms Grahame's constituency in due course.

I was heartened to hear Ms Grahame's reference to a family connection in relation to Abbotsford house. Genealogical references have been sorely missing from the chamber since the retirement of our dear friend Stewart Stevenson.

Emma Harper made a powerful contribution that championed the south of Scotland. I am sure that she is aware of the value that we place on the south of Scotland. We passed legislation to create South of Scotland Enterprise in the previous parliamentary session, and there is our support for the Borderlands deal. The south of Scotland could have no greater champion than Emma Harper, and I know that, in her position, she will continue to champion the area throughout this parliamentary session.

Sharon Dowe was absolutely correct to recognise the immense efforts of the tourism sector over the past two years. Christine Grahame touched on the importance of the furlough scheme. Claire Baker touched on the economic impact that tourism has faced and, crucially, she stressed the importance of overseas visitors. I completely recognise the point that Sharon Dowe made: we want to encourage as many people from across the UK and, more broadly, from Ireland to visit Scotland. I also recognise the very important contribution that visitors from overseas make.

As has been touched on, the tourism sector is a key part of Scotland's economy. In 2019, day and overnight visitors spent almost £11.6 billion in Scotland. Before the pandemic, the tourism sector contributed £4.5 billion in gross value added to Scotland's economy—about 3 per cent of total GVA. It also employed 229,000 people, which is almost 9 per cent of employment in Scotland, or one in every 11 jobs.

The pandemic and the measures that were necessary to contain the virus have had a profound impact on the sector. For instance, in May 2020, GDP in the accommodation and food services sector, which comprises a large part of our tourism sector, was almost 84 per cent below its pre-pandemic level—in comparison, GDP in the economy overall was 21 per cent below its pre-pandemic level. By December last year, GDP in the sector was still almost 13 per cent below February 2020 levels.

Although restrictions have been lifted and conditions are improving, it is important to recognise that the sector, particularly those parts that rely on international visitors, is still recovering

from that shock. It is important that we continue to build confidence in those markets and that we let people know that Scotland will welcome them.

We have already taken steps to start that process. Recognising that we have to build consumer demand, we commenced an international marketing campaign in 2021 as part of our phase 1 tourism recovery programme. We hope to see the results of that campaign in the 2022 season.

Phase 1 of our tourism recovery programme supported nine other projects, with up to £25 million set aside for them. Some of the projects are now complete, and some are on-going. One particular highlight was our days out incentive fund, which provided £1.57 million to businesses to offer up to 50 per cent off subsidised tickets for local attractions. The scheme was designed to encourage more visits in the off season, and more than 140 attractions signed up.

It is our sincere hope that the recovery programme will support a strong bounce back for the tourism and hospitality sector over the next few years. It will not only help the sector to recover but help us to deliver better on Scotland outlook 2030—the national tourism strategy—which has not been fully realised in light of the pandemic. The recovery programme will help to shape our approach to supporting the sector's growth through the new national strategy for economic transformation. We will therefore continue to work with the industry and key partners as we consider how best to support the 13 proposals that were put forward for phase 2 of the programme.

Previously, tourism has been a key sector for supporting employment, particularly in rural areas, as has been touched on in the debate. Before the pandemic, tourism represented a larger portion of employment in rural areas than it did in Scotland's economy overall. For example, in 2019, tourism employment accounted for about 17 per cent of the workforce in Argyll and Bute, 15 per cent in the Highlands and 11 per cent in Edinburgh, so it is clear that tourism is helping our rural economies to thrive.

The sector not only is valuable to the economy but has the potential to support important Government policies. For example, it is estimated that 24 per cent of children were living in relative poverty after housing costs in 2017 to 2020. Consequently, a huge number of families in Scotland never experience even a short break. Therefore, our ScotSpirit holiday scheme, which was one of our phase 1 recovery measures, involves the sector working with charity partners to provide short breaks to low-income families, disadvantaged young people and unpaid carers. Although the trips are supported through Scottish Government funding, it is important to have good

collaboration with the sector, which can support the families when they visit.

Although addressing climate change will create challenges for the sector, tourism also has the potential to support our climate change targets. Our destination net zero programme therefore aims to support Scotland's tourism sector to transition to a low-carbon future through globally recognised leadership. Not only is that the right thing to do but, with consumers now being much more conscious of their carbon footprint, it is important that we offer low-carbon, guilt-free experiences. Our Scandinavian neighbours already pride themselves on doing that, and their tourism economies remain strong.

It is important to recognise that the sector has experienced challenges in restarting after the pandemic. Recent data from the business insights and conditions survey indicates that 48 per cent of businesses in the accommodation and food services sector were experiencing shortages of workers. In comparison, 37.5 per cent of businesses with more than 10 employees in the economy overall were experiencing such shortages.

Historically, non-UK nationals have been a critical part of the workforce. In 2019, 16 per cent of the workforce was made up of non-UK nationals—that is almost double the Scottish average—but visa requirements are now making it challenging to recruit from that pool of able and willing candidates.

Unfortunately, in 2019, more than half of employees working in the sustainable tourism sector—53.3 per cent—were paid less than the real living wage. Although a commitment to paying the living wage might go some way towards making jobs more appealing, there are sometimes other contributing factors, such as demanding hours, a perceived lack of opportunity for career progression and the sector being seen as offering unstable employment following the pandemic. We recognise all of those challenges and are committed to working with the industry and the UK Government as we seek to address them.

Although we have come some way since the initial lockdown in March 2020, the industry unfortunately continues to report low consumer confidence in visiting local attractions, so let me conclude by picking up on a point that Sharon Dowey made eloquently. As elected representatives, we have an opportunity to lead by example, by demonstrating that we believe it to be safe to visit these places once more. Scottish tourism month affords us an opportunity not just to celebrate achievements but to publicise our many local attractions.

As others have done, I encourage all members to visit their constituency's attractions, to listen to the experiences of the operators and to reassure their constituents that the Scottish Government believes that it is safe to, once again, be out and about for leisure purposes. With about 80 per cent of our overnight visitors coming from within the UK, our example is bound to make a difference in building local confidence.

Again, I thank Evelyn Tweed for securing the debate. In Scottish tourism month 2022, let us celebrate the very best that our sector has to offer. We have shown that we can be resilient; it is now time to flourish once more.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much, minister.

In the interests of pre-empting a point of order, I point out that Willie Coffey has said in the BlueJeans chat function that Wallace was born in Ayrshire, that Elderslie did not exist in the middle ages and that Ellerslie, which is in Ayrshire, did. I am sure that the battle between the minister and Mr Coffey is set to rage for the remainder of the session.

That concludes the debate.

Meeting closed at 18:18.

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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