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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 31 March 2022

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

General Question Time

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

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

Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc

1. **Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc. (S6O-00950)

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): The Michelin Scotland Innovation Parc is a great example of team Scotland—comprising the Scottish Government, Dundee City Council, Scottish Enterprise and the private sector, including Michelin—working together to deliver change.

MSIP continues to make significant progress since it was formally opened in July 2020. MSIP provides job opportunities and skills development to Dundee and Scotland as a leading global destination for innovation and investment in sustainable mobility and low-carbon energy. To date, MSIP has 11 tenants on site and has created 115 jobs, and £2.1 million of funding was announced last week for the MSIP skills academy, which is due to be launched later this year.

Joe FitzPatrick: What role can MSIP play in delivering Scotland's ambitious net zero targets, particularly around use of hydrogen? How much involvement has there been by, and how much support has come from, the United Kingdom Government?

Ivan McKee: MSIP is a key exemplar of the ambition that the Scottish Government has for a just transition to net zero by 2045. MSIP will be an international location for innovation in sustainable mobility and low-carbon energy, with a strong focus on hydrogen. It will have a mix of start-up, high growth and more mature companies, and both inward and indigenous investors.

There will be a research and innovation organisation, and facilities including the skills academy and incubator facilities for small and medium-sized enterprises. MSIP has a strong pipeline of interest and regular contact from companies in the hydrogen sector.

Officials continue to engage with the UK Government on the exciting and innovative opportunities that are available at MSIP, and to showcase Dundee as a leader in providing essential skills for future and green economic growth.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): When the closure of Dundee's Michelin factory was announced in 2018, the company committed to involving Unite the union in development of the new innovation park on the site. Michelin also committed to offering the first opportunities for re-employment to former Michelin staff, and to encouraging new companies that were coming to the site to do the same. Given that the Scottish Government has already invested £60 million in the site, can the minister confirm precisely how many former Michelin staff have been employed there? What meaningful engagement has Unite the union had in the development?

Ivan McKee: Of course, we are keen that all partners are engaged in all discussions about development of that exciting opportunity. As I said, 115 jobs have been created, and the site is on target to create more than 800 jobs over the next five years. My understanding is that all 850 employees who previously worked at the site have found other work opportunities or have decided to take another course of action, including retirement. However, I am sure that businesses such as are now opening at the site very regularly will be keen to interact with former Michelin employees who are keen to work there, and that the businesses will seek to find employment opportunities for them.

Road Safety

2. **Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how much funding it currently provides to improve road safety. (S6O-00951)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): In 2021-2022, the Scottish Government invested almost £20 million to support road safety across Scotland, through trunk road casualty reduction measures, national partnership works—such as the Scottish safety camera programme—and road safety campaigns and marketing activities, which are led by Road Safety Scotland. For 2022-23, we have increased that investment to more than £37 million. That includes the formation of a new road safety improvement fund, which will allow partners

to deliver initiatives to reduce casualties, in line with our ambitious targets that were captured in “Scotland’s Road Safety Framework to 2030”.

Gordon MacDonald: Between 2007 and 2018, road casualties across Scotland dropped by nearly 50 per cent. The latest figures, for 2020, highlight that that reduction in the number of people being injured on our roads accelerated during the pandemic and now stands at 69 per cent below the 2007 number.

Unfortunately, however, in recent years there has been a worrying increase in the number of cyclists who are injured on our roads. What steps is the Government taking with its local authority partners to address that issue?

Jenny Gilruth: We want more people to choose to walk, wheel and cycle to get around, but it is obvious that more people need to feel safe to do so. Gordon MacDonald rightly highlights the worrying increase in injuries to cyclists in recent months.

There were 605 pedal-cycle casualties in 2020, which is 13 more than there were in the previous year. Among those were 11 pedal-cycle fatalities, which is one more than there were in 2019. We are absolutely determined to reduce those numbers, so the new road safety strategy includes the specific target of reducing deaths and serious injuries of cyclists by 20 per cent by 2030.

The Government has also increased the active travel budget—which is the largest in Scotland’s history—to £150 million next year, and we are sustaining our places for everyone programme and more than doubling the investment in the national cycle network next year.

Much of the delivery will happen, of course, in partnership with local authorities, which is why we are also increasing the capital funding programme through the cycling, walking and safer routes grant this year, which will go directly to local authorities. It will increase to £35 million from next year.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Further to that answer, what difference have the 20mph speed limit and dedicated cycle lanes had on road traffic accidents in areas such as my constituency?

Jenny Gilruth: The Scottish Government absolutely recognises that the 20mph speed limit is a key element in reducing road casualties and creating a safer environment for people to walk, wheel or cycle. The recent programme for government includes a commitment to ensuring that all appropriate roads and built-up areas have a safer speed limit of 20mph by 2025. We have formed a task group to plan the most effective route for that implementation. I welcome the work

that Scottish Borders Council has done in that endeavour, in terms of introducing 20mph zones in Ms Grahame’s constituency.

Aviation Industry (Meetings)

3. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met representatives of the aviation industry to discuss the sector’s recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and what issues were discussed. (S6O-00952)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): The Scottish Government engages regularly with aviation stakeholders to discuss the recovery of connectivity. Officials engage with airports and airlines on a daily basis, and I had a very positive meeting last week with Edinburgh Airport Limited. We are committed, in this year’s programme for government, to working with Scotland’s airports to help to restore and to grow international connectivity, while not returning to previous levels of emissions.

In addition to our work with Scotland’s airports, last month Transport Scotland officials had productive meetings with 12 airlines to discuss existing, returning and potential new routes. Given the importance of aviation as an enabler for so many other parts of the economy, it remains our aspiration to help Scotland become as well connected as peer nations and regions.

Tess White: The Scottish Affairs Committee’s recent report “Airports in Scotland” concluded that the public funding received by Glasgow Prestwick Airport Limited

“has ensured there is not a level playing field across airports in Scotland, leading to a distortion in the market”.

What is the Scottish Government’s response to that conclusion? Can the minister provide any more information about the future of Prestwick airport?

Jenny Gilruth: Glasgow Prestwick Airport is required to operate on a commercial basis, at arm’s length from the Scottish Government, to comply with our obligations under the trade and co-operation agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

On the future of the airport, it remains our intention to return the business to the private sector when the time and the circumstances are right for the business and for the Scottish Government, as the shareholder. We are not putting a timeframe on that.

I think, however, that we need to recognise the on-going challenges that the pandemic has brought to aviation more generally. We have provided support to the sector with the powers that are available to us and within our limited resources. We have also provided support through

the granting of 100 per cent non-domestic rates relief to eligible aviation businesses for 2021 and 2022.

Department for Work and Pensions (Office Estate)

4. Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Department for Work and Pensions regarding proposed changes to its office estate that could result in job losses in the north-east and elsewhere in Scotland. (S6O-00953)

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): Although the Scottish Government was not consulted prior to the announcement, officials have been in contact with the Department for Work and Pensions. We are keen to understand the impacts of that change in its estate strategy on individuals and communities, and to work with it to minimise the risk of any redundancies in Scotland. The DWP confirmed that the changes will not affect any public-facing roles and that, where possible, staff are being offered opportunities to be redeployed. The DWP also indicated that it does not expect to reduce head count through that process.

I appreciate that it will be an unsettling time for individuals; they must be our priority. We have made an offer to stand up our support through our initiative for responding to redundancy situations—the partnership action for continuing employment. The DWP does not think that PACE support is required at this time. However, the offer will remain open for anyone who requires it. If needed, PACE will provide individual skills development and employability support.

Mercedes Villalba: Last September, the First Minister announced the creation of more than 2,000 jobs in Social Security Scotland by the end of this year. The DWP staff who are at risk of redundancy have a high level of expertise in delivering social security benefits, which could prove to be useful in supporting roll-out of new devolved benefits. Therefore, will the minister commit to working with the PCS Scotland trade union and the DWP to explore redeployment of those workers to Social Security Scotland, particularly in areas where there is a high risk of redundancy.

Ivan McKee: As I said, the information that we have from the DWP is that it does not expect to reduce head count through the process. PACE support is available, if it is required for people to seek alternative employment. That would, of course, include suitable opportunities that become available through Social Security Scotland or elsewhere. I am sure that the relevant minister will be happy to pick up that specific matter.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (Impact of Spring Statement)

5. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what the impact of the United Kingdom Chancellor of the Exchequer's spring statement will be on Scotland's SMEs. (S6O-00954)

The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur): As with so many other aspects of the spring statement, it was a missed opportunity to help small and medium-sized enterprises, many of which are still reeling from the impact of the pandemic. In advance of the spring statement, we called on the UK Government to extend the VAT reduction for the hospitality sector, to introduce a temporary reduction of the VAT on fuels and to remove the incoming increase to national insurance contributions. Those measures would have helped to reduce costs for small and medium-sized enterprises across the country, but the chancellor did not listen.

The UK Government's failure to provide adequate support and its decision to press ahead with an increase in national insurance when businesses are faced with the burdens of Covid recovery, inflation and energy costs, to name but a few, is extremely disappointing, to put it mildly. The measures that were announced in the spring statement are not nearly enough, given the pressures on businesses at the moment. We have urged the UK Government to take more action in reserved areas, but it has not done so with that spring statement.

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, minister.

Tom Arthur: If the UK Government is not willing to use its reserved levers, those powers should be put into the hands of this Parliament, instead.

Michelle Thomson: I thank the minister for that very strong answer. He highlights the accelerating inflation, rising national insurance and so on, to which I would add borrowing costs. Much more should have been done to support SMEs. Will the minister meet me to discuss some ideas that I have about further specific actions that can be taken to support SMEs in my constituency of Falkirk East and across the sector?

Tom Arthur: I agree absolutely with the member that the chancellor should have offered more support to SMEs and all those affected by the cost of living crisis. My colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy wrote to the chancellor urging him to use the tax levers at his disposal to help people and businesses through the crisis. The failure to provide any substantial support to SMEs and the refusal to introduce a windfall tax on those who are profiting from the pandemic and the energy crisis are an

indication of where the chancellor's priorities lie. The chancellor should have introduced measures to raise the revenue required to support SMEs. I would, of course, be happy to meet the member to discuss these matters further.

Cycling Safety

6. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the Scottish National Party manifesto commitment for every child to leave school being able to cycle safely. (S6O-00955)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Bikeability Scotland is the national cycle training programme for schoolchildren. The programme is delivered by Cycling Scotland using Transport Scotland grant funding. Bikeability is now delivered in 31 local authorities across the country. Before the pandemic, 47 per cent of all primary schools in Scotland participated in the programme.

In consultation with Transport Scotland, Cycling Scotland adapted bikeability delivery in response to the coronavirus lockdown. In 2020-21, training was delivered for the children of key workers at 70 childcare hubs across 15 local authorities. As lockdown restrictions have eased, Cycling Scotland has been working closely with participating local authorities to restart delivery, including through issuing guidance, funding and other support.

Martin Whitfield: I am grateful for that answer.

How many children will leave school in 14 weeks' time being able to cycle safely on our roads?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I pointed out during my original answer, clearly, the Covid pandemic has greatly impacted the bikeability scheme's ability to operate fully and most effectively, which I hope that the member appreciates is understandable.

The member can take heart from the work that Cycling Scotland is undertaking to ensure a great increase in the proportion of schools that are participating by September 2023, and the fact that it is keen to do even more in the years ahead.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): As the cabinet secretary has already said, just 47 per cent of primary schools deliver on-the-road training, which is nowhere near enough. How does the cabinet secretary plan to increase that number?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Bikeability Scotland is already planning to increase those numbers in the next school year. It anticipates increasing the proportion of schools that are participating to 57 per cent by September 2023. We will of course

continue to invest in the bikeability Scotland scheme to grow participation numbers beyond that.

"Highway Code" (Changes)

7. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact on travel in Scotland of the recent changes to the "Highway Code". (S6O-00956)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): As Liz Smith will know, changes to the "Highway Code" came into force on 29 January 2022, aimed at providing better protection for pedestrians and cyclists. A main change to the "Highway Code" is the introduction of the hierarchy of road users, which places those road users most at risk in the event of a collision at the top of the hierarchy. Although that matter is reserved, the Scottish Government broadly supports those changes.

Transport Scotland continues to work with partners across the United Kingdom, including the Department for Transport, to align future awareness campaigns with any further changes to the "Highway Code". Although it is too early to have assessed the impact of those changes thus far, they are being monitored and an assessment will be undertaken at the appropriate time.

Liz Smith: I am glad to hear that there will be some assessment, because the policing of those changes is a matter for Police Scotland. On account of the concerns that many constituents, especially elderly constituents, have raised that many drivers, cyclists and pedestrians are not properly adhering to the new code, what can be done to raise awareness of the changes and to ensure that those who are flouting the new regulations are properly dealt with?

Jenny Gilruth: To respond to some of Liz Smith's points, in January of this year the Department for Transport informed Transport Scotland that it felt unable to embark on a communications or media plan in advance of the changes that would be coming into effect on 29 January.

Instead, it decided to propose a communication plan in two phases. The first phase was an awareness-raising campaign, which took place in early February, that alerted road users to the changes as they came into effect; the second phase is a broader behaviour change campaign that will take place in May and June, which will align with seasonal increases in active travel to help embed the changes and encourage the understanding that Liz Smith spoke to in her supplementary question.

It is fair to say that we were disappointed that the UK Government felt unable to promote those

changes ahead of 29 January, so we took the proactive decision to do so ourselves in Scotland. Transport Scotland, Police Scotland, Road Safety Scotland and Traffic Scotland all used their social media to raise awareness of the changes, and the Scottish Government provided £75,000 for a three-week awareness-raising campaign, which ran in February on radio and social media.

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): The amendment of rule 126 to add that

“tailgating will be enforced by police as a dangerous and careless driving offence”

has great potential to improve the experience of road users.

A report by the Co-op from September 2020 highlighted that

“over half of young drivers feel pressured to drive faster by other motorists”.

Does the minister agree that that crackdown on inconsiderate driving is a welcome step?

Jenny Gilruth: I agree. Kaukab Stewart highlights a key issue about ensuring that young drivers are supported and that they feel empowered to make the right choices in how they drive their vehicles.

We know that, too often, young drivers are not just the cause of road traffic accidents but, sadly, their victims, and we need to change that. It is just not acceptable for anyone to drive aggressively or in a way that lacks courtesy to other road users.

Our new “Scotland’s Road Safety Framework to 2030” includes a strategic action to work with partners to change the attitudes and behaviours of road users in Scotland. Last week, I announced an increased funding package of £70 million for our road safety work.

The enforcement of road laws is, of course, a matter for Police Scotland, with which we will continue to engage on a regular basis on this and other road safety and driver behaviour-related issues.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general question time. Before we move to First Minister’s question time, I invite members to join me in welcoming to the gallery Her Excellency Saida Muna Tasneem, the Bangladesh High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. *[Applause.]*

First Minister’s Question Time

12:00

Ferries (Construction Contract)

1. **Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Presiding Officer,

“I think this is one of the achievements we are most proud of. This yard is iconic in Scotland”.

Those were Nicola Sturgeon’s words in 2016, when talking about the contract to build ferries at Ferguson Marine Engineering Ltd. Does the First Minister accept that she has made the yard iconic for all the wrong reasons?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I still believe that the Scottish Government was right to do everything possible to save Ferguson’s shipyard. If it were not for those decisions, Ferguson’s shipyard would not still be open and employing significant numbers of people, as it is today. Douglas Ross and I may well take different views on this, but I think that it was right for the Scottish Government to protect and save jobs and the shipyard.

As I set out at First Minister’s question time last week, the delays to the timetable for the construction of the ferries and the cost overruns are a matter of deep regret. The Audit Scotland report that was published last week set out much of the detail on that, and the Scottish Government’s Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd is certainly intent on learning all lessons. However, I do not regret the fact that Ferguson’s shipyard is still operational and employing lots of people.

Douglas Ross: It is good that people continue to be employed; we welcome that. However, there was not a single mention in the First Minister’s answer of the island communities that have been waiting for years for those lifeline services. That is where her regret should lie, but they do not even merit a mention.

The deal that the First Minister is so proud of has become a disaster. We now know that the Government waived a crucial safeguard that would have protected taxpayers’ money. International guidelines say that the refund guarantee is the financial cornerstone of a shipbuilding project. The guidelines state:

“it is unlikely that any shipbuilding contract would be signed if there was no such guarantee”,

yet that is exactly what the First Minister did, knowing the risks.

Last week, when I asked about the guarantee, she said:

“That decision was clearly taken based on the balance of risks.”—[*Official Report*, 24 March 2022; c 13.]

In other words, she dropped a vital safeguard, which is standard for such contracts, in order to cut a deal. Five years on, does the First Minister accept that the risks were far too high and that it was a bad deal?

The First Minister: In my initial answer, I expressed deep regret—I think that those were my actual words—about the delay in the construction of the ferries and the cost overrun. Clearly, the people who are most impacted by the delay in the construction of the ferries are those who live on our islands. That is where my deep regret rightly lies.

On the wider question on the refund guarantee, I set out my response in full last week. There was a failure on the part of FMEL to offer the full-refund guarantee and, as I set out in detail last week, a number of steps were taken to mitigate the risk that was caused by that. The three key steps in mitigation that were taken were, first, the final payment that was to be made to FMEL for the delivery of the vessels was increased from 15 per cent to 25 per cent of the contract price. Therefore, in effect, CMAL would withhold more of the payment until the later stage. Secondly, CMAL would take ownership of all equipment, machinery and materials as they arrived at the shipyard. Thirdly, FMEL would require all major suppliers to offer the full refund guarantee, with CMAL as the payee.

Those were the mitigation steps that were taken, and there was then a requirement for ministers to take a decision on a balance of judgment. As the paperwork that has been in the public domain for some time now makes clear, CMAL articulated concerns about that—that is all laid out in the paperwork and the Audit Scotland report. However, there was also a view that the negotiations with FMEL had led to the best deal that could have been struck with FMEL.

Again, I express my deep regret at the delays and cost overruns in the construction of the ferries. Lessons have been, are being, and will be learned. I do not, however, regret the fact that the shipyard still exists and is now employing more than 400 people. As well as learning lessons from this experience, we are also determined to ensure that the shipyard has a bright future.

Douglas Ross: The First Minister stands there and says that lessons have been learned, but last week’s Audit Scotland report said:

“There is no evidence that the Scottish Government, Transport Scotland or CMAL conducted a formal project review exercise after the original contract failed.”

That is how to learn lessons, but her Government did not do that.

Despite her very long answer, the First Minister could not accept that the deal was a bad deal. However, she mentioned CMAL and its statements that are in the public domain and in the Audit Scotland report. CMAL knows that the deal is a bad deal because it said—let us remember that the company is owned by the Scottish Government—that it would not agree another contract with those conditions. A Government-owned company said that.

What else did CMAL say, according to the Audit Scotland report? Regardless of what Scottish Government ministers tell the company, because it is so opposed to the deal and can see the pitfalls, even if the Government and ministers told it otherwise, it would not take that approach. CMAL gets how bad the deal is, but the First Minister does not.

The issue is important to islanders and island communities, because the ferries are vital to their way of life and work, so let us look at what happened here. Nicola Sturgeon signed off a contract against the advice of experts. She started building ferries without agreeing a design. She threw good money after bad and £0.25 billion has been spent with nothing to show for it. Worst of all, the person who has ultimate responsibility, the First Minister, removed the essential safeguard that would have protected Scottish taxpayers.

A former Scottish Government shipbuilding adviser says that the final cost could rise to between £350 million and £400 million. Can the First Minister guarantee to Scottish taxpayers that that will not be the final bill?

The First Minister: The chief executive of the shipyard and CMAL have endorsed the latest cost estimate, which the finance secretary set out in the chamber last week alongside the latest updated timescale. That is significant, because it is the first time that it has happened. Those are the cost estimates, and all the efforts of those in the yard are now ensuring that the ferries are delivered.

I am not standing here and saying that there is not a great deal to deeply regret about the conduct of the contract. It clearly has not gone the way that anybody would have wanted it to. However, Douglas Ross said that there is nothing to show for it. As of the middle of March this year, 462 people have employment in Ferguson’s shipyard. That is something to show for the Government’s actions.

Douglas Ross also said that no lessons have been learned, then went on to narrate the lessons that CMAL has already learned and is putting into practice. We will continue to learn the lessons and, most importantly, we will continue to focus on completing the ferries, which is the most important thing for our island communities. We will also

focus on ensuring that Ferguson's shipyard and all those who work there now and in the future have that bright future that people across Scotland want.

Douglas Ross: I know that the First Minister does not like First Minister's questions, because members hold her to account and seek answers from her, but she did not even make an attempt to give a guarantee. A former Scottish Government adviser has said that the costs will go to £350 million to £400 million, but we have heard nothing from the First Minister to guarantee to Scottish taxpayers that that will not happen.

What should have been, in the First Minister's words, a proud achievement, has become a sign of the Government's incompetence. In 2014, the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, said that the SNP would replace 12 ferries for £250 million, but it has not even built one ferry for that amount of money. It has ignored the experts, and islanders remain stuck with a rotten ferry service and no sign of improvement.

The First Minister's Government struck a deal, on the balance of risks, that has been catastrophic for Scottish taxpayers, and any evidence as to why that call was made has mysteriously vanished. Audit Scotland could not find a shred of evidence—it says that in its report.

Nicola Sturgeon's whole claim here, even after she has lost £250 million without building a single ferry, is that the deal was the best option available. Is she seriously saying that she would sign the same deal all over again?

The First Minister: That was the view at the time that the contract was signed. Obviously, we would not repeat what has happened; that is self-evident.

On the issue of the costs, Douglas Ross has quoted—I know that he was quoting somebody else—costs of between £350 million and £400 million. I simply do not recognise those numbers. The cost estimates are as they were set out by the finance secretary, and we stand behind those cost estimates. I have been very clear about that.

Our focus now is on ensuring that the ferries are completed in the interests of our island communities and that Ferguson's shipyard and all those who work in it have a bright future. We will learn the lessons from what has happened. I have said several times today that I deeply regret the experience, and I take full responsibility—as I did last week—for that, but my focus, and that of the Government, is on learning the lessons and securing the future of the shipyard.

Ferguson Marine (Port Glasgow) Holdings Limited (Turnaround Director)

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): The waste of public money—a quarter of a billion pounds so far—by the Government at Ferguson's does not end with the award of the ferry contract. In August 2019, Tim Hair was appointed as turnaround director at the yard. The emails that I have here, which were obtained through freedom of information requests, show that the appointment was rushed through, without the usual competition, in just a few days. Mr Hair was selected from a shortlist of only three people, all of whom were recommended by the corporate adviser PricewaterhouseCoopers. In the process of negotiating his salary, Mr Hair started by offering a rate of £2,000 a day, but he ended up being paid just under £3,000, plus expenses, per day. The emails also show that the First Minister was informed about all that and did not raise a single objection.

As people across Scotland tighten their belts, can the First Minister explain why she thought that it was right to pay Tim Hair more than £2 million, which meant that he earned in just 11 days what the average Scot earns in a year?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The decisions that were taken at the time were in line with proper processes and procedures and with market rates. I do not set the market rates at which people are paid.

A new chief executive is now in place at Ferguson's, who has updated Parliament on the revised timescales and the revised costs for the ferries. We will continue to update Parliament, and Parliament will continue to hold the Government and the company—which, of course, is now in Government ownership—to account. We will concentrate on learning the lessons but, more than anything, we will concentrate on completing the ferries and on securing a good future for the shipyard. The Scottish Trades Union Congress has already said that that is of huge significance and that the Government was right to intervene to secure the future of the shipyard.

Anas Sarwar: A market rate of £3,000 a day—was the First Minister signing Lionel Messi? Who is the First Minister kidding? I do not hear any apology or any regret for paying Tim Hair £2 million. Let us not forget that that £2 million was to turn around the yard, but the ferries have still not been delivered, are costing more and have been delayed again.

The email that I am holding, which was also obtained through freedom of information requests, shows that Government advisers suggested that Tim Hair needed a decent pay package so that life was not “unnecessarily painful” for him while he

swapped Hampshire for Port Glasgow. That is shocking and out of touch.

At a time when families are having to count every penny, it seems that the First Minister is suggesting that Tim Hair was, as he said, value for money. Does the First Minister honestly think that he has been value for money? If not, what will she do to recover £2 million of taxpayers' money?

The First Minister: I make it clear that I do not think that the experience of the contract has been acceptable in any way, shape or form, but the focus now, under the new chief executive of the shipyard, is to get the ferries completed in the interests of island communities and to secure the future of the shipyard. That is what the Government will continue to focus on. That is in the interest not only of island communities but of those who work in the shipyard.

We should not lose sight of the fact that, but for Government intervention, the shipyard would no longer be operational, it would no longer be open and nobody would be employed. Right now, we have more than 400 people employed in that shipyard, and we intend to do everything that we can to ensure that it has a bright future, which I think is what people in Port Glasgow and across Scotland will want to see.

Anas Sarwar: We are all for protecting jobs, but let us be clear: this was a public relations stunt to protect Nicola Sturgeon's job, Derek Mackay's job and the jobs of Scottish National Party MPs.

While people see their bills going up, they see a Government paying a quarter of a billion pounds when there are still no ferries. Contracts and jobs are going abroad, and £2 million has been paid to one person. This Government and this First Minister are all about spin and PR, while the public pays the bill.

Nicola Sturgeon says that what happened was normal and was done by the book, but Audit Scotland says the opposite. She says that she is open and transparent, but Audit Scotland does not agree. Nicola Sturgeon says that the delays are unacceptable, but then accepts them. She says that she wants to learn lessons, but she does not want a public inquiry. She says that the Government takes responsibility, but not a single person has. Why does she think that it is acceptable that, while people need help with the cost of living, they are instead paying the cost of her Government's failure?

The First Minister: I do not think that Anas Sarwar really does support the protection and retention of employment. If we had followed what he has just set out, there would be no Ferguson's shipyard and no one would be employed in that shipyard.

From the point of public ownership to November 2020, the number of permanent jobs at Ferguson's more than doubled. A level of more than 350 permanent staff has been sustained since then. There are currently about 400 permanent employees, and there are additional agency workers. Since August 2021, 42 apprentices have learned a trade in the yard, and the yard plans to take on more apprentices later this year. More than 70 per cent of all the people employed at the yard live in Inverclyde. Those are people who are employed right now and who would be finding the cost of living crisis much harder had the Government not saved the shipyard.

That is the reality. The experience of the contract is deeply regrettable, but what is not regrettable is saving the shipyard and the jobs of those who work in it.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We move to supplementary questions.

Ministry of Defence Housing (Use by Displaced Ukrainians)

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): In my constituency, many Ministry of Defence family homes around the Dreghorn and Redford barracks have been left empty for many years. Recently, I wrote to the Tory Secretary of State for Defence to highlight that issue again. Will the First Minister support my calls for the United Kingdom Government to consider using the hundreds of empty MOD homes in Edinburgh and across Scotland to house people who are being displaced as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The scale of the humanitarian crisis means that it is important that all housing options are fully explored. I think that MOD housing should and must be considered as part of that process. I would therefore welcome the UK Government, which has sole responsibility for MOD property, making empty homes available to support displaced people from Ukraine.

The Scottish Government is already bringing together key partners to ensure effective co-ordination of plans to address the accommodation needs of people who are settling in Scotland. We are committed to working with all partners to ensure that all arrangements in place are safe and sustainable, and offer true sanctuary for those fleeing the war.

Commodity Costs (Support for Farmers)

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): The First Minister will be aware that the war in Ukraine, which is closely linked to global gas prices, is having an impact on agricultural commodities. Borders farmers are

facing rising costs for inputs, including manufactured fertiliser. The United Kingdom Government has announced steps to address that uncertainty among growers and to keep costs down for farmers, but we have not yet heard anything from the Scottish National Party Government. What action is the First Minister's Government taking to support farmers at this very challenging time?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): We continue to work with farmers to give them whatever support we can. It is important to point out that, although the impact of the war in Ukraine is obviously being felt by our farming community, that community was already suffering from the impacts of Brexit, so, in many respects, real responsibility actually does lie with the UK Government.

Racial Profiling (International Students)

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that international students are not subject to racial profiling when trying to access accommodation in Scotland?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Nobody—neither students nor anybody else—should be the subject of racial profiling, and we would take a very dim view of any evidence that that was happening. I would be happy to hear more of the information that lies behind the question, look into it if necessary and consider what action may be required as a result.

Fuel Poverty (Heating Oil)

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I know that the First Minister is aware of the extreme impact of fuel poverty in the Western Isles, where 88 per cent of households are not connected to the gas grid. Although electricity prices will rise sharply across the whole of Scotland from tomorrow, the price of heating oil has already more than doubled since this time last year. There is little to no competition in my constituency, which leaves consumers without any choice of supplier. Will the First Minister give an assurance that the Scottish Government will continue to make representations to the United Kingdom Government to urge it to introduce proper regulation and price caps for the heating oil industry?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Yes, I assure Alasdair Allan that we will continue to make representations to the UK Government on that very important matter. It is an unregulated market and the powers to introduce regulation remain with the UK Government, but the Scottish Government recognises the impact of price increases on off-gas-grid energy consumers, and I am very aware

of the severe impacts that fuel poverty has in rural and island communities.

We have confirmed that we will continue our fuel insecurity funding to support those who are struggling with bills regardless of what fuel they use, and we will continue to provide assistance for households to move away from dependence on heating oil where a low-carbon alternative is available.

Cancer Waiting Times Targets

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): This week saw the publication of another deeply troubling set of cancer statistics. They reveal that fewer than 80 per cent of urgent referrals are being treated within the two-month target, which is shamefully short of the target set by the Scottish National Party Government, and it cannot use the pandemic as justification for that. The target has now not been met for almost a decade and this is the worst performance since 2008. For all the time that the target remains unmet, patients and their families are left in limbo. What steps will the First Minister urgently take to recover 10 years of missed targets?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): On the extremely important issue of cancer waiting times, the member will be aware that there are two key targets. We actually exceed the 31-day target. On the 62-day urgent suspicion of cancer referral to treatment target, although in percentage terms that target is not being met—we are working hard to meet it—more people are being seen within that target than was the case a year ago and two years ago.

We have announced additional funding of £10 million this year and a further £10 million in the coming financial year, with a particularly strong focus on the colorectal and urology pathways, which are two of the pathways that have the most challenges in relation to waiting times. The initiatives that the funding supports include, for example, upskilling nurses and investing in diagnostic tests. We have also established three pilot early cancer diagnostic centres and continue to invest in our detect cancer early programme.

A range of initiatives that are backed by funding are under way as we seek to shorten waiting times under the 62-day target in particular. It is important to point out that the median wait under that target is 46 days, which is well within the target.

Nursing Vacancies

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): This week, the Royal College of Nursing reported record vacancies in Glasgow; it also reported that spending on bank and agency nurses has risen to £76.5 million. That is unsustainable and

unacceptable; it means delays and a lack of continuity of care for patients, increased pressure on existing staff and more strain on an already extremely tight budget. Can the First Minister say what new actions the Government will take to urgently address the crisis, because current plans are not working?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care met with the RCN yesterday. We have a range of initiatives in place, which I and the health secretary have spoken about in the chamber in recent weeks, to support recruitment in our national health service, which is very challenged at the moment for a variety of reasons that members are well aware of.

However, in Scotland right now, overall nursing and midwifery staffing—excluding vacancies, obviously—is at a record high. It has increased by 14.5 per cent since the Government took office. Overall NHS staffing has increased by more than 20 per cent to a record high since the Government took office. Record numbers are working in our NHS, but we want to recruit more and we have targets to do so. That is why we are investing heavily and working with NHS boards on targeted initiatives to make sure that that recruitment is successful.

Decarbonisation

3. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the First Minister what changes the recent shifts in fossil fuel prices and the need for energy security have made to the Scottish Government's plans for decarbonisation. (S6F-00957)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The Scottish Government takes a comprehensive approach to meeting our net zero targets. Our draft energy strategy and just transition plan will consider technologies for transforming Scotland's energy systems.

Through our heat in buildings programmes, we are driving the decarbonisation of homes and buildings, and we have enhanced support and advice schemes as part of the £1.8 billion investment over this parliamentary session. The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport recently wrote to the United Kingdom Government to outline Scotland's proposals for decarbonisation, including accelerating the electricity network, increasing financial resources for renewables and resolving unfair network charges that are not aligned with net zero.

Maggie Chapman: There is an urgent need for action. People are facing a cost of living crisis now and energy bills are going up from tomorrow—all while the UK Government seems determined to

abandon climate commitments and increase the growing profits of oil and gas companies. A crisis of this nature needs a concerted and holistic response. We must deliver, at scale, measures to help those most in need. We must insulate Scotland, retrofit buildings, invest in low-carbon heating and grow our renewables potential.

What is the Scottish Government doing to supercharge renewables and energy efficiency programmes? What plans are in place to ensure that the necessary workforce and skills are in place? Does the First Minister agree that the oil and gas companies should not be profiting from the cost of living crisis?

The First Minister: We believe that the UK Government should be doing more—and have set out ways in which it can do that—to help people right now with the cost of living crisis. We ourselves are taking a number of actions but, in the main, the levers and resources lie with the UK Government.

We also believe that this is a time for trying to accelerate the transition to net zero, not for moving off that ambition in any way. As I said in my earlier answer, we have extensive plans in place across the energy sector to meet those targets. They include, for example, investing £100 million in the hydrogen sector and boosting support for households to improve their own energy efficiency and to transition away from fossil fuel heating. Our green jobs workforce academy supports existing employees to undertake necessary upskilling and reskilling to secure green jobs opportunities. We have also called on the UK Government for an extended windfall tax on organisations, including oil and gas companies, that are making significant profits right now. Our most recent budget sets out record levels of investment to address the climate emergency and deliver a just transition to net zero.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): Will the First Minister welcome the achievement of an 11 per cent reduction in emissions from North Sea operations, and does she agree that the production of more gas on the UK continental shelf means less imported liquefied natural gas—cutting emissions by nearly 300 per cent?

Should we in Scotland not be in the lead on opportunities for decarbonisation, such as the use of offshore wind to power platforms, hydrogen technology, and carbon capture and storage, which the UK Climate Change Committee says is vital to getting to net zero? Does she recognise that, without a thriving oil and gas sector, Scotland may simply lose those major opportunities to lead on net zero, because that sector's skills, technical expertise and operational experience are essential to delivering them?

The First Minister: I certainly welcome the efforts of the oil and gas sector to decarbonise its own activities. That is something that we should all welcome. Of course, we also have to think about the impact on the environment of the use of oil and gas. That is an important part of getting to net zero as well.

I agree, and have made clear my agreement, that the skills, expertise and infrastructure of the oil and gas sector will be extremely important in making sure that we make that transition to renewable and low-carbon sources of energy.

We need to make that transition as quickly as possible, for a variety of reasons—the importance of that has been underlined in recent weeks—but we need to do that fairly and justly, as well. When he was a minister with these responsibilities, Fergus Ewing played an important role in helping to ensure that the Government is on the right track.

Nobody wants to increase dependence on imports of oil and gas, so we must therefore ensure that we are investing properly in the transition to renewables, and that is what this Government is seeking to do.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The First Minister just said that

“Nobody wants to increase dependency on imports”,

but reports this week suggest that, without political backing, the United Kingdom could be wholly dependent on imports of oil and gas within 15 years, due to a lack of confidence to invest.

Given that the Cambo field is priced into the Climate Change Committee’s net zero projections for decarbonisation and could help to reduce the cost of energy bills, create around 4,000 jobs and significantly help the UK’s energy security, will the First Minister consider giving her political backing to production from Cambo?

The First Minister: I have made clear my views on Cambo—they are well known and well reported. I am not the decision maker on Cambo, but I have made clear my views on that.

Everybody—even the member’s colleagues in the UK Government—accepts the importance of moving away from reliance on fossil fuels as quickly as possible, and that we need to do that justly. The question is how we best do that. Of course, right now, a significant proportion of what is produced in the North Sea is actually exported.

We need to invest more in renewables and low-carbon energy sources. As Fergus Ewing rightly said, we need to invest in carbon capture and storage, and, again, it is regrettable that the UK Government has not prioritised the Scottish Cluster—the Acorn project.

The transition away from fossil fuels is inescapable and the war in Ukraine has just reminded us of how important it is. There will be differences of opinion about the best way to transition, but that we must do so is inescapable. For this Government, the investment in and support of renewables is a crucial part of that.

Register of Persons Holding a Controlled Interest in Land

4. Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government anticipates the impact will be of the register of persons holding a controlled interest in land, which will launch on 1 April. (S6F-00968)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The new public register will increase transparency around land management and ownership. It will be held by Registers of Scotland and be free to access, and it will provide information about those who ultimately make decisions about the management or use of land, even if they are not registered as the owner. In short, it will mean that those who are in control of land and are taking the decisions about its use are not able to effectively hide their identities because they are not the registered owner.

The register will include overseas entities and trusts, irrespective of when the land was acquired, and the information will enable individuals and communities to identify and engage with those who make decisions about land that affect them. It marks a significant milestone in making land ownership in Scotland more transparent, which is a key objective for the Scottish Government’s land reform ambitions.

Christine Grahame: I welcome the legislation. To put the issue in practical terms, the First Minister will be aware that in many small towns, such as Galashiels in my constituency, town centres are blighted by many long-term vacant large retail outlets, whose actual owners or landlords cannot be traced, which prevents organisations such as Energise Galashiels and the local authority from redeveloping the town centre through either voluntary or compulsory purchase. Is that the type of difficulty that the legislation will, at long last, help to resolve?

The First Minister: That is certainly one of the issues that the register will help to resolve. As I said earlier, its main purpose is to improve transparency, so that the public have information about the people who are making the decisions about land use, wherever that land is, regardless of who is the registered owner of it. Anyone, including local authorities, who wants to contact the person who controls or influences those decisions will be able to use the register to find their contact details, where they are on the

register. It will make it easier for communities to find and contact those who control land and properties, and then influence the decisions about the land and property that impact on them or their communities.

ScotRail (Improvements)

5. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what immediate improvements the Scottish Government plans to deliver for passengers when it takes control of ScotRail on 1 April. (S6F-00958)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The transition of ScotRail passenger services into public ownership tomorrow will be a very significant milestone. It will also fulfil a manifesto commitment of this Government and mark a new beginning for ScotRail. It provides an opportunity to modernise and deliver passenger services that are efficient, sustainable, safe and fit for the future and that reflect the changing world we live in.

From tomorrow, services will continue as normal. It is important that we provide reassurance and familiarity to passengers in the immediate term, as we recover from the disruption and impact of the pandemic. Later this spring, we will launch a national conversation, offering rail staff, passengers and communities an opportunity to contribute to the future vision for Scotland's railway and help to shape this new beginning for ScotRail.

Graham Simpson: We know that the Scottish National Party is no good at running things—we just have to look at the ferries for that. Given that fiasco, rail passengers should be worried that NatRail will turn out to be CalMac on wheels.

On Sunday, the Minister for Transport, Jenny Gilruth, was quoted as saying:

“From day one, you might not necessarily see anything that looks different but the major difference is accountability.”

Ms Gilruth obviously did not get the memo that the Government does not do accountability. So far, what we know is that we will have rising fares, service cuts and ticket office closures. What part of that is an improvement?

The First Minister: The Government has already delivered significant improvements on our railways, and that is even before the railway comes into public ownership, as it will tomorrow. I know that the Conservatives like being reminded of this, so I will say again that, since 2009, under this Government, the communities of Alloa, Laurencekirk, Armadale, Blackridge, Caldercruix, Conon Bridge, Shawfair, Eskbank, Newtongrange, Gorebridge, Stow, Galashiels, Tweedbank and Kintore have all been reconnected to the rail

network through the reversal of cuts. In the next three years, Reston, East Linton, Dalcross, Cameron Bridge and Leven will follow.

Under the Tories, railway workers in England have faced a pay freeze. A fair pay deal was delivered in October last year for ScotRail staff.

Lastly, we have taken action to keep rail fares down. ScotRail fares are, on average, 20 per cent cheaper than in those areas of the United Kingdom that are governed by the Conservatives.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): The public ownership of ScotRail is very welcome, both to all reasonable members in this place and to the public at large. Does the First Minister think that it will increase opportunities for the railway and better serve Scotland's people and economy?

The First Minister: Yes, I do. Bringing ScotRail into public ownership and control is a historic moment, and I am delighted that it is happening under this Government. However, many others, including the rail unions, campaigned for this to happen and it is important to pay tribute to them, too.

Our commitment is clear: we have invested £9 billion in the railway since 2007. I have just listed the stations that have been reconnected since 2009, with five more to follow. We have delivered a pay deal for staff, in contrast to the pay freeze south of the border.

We will continue to press for full devolution of rail powers, including full devolution of Network Rail in Scotland, so that we can truly deliver the railway that Scotland wants and deserves.

Long Covid Support Fund

6. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister whether the Scottish Government will provide an update on what the £10 million long Covid support fund has been allocated for and how much has been spent. (S6F-00984)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Services and support are already being provided across Scotland for those with long Covid. We know that more is needed, not just now but for the long term, to support people in the most appropriate way. Our long Covid strategic network brings together clinical experts, national health service boards and those with lived experience, and will determine how we target the support fund at the areas where additional resource is needed and can make the biggest difference in the long term.

The first tranche of funding will be allocated over the next few weeks. The funding will be used by boards to strengthen the co-ordination of services across supported self-management, primary care,

rehabilitation support and secondary care investigation and support.

Jackie Baillie: I thank the First Minister for her answer, but long Covid sufferers say that there are very few services in place. That funding was announced in September 2021. No indication was given at that stage that, six months later, not one penny would have been allocated to health boards to develop services. Instead, as we have heard, the money will be spread over the next three years. The number of people suffering from long Covid has been estimated by the Office for National Statistics to be 119,000 and rising. Why has the pace been so slow? When will every health board in Scotland have dedicated long Covid services to help patients and their general practitioners?

The First Minister: As I indicated in my initial answer, we have set up the long Covid strategic network. We did that deliberately so that the targeting of the funding would be driven and determined by clinical experts on the front line and by people with lived experience of long Covid. In addition, we have launched a long Covid information platform to help people to manage symptoms. We have worked to raise awareness of long Covid and signpost people to appropriate support. NHS Scotland is already delivering care in line with the recommendations of the clinical guidelines developed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. That is underpinned in Scotland by the full range of NHS services, including primary care teams and community-based rehabilitation services with referrals to secondary care where necessary.

Long Covid clinics are one model that NHS boards may be considering. However, no single approach will fit all areas and circumstances. We will continue to support the development of multidisciplinary support services, because that support will be required for the long term.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Long Covid is becoming the biggest mass disabling event since world war one: there are nearly 120,000 sufferers. Those people need clinics, care pathways and long Covid nurses, yet we are still nowhere. I have asked the First Minister about the issue every month since the funding was announced in September and she said that an action plan was being implemented—six months later, we have just learned that not one penny of that £10 million has left the Scottish Government bank account. Will the First Minister apologise to Scotland's long Covid sufferers? Will she wake up her ministers on the issue and get help to sufferers fast?

The First Minister: No, we will continue to support the development of services that are appropriate to those who need that support not

just now but in the long term. That is already underpinned by the full range of NHS support services. I have outlined the work that has already been done and I have outlined why we took the decision to allow clinical experts and those living with long Covid to direct the nature of the funding that is being made available.

I have been encouraged by members in the chamber to follow the example of the approach that is, allegedly, being taken south of the border. A report was published just last week by the Westminster all-party parliamentary group on coronavirus, which stated that the pathways that have been established by the UK Government

“including Long Covid clinics are inadequate and do not meet current demand”.

It also said that

“some of those clinics may be experiencing temporary or even permanent closures”.

The reason why we are doing this in the way that we are is so that we do not somehow suggest that there is one model of support. The support needs to be delivered across the entirety of the NHS.

Of course, we still need to understand more about the nature of long Covid, which is why, right now, the chief scientist office is funding nine Scottish-led research projects to enable us to continue to develop our understanding of long Covid and ensure that services develop alongside that.

Ukrainian Refugees (Protection)

7. Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what immediate safeguarding measures will be in place to ensure that arrivals from Ukraine are protected from organised criminal activity, human trafficking and exploitation. (S6F-00962)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Any form of human trafficking or exploitation is abhorrent and people must be protected from it. Police Scotland's national human trafficking unit continues to engage with internal and external partners and enforcement agencies to maintain high visibility of human trafficking and exploitation risks at points of entry around Scotland. Anyone with concerns about human trafficking should contact Police Scotland.

On safeguarding, where people are opening their homes to displaced people from Ukraine, hosts can apply for expedited disclosure checks of the same level of scrutiny as the initial checks that are carried out for those working with children and vulnerable adults. That comes under the new regulations that were introduced last week to

ensure that we have a safe, speedy and free vetting system.

Jamie Greene: We all thank the huge number of Scottish families who have come forward to open their homes to the Ukrainians who are coming here through the United Kingdom-wide scheme. However, we have to be realistic about the fact that, sadly, not everyone who offers help will be well intentioned. In fact, organised criminal gangs may see what is happening in Ukraine as more of an opportunity than a tragedy.

A number of important organisations, including the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance, or TARA, Survivors of Human Trafficking in Scotland and Scotland Against Modern Slavery have all raised valid concerns about the vulnerability and desperation of those who are arriving and the potential for harm as a result of arrivals being lured into low-paid, illegal or sexually exploitative activities or—even worse—simply being abused in private homes.

What work will be undertaken by the Government and its public agencies to adequately vet and prepare, and also educate, host families before the arrival of those who are coming to Scotland? After they have arrived and settled, what on-going safeguards will be in place in the medium to long term to ensure that we track, trace and monitor both the wellbeing and the safety of those who have resettled in Scotland to ensure that none of them is being exploited in any way whatsoever?

The First Minister: That is a very important issue. We are, and we have been, designing support services to ensure that appropriate safeguarding is in place and that we, and the partners with whom we are working, can take account of the on-going wellbeing needs of those who come to Scotland. Disclosure checks are an important part of that, but we are taking a multi-agency approach to ensure that people get the support that they need, not just on arrival and when they are first being accommodated but throughout the time that they may be in Scotland.

One of the reasons why we agreed the supersponsor route with the UK Government was to ensure that we could have an approach that gets people to Scotland quickly and accommodates them temporarily, while on a slightly longer timescale—I stress the word “slightly”—we can put in place all the wider support and do all the appropriate checks. We have support arrangements already in place, starting with the welcome hubs that have been established.

The big hold-up at the moment—we are working constructively with the UK Government to try to resolve this, and I met Michael Gove earlier this

week to discuss it—is that, although we have the supersponsor route and the support in place, we are currently being held up by the slow pace of the granting of visas. I know that the UK Government is seeking to speed that up, and I hope that that happens quickly, so that we can start to welcome significant numbers of people to Scotland, with all the support that Jamie Greene rightly identifies as being vital for them.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes First Minister’s questions.

Benefit Sanctions

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-03259, in the name of Kaukab Stewart, on impacts of benefit sanctions. The debate will be concluded without any question being put. I ask those members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes with concern a recent paper by researchers from the University of Glasgow examining the impact of social security sanctions internationally on the labour market, and wider social impacts; understands that it found that any temporary positive impacts on employment carry with them negative impacts for job quality and stability in the longer term, along with increased transitions to non-employment or economic inactivity; further understands that the studies reported significant associations between sanctions and increased material hardship and health problems, and found some evidence that sanctions were associated with increased child maltreatment and poorer child wellbeing, and considers that this is further evidence of what it sees as the ineffective and punitive nature of the sanctions regime in the UK, which it considers negatively impacts people across Scotland, including in the Glasgow Kelvin constituency.

12:49

Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for giving me the time today to bring to the chamber my first members' business debate. Less than a year ago, I never thought that I would be standing here as the first woman of colour to be elected to the Scottish Parliament. Having come from a very modest family background, I am well aware of the importance that benefits can have in supporting families at times of unemployment and redundancy.

I put on record my thanks to the research team at the Medical Research Council and to the chief scientist office, which funds the social and public health sciences unit of the University of Glasgow, which is based in my constituency. Glasgow university has a long pedigree of developing and applying the latest methods of multidisciplinary research, in order to identify mechanisms that can bring about change, and of developing and assessing policies and programmes to improve health and reduce inequalities.

The motion in my name is based on research that was recently published in the *Journal of Social Policy* by Drs Marcia Gibson, Serena Pattaro and Nick Bailey. I hope that Marcia and Serena will shortly be able to join us in the public gallery to hear the debate.

That research was one of the most comprehensive reviews of the international

quantitative research evidence on the labour market and the wider impacts of benefit sanctions. The body of qualitative research has already established that intensified sanctions and conditionality have had important implications for public health and health inequalities. The new scoping review reported positive impacts for employment, but the research also reported negative impacts for job quality and stability in the longer term, along with increased transitions to non-employment or economic inactivity.

Today, I will focus on three important issues that arise from the study. First, benefit sanctions mask the impact that they have on children and young people through no fault of their own. The United Kingdom Parliament's Work and Pensions Committee reported in 2018:

"Children play no part in a failure to comply with conditionality, yet when a sanction is imposed they feel the effects just as acutely."

How can anyone penalise a child because of the consequences of a parent or guardian's actions, over which the child has no control? It is heartening to know that the Scottish Government took a different path when employment services were devolved. Gone were the mandatory schemes and in came the new Scottish approach of dignity, respect and fairness, in order to improve outcomes.

My second issue concerns benefit sanctions and a subsequent reduction in welfare payments. They are a false economy and often hide the true cost to Government of increased crime, poorer physical and mental health and an increased need for social care. The wider impact that poverty has on individuals, families and communities can manifest itself, for example, in family breakdown and, sadly, an increase in the number of children entering the care system.

Sir Robert Devereux, the former Department for Work and Pension permanent secretary, admitted as much when he was asked whether the reduction of the welfare budget under his watch had led to increased costs for other Whitehall departments, such as health and justice. He did not know. He was concerned only with reducing DWP spending. Therefore, while the DWP was being rather smug at its success in cutting welfare costs, other departments were faced with picking up the pieces and paying heavily for it. Who knows what the true cost to society is? Members just need to think about the huge rise in food banks since benefit sanctioning really took off.

The third issue that I will focus on is a request—actually, it is a demand. The DWP needs to give researchers access to data in order to ensure that there is robust independent scrutiny of the results of benefit sanctions. How many sanctions have been issued? How long are they? What impact

have sanctions had on job searching activities? What was the quality of the jobs that were found? How long did they last? How many people took a low-quality job in order to escape that draconian regime? Originally, sanctions could have lasted anything from six months to three years. Although Amber Rudd reduced the maximum time to six months, that is still a longer sentence than people receive for some criminal convictions.

I draw members' attention to the 94 reviewed studies from across the world. What would give us the 95th? The UK releasing appropriate data to allow independent research to be conducted. Today I have written a letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, calling on her department to promptly grant access to anonymised data from the claims and sanctions histories of the Department for Work and Pensions to the research team in Glasgow so that its inquiry can be completed. I encourage my colleagues across the chamber to add their names to that letter, which I will issue shortly.

Since 2010, the coalition and successive Conservative Governments have claimed that the Government has been helping people to find and use open Government data. However, despite numerous requests, freedom of information requests and assurances given to successive work and pensions committees that such data would be released, it is still not available. I ask myself why. What is it that they do not want anyone to find out? Why would they not want robust independent scrutiny to validate their evidence and confirm their success?

This Parliament has debated the impact of benefit sanctions for nearly 10 years now. Despite a Scottish approach, new voluntary employment support services and the new Scottish child payment, the management of social security support for the unemployed is reserved. Reserved it may be, but the sanctions have a knock-on effect for the Scottish Government.

It is time for us to be open with our data. It is time for the UK Government to step up to the mark and be open with its data. Only then can we truly learn from its analysis of what works, what does not work and—literally—who pays for failure. Once again, children bear the brunt of adult decision making.

I look forward to contributions to the debate from across the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Marie McNair joins us remotely.

12:57

Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): As a long-standing campaigner against the

negative impacts of the so-called “welfare reforms” of the UK benefits system, I am keen to participate in the debate. I congratulate Kaukab Stewart for securing it and for highlighting the important work done by the researchers on behalf of Glasgow university.

It is no surprise to see that they conclude that benefit sanctions do not work and that, in fact, they have a detrimental impact on claimants and their children. The UK sanctions regime has inflicted much misery and hardship on many of our constituents for many years, for no real positive return. It was introduced as part of a callous war on welfare for political impact and gain. It is a vehicle for penalising those who are in need of benefits that has been used by successive UK Governments for many years. The Tories, Labour and the Liberals have all used them. In fact, Dr David Webster, an honorary senior research fellow at the University of Glasgow, has pointed out that the number of sanctions in the UK rose to among its highest levels when the Labour Party's John Hutton was secretary of state at the Department for Work and Pensions.

The main benefit to which sanctions are now applied is, of course, universal credit. So, the appalling sanctions regime is added to all the other unjust parts of that benefit: the five-week wait that forces people into debt, the removal of the premiums for disabled people, the two-child policy and its appalling rape clause—the list goes on.

In his recent regular briefing on sanctions, Dr Webster points out that there is a “rapid rise” in benefits sanctions again. He states that the harshening of the conditionality policy with the introduction of the DWP way to work scheme is also bound to increase the numbers of sanctions, despite that approach being widely criticised.

I thank Inclusion Scotland for its very helpful briefing, in which it points out that sanctions have resulted in many disabled people and their families experiencing greater poverty in work than when they were unemployed. More will face such poverty in the future as universal credit is rolled out. The briefing also agrees with Dr Webster's analysis that the number of sanctions has seen a big increase recently, to the extent that we will see the highest annual figure for total sanctions on all benefits since 2016.

Inclusion Scotland also points out that disabled claimants were between 26 and 53 per cent more likely to be sanctioned than non-disabled claimants. The rhetoric from the Tories and others that sanctions are not impacting on disabled people is blown out of the water by those statistics. Quite frankly, any politicians who are immune to the hardships that sanctions are causing need to get out more. I have seen the

impact at first hand when volunteering at a food bank in my constituency. I have seen the look of despair and the empty kitchen cupboards that sanctions cause.

I pay tribute to advice agencies, council staff, food banks and the caring communities in my constituency for everything that they do to assist people who are struggling because of benefit sanctions. Out of concern about the impact of that harsh policy, the Scottish Government has amended the Scottish welfare fund guidance to allow crisis grants to be awarded. That is just another example of us having to mitigate the inhumane Westminster welfare policy. Given the likely rise in the number of sanctions, it is even more important that the Scottish Government makes sure that it is widely known that support is available.

I am in no doubt that a policy that leaves people and their families with no money or less than they need cannot have anything good in it. It will have no part to play in a compassionate Scotland that has all the welfare powers that are needed to look after our citizens and help our young people to thrive.

13:01

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): A well-run and effective welfare state stands to benefit not just the people who rely on it directly for support but wider society, as it allows many people to continue engaging in society even when times are tough, and times are just that—tough.

While the country begins to recover from the global pandemic, wrestles with inflation and deals with the humanitarian and supply-chain crises resulting from President Putin's war in Europe, there has been and continues to be a tremendous amount of pressure on the people of this country, who turn to the welfare state to relieve some of that pressure on their and their families' lives.

I take a moment to commend the front-line employees and agents of the DWP who, day in and day out, are working hard to ensure that people are supported by every system and lever that is available to them. Just a few weeks ago, I had the privilege of visiting one of the new Jobcentre Plus centres here in Edinburgh to see the joined-up thinking that is taking place. In debates such as this, it is sometimes easy to vilify the people on the front line. I urge all the speakers in the debate to minimise that kind of contribution.

Moving to the substance of the debate, I have a couple of points that I would like to raise. I have a feeling that many representations will be made about sanctions over the next few minutes that will not be strictly accurate. Sanctions will be painted as a regular excuse to deny help to people who

need it by heartless agents of the state. However, that simply does not match up to reality. Sanctions are used infrequently and executed only after careful consideration.

In her opening speech, Ms Stewart asked for data. Let me give her some data from the Partick jobcentre, which is in the constituency that she represents and is also mentioned in the motion. According to DWP figures for that centre, no one was sanctioned between July 2019 and July 2020. We can therefore see that the handing out of a sanction is not something that is done liberally and without thought but rather a tool that is used in a targeted and thoughtful way.

It is also worth noting that the University of Glasgow study that is cited in the motion is yet to be published and is not specific to the UK. Rather, it has a much broader international focus, so we should be careful of mapping its findings directly on to the UK. I close by advising caution to people who would use that unpublished paper, which is not specific to the UK, simply to make political points. We should keep in mind that the way in which sanctions are portrayed in the media and by people who have their own political agenda is not always accurate, and that sanctions are, to use the language of the Scottish Government, a "targeted and proportionate measure".

13:05

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The benefit system in the UK is set up not to help people into work or provide stability but to punish people who are not in work, and it does so regardless of whether they are able to work. Disabled people are more likely to be sanctioned, more likely to end up worse off financially when they take up part-time work, and more likely to experience serious harms when they are sanctioned.

The system is not only punitive; it is also discriminatory. Jeremy Balfour just reassured us that sanctions are not carried out liberally; the point is that they are carried out. I frankly do not care whether someone has missed a job interview for a reason that is not deemed good enough; no reason is good enough to remove somebody's recourse to purchase food and fundamentally stay alive. However, that is what the UK Government does, and frequently.

There needs to be more recognition that people's lives—particularly the lives of many who need to rely on universal credit—are not predictable or rational enough to be measured by some inflexible flowchart in DWP offices. To give just one example, in 2016, I had to rely on universal credit after the loss of a job. I soon reported that I had found work—a full-time job in

the Scottish Ambulance Service—and my monthly payment was duly reduced to £0 a month. My new steady income made me look sensible enough to convince a landlord that I deserved a roof over my head, so I moved into a studio flat and got on with my life.

One lunchtime, I unlocked my phone to find that I had missed a call and had a stern voicemail message instructing me to get in touch as soon as possible. After an impromptu 45-minute performance of Vivaldi, I got through to be told that I had to attend an interview the next day, as I had failed to fill in a change of housing circumstances form. It should be noted that that change of housing circumstances would have qualified me for higher housing support and had come to the DWP's attention when it received my change of address form. I had committed the horrendous crime of secretly moving into a flat and then clying on myself by covertly sending the DWP my new address.

I explained that I could not attend the meeting, because I would be at work, and I was threatened with a sanction on my £0 payment. The DWP carried on phoning me daily for almost a week. I then received a letter underlining my transgressions at the address that the DWP insisted that it knew nothing about.

For me, the DWP's nonsensical approach to my getting a job and a secure tenancy was just ludicrous rather than life threatening, but it is an indicator of how an uncaring, inconsistent and often incomprehensible process cannot be rigidly applied to real lives. Many others learn that lesson in a much harsher way.

One of my constituents had to isolate with Covid and ended up in a desperate situation when the stay-at-home guidance meant that she had to cancel a coach meeting at short notice. She and her children suddenly found themselves stuck in a home that they did not know whether they would have money to heat, while waiting for those advocating for her to convince the DWP that quickly and cruelly cutting her already insufferably low income was not right or reasonable. That situation is not unusual.

As Kaukab Stewart outlined, the sanctions situation is so bad that the DWP will not even tell us how bad it is. That same DWP publicly admitted that it had wrongfully pressured disabled people to accept less support than they were legally entitled to, and it will not give researchers access to data on sanctions. The research that the University of Glasgow has undertaken is therefore vital to help us understand more about what the DWP will not tell us. I thank the university for its work and my colleague Kaukab Stewart for bringing it to the chamber today.

13:08

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I am happy to add my name to the calls against the inhumane UK benefit sanctions regime, under which so many have suffered. I am glad that the issue is being recognised in Parliament today, and I congratulate Kaukab Stewart on her motion. The research that the motion mentions confirms what I am sure many of us already knew from seeing the direct impacts that social security sanctions have on those who have to endure them.

Although not specifically related to sanctions, the direct human costs of the DWP's inhumane practices are highlighted perfectly in the film "I, Daniel Blake". I encourage any member who has not seen that film to do so, as it brings home the realities of being out of work and trying to access basic support. I mention that to members across from me on the Tory benches, in particular, because it is their Government in Westminster that insists that sanctions are effective.

Only two months ago, we found out that the UK Secretary of State for Work and Pensions blocked sight of an evaluation of the effectiveness of benefit sanctions, which the DWP commissioned back in 2019 as part of its internal research on the benefit of sanctions. At that time, the DWP promised to make the findings public. I do not doubt that the research had similar findings to those of the paper that we are talking about now, which means that it was a political choice to continue punishing people, even though it is obviously not an effective policy. On top of that, we found out this month that, shockingly, the DWP blocked data from a study on whether benefit sanctions are linked to suicide.

Thankfully, there is now a massive amount of published evidence that shows that threatening claimants with the loss of benefits does not incentivise them to take up unsuitable jobs; instead, it has direct impacts on their physical and mental health and even on economic activity, which is what proponents of sanctions claim is their main purpose. The evidence all shows that, plainly and simply, cruelty is at the centre of those political choices. Previously, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation made the point clear, when it said:

"Sanctions are going too far and causing destitution."

In Scotland, we now have the opportunity to change some of the culture through the expansion of benefits under Social Security Scotland. I call on the Scottish Government to make it clear that, for new benefits that are administered by Social Security Scotland, it will not pursue a sanctions regime. I have already been told by a number of constituents in one of the pilot areas for the new adult disability payment that accessing information on the eligibility criteria was difficult and there was a lack of clarity, which caused stress and

confusion. I understand that transfers and changes of benefits will be difficult but, from the outset, it must be a better system than the one that people faced under the DWP.

I hope that the Scottish Government listens to the criticisms of the new system that people raise as we go forward, and that it commits to making it much fairer. I hope that we all continue to speak out against the DWP's unfair and meaningless sanctions, which do not help anyone.

13:12

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I thank Kaukab Stewart for securing the debate.

The University of Glasgow study makes a major contribution to our understanding of the current impact of sanctions. The evidence from studies and charities that is outlined in the report suggests that sanctions

“have a wide range of negative impacts, including increased hunger, material hardship and debt, inability to pay bills, and deteriorating health.”

The report states that, given the evidence of potential harms, policy makers should consider limiting sanction policies that remove benefit income from households that are already likely to have very limited incomes or savings.

My constituency of East Lothian was the first in Scotland to pilot universal credit. In what my council colleague described as an “experiment in cruelty”, two thirds of council tenants fell into rent arrears and were left without any money for weeks on end. A report by the local citizens advice bureau found that more than half of the people who were moved on to universal credit in East Lothian were, on average, £44 a week worse off.

Like the rest of the UK, East Lothian was hit hard by the implementation of universal credit, and claimants continue to be penalised with cuts and unfair and unjust sanctions.

The new law that was passed last month reduces from three months to four weeks the period during which claimants can seek a job in their preferred sector without being forced to look elsewhere for work. Claimants can now be hit with sanctions if they do not take a job offer after four weeks, no matter the sector. The emergency bill went through unscrutinised and has come under fire for being “unjustified” and

“with no clear means in measuring success”.

The new rule lacks legitimacy, reinforces an insecure workforce and creates an environment that does not value meaningful employment.

In the previous three months, food bank usage in East Lothian has grown by 40 per cent, 28 per cent and 54 per cent respectively. Statistics show

that more than 90 per cent of people who use the service are working poor. That proportion has grown in the past few years and months.

Boris Johnson has indicated that he wants to see a highly skilled, highly motivated workforce. Benefit sanctions will not achieve that. In fact, they will be counterproductive. This is all about the stick—there is no carrot.

The UK Government claims that sanctions are used to motivate claimants into getting jobs, but its own publications admit that, although claimants are more likely to enter jobs, they are often low-paid jobs with limited retainment. In fact, evidence from the London School of Economics and Political Science shows that sanctions are unhelpful in moving people into work. Instead, just the threat of sanctions creates unmitigated distress that gets in the way of finding work and has potentially life-altering negative consequences.

Benefits sanctions, cuts and austerity are plunging children into poverty. Rising energy prices and the cost of living is expected to increase the poverty rates across Scotland and the UK. The Scottish Government has put in place six new benefits, including the Scottish child payment, to mitigate the impact of those toxic policies.

With 40 per cent of children in poverty coming from a single-parent household, at its peak, around one in five single parents a year was referred for a sanction, and one in seven had a sanction imposed. Such measures only push single-parent households further into poverty.

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has shown that benefit sanctions have a disproportionate effect on young people under 25, and there is also evidence of severe impacts on homeless people and other vulnerable groups.

There is a strong link between benefits sanctions and increased poverty. Those who are on the breadline cannot afford to have the little amount of income support that they receive removed as a cruel and archaic punishment.

I stand by the Scottish Government, which wants a Scottish social security system that treats people with dignity, fairness and respect, and does not impose life-altering sanctions on the most vulnerable people in society. Politics is all about choices and priorities. The UK Government has made the wrong choice and the poorest in our society will suffer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Before calling the next speaker, I advise that, because of the number of members who wish to speak in the debate, I am minded to accept a motion without notice under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by

up to 30 minutes. I invite Kaukab Stewart to move the motion without notice.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

13:17

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I start by congratulating Kaukab Stewart on giving us the opportunity to discuss benefit sanctions and I thank the University of Glasgow researchers for their very important work.

When a new drug is developed, it must go through careful testing and it will not be approved unless there is clear evidence that it does what it claims to do, and does so safely. It is strange, then, that we do not apply the same principle to benefit sanctions. Hundreds of thousands of benefit sanctions are issued each year, yet there is little evidence that they have significant positive impacts. On the contrary, there is strong evidence to suggest that they have a range of highly negative outcomes for individuals and for society at large.

I want to highlight the mental health impact of sanctions. Take some of the poorest people in the country, make them live on an income that does not stretch to putting three meals a day on the table and heating the house properly, and then threaten to remove even that meagre amount at any moment. That is a recipe for a mental health crisis, and a reality that too many people face, such as Charlie whose electricity was cut off on Christmas day because of sanctions. He told University of Essex researchers:

“There was this image which will probably stay with me for the rest of my life. On Christmas day I was sat alone, at home just waiting for darkness to come so I could go to sleep, and I was watching through my window all the happy families enjoying Christmas and that just blew me away. And I think I had a breakdown on that day and it was really hard to recover from and I’m still struggling with it.”

A University of Glasgow study tells the same sad story: every 10 sanctions applied per 100,000 people were associated with an additional eight people experiencing anxiety and depression and an additional one person receiving mental health treatment. It is therefore no wonder that the National Audit Office found that receiving an employment and support allowance sanction resulted in reducing disabled claimants’ time in employment, which is precisely the opposite effect to that intended.

Meanwhile, the DWP refuses to acknowledge the harm that it is causing.

All that is also before we consider the equalities impacts. An LSE study found that

“Independent of age and gender, White claimants were less likely to be referred for a sanction, and less likely to ultimately receive a sanction, than were claimants from other ethnic groups. Black claimants and claimants of Mixed ethnicity were ... more likely than claimants from other groups to be referred and sanctioned.”

Benefit sanctions, quite simply, are racist.

However, there is another way. I am proud that it was Greens who first pointed out that the devolution of employability programmes to this Parliament was an opportunity to reduce the number of sanctions. That is why fair start Scotland has been, from the outset, entirely voluntary. Moreover, it works. Participants benefited from “not feeling pressured” by the service and felt more able to engage with the support on offer willingly and more effectively.

Finland’s nationwide trial of universal basic income—something that the Scottish Greens have long supported—removed all requirements to seek work and, in doing so, did not reduce a person’s likelihood of becoming employed and led to less mental distress and fewer feelings of depression and loneliness. Those are the things that we should be talking about and focused on.

Benefit sanctions are not only dangerous and a form of violence against some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in our communities; they do not help people find work and, indeed, can make doing so even harder. Most fundamental of all, they contravene basic human rights. We all have the right to live in a warm safe home, to have food and to have clothing. It is what we pay social security for—and it should never, ever be taken away.

13:21

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): I congratulate Kaukab Stewart on securing the debate and welcome the opportunity to speak in it.

As we have heard, a recent paper by University of Glasgow researchers notes that the cruel and heartless benefit sanctions imposed by the UK Government have a significant impact internationally on the labour market and have negative widespread social effects. What is more, they do the exact opposite of what they are intended to do, in that they result in unemployment and economic inactivity as people are forced into low-quality jobs that they are not matched to.

I want to highlight the work of Dr David Webster of the University of Glasgow, whose research on the labour market contributes to the work of the Child Poverty Action Group. His most recent publication in February states that

“the rapid rise in UC sanctions which was noted in ... November 2021 ... has continued.”

Last month, in the unelected House of Lords, the junior DWP minister Baroness Stedman-Scott was adamant when she said:

“we are not having tougher sanctions.” —[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 3 February 2022; Vol 818, c 1011.]

However, that is simply not true. In November, there were nearly 50,000 claimants serving a universal credit sanction, well above the pre-pandemic peak of 36,780—and, yes, I did say “pre-pandemic peak”.

As we look forward from Covid and aim to build a fairer society for everyone, the Conservative Government is increasing cruel and ineffective sanctions—and we should be in no doubt that they do not work. The UK Government has announced the new way to work initiative, which has the noble ambition of getting half a million people into work by June. How is it going to do that? It will use the threat of sanctions to force claimants to look for work more quickly outside their chosen sectors and to widen their search into fields where they have no experience after just four weeks. According to Dr Webster,

“It is bound to increase the number of sanctions”

handed out by the DWP and will result in

“worse matches between people and jobs, damaging earnings, morale and productivity”.

That is exactly what we do not need right now. We often talk about evidence-based approaches to policy—well, there is the evidence.

Of course, the UK Government is not interested in the evidence. In his research, Dr Webster found that

“Under Secretary of State Thérèse Coffey, the DWP appears to have adopted a comprehensive policy of blocking information on the effects of benefit sanctions.”

That raises the question: what do they have to hide? Dr Webster is not the only one to think that. The chair of the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, Stephen Timms MP, has said:

“This emerging pattern of obstruction suggests that a culture of secrecy is entrenched in DWP.”

The UK Government’s ignorance results in people having to make choices between heating their homes and feeding their children. That, unfortunately, is Great Britain in 2022. It is the real experience of people who are being hit hard by the cost of living crisis, which the Conservatives have no intention of doing anything meaningful about.

That ignorance is forcing people into the arms of food banks in my constituency. The volunteers at food banks do a fantastic job, but they should not be needed in 21st century Britain—although, of

course, Jacob Rees-Mogg thinks that food banks are “rather uplifting”. Kind, compassionate and caring conservatism that is not.

Although I am glad that we are getting a chance to debate the matter, members should be under no illusion: Boris Johnson does not care what we have to say. He does not even care what his own MSPs have to say. What is the way out of this mess for the people of Scotland? I know what it is. It is most certainly not Boris’s benefit-sanction Britain. It is that Scotland becomes an independent country with full powers showing more compassion to people who need it.

13:25

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank Kaukab Stewart for securing the debate. Colleagues have outlined extremely well how benefit sanctions are inhumane, callous and cruel. They are nothing but a symptom of the UK Tory Government’s out-of-touch and hostile attitude to the people who most require support.

Sanctions have consequences. Evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that benefit sanctions increase the risk of homelessness and put financial and emotional stress on families, which harms children. Ms Stewart described that in detail. Sanctions also cause health harms.

Tackling poverty and the cost of living crisis already have many challenges. We have heard about people choosing between paying their bills and buying food—between heating and eating. There is no evidence that sanctions work.

In 2018, I supported a constituent who had battled the DWP for three years before contacting me to receive the support to which she was entitled. I contacted the local MP, who is now the Secretary of State for Scotland, to help, because the DWP is a reserved matter. He offered no support, provided no help and said that he had full confidence in the DWP’s decision making. Because of the issues with the DWP and the extreme stress that that piled on her, my constituent sadly took her own life, leaving a young son and her partner behind. That directly links to what Alex Rowley said about suicide being linked to sanctions. It is a tragic case that simply highlights how the UK Government and the welfare system do not treat people with dignity and respect.

I will highlight the particularly negative impact of benefit sanctions on rural areas, including across Dumfries and Galloway. Rural transport is hugely challenging, particularly for people who are on welfare support and are more reliant on public transport to attend jobcentre appointments. Jobcentre appointment times do not coincide with

rural transport timetables, but I have found the jobcentre's approach to accommodating the needs of people who live in rural settings to be extremely inflexible. One person whom I supported was sanctioned and lost 100 per cent of his income because his bus was five minutes late.

That punitive approach appears to be continuing, now that face-to-face appointments have resumed following removal of Covid-19 protections. I call on the minister to work with the UK Government to consider the need for a flexible and person-centred approach to appointments for people across rural Scotland, and for not penalising people for living rurally. I welcome the fact that, in contrast, Social Security Scotland considers rural needs by offering telephone appointments and advisers who will even visit people in their own homes.

The Parliament and the Scottish Government are constrained because we do not have complete control over welfare; we cannot mitigate every measure that is foisted on the Scottish people. The only way to truly address the unequal, cruel and callous Tory welfare system is by Scotland taking its future into its own hands and becoming a normal independent country.

13:29

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I, too, thank my colleague Kaukab Stewart for securing this important debate.

First, I want to take a moment to remind us all how we got to where we are today. The former Tory Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, said:

“Alongside what we have already done with the mandatory work programme and our tougher sanctions regime, this marks the end of the something-for-nothing culture”.

I repeat:

“the ending of the something-for-nothing culture”.

Let that sink in. That treats those of us who have been recipients of UK social security as if we have been taking something that we do not deserve—as if we are feckless, lazy and grubbing.

The stigma of that experience still lurks in the recesses of my mind. Thinking back to when I used my income support to buy my baby son's babygrows from charity shops, I was not thinking about the circular economy nor about reducing, reusing and recycling. I was trying to figure out how to make the small amount of money that I had go further, in a time before baby boxes. Wow! How 24-year-old me could have done with one of our amazing levellers, the baby box. That, too, is seen by people in some quarters as being “something-for-nothing”.

We should make no mistake about it: benefit sanctioning is a political choice. We have yet to be presented with any real and tangible hard facts that show that removing people's only source of income—income at a level that is so low that it is already recognised as being the minimum amount that a person needs in order to survive—has any positive outcome. It is a choice that politicians have made and it is a culture that they have created, in our UK benefits system. It is punitive and punishing—all stick, and scant carrot.

I worked as a senior caseworker for a member of Parliament, and I will never forget the benefit sanctions cases that we had coming into the office—they were people who were in desperate need of support. I did not see, standing in front of me, people for whom hunger and destitution were an appropriate punishment for their missing an appointment—for being on a late-running bus, for being ill, for having the audacity to have to collect kids from school at the same time as a DWP appointment, or for not showing evidence of 35 hours of job searching. Who knew that a person could actually demonstrate 35 hours of job searching? That blows my mind.

I saw many people who were experiencing multiple and complex trauma being retraumatised by a system that was designed to be hostile, designed to end the “something-for-nothing culture” and designed to reduce people to being so hungry that they would open a can of soup to drink it cold, straight from the tin, in a food bank, because they had not eaten for days and their pittance of a hardship payment was gone within seconds of their receiving it.

What kind of country creates a system that is designed to punish people for being poor and for having everyday real-life situations, like those that I have outlined, happen? I ask members to imagine that, each time they missed an appointment or did not manage to finish something in the time allotted, they lost a full month's pay. Now, I ask them to imagine losing six months' pay while they are living a chaotic life that is beset by substance use and trauma, and is built on a foundation of adverse childhood experiences. Is that someone who is living the high life and getting something for nothing? I proffer the radical thought that the life choices of that individual would be continually knocked, and that the imposition of harsh sanctioning would, in fact, only add to and exacerbate the deep poverty that they are experiencing.

We can contrast that with our Scottish social security system, which is being created with dignity and fairness at its heart. It is lifting people out of poverty and supporting folks, instead of punishing them.

13:33

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): I, too, commend my colleague Kaukab Stewart for bringing this important issue, and her research, to the chamber, and I thank all colleagues who have contributed to this important debate. It has highlighted the strength of feeling among members on all—or certainly most—sides of the chamber that the punitive sanctions that are imposed by the UK Government in respect of universal credit simply do not work.

As colleagues have articulated, the Scottish Government has, for some time now, been deeply concerned about the UK Government's current sanctions policy for universal credit claimants. As we have heard, it allows any claimant to be sanctioned at any time, at the discretion of jobcentre staff.

Jeremy Balfour: Will the minister acknowledge that, back in November last year, 0.88 per cent of those on universal credit were sanctioned? We are talking about less than 1 per cent, so it is not something that is being used willy-nilly.

Ben Macpherson: I take in good faith the statistics that Jeremy Balfour has relayed to Parliament. However, I point out—I will say more about this shortly—that although, during the pandemic, the Department for Work and Pensions took the decision to move away from using sanctions, they are now, to great concern, being reintroduced and potentially ramped up.

In relation to something else that Mr Balfour said, I express my gratitude for the many jobcentre staff, who do important work to help people, but the discretion of jobcentre staff to impose sanctions can be problematic, as we heard in different accounts from members across the chamber—some of them personal, as in Emma Roddick's case.

Sanctions are just one of a number of issues with the current universal credit system, which is failing the people it is designed to help and should be helping, with punitive policies such as the five-week wait, which I cannot believe is still in place; the two-child limit; and the benefit cap, which the Scottish Government will mitigate, as we recently announced.

As today's discussion has emphasised, there is long-standing evidence of the detrimental impact of sanctions, with the mental health charities Mind and Activity Alliance both reporting that sanctions can instil in many people a sense of fear and distrust of the welfare system. We are trying to change that through our new social security system, with regard to Scottish benefits.

A new study by the University of Glasgow further emphasises the wrong-headedness of sanctions and their appalling impact on people's job stability and health, and more widely.

Jeremy Balfour: If the Scottish Government was in charge of universal credit, would it simply get rid of all sanctions or would it amend them and do things in a different way?

Ben Macpherson: Again, I will say more about that shortly, time allowing, but in our employability programmes, we have shown—this is a conceptual point, but we all know it instinctively from anecdotal experience—that people respond much better to support and encouragement than they do to threat and fear. That is at the heart of our social security principles, which are dignity, fairness and respect. As Maggie Chapman emphasised, they have been shown to be effective when it comes to employability through our employability programmes.

Sanctions increase hardship and lead to poorer child wellbeing. As the report concludes,

"The high proportion of adverse impacts on measures of material hardship, health and child outcomes is sufficient to give significant cause for concern."

As others have said—Kaukab Stewart emphasised this in her opening remarks—the unintended consequences of benefit sanctions are significant. The cost to the state and to all of us as citizens in different areas is significant. The report rightly emphasises that, and the costs, of course, fall on community organisations, whether that is food banks or third sector organisations; on UK Government departments, as Kaukab Stewart emphasised; and on the Scottish Government. That is exactly why we are right to be talking about the issue today. The costs that arise elsewhere in the system are significant and detrimental.

It is clear from the research and from today's debate that sanctions are ineffective in helping people out of long-term unemployment. That is why, unlike UK Government approaches, our employment support services are voluntary, meaning that people are not driven to take part in them through fear of benefit sanctions. Instead, they are supported.

The UK Government suspended sanctions at the height of the pandemic, as I mentioned. However, since their reintroduction in June 2021, the number of sanctions being issued has risen sharply. Almost 50,000 people in the UK received a sanction in November last year.

Jeremy Balfour: Will the minister take an intervention?

Ben Macpherson: I am a bit pressed for time now. I apologise to Mr Balfour.

Sanctions can cut a person's standard universal credit payment or, in some cases, reduce it to zero. I want to make an important point in response to Alex Rowley. With regard to the Scottish social security system, no sanctions are applied to claimants of Scottish Government benefits. That is already the position. If sanctions are applied to someone who is in receipt of universal credit in the UK system, resulting in a zero award, they will still be entitled to and eligible for the Scottish benefits that are linked to universal credit. There are no sanctions in those cases, and we are doing what we can to help people if they receive a sanction in the UK system.

I ask Mr Rowley to write to me about the points that he made about information sharing in his region, and we will work together to make sure that we provide the information to give people more clarity, because we are absolutely committed to that.

I underline the fact that sanctions are nonsensical. The UK Government tells us that sanctions get people into work faster, but, as the research highlights, they are nothing more than a quick fix, and they adversely impact people's longer-term outcomes. In many cases, sanctions are more about filling the gaps in the labour market that have been created by the UK Government's bad economic management, including its Brexit position.

As the report highlights, sanctions are associated with a range of adverse impacts, including worsening job quality and stability in the longer term. Sanctions do not make sense and do not work. The report goes on to state that, although sanctions might get people into work quickly in the short term, they fundamentally lead to higher rates of exit to non-employment or economic inactivity, and to more rapid returns to benefit claiming. They do not help people to get into the labour market in a way that is good for them and the economy as a whole.

To back up Kaukab Stewart's point, I think that it is important that the UK Government releases its research. I add my voice to the calls for the UK Government to issue that information in a transparent way.

Today's debate and the research that has been generated prove that the UK Government's punitive sanctions policy is ineffectual, unfair and fundamentally damaging to the very people the social security system should be supporting. The matter is clearly ideological on the part of the Conservative Party, which is why the UK Government does not want to release the information, but it should. That is why the Conservatives continue to have a policy position of sanctioning when it clearly does not work. They should change that position. I am glad that the

vast majority of members of this Parliament have made the case clearly that our social security system should help people. When it comes to our devolved powers, that is exactly what we will focus on.

13:42

Meeting suspended.

14:00

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

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

The next item of business is portfolio question time, on constitution, external affairs and culture. I remind members that questions 5 and 6 are grouped together. I will take supplementaries after both questions have been answered.

As ever, if any member wishes to ask a supplementary, I ask them to press their request-to-speak button or type R in the chat function during the relevant question. I make the usual plea for brevity in questions and answers, to allow us to get through as many questions as possible.

Independence Referendum (Work on Prospectus)

1. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how many of its staff members are working on the prospectus for another independence referendum. (S6O-00942)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The work to prepare an independence prospectus is being co-ordinated by the constitutional futures division within the Scottish Government's constitution and Cabinet directorate. That division is currently comprised of one senior civil servant and 14 other officials. The work will draw on other officials across a range of portfolios, who will contribute to varying extents as part of their wider responsibilities in supporting the Scottish Government.

Russell Findlay: People across Scotland will be dismayed to discover that the Scottish National Party Government is diverting yet more precious staff and resources towards another referendum. The SNP's programme for government said that work on that would take place only if the Covid crisis was over. Why is the cabinet secretary's Government ignoring its own programme and squandering money on its obsession with a referendum, which the people of Scotland do not want?

Angus Robertson: I commend the member for the implicit recognition in his original question that there will be an independence referendum. That is very welcome.

The member and I differed on the issue in the Scottish Parliament election last year but, as democrats, I hope that we all recognise that the parties that were committed to there being a referendum won the election, and that the parties that opposed a referendum, such as his, lost the election.

We are now getting on with delivering on the policy of the Government, including a prospectus, ahead of the independence referendum, and I look forward to further announcements on that in the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A couple of members have supplementaries.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary tell us how many Government staff are currently working on Brexit-related matters for a policy that Scotland did not vote for, unlike an independence referendum, which Scotland did vote for? Does he agree that the £120 million that the United Kingdom Tory Government squandered on its ludicrous festival of Brexit earlier this month was a complete waste of public money?

Angus Robertson: As I have mentioned, the constitutional futures division that is working on the prospectus is comprised of one senior civil servant and 14 other officials. The far-reaching consequences of Brexit have meant that almost all parts of the Scottish Government have had, or continue to have, officials dedicated to assessing and responding to the UK's exit from the European Union.

Brexit has resulted in exports of UK goods falling by 14 per cent in the three months to January, while the global average continued to rise over the same period. The opportunities of independence stand in stark contrast to the economic damage that is being caused by Brexit, and it must be up to the people of Scotland to decide their future.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Despite the war in Ukraine, the pandemic that is raging, with Scotland having the highest infection rates in the whole of the UK, the enormous hospital waiting times, the fact that people are desperate for care home packages and the ferries construction scandal, the cabinet secretary carries on regardless. If even independence supporters do not think that there should be an independence referendum now, why is he carrying on regardless?

Angus Robertson: I always thought that, in a democracy, it was recognised by democrats, including those who stood in the name of the member's party, the Liberal Democrats, that when one stood in an election on a manifesto that opposed something and lost, the party that won that election—which in this case it did on a manifesto to deliver a referendum—should deliver on that. I would have thought that even a Liberal Democrat would recognise that the democratic result of last year's election would compel us to get on with our policy platform, instead of jeering from the sidelines in opposition to that democratic result.

Correspondence (Russian Ambassador)

2. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what response it has received to the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture's letter to the Russian ambassador on 26 February. (S6O-00943)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I wrote to the Russian ambassador on 26 February condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the strongest possible terms and laying out the Scottish Government's position that Russia's illegal aggression against Ukraine had no conceivable justification.

I have not received a response from the Russian ambassador. I will continue to condemn Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and to offer my unqualified support for Ukrainian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

Neil Bibby: The solidarity that people have shown with Ukraine is undiminished after more than a month of fighting. So, too, is the resolve of the international community to isolate instruments of the Russian state. To reinforce the sentiments that he expressed to the Russian embassy, will the cabinet secretary agree that more should be done here in Scotland to divest public money from sanction-hit financial institutions such as Sberbank? Will the Scottish Government encourage companies trading with Russia to take economic action and will it support our public sector pension funds and other Scottish institutions to do so, too?

Angus Robertson: The short answer to the points that Neil Bibby raises is yes. In addition, it is important for us to stress that this country stands together with all those in the international community who oppose this illegal war, whether they are in Russia, Belarus, here in Scotland or elsewhere in the world.

I understand that Police Scotland has engaged directly with Ukrainian and Russian communities

to provide reassurance and to encourage them to report any concerns so that it can work with communities to address those. Universities Scotland has confirmed that institutions are reaching out to Ukrainian and Russian students with offers of support.

Mr Bibby asks if there is more that we can do to identify whether there is any way of hitting the Putin regime and those in the Russian economy who support him. The answer is yes. If the member has any further suggestions, I would be really pleased to hear those, because there is a consensus across Parliament that we should do everything that we can to oppose the aggression by the Russian Federation against the people of Ukraine.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): The cabinet secretary's letter stated:

"Our quarrel is not with the people of Russia, nor the Russian community who live and work in Scotland, but with President Putin's regime and its deplorable actions."

Will the cabinet secretary further reassure us about any work that is being done to provide support to Russians and Belarusians who oppose authoritarianism in their homelands, but who may be at risk of unfair treatment here in Scotland?

Angus Robertson: That is exactly the point that I was making a moment ago about our interactions with the Ukrainian consulate in Scotland and with Ukrainian community organisations. We also send out a message to people who are of Belarusian or Russian heritage and living in Scotland. Our quarrel is not with those who stand, with the rest of us, in opposition to aggression by the Putin regime. The war is not their fault.

I have already mentioned the efforts undertaken by Police Scotland. We must do everything that we can to ensure that community relations are maintained. At the same time, we are unequivocal about our opposition to the naked aggression against Ukraine. We will do everything that we can to help Ukrainians in Scotland as well as those who seek refuge and wish to come here to get out of harm's way and away from the aggression being wrought on their country.

Global Affairs Framework

3. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its global affairs framework. (S6O-00944)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Work on the global affairs framework is continuing and the framework will be published in due course.

Annabelle Ewing: I thank the cabinet secretary for his brief answer and look forward in due course to the publication of the framework. Is he able to update us now on the work of the Scottish council on global affairs, which I believe was set up last autumn? Will he also take the opportunity to report on the work that is being undertaken to expand the fantastic resource of the Scottish diaspora network across the world?

Angus Robertson: The Scottish council on global affairs will be Scotland's first international relations institute, providing a hub for collaborative policy and relevant research and a home for informed non-partisan debate on all areas of global affairs. I am pleased that the universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh and St Andrews will formally launch the institute at the end of April.

There is a wide range of activity across the Scottish Government to engage with our diaspora groups and those who have a connection with, or affinity for, Scotland. Our external network of international offices will work directly with our diaspora communities in key locations around the world, and two new overseas offices in Copenhagen and Warsaw will further expand the network. We are also undertaking research to inform our future approach to diaspora engagement to expand our international impact.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): On the issue of expanding our global impact and the network, what is the Scottish Government doing to support Covid recovery and work with partner countries and to support them in addressing monopoly production and protections? Only 5 per cent of Malawians have been vaccinated and they do not have access to testing. I have just been to a meeting with Global Justice Now, at which that was a key issue. What can we do through our global network with our partner countries to help to tackle Covid?

Angus Robertson: The good news for Sarah Boyack—I hope that she knows this—is that that is a major priority for the Scottish Government, and Neil Gray and I have been underscoring the issue. In fact, during the Commonwealth day members' business debate this week, I made that point about the support that we wish to offer to our partner countries, and the fact that that is a priority for the Government. I hope that that assures Sarah Boyack that there is much more that we can do as we all emerge from beneath the cloud of the Covid experience. We have established relations with a number of countries, and we wish to do everything that we can to pursue the priorities that she highlights.

International Offices

4. Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it

will provide an update on how its international offices are functioning and improving international relations. (S6O-00945)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Scotland's international network works to create domestic opportunities, attract investment and, ultimately, benefit the people of Scotland. Our offices are focused on improving Scotland's international profile, helping businesses to trade internationally and protecting Scotland's interests in the European Union and beyond. Together, that will continue to further Scotland's economic, cultural and policy visibility in key countries in the months and years ahead.

Emma Roddick: I am sure that, like me, the cabinet secretary takes pride in Scotland choosing to pursue world-leading human rights and equalities legislation. How will his international offices help the Scottish Government to promote best practice in equalities policy internationally?

Angus Robertson: That is an excellent question. We believe that our actions abroad should be consistent with our focus on equality and inclusion at home. That is why Scotland is developing a feminist approach to foreign policy, which will help us build on our international work to date, such as the Glasgow women's leadership statement on gender equality and climate change at the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—and a review of our international development programme, which led to the incorporation of a new equalities funding stream. We will also continue to promote our policies internationally, such as the groundbreaking approach on period poverty.

Ukrainian Refugees (Warm Scots Welcome Scheme)

5. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the warm Scots welcome scheme for Ukrainian refugees. (S6O-00946)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): We have worked rapidly with a number of partners to set up our warm Scots welcome programme and supersponsor scheme, linking in to the United Kingdom Government's visa and homes for Ukraine scheme.

We have established welcome hubs to support displaced Ukrainians who are arriving in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Cairnryan with a place of safety and security. Those will provide meals and accommodation and will triage people to find out what support they need. We will ensure that

everyone is treated with compassion, dignity and respect.

We continue to work closely with the United Kingdom Government to understand when and how people are arriving in Scotland, and we share the frustration of those who want to provide accommodation in Scotland, and the anxiety of those fleeing war, at the slow pace of the Home Office in turning applications into visas. We are working with UK ministers to encourage them to move at a quicker pace, to allow people to arrive as quickly as possible.

Bill Kidd: Does the minister agree that the safeguarding of refugees in the UK is a top priority, and that policies to eradicate the human trafficking, procuring and sexual exploitation of women and girls are an important aspect of protecting those who are more vulnerable to such exploitation, such as lone women and children who are fleeing conflicts and humanitarian crises?

Neil Gray: Yes. It is, of course, vital that those who are fleeing the illegal war in Ukraine are protected as they seek to find a place of safety. Any form of human trafficking or exploitation is completely unacceptable, and I encourage anyone who has concerns about human trafficking to report them to the modern slavery and exploitation helpline or to Police Scotland. We have translated a range of key information on the Scottish Government website and I urge people who are seeking sanctuary in Scotland and those who are assisting them to follow those guidelines.

Police Scotland's national human trafficking unit continues to engage with internal and external partners and enforcement agencies to maintain a high visibility of human trafficking and exploitation risks at points of entry around Scotland.

This week, we have introduced new regulations to ensure that we have in place a safe, speedy and free vetting system. That means that people who are opening their homes to displaced people from Ukraine can apply for expedited disclosure checks of the same level of scrutiny as the initial checks that are carried out for those who work with children or vulnerable adults.

Ukrainian Refugees (Support)

6. Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support Ukrainian refugees will receive after arriving at a welcome hub in Scotland. (S6O-00947)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): Multi-agency teams will be on hand at our welcome hubs to triage people, assess their needs and provide support such as

healthcare, translation services, clothes, food, temporary accommodation and trauma support.

The people who come here from Ukraine have a right to work and to access social security and public funds, so we will ensure that they are aware of and get access to the wide range of services and support that they need. Welcome packs in Ukrainian will provide information on accessing a range of support, translators will be on hand to help and trauma experts will be on call.

Siobhian Brown: I have been contacted by many constituents who are looking to host refugees fleeing Ukraine. How is the Scottish Government co-ordinating with local authorities to ensure that refugees and hosts are given proper support?

Neil Gray: I thank Siobhian Brown for giving me the opportunity to thank people around Scotland for their incredible generosity in wanting to open their homes to those forced to flee Ukraine.

Scotland has a wealth of experience and learning from previous refugee schemes. As set out in the "New Scots Refugee Integration Strategy 2018-2022", we have a tried and tested approach to integrating refugees into our communities, schools and workplaces.

We are working closely with a range of partners to develop clear guidance for local authorities and individual hosts, as well as to put in place support for Ukrainians who arrive through that route. We are also encouraging all those who wish to provide support to look at the Ready Scotland website, which has information about local refugee support groups. I encourage people to reach out to those groups, to see what more they might be able to do to help.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Sharon Dowe, who joins us remotely, has a brief supplementary question.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): Much has been made of the supersponsorship scheme, but what of the next steps? As of last night, officials at the City of Edinburgh Council said that they were still waiting for data on those who have expressed an interest in hosting Ukrainians, so that they can start pairing refugees with homes. Meanwhile, hundreds of Scots who are ready to open their doors are still waiting for an update. Has that data been made available to councils since last night? How many Ukrainians who have arrived in Scotland have been matched with a home?

Neil Gray: Sharon Dowe will share my frustration at the slow pace of receipt of data from the United Kingdom Government. At the end of the day, we are still reliant on the UK Government's immigration system in order to work at speed.

To be fair, an incredible effort was made following the First Minister's conception of the supersponsor idea on one Friday to getting the system up and running on the following Friday. However, since then, it has been a very slow process in getting applications turned into visas and in our receiving the data.

I appreciate the frustration that the member feels. We feel it too, and we are asking the UK Government to move much faster to make sure that those who are offering support with accommodation here in Scotland and those fleeing war in Ukraine get what they need as quickly as possible.

Post-Brexit Funding Arrangements (Engagement)

7. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture has had with United Kingdom Government ministers regarding the post-Brexit funding arrangements, including the UK shared prosperity fund, which is due to launch this Friday, on 1 April. (S6O-00948)

The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Scottish ministers have always maintained that the replacement for European Union funding that is included in the UK shared prosperity fund ought to be devolved to the Scottish Government in line with the principles of devolved Government and that investment must support national economic priorities.

In the past month, my colleague Richard Lochhead has met UK Government ministers twice to advocate for Scotland. Although no date has been confirmed by the UK Government for the fund's intended launch next month, I am optimistic that future engagement can continue to take place to ensure that the shared prosperity fund aligns with Scotland's policy aims.

Kenneth Gibson: Obviously, given that the fund is due to launch tomorrow, it is disappointing that the cabinet secretary still awaits information. The Finance and Public Administration Committee has been advised in evidence that the shared prosperity funds are being top-sliced from Barnett consequentials—a situation that did not apply before Brexit. Will the cabinet secretary confirm whether that is, indeed, the case? If that is the case, will the shared prosperity funds that are directed by Westminster simply reduce those that are available to this and other devolved Administrations?

Angus Robertson: That is a key question from Kenneth Gibson. Although the United Kingdom Government has outlined the overall value of the

shared prosperity fund, Scotland's specific allocation is still to be determined, and it remains unclear what methods will be used to allocate the fund nationally. There has been no indication that it will be top-sliced from Barnett consequentials. In November 2020, Scottish Government officials calculated that replacing the European structural funds, including the European territorial co-operation and LEADER programmes, would require £183 million of funding per year.

Maurice Golden (North East Scotland) (Con): The UK shared prosperity fund and the levelling up fund are fantastic ways in which the UK Government can invest in Scotland. Does the cabinet secretary agree how disappointing it is that Dundee City Council failed to submit a bid for the first round of the levelling up fund?

Angus Robertson: Despite the engagement to which I drew attention a moment ago, there is a strong likelihood that, in financial terms, the UK shared prosperity fund will be insufficient. Last autumn, the announcement of the UK spending review noted that the fund will provide only £2.6 billion over three years across the whole of the UK, with £560 million of that already ring fenced for the UK Government's multiply programme on adult numeracy. That falls far short of the calculations of what is necessary to maintain the levels of investment of the European Union structural funds. Replacing the European regional development fund and the European social fund in Scotland would require £162 million per year, and an additional £21 million would be required each year to continue the work of the LEADER and European territorial co-operation programmes.

I would welcome the co-operation of Scottish Conservative Party members to apply pressure on the UK Government to at least match the commitment that was shown to Scotland by the European Union, which the UK has not done so far.

Cultural Attractions (Support for Local Authorities)

8. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting local authorities to make best use of their cultural attractions and facilities. (S6O-00949)

The Minister for Culture, Europe and International Development and Minister with special responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine (Neil Gray): In 2021-22, we have provided councils with an overall Covid-19 support package of up to £1.5 billion. It is for locally elected representatives to decide how best to use resources to deliver culture services.

We are continuing to work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and others towards

recovery and renewal of the culture sector, including at local level. I recently met COSLA's community wellbeing spokesperson and look forward to meeting the culture conveners group soon after May's elections.

Creative Scotland supports culture at local level, including through its place partnerships, with a range of local authorities across the country.

Alexander Stewart: Local authorities' spending per head on cultural attractions varies greatly across Scotland. Even before the pandemic, Clackmannanshire, which is in my region, had one of the lowest spends per head in the country, at just £2.01 in 2019-20. What action will be taken to support the cultural sector in Clackmannanshire, to ensure that it makes a strong recovery from the pandemic?

Neil Gray: We place great value on the cultural recovery that we want to see in our facilities, events, attractions and arts and creative sector. We have a great understanding that it is not just an economic recovery that will be important, but a wellbeing recovery. Over the past two years, we have all suffered from not being able to attend the facilities, events and attractions that bring us great joy, as we would have wanted to. Re-opening will have a converse affect, and will, we hope, help our wellbeing. We will continue to work with Clackmannanshire Council, which is well led, and many other local authorities, so that we can continue to ensure that our culture facilities are well looked after.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Public libraries are a vital social and cultural hubs in communities in Scotland, including in my constituency. Will the minister provide an update on the roll-out of the public library Covid relief fund, as libraries continue to play their full part in supporting wellbeing during the pandemic recovery?

Neil Gray: Yes, I will. This week, we announced the final tranche of the support through that fund. Seven libraries received, I think, £200,000, which brings the total funding through that fund to £1.25 million. We will continue to support public libraries, because we understand the clear role that they play in local communities, in terms of culture and heritage. They also have a wider role to play, and we will be looking to support our public libraries to continue the good work that they are doing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio question time.

Investment in Natural Capital

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a statement by Màiri McAllan on interim principles for responsible investment in natural capital. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:26

The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan): The recent United Nations 26th conference of the parties—COP26—in Glasgow highlighted Scotland's international reputation for its natural capital and supporting policies. Those include the First Minister's endorsement of the leaders pledge for nature to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and our significant public investment in woodland creation and peatland restoration as nature-based solutions to climate change.

Our natural capital has become an increasingly attractive proposition for private investment. That investment is largely focused on delivering carbon management, but it also supports a wide range of benefits, including economic development—especially in rural areas—biodiversity improvements, resilience of food supply and natural flood management. That investment is welcome and necessary, but it must be responsible. We share concerns about the need to ensure equitable sharing of the benefits of that investment with local communities and wider society, including when the investment involves the purchase of land or carbon rights for the purpose of carbon offsetting.

That is why, during COP26, we emphasised our ambition to develop a values-led and high-integrity market for natural capital. We want responsible investment that delivers a wide range of our environmental, social and economic policy priorities; that is high integrity, so that it verifiably restores and enhances nature; and that is genuinely values led, so that it supports a just transition and involves and benefits communities. That commitment is now also embedded in our national strategy for economic transformation. Private investment in natural capital is critical to enabling the pace and scale of action required to fulfil Scotland's world-leading ambitions on addressing climate change and halting ecological decline. We have already committed significant public funding to the natural economy—more than £500 million over this session of Parliament—but the fact remains that no Government can, alone, meet the funding required.

The Green Finance Institute has estimated the investment gap for nature restoration in Scotland to be around £20 billion over the next decade. We are determined to ensure that that necessary private investment is socially responsible and provides wider public benefit, including for our local communities. As stated in our global capital investment plan, we want to work with investors who share our values so that we encourage the right investment in our natural capital. We want to work with communities to ensure that they are empowered and poised to benefit from our journey to net zero.

Our approach offers significant opportunity across our economy in terms of increased investment in good jobs and fair work, in land management, and in the supporting fintech, agritech and supply chain sectors.

NatureScot estimates that there are currently around 200,000 nature-based jobs in Scotland and that the sector has been responsible for a third of the jobs growth in Scotland over the past five years. Increasing the right kind of private investment will be important for continued jobs growth, especially in rural communities, and will also provide new income streams for farmers and land managers. We know that young people are increasingly interested in nature-based careers that help to fight the twin nature and climate emergencies.

In order to restore our natural capital, ensure a just transition, deliver good jobs and secure a vibrant future for our rural communities, we must design a market for investment with those objectives at its heart. Today, we are setting out our ambition and strategic direction to support and promote the type of activity that we want to see—striking a balance between, on the one hand, the need for responsible private sector investment that supports our policy priorities, such as climate change mitigation, fair work and a just transition, and, on the other, the need to support community rights and ambitions.

There are examples from other industries, such as onshore wind energy, of how the benefits of land-based private investment can successfully be shared with local communities. Furthermore, our groundbreaking land rights and responsibilities statement, published in 2017, sets out principles that underpin the Scottish Government's vision for a stronger relationship between the people of Scotland and our land, where ownership and use of land deliver greater public benefits through a democratically accountable and transparent system of land rights and responsibilities. We are currently conducting the statutory five-yearly review of the land rights and responsibilities statement to assess whether it needs to be

updated to remain fit for purpose and future challenges.

The Scottish Government is committed to that and to community empowerment. For example, the new Scottish land fund is now open and has awarded a total of £6.5 million to more than 80 projects so far this year. The budget for this year is £10 million and will be doubled to £20 million by the end of this session of Parliament.

The new land reform bill will aim to ensure that the public interest is considered in transfers of particularly large-scale land holdings in order to tackle problematic scale and concentration that can hamper community ambition. We will also aim to introduce a pre-emption in favour of community buy-out where the public interest test applies and where it is appropriate to do so.

Our proposals will complement existing community right-to-buy mechanisms and guidance that supports community engagement in land-based decision making. That includes our guidance on engaging communities in decisions relating to land and the Scottish Land Commission's good practice programme, which comprises a series of land rights and responsibilities protocols.

In addition, the Scottish Government is working in close collaboration with partner agencies. That includes the work that the Scottish Land Commission is taking forward as a matter of urgency to help us to better understand the implications of investment in natural capital on the land market.

In advance of more formal policy developments, today we are publishing a set of interim principles for responsible private investment in Scotland's natural capital. The interim principles set out our ambition for the market in Scotland and spell out our commitment to ensuring that the interests of thriving and empowered local communities and the wider public are at the very heart of our approach, both now and in the future.

As a priority action under the national strategy for economic transformation, we will develop new market infrastructure, rules and governance arrangements for responsible private investment in natural capital. The approach will build on existing investment mechanisms, such as the Woodland Carbon Code and "The Peatland Code". Market development will take time to come to fruition and will depend on partnership work across the public, private and third sectors.

On that note, I extend my gratitude to the economic, environmental and societal agencies whose insight and expertise have been instrumental in the development of the principles. As I mentioned, Government cannot achieve the scale of our ambition alone—we need to build a

broad coalition of the willing. That collaborative approach will be continued through discussion with communities, land managers, investors and other stakeholders on the interim principles and how they will apply in practice, and to help us to develop best practice and options for market infrastructure.

To that end, we will engage on the interim principles through existing initiatives such as the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital, the Scottish nature finance pioneers group and networks such as those used by the Scottish Land Commission to support the land rights and responsibilities statement. Collaboration will be critical to achieving our aims.

No Government has all the answers or has all this worked out yet. However, we are here and ready to lean in to the challenge, alongside those who share our commitment to a high-integrity, values-led market and to learning by doing. That will not be easy, but the things that are worth doing seldom are. I hope that we can all get behind the challenge, and I very much look forward to working with Parliament to turn the vision into reality.

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

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I thank the minister for prior sight of her statement.

The statement goes some way towards addressing the interim principles for responsible investment in natural capital, and we welcome aspects that the minister has touched on today. However, it falls short of the expectations of many people in rural Scotland. Although the Conservatives support investment in natural capital, it has to be done responsibly and while ensuring that rural livelihoods are not lost in the process—a sentiment that I believe we all share.

I recently spoke to the Scottish Tenant Farmers Association about the loss of agricultural land as a result of the expansion of large-scale forestry by companies that are seeking to offset their carbon footprint. We have seen not only tenant farmers but other rural workers, including gamekeepers and ghillies, moved off their land. Tenant farmers' primary concerns are around agricultural tenancy laws, which allow for the facilitation of the disposal of land for greenwashing.

Alongside the new interim principles, will the minister consider further supporting tenant farmers so that they, too, can benefit from net zero and

from these principles? Will she seek to ensure that tenancy laws in Scotland reflect the need to prevent productive agricultural land being lost to so-called Highland clearances?

Màiri McAllan: I thank Rachael Hamilton for welcoming what the Government has set out today, in so far as she did so. I am very aware of both the opportunities and the challenges that are presented by the move to net zero, and of the centrality of our land within that. That is partly why we are here today. Within that, I am aware of the concerns of farmers, including tenant farmers, and crofters. I and my colleagues across Government—because this is a genuinely cross-Government effort—engage regularly with farmers, crofters and tenants.

To give Rachael Hamilton some comfort—I hope—on the extent to which the Government is aware of that issue, I will read from principle 6 of the principles that we are publishing today, which is headed “Investment that supports diverse and productive land ownership”. Point 3 states:

“Where there are leases or other forms of tenure in place, for example in agricultural tenancies or crofting tenure, investors should identify and engage relevant parties early in decision making and consider opportunities for shared benefit.”

As I said, this statement today is the beginning, not the end. Following the publication of the principles, there will be a process involving further engagement and the development of best practice. I hope that that reference to inclusion gives Rachael Hamilton some comfort on the point that she raised.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement. However, given that an important statement on ferries was bumped for this one, it really ought to have contained a lot more substance. Today's statement does nothing to address the fact that Scotland's land market continues to be dominated by private investment and that wealthy individuals continue to own vast amounts of land.

The Scottish Government is seeking to improve transparency around land ownership through the register of persons holding a controlled interest in land, but the enforcement measures that have been announced for non-compliance with the register are weak. A £5,000 fine will not deter those wealthy landowners who can afford to pay. Can the minister confirm whether the Scottish Government will remove public subsidies from landowners who refuse to comply?

Although the Scottish Government has published the interim principles today, it is unclear how landowners will be made to comply with them. Will the principles be incorporated into the land

rights and responsibilities statement? Will the Scottish Land Commission be given the powers to turn those interim principles into an enforceable code of practice for landowners?

Màiri McAllan: I share Mercedes Villalba's concerns and I am considering all of them as we develop this work and the land reform bill.

However, this Parliament voted for what were then—and are still—regarded as the world's most ambitious targets for emissions reduction.

Mercedes Villalba: Will the minister answer the question?

Màiri McAllan: If the member gives me a chance, I am answering the question.

Because the Parliament voted for the targets, it is incumbent on all of us to make sure that we achieve them. In Scotland, we are fortunate that we have ample scope in our natural world to sequester carbon and support diversity, but it is absolutely clear that the Government cannot fund that work alone. There is a £20 billion investment gap between what the public sector can do and what is needed in order to do the land-based work that will allow us to fulfil our targets.

The member is asking me to answer her question, but I am afraid that many of the questions that she has posed today are part of legislation for which the consultation is still being developed, and it would be inappropriate for me to come to the chamber and divulge that information prior to public consultation. However, I assure her that I am considering all of that work, as well as the review of the land rights and responsibilities statement and the advice that I will get from the Scottish Land Commission on what are informally being called "green lairds". All of that will be fed into the legislation as it is developed.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Those principles clearly touch on issues that will be of huge interest to the agricultural sector, so how do we take the crofters and tenant farmers with us on that journey as we seek to restore and enhance nature?

Màiri McAllan: Jim Fairlie is absolutely right that, when it comes to Scotland's land, our farmers and crofters are key. Not only do we rely on them to produce our food and fulfil the Government's good food nation ambition that we are rolling out, but their stewardship of our land makes them an absolutely key player in the delivery of a net zero Scotland that lives in harmony with nature. Therefore, I assure the member, just as I did Rachael Hamilton, that the Scottish Government is seized of the importance of supporting farmers to deliver sustainable food production and to fulfil what we need them to do—and what they are well poised to do—in relation to climate change

mitigation and support for biodiversity. The member knows that my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands is undertaking that work through the agriculture reform implementation oversight board—ARIOB—but it is also front and centre of the work that we are publishing today. I refer the member again to principle 1,

"investment that delivers integrated land use",

principle 6,

"investment that supports ... productive land ownership"

and principle 6.3, which I read to Rachael Hamilton.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Last year, against the Scottish Government target of 20,000 hectares, 5,600 hectares of peatland were restored. That is the fourth year in a row that that target has been missed. Ambitions and targets are relevant only if there is a route to achieve them. There is a lack of qualified men and women in the green economy. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that the education system is supported to develop green economy qualifications, in order to enable the national capital investments, which the minister talks about, to be realised?

Màiri McAllan: Again, the member touches on the crux of the issue that we are facing. The public sector has a role to play in setting targets, including those on emissions reduction and peatland restoration. We can invest money to provide stability in the market, and we are doing that with peatland restoration. We have committed £0.25 billion over the next decade, but there is, inevitably, a gap. The principles that we are publishing today are exactly about trying to rise to the challenge of that gap by leveraging in private investment, but doing so in a responsible way.

The member is absolutely right to mention the importance of skills, because not only are they essential for all the work that we need to undertake in woodland creation, peatland restoration and marine habitat, but young people are continually crying out to be involved in those areas—they want to be part of the green sectors of the future. A number of pieces of work are being undertaken in my portfolio, including a review of land-based learning, and investments are being made in land-based work as part of our skills guarantee. I would like to assure him that we are trying to rise to that challenge, not only because it is necessary but because young people are calling out for us to do so.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank the minister for her statement, which highlighted that the estimated investment gap for nature restoration in Scotland is around £20 billion over

the next decade and that Government alone cannot address that gap. As she has said, responsible private investment will be critical to that, so could she please expand on how the Scottish Government will balance the need for private investment in a way that ensures harmony with its land reform ambitions and with any aspirations that are expressed by communities?

Màiri McAllan: As I have said today, we are absolutely committed to taking action to ensure that increasing levels of natural capital investment in Scotland are delivering benefits for local communities and wider society. That is part of fulfilling not only our legal commitments to emissions reduction but, equally, our important legal commitment to a just transition. I have mentioned already the package of work that I am expecting from the Scottish Land Commission to help the Scottish Government find a pathway to balancing the need for private sector investment in natural capital with community rights and with that all-important legal commitment to a just transition.

That is all reflected in what we are publishing today, which are the principles for our values-led high-integrity market. All of that is set out in the papers that have been published. Moving forward, we will take what we have published today, which I am pleased to note is already being welcomed by stakeholders, to communities, crofters, farmers and investors. We will use those principles as a vehicle to better understand best practice and to inform how we set the rules for the market. A number of land-based pieces of legislation are due to come through Parliament this term, which I expect all of this work to feed into.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister's statement is vital and detailed, especially regarding the green lairds who have already been buying up huge swathes of Scotland. Will she bring forward proposals to regulate our land market to stop land being bought and used when there is no public interest? Will she confirm whether the right of pre-emption for communities will mean that they no longer have to register an interest in land?

Màiri McAllan: I thank Rhoda Grant for that question; again, I know that she cares very much about this issue, and she and I have had exchanges about it in Parliament before.

I would like to assure Rhoda Grant that this work, as well as the other work that is being taken across the land reform and environment portfolio and in others, is entirely geared towards the objective that a net zero Scotland should be a country in which more people live and work sustainably on our land, and not fewer. Community empowerment is a huge part of that.

There are examples of how we can empower our communities. It can be through jobs, for example, as has been mentioned before. It can be through community benefit. I think that all of us across the chamber will have examples in our constituencies and regions of town centres that have been transformed by funds that have flowed from renewables development.

As regards the right of pre-emption, I have to tell Ms Grant what I told her colleague. I am still very closely considering the content of the land reform bill and how it will function, but I hope to publish the consultation shortly.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): The minister made mention in her statement of jobs in rural communities. Is there anything that the Scottish Government is able to do to ensure that private investors make a contribution to the rural communities that they will come into contact with?

Màiri McAllan: The member touches on another important issue. There are changes in the market, and the centrality of our land to our climate and nature aspirations is driving this quite rapid development in our market. That presents opportunities and it presents risks. In what we are publishing today, the Scottish Government is seeking to mitigate the risks and rise to the opportunities. Some of those opportunities could be for community benefit, as I discussed in my response to Rhoda Grant, and they could be for jobs and they could be for a series of other things.

On jobs, as I said to the member on the Tory benches, we know that people are increasingly looking for jobs that will help them to contribute to the restoration of our natural world. Not only that, those jobs could allow young people from constituencies such as mine, who perhaps feel that they have to leave their local communities in order to find opportunities, to stay and contribute to something substantial.

On the specifics of Emma Roddick's question, I draw members' attention to principle 2,

"Investment that delivers public, private and community benefit",

and to point 1 under that, which reads,

"Investment in and use of Scotland's natural capital should create benefits that are shared between public, private and community interests contributing to a just transition."

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I thank the minister for early sight of her statement and add my welcome to the long-overdue recognition at COP26 of the role that nature and biodiversity must play in helping us to keep global warming below 1.5°C. The Scottish Liberal Democrats believe that nature restoration and rewilding are key to achieving our net zero and biodiversity

targets. Will the minister commit to setting additional targets for rewilding of publicly owned land and will she say how she will ensure that proper due diligence is carried into any private investors?

Màiri McAllan: I tend not to use the term “rewilding” because I sometimes worry that it could mean rewilding to the absence of people. As I have said, my and the Government’s vision for a net zero Scotland is of a rural Scotland with more people living and working sustainably on the land. Although there are aspects of rewilding that we support, which can be actions ranging from very small scale to landscape scale, I prefer to use the terms “rewilding” and “repeopling” together, which I know is something that the member will appreciate.

As regards targets, I will not pre-empt the content of some of the work that my colleague Lorna Slater will be taking forward in a natural environment bill this session. I have no doubt that Ms Slater will be keen to engage with the member on that.

Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Can the minister say more about the way in which the principles will continue to reshape people’s relationship with the land in Scotland and the pattern of that relationship, given that the relationship has often been skewed historically by iniquitous patterns of land ownership and use?

Màiri McAllan: That is a very important point, because that iniquitous pattern of land ownership is partly why we are here today and it is why the Government maintains an unwavering commitment to continuing Scotland’s land reform journey. Too often in decades and centuries gone by, developments in Scotland have happened at the expense of communities. As part of a just transition, we cannot allow that to happen again; we must learn from the mistakes of the past.

We want empowered communities to be able to benefit from the opportunities that land and land use change will present over the next 20 years. As I have mentioned, the principles that we are publishing today will be taken forward as part of an on-going engagement process. That will allow us to develop an evidence base to ensure that best practice is being undertaken and it will inform future laws including part of the land reform bill and others.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement. It is heartening to hear the Government reiterate its commitment to community empowerment through mechanisms such as the pre-emption in favour of community buyout where a public interest test applies. Will the minister outline what is being done to support

communities to get organised so that they can grasp the opportunities that will arise as a result of the new legal mechanisms delivered by the Scottish Government and the Greens?

Màiri McAllan: I thank Ariane Burgess for that question, because I agree that, although we have a job in the Executive and the legislature to make sure that the rules are there to facilitate land reform, it is equally important that communities are able to utilise those and be supported to do so. Thankfully, communities in Scotland have more options than ever before to take ownership of land and assets, including several distinct rights to buy in existing legislation, and they can now choose which route to community ownership best suits their aspirations. Measures in the forthcoming land reform bill will aim to complement what has gone before and support existing rights.

However, communities ought not to wait for the next land reform bill but should use the opportunities that are currently available to them, which include grant support to help them with the acquisition of land and land assets through the Scottish land fund, which I mentioned in my statement. Grants of up to £100,000 are available as part of that fund.

My feeling is that the land reform laws that have gone before have created a culture in which communities feel more able to use and buy assets to suit them; that they do not always use the legislation to do that is a good thing. However, the march of land reform in Scotland continues apace.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The minister talked at length about the need for private investment in natural capital and said that there was a £20 million gap. However, I do not think that I heard in the statement how the Scottish Government will encourage and incentivise individuals and firms to make those investments, what the identity of those firms and individuals might be and where, for example, they are registered as companies. Can the minister assist me now?

Màiri McAllan: The question of leveraging and mobilising funding is a good one. Ultimately, investors value certainty, and the principles that we have published today provide clear policy signalling that tells investors where we stand in Scotland, which will allow them to take investment decisions based on that knowledge and on the certainty of the Government’s position.

As I said to the member’s colleague, the interim principles are a start and not the end. They are designed to be a vehicle for engagement with the investment community that will ensure that we establish a market that works for investors and communities.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Following on from Liam Kerr's question, can the minister go into more detail about the kind of natural restoration enhancements she envisages private sector investment bringing about, and does she perhaps have a current example thereof in Scotland or elsewhere?

Màiri McAllan: Yes. That is another good question, which goes to the heart of why we are here. I bring my comments back, again, to the fact that Parliament set world-leading climate targets and is committed to treating the climate emergency and the ecological emergency as twin crises. We are very fortunate in Scotland that marvels of our natural world will come to our rescue in those challenges.

The member asks for examples. Woodland creation is a key example. In the past few years, Scotland has planted 80 per cent of all trees that have gone into the ground across the United Kingdom. Another example is peatland restoration, which is truly a win-win in the climate and nature emergencies, as it sequesters carbon, supports biodiversity and creates green job opportunities.

Onshore and offshore renewables are, of course, other good examples of land-based investment, and an example of increasing importance is blue carbon, which includes seagrass and salt marsh restoration.

All of those nature-based processes will help us take on the climate emergency, and all of them are opportunities that Scotland is so well placed to utilise.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement. There will be a very short pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Scotland's Vision for Trade (Annual Report)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is a statement by Ivan McKee on "Scotland's Vision for Trade Annual Report March 2022". The minister will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interruptions or interventions.

14:59

The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee): Scotland is a proud trading nation. For centuries, we have exported goods and services around the globe. Today, our food and drink, higher education and science and technology exports, to name but a few, are renowned the world over. In Scotland, we recognise that international trade is a force for good. However, it can present us with difficult challenges—from how we respond to world events outwith our control to how we ensure that the benefits of trade are shared equitably and responsibly.

In recent years, the complex system of international trading connections has come under considerable strain. The Covid-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to the supply of critical products. The United Kingdom's hard exit from the European Union compounded those challenges, creating barriers to our access to the goods and services that we take for granted and to our ability to share what we produce with our neighbours.

In January 2021, amid that disruption and uncertainty, I presented "Scotland's Vision for Trade" to the Parliament. The vision offers a longer-term perspective on and a coherent approach to trade, and a set of guiding principles that we can use to underpin our trade decisions and relationships.

I am pleased to present the first annual report, which details our progress so far in implementing the vision. The context in which I do so is, of course, marked by further dramatic shifts in the global trading system. The need to apply principles to international trade decisions has become even more important. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has resulted in a new global crisis and humanitarian catastrophe. Trade and economic relationships with Russia have been a particular focus of the co-ordinated worldwide response. The vision provides our guiding principles as we stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

The report documents how we have been putting the core principles of inclusive growth, wellbeing, sustainability, net zero and good

governance into practice to meet the needs of Scotland's people and businesses. It sets out the actions that we have taken to implement our vision, our progress in using the levers that are available to the Scottish Government and how we have sought to influence the UK Government in areas in which levers are currently reserved. As I said last year when laying out our vision to Parliament,

"actions speak louder than words."—[*Official Report*, 26 January 2021; c 22.]

I will therefore take a few moments to highlight a few of the actions that we have taken so far.

Last year, Glasgow hosted one of the most important gatherings of world leaders this century. Scotland can be proud of the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—for many reasons. One of those reasons is that it marked the end of our overseas support and promotion activities that were solely focused on fossil fuel goods and services. We made that commitment in "Scotland's Vision for Trade".

Looking ahead, we are turning our focus to supporting the energy and climate transition, using momentum from COP26 to deliver opportunities for Scotland. For example, creating trade opportunities is a core part of our hydrogen action plan, which will help to make Scotland a leading nation in the production of reliable, competitive and sustainable hydrogen.

In this first year, we have focused on improving the trading environment for Scotland's businesses, which can face a number of barriers to trading internationally. Something as simple as product labelling requirements can deter companies from entering a market or increase costs, and addressing such market barriers can open up significant opportunities for businesses. We have therefore developed a methodology to identify and prioritise the most significant market access barriers that affect Scottish trade, so that we can begin to address them.

In taking advantage of trade opportunities, we have consistently sought to strike the right balance between competing priorities in order to ensure that trade rules do not jeopardise other important aims. The vision provides us with a framework for doing so. For example, our green port proposals adapt the UK's free port model to help to deliver a net zero economy and a fair work first approach, and our notification to the World Trade Organization of our single-use plastics regulations allowed us to demonstrate transparency and openness with regard to the scrutiny that comes with effective global governance, while ensuring that trade rules do not prevent Scotland from meeting ambitious environmental targets.

However, as the report makes clear, there is much more that we can do to advance Scotland's economic, social and environmental aims through trade. We are at the beginning of implementing our vision, and we are open, honest and ambitious about the work that lies ahead of us.

Actions in that regard will not be taken in isolation from other strategies, but will underpin and support them by helping to create optimal trading conditions for Scotland's businesses. For example, the vision will directly support the national strategy for economic transformation's aim to strengthen Scotland's position in new markets and industries and to generate new, well-paid jobs from a just transition to net zero, and it will support Scotland's export growth plan, "A Trading Nation".

For our economy, that includes identifying further opportunities to make it easier for Scottish businesses to trade digitally, while boosting our international recognition as an ethical digital nation. Those objectives are also set out in the recently published technology sector export plan.

For Scotland's people, in recognition that there are winners and losers from trade, we will build our evidence base on what those differential impacts are and how we can address them. That approach aligns with our ambitions for our economy to drive progress towards a fairer and more equal society, as set out in our national strategy for economic transformation.

For the planet, we will continue to build coherence between our climate, environmental and trade ambitions, while developing our understanding of the strengths and opportunities that are presented by our environmental goods and services sectors.

Although we are clear about the actions that Scotland can and should take in relation to trade, we also rely on others acting in a way that supports our economy, our people and the planet. As the report details, we have pressed the UK Government to use the trade-related levers that sit with Westminster to support Scotland. For example, since leaving the European Union against Scotland's wishes, the UK Government has pursued a series of ad hoc free trade agreements with countries around the world. Although they have been presented as a benefit of Brexit, in reality, the expected economic benefits from those deals are tiny, and they in no way compensate for the economic impact of our exit from the EU.

Given the impact of those agreements across a wide range of devolved and reserved issues, we and the other devolved nations have repeatedly called for a full role for the devolved Administrations and legislatures in all trade

negotiations. Despite the UK Government's refusal, we have engaged fully on each and every agreement, pressing for greater opportunities for Scotland's strong services sectors and the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers for our priority goods exports. In doing so, we have drawn on the principles set out in the vision to promote and protect Scottish trade priorities.

Our call for increased involvement is not just about process. The UK Government recently signed free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand, both of which raised issues of profound importance to Scotland, but our lack of a formal role led to our concerns being ignored. We have consistently pressed the UK Government to protect Scottish producers from imports that originate from countries with different environmental and animal welfare standards. Appropriate protection was not included in either agreement. Now, for example, a Scottish premium beef exporter risks being undercut by competitors from Australia and New Zealand who are not competing on a level playing field of like-for-like standards.

We also continue to press the UK Government in other areas. We continue to push for the UK Government to build on the terms of the trade and co-operation agreement and deepen the UK's relationship with the EU, as our nearest and largest trading partner. We are also engaging with the UK Government to ensure that Scottish interests are identified, protected and promoted at the World Trade Organization, which reflects commitments made in the vision.

In the vision for trade, we issued an open invitation to individuals, businesses and other organisations in Scotland, and globally, to discuss trade policy with us. I reiterate that call for engagement. Those inputs are crucial to our work on implementing the vision, and they will ensure that our approach is informed by their experience and expertise.

Last year, I told the Parliament that the vision made clear the kind of country that we want to be, with strong principles to guide how we do business around the world so that people, companies and other Governments know who we are and what we represent as a nation. One year on, the report demonstrates that we remain absolutely committed to openly, transparently and unapologetically setting high standards for ourselves and for others.

I began my statement by reflecting on Scotland's proud trading legacy. In a context of turbulent global affairs and strains on the international trading system that are unprecedented in modern times, Scotland does not forget its principles, nor does it compromise

them when it suits. Today, we continue that legacy.

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 would press their request-to-speak buttons now.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank the minister for the early sight of his statement.

In the first paragraph of his statement, he rightly mentions that the higher education sector is one of the key sectors when it comes to improving a range of economic factors. He is absolutely right about that. However, Universities Scotland has commented that Scotland is not sufficiently competitive when it comes to economic growth, and that was one of the unanimous conclusions of the Parliament's Finance and Public Administration Committee.

I will read a short section of the Universities Scotland comment on that. It says:

"The research excellence grant has declined 18.2% in real terms since 2014/15".

It continues:

"Over the same time period, Scotland's universities have won a progressively smaller percentage share of UKRI resources, from a 15.4% share to a 12.9% share."

What does the minister think is the reason for Scotland not winning so many of those research grant projects, and what is being done to address that?

Secondly, the minister talked about improving the trade environment for Scotland's businesses. He will know that one of the big asks of the business community—and, indeed, of the Scottish Funding Council—is that much more needs to be done to upskill and reskill our workforce, and to provide a much greater focus on digital skills, data science and leadership and management skills, by making far more resources available through the national transition training fund. Is that going to happen?

Ivan McKee: On economic growth, as we emerge from Covid, we are determined to continue to grow Scotland's economy. Of course, the biggest drain on our economic growth has been the policy of the UK Westminster Government in taking Scotland out of the European Union against our will. That has had the biggest impact on growth, international trade and investment opportunities for Scotland.

Liz Smith is absolutely right about the world-leading position of Scotland's universities. I have

just got back from Expo 2020 in Dubai. Heriot-Watt University is the biggest international university in the Emirates, which is a fact that we and the university are very proud of. I met the university on its new campus; I also met the University of Strathclyde on its campus in Dubai. Scotland's universities are positioned extremely well—they occupy leading positions around the world. We continue to work with the university sector to promote and develop its profile, and to recognise that it is a cornerstone, not just from the point of view of academic excellence, but in promoting our values, as well as trade and investment opportunities around the world.

We are rightly proud of the fact that Scotland continues to lead Europe in our higher education research and development spend, and we will continue to focus relentlessly on that. As Liz Smith identified, Scotland gains 13 per cent of UK spend on R and D, which is far above our population share. We continue to work in a hugely competitive environment to make sure that Scotland punches above its weight.

Turning to the issue of digital skills, I am sure that Liz Smith will have read “Scotland's Inward Investment Plan: Shaping Scotland's Economy”, which identifies as a key action increasing the number of digitally trained people who are focused on digital careers from 4,000 a year to 10,000 a year. We are on target to achieve that.

On the wider upskilling piece across the economy, Liz Smith will be well aware of the significant funding that the Scottish Government is putting into digital upskilling and reskilling across a range of areas in which that is required for Scotland to maintain its leading position in the key industries of the future.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):

I thank the minister for providing prior sight of his statement.

He is absolutely right to emphasise the importance of trade. Trade is fundamentally important if we want to see improved prosperity and, most importantly, an increased number of high-quality jobs, particularly as we look to transition away from oil, which has been at the top of Scotland's export table for a number of decades.

However, in order to make a difference, it is necessary to have targets, metrics and milestones. I have to say that the annual report and the report on which it is an update are rather light on numbers, which is a surprise, because the 2019 report, “A Trading Nation—a plan for growing Scotland's exports”, did an excellent job of identifying metrics.

Will the Government, in future updates to that plan, commit to a range of metrics, so that we can

measure progress? “A Trading Nation” pointed out that 0.2 per cent of Scotland's gross domestic product is attributable to trade, and set a benchmark of 0.5 per cent. It also identified a number of opportunity gaps in key markets, especially the USA, which accounted for a 10.7 per cent share of the export value gap. Are there any updates available on those core benchmark metrics for our trade?

Similarly, it was identified that 97,000 firms do not export and that 10,500 firms export just 18 per cent of their output. Are any updates available on those numbers? Is an update available on the number of firms that the Scottish Government has assisted in the past year?

The real question that we need to ask ourselves is: what does Scotland want to sell to the world? For future updates to “Scotland's Vision for Trade” to be helpful, we need metrics, so please can we have them?

Ivan McKee: I am delighted to be able to respond to that question by making the member aware that we will soon bring forward an update on “A Trading Nation” and will provide the exact data that he requires. That report is in the final stages of being pulled together, two and a half years after we published the plan. I will also shortly bring forward an update on our foreign direct investment plan, “Shaping Scotland's Economy”, to articulate the progress that we have made there. The member can be assured that a full suite of numbers will be available as part of those updates.

The member should recognise that we are talking about “Scotland's Vision for Trade”, which is one of our four international plans. It sits alongside “A Trading Nation”, which focuses on what we sell around the world and how we sell it and support businesses to sell more, and alongside our inward investment plan, which focuses on how we continue to cement Scotland's position as the leading inward investment attraction in the UK outside of London, as well as our global capital investment plan, which is very much related to the work on natural capital investment that my colleague Màiri McAllan spoke about in the previous statement.

The vision for trade is about our principles and the measures that we take to ensure that those principles are applied. It is about how we trade, rather than what we trade. The other plans in that suite of work focus on the numbers—the member knows that I am hugely focused on those. The report that we are talking about today is about our principles and the concrete actions that we are taking to embed and develop those principles, to ensure good governance of trade and to work with others to take forward environmental, social and

other standards and tackle those aspects of our trading relationships.

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): The minister has said that no trade deal that the UK Government can strike will make up for what Brexit has taken away from Scotland. It is clear that the UK Government is not delivering on our vision for trade but is instead bargaining away Scottish interests. Does the minister agree that, with the full powers of independence, Scotland would be able to make our objectives and values part of our trade decisions and relationships in the future?

Ivan McKee: Governments around the world have a range of levers available to them to influence trade and its impacts. Today's report outlines the progress that we have made, using the levers that are available to us and based on our principles. It also sets out how we have pressed the UK Government to use the levers that are currently reserved to Westminster to act in the interests of Scotland's economy and people, and of our planet.

The UK Government is negotiating a series of ad hoc free-trade agreements which are, as I said, expected to result in tiny increases in the economy that will in no way compensate for the loss of trade as a result of Brexit. The UK Government has no wider strategy and has not prioritised building on the terms of the current trade agreement with the EU, which is our nearest and largest trading partner.

In contrast, our vision for trade is an example of a coherent, strategic and principles-based approach to the trade that Scotland could take forward as an independent country.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): The minister has claimed that his Government seeks to reduce barriers to trade and has outward-looking principles, yet it remains the policy of his Government to put up hard barriers to trade with our closest neighbours and largest trading partners in other parts of the United Kingdom and to destroy the internal market that we enjoy.

To focus on something that he can actually deliver, will the minister advise what the Government is doing to support Scottish business and to increase operations and trade opportunities within our United Kingdom market?

Ivan McKee: The irony of that is remarkable. It is the Tory Government that has done the most damage to Scotland's economy and our trading relationships through its completely misguided approach to Brexit. We would not have agreed with it, but the Tory Government could have done Brexit in a way that maintained our position in the single market and the customs union. However, it

chose to ignore that because of some ridiculous and misguided points of principle and to sacrifice Scottish and UK business on the altar of its ridiculous obsession with being an island apart from the rest of the world. It is complete nonsense.

As is clear in the plan, the Scottish Government is focused on reducing barriers to trade. We will continue to trade with our nearest neighbours. We work with Scottish businesses, as I am sure the member is aware, to support their ability to export internationally and to the rest of the UK. Our staff in Scotland house in London focus on opening up opportunities for Scottish businesses to identify markets beyond Scotland, both within the UK and internationally.

The Government remains focused on reducing trade barriers, supporting Scottish business, increasing investment into Scotland and continuing to deliver on that agenda. We are very proud of that approach, which is in contrast to the policies of the UK Government, which has sought to erect barriers to trade at every opportunity.

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): Valneva's decision to develop and manufacture its Covid-19 vaccine in Scotland is very welcome, as is the recent announcement of a Scottish Enterprise funding package, which will support high-quality jobs. Having one of the largest and most advanced manufacturing sites in the world in West Lothian brings with it substantial opportunities for exports of vaccines across the world. Can the minister say any more about how the Scottish Government and its vision for trade will help to ensure that we realise the substantial opportunities from trade for our life sciences and biotechnology industries?

Ivan McKee: Fiona Hyslop is absolutely right; Scotland's life sciences sector is a key part of Scotland's economy. We identified that in our national strategy for economic transformation. It is a key export sector in "A Trading Nation" and continues to punch above its weight in terms of research and development, investment in the sector and inward investment. We are working with the sector through the industry leadership group to develop a life sciences sector export plan, which will continue that growth.

The Valneva site, which I had the pleasure of visiting on Monday, is remarkable. For Scotland to land such globally significant inward investment to manufacture Covid vaccines and many other vaccines at scale is a testament to the growth and strength of the sector. It has not been helped by the UK Government doing its best to cut the legs away from Valneva through its ridiculous behaviour in relation to the contract that it had with it to supply vaccines. The Scottish Government stepped in, rescued the deal and made sure, through Scottish Enterprise investment, that the

plant will be one of the cornerstones of Scotland's life sciences sector. That is one of the many inward investments that are coming down the track, which will be announced in due course, to continue to support the sector.

The vision for trade supports those aims by identifying actions that the Scottish Government can take to influence the trading environment by building the necessary conditions for growth. That offers opportunities for the life sciences and biotechnology industries right across Scotland.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):

The statement is a bit light on delivery plans, but the Government is committing to a methodology to prioritise addressing identified market access barriers. What is the timescale for using that methodology? Will the minister share the analysis with the Parliament and who will be responsible for delivering the actions that are needed to address those barriers?

Ivan McKee: I point the member in the direction of "A Trading Nation", which is the plan for growing Scotland's exports. It is jam-packed full of targets and I will come back very soon to update the Parliament, as indicated earlier, on the detail of those.

The vision for trade is about how we trade, how we interact with others around the world to be able to take forward our principles and how we interact with them on good governance and tackling environmental challenges. It is also about making sure that we recognise that there are winners and losers from trade, how we position Scotland's trading behaviour in that regard, and taking steps, as I identified, to exit from our support for fossil fuels as part of our net zero mission.

As identified in the vision for trade, we are taking forward a process for identifying market access barriers, where businesses can notify us of them. We can then deal with those directly when we have the scope to do so on the world stage or engage with the UK Government when it has the levers to do so. We will continue to identify and tackle those barriers. As I said, if the member wants to know where we are on the export plan actions, she should come back for the next instalment, when she will hear about the update on "A Trading Nation".

The Presiding Officer: I appreciate that the minister wishes to provide comprehensive responses, but several members would still like to put a question.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):

The minister mentioned the Australia and New Zealand agreements in his statement and pointed out that there was no formal role for Scotland in those. Does he agree with the comments from the

NFU Scotland president, Martin Kennedy, that the UK-New Zealand trade deal

"offers virtually nothing to Scottish farmers and crofters in return but risks undermining our valuable lamb, dairy and horticultural sectors by granting access to large volumes of imported goods"?

Ivan McKee: Yes, I absolutely agree with that, and if the UK Government had engaged us in the full process of those negotiations, as many other international trading partners do with their sub-national jurisdictions, we would be in a much better place.

Unfortunately, however, the UK Government has refused to do that and, as part of our efforts through our vision for trade, we continue to call on it to behave in a much more connected and inclusive manner and to include the devolved Administrations in the process of negotiating those trade deals.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): It is depressing that the minister comes back to the chamber and reports on yet more disputes with the UK Government. His inability to reach agreement with the UK Government is hampering our efforts in this area. We need better from our two Governments. That is important because, since the Scottish National Party came to power 15 years ago, the trade deficit has grown significantly. What will be the effect on the trade deficit of awarding two ferry contracts to Turkey and of constructing in the far east many of Scotland's offshore wind farms?

Ivan McKee: Willie Rennie should be aware that Scotland's trade position is much better than that of the UK as a whole. Recent data has shown that Scotland has a trade surplus in comparison with the rest of the UK. That is something that we want to continue to build on.

As for disagreements, he should listen more closely. We have been keen to engage with the UK Government. We have produced comprehensive documents articulating Scotland's position for all the FTAs that the UK Government has negotiated, and have made those available in plenty of time. Four years ago, we produced a paper articulating how Scotland and other devolved Administrations should be involved in that process.

The UK Government has refused to engage with us on any of that. That is the root cause of the problem. We stand ready to engage with it, present Scotland's case and be part of those trade negotiations, but the UK Government, through its misguided policies, refuses to engage with us on that. If the member wants to make a difference, he should be pushing the UK Government to take the devolved Administrations seriously in that regard.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I am sure that members of all parties will agree how important it is that work continues to ensure that Scotland operates as a good global citizen. The minister touched on that in his statement, when he spoke about values. Will he provide an update on the steps that have been taken to continue to develop and strengthen connections between human rights and trade?

Ivan McKee: “Scotland’s Vision for Trade” importantly recognises that human rights must be a central consideration in our trade policy. As a part of that, we are looking to embed human rights considerations in our trade-related activity, including through additional guidance on due diligence. We will continue to review that and to benchmark ourselves against developments in the European Union. We will also seek to engage constructively on that with the UK Government, including on the negotiation of free trade agreements. The UK Government should ensure that future trading partners comply with fundamental human rights and international law.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I thank the minister for early sight of his statement. The annual report references fossil fuel subsidy reform, and the minister referred to the free trade deals that the UK Government has made with Australia and New Zealand. Will he provide further information about the impacts that those deals will have on our environmental and animal welfare standards, and about how, alongside the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, they will limit our ability to prevent environmental harm and to maintain high regulatory standards in areas such as food safety, energy, animal welfare and climate?

Ivan McKee: We take all those issues extremely seriously, and “Scotland’s Vision for Trade” has that at its core. As I said, we continue to engage with the UK Government to make sure that those principles are embedded in any free trade agreements that it takes forward, and we continue to highlight areas in which that is not the case. The vision for trade, which is recognised internationally as a benchmark on how to trade in such a manner, has that at its very core, and we are proud of the fact that that allows us to articulate those important issues of how we trade as much as what we trade, and to make sure that they are absolutely central to Scotland’s approach to international trade.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): After today, the devolved Government is ending overseas trade support for oil and gas service companies. Does the minister agree that it will be left up to local authorities in the north-east to defend the thousands of jobs of workers in that sector, and will he take the opportunity to

apologise to the people of the north-east for this latest betrayal by the SNP-Green coalition of chaos?

Ivan McKee: I hate to break it to the member, but the UK Government is doing the same, in withdrawing support from businesses that are focused solely on fossil fuel exports.

That is absolutely the right thing to do. It allows us to refocus our support. We are still spending the same amount of money on supporting those businesses; we are just focusing it on businesses that are transitioning to the renewables sector, rather than businesses that are not.

Frankly, the member should also know that the vast majority of businesses in the oil and gas sector, which I meet regularly, are well down the road of transitioning away from sole reliance on oil and gas to renewables. For the member to encourage them not to transition is absolutely counter to what he is trying to achieve, and if such businesses do not transition it will be harmful to the economy of Scotland and those whom he represents.

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): Edinburgh and south-east Scotland city region deal recently approved a £30 million investment in the food and drink innovation hub at Queen Margaret University in East Lothian. East Lothian Food and Drink is the sector’s only business improvement district in Scotland. The sector is one of our major growth areas.

With the continued effects of Brexit still impacting on the sector, what can the vision for trade do to support growth in the food and drink sector in East Lothian and Scotland?

Ivan McKee: The Scottish food and drink sector is renowned around the world for its high-quality standards and provenance, and our support through Scotland’s food and drink export plan helps the industry to exploit the most significant international opportunities. That sits alongside the food and drink sector recovery plan, which mitigates the impact of Brexit and Covid.

The vision for trade supports that by identifying actions that the Scottish Government can take to improve the trading environment to benefit the sector. We are keen that new free-trade agreements offer opportunities for Scottish exports, although of course they will not compensate for the barriers that the UK Government has erected between Scotland and the EU.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the statement on “Scotland’s Vision for Trade.”

Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item is a debate on motion S6M-03864, in the name of Keith Brown, on the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

15:32

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):

I am delighted to open the stage 1 debate on the general principles of the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill. I thank the convener and members of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee for their scrutiny of the bill and their stage 1 report. I am grateful to those who provided views to the committee as part of that process, many of whom experienced the strike at first hand and gave powerful testimonies.

There are, of course, a number of recommendations in the report that will require careful consideration, as I reflected in my response to it. I welcome the recommendation that the general principles of the bill be agreed to.

As we know, the miners strike of 1984 to 1985 was divisive in many ways. The unprecedented strain and turmoil of the year-long dispute was felt by many people who were either directly or indirectly connected to the coal-mining industry. A sense of unfairness clearly remains in Scotland's former mining heartlands, one of which I represent.

Importantly, the committee's report refers to the lasting psychological and economic impact that the strike had on generations of communities. Indeed, the lasting effects of the strike were also common themes in the evidence that was received by the independent review group that recommended the pardon, and in the representations that were made to the Government in its consultation last year.

In commissioning the independent review in 2018 and in subsequently introducing the bill, the Scottish Government has given a voice to many former miners who still feel the burden of a criminal conviction, and to their families, who remain angry about the management of the strike. We recognise that uncovering the truth of what happened during the strike is important to those affected.

The committee heard that more needs to be done for those communities, in terms of investment and providing opportunities, and that many communities have felt forgotten and taken for granted.

In my evidence to the committee, I spoke about the Scottish Government's support for the work of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. We value our long-standing relationship with the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and the support that it has delivered to ex-coalfield communities through our strategic partnership. In 2021-22, we have supported its work in our ex-coalfield communities through an annual grant of £754,000, made available through our empowering communities programme. Funding has enabled delivery of a wide range of grass-roots activities to tackle issues associated with poverty in those areas and to support those fragile communities, many of which were at the start of a community empowerment journey and are in the areas worst affected by the pandemic. By concentrating our regeneration efforts on the communities that need it most and by working with local people to deliver change, we hope that we can help to reverse the decline felt in former mining communities.

Of course, that is the present day. To fully understand the events of the strike nearly four decades ago, we need a United Kingdom-wide public inquiry. The committee's view is that a UK-wide inquiry could consider the management of the strike and whether compensation for former miners is appropriate. I completely support that view. My sincere hope is that the passage of the bill will strengthen the calls for a full UK public inquiry. To that end, the Scottish Government would be happy to consider and compile factual and other information—which other bodies may be able to offer—as part of any future representations made to the UK Government. The search for answers should not end here; it should continue beyond the passage of the bill.

However, for now, we have the opportunity to bring some reconciliation to our mining communities. That should be the objective of the bill. I am clear that the bill is not about apportioning blame to any particular individual or group of individuals, or questioning the decisions made by the judiciary at the time. The bill does not intend to rewrite history; neither does it seek to pass judgment on all the events that happened during the strike. We do not have the facility to do that—we have neither the records nor the powers to look at all the issues that a full UK public inquiry could perhaps consider.

By introducing the bill, the Scottish Government is, within its existing powers, seeking to recognise the disproportionate, often unforeseen and long-lasting consequences that fell on miners as a result of a conviction. The pardon, therefore, symbolises a desire to heal old wounds by removing the stigma of a criminal conviction for those who meet the qualifying criteria.

I recognise, as the committee highlights in its report, the highly abnormal social situation that the strike created. There were many interests who became involved in the dispute in different capacities. I was a student at the time and was involved in activities from that side. The strike is still an emotive subject, and the bill seeks to deal with the past in a sensitive way and ensure that an appropriate balance is struck. I will therefore consider very carefully the committee's recommendations around expanding eligibility to family members and others who stood in solidarity with striking miners.

I will also consider whether it would be appropriate to extend the pardon to convictions that arose from incidents beyond the picket lines and other demonstration-type gatherings. I will also reflect on whether the list of qualifying offences should be broadened. It will be important for me to discuss those matters with mining and policing interests before determining my position. Regardless of the scope that the Parliament agrees for the pardon, I am pleased that the committee considers that the pardon should apply automatically.

The committee has also highlighted the need to maximise awareness of the pardon. I agree that that is vital and can confirm that, arising from my discussions with the committee, the Scottish Government has had some productive discussions on that already, with a view to identifying and reaching out to those who may benefit from being informed about the pardon. That work is on-going and will bring challenges, given the passage of time since the strike and the lack of robust records. I am committed to working with partners and to using as many levers as we can to maximise awareness of the pardon, should the bill be passed. I hope that members will feel reassured by that.

I underline the clear message that the Scottish Government is sending by introducing the bill, which is that we understand that it was the unprecedented strain of that bitter and prolonged dispute that led to so many convictions and that, as a society, we want to pardon those convictions. In that way, we are recognising the hardship and suffering of entire communities and bringing some comfort and reconciliation to the many who were involved.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill.

15:40

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in the debate as convener of

the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee.

We thank all those who gave evidence to the committee, particularly the mining communities who took the time to share their experiences with us. We also thank the Coalfields Regeneration Trust and other organisations and groups for their assistance. The evidence that we heard was invaluable to our work.

I thank the clerks for supporting the committee through the scrutiny process and in the production of our stage 1 report.

The committee strongly supports the bill and we welcome the Scottish Government's commitment to righting some of the wrongs that many communities suffered during the miners strike. The committee agrees that an automatic pardon will go some way towards providing justice for affected families.

The committee acknowledges the difficulty faced by the Scottish Government in identifying individuals who may fall within the scope of the pardon due to a lack of available records from the time. Although witnesses broadly supported an automatic pardon, the committee also heard that a letter or written statement from the Scottish Government would be welcomed by the individuals affected, and particularly by the families of miners who have now passed away.

We welcome the Scottish Government's proposal to work with the National Union of Mineworkers to identify as many individuals as possible. The committee recommends that the Scottish Government provides a straightforward way for individuals and families to contact it directly if they consider that they fall within the scope of the pardon, for example, via the Scottish Government website. However, the committee is keen to ensure that any such steps do not delay the passage of the bill. The committee is clear that no amendments to the bill should delay its passage.

The committee report notes the difficulties faced by the Scottish Government in accurately determining the number of non-miners who were arrested while supporting miners during the strike and we accept that the definition will catch the majority of individuals affected. However, we heard from mining communities that some family members and friends who stood in solidarity with miners were also convicted as a result of the strike. The report recommends that the Scottish Government considers extending the definition in section 4, particularly in relation to family members of miners.

We also heard calls for the pardon to be extended to include actions associated with the strike that occurred in the community. On balance,

we recommend that the Scottish Government should consider extending the pardon to those arrested as a result of those other activities, particularly those associated with miners' welfare.

The committee notes that the Scottish Government went further than the recommendations of the independent review in relation to the offences included in the bill and in doing so has captured the most common offences committed during strike-related activity. We explored the scope of the offences included in section 2 and examined whether those convicted of offences under the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act 1875 should be included. However, the committee was not able to reach agreement on whether the list of offences provided is adequate.

We heard views for and against an award of compensation for those who fall within the scope of the pardon. Our report acknowledges the significant impact of the convictions on many individuals in terms of not only loss of income through redundancy but loss of additional employment rights such as redundancy payments, pension rights and future prospects, which were prejudiced as a result of having a conviction.

Although the committee acknowledges those impacts, we note that many of the areas that would require to be addressed are reserved to the United Kingdom Government. We also acknowledge that a scheme of compensation would move the bill away from its intention of having a symbolic effect. On balance, we consider that implementation of such a scheme in Scotland would create significant practical difficulties that are likely to delay the passage of the bill and that therefore it is not the appropriate mechanism for delivering a compensation scheme. However, we note the calls that the Scottish Government has made on the UK Government to undertake a full public inquiry into the miners strike. It is the committee's view that any inquiry should consider options for compensation for the miners and their families.

In the extensive evidence on the policing of the strike and the role of the judiciary, we heard conflicting accounts from witnesses. We agree that a full investigation into the policing and management of the strike is long overdue and should take place, and we note views on both sides as to whether the UK Government or the Scottish Government should take responsibility for an inquiry. The Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament were not in existence at the time of the strike, although police and sheriffs were acting under a Scotland-specific system. On balance, the committee agrees that the most appropriate method of investigation is for the UK Government to hold a full public inquiry. We note

calls from the Scottish Government on the UK Government to do so, and we urge both Governments to work together on that.

We heard powerful evidence of the lasting psychological and economic impacts that the strike has had on generations of communities, and that they may have never fully recovered. The impacts are still felt today, and there are calls for more to be done through investment and providing opportunities. We welcome the Scottish Government's funding and work to date through the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, and we urge the minister to ensure that that continues.

The committee also welcomes the cabinet secretary's commitment to take further steps and go beyond the passage of the bill, and we look forward to seeing where progress can be made. Our report also notes the Scottish Government's commitment to continue discussions with the UK Government on taking responsibility for the suffering of the mining communities during the strike period. Last week, the cabinet secretary wrote to the committee with the Scottish Government's response to our stage 1 report, and the offer to meet with members of the committee for discussions in advance of stage 2 is welcome.

The committee is content to recommend to the Parliament that the general principles of the bill be agreed to, and we look forward to hearing more from the Scottish Government about what further work it plans to undertake in order to continue helping to rebuild these communities.

15:46

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am very pleased to open this stage 1 debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. The Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill will be an importantf would say piece of legislation for many people, not just for what it seeks to do but for what it symbolises. The bill is an opportunity to take a significant step towards providing much-needed closure, not only for the individuals concerned but for the families and communities that were affected across Scotland. For that reason, the Scottish Conservatives will support the general principles of the bill at decision time this evening.

Alongside fellow members of the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, I have listened to swathes of evidence that make it clear how much the bill is required. I take the opportunity to thank the many witnesses who have provided evidence to the committee over the preceding months. I acknowledge the opportunity that I had this morning, along with my committee colleague Pam Gosal, to meet members of the National Union of Mineworkers and their families.

The journey to this stage of proceedings started nearly four years ago, when the independent review was commissioned. The scale of the public response to the review led to it being delayed twice. It was not until late 2020 that the independent review published its recommendation that a pardon be provided through an act of the Scottish Parliament. Our committee has since devoted considerable time to the issue throughout the current session of Parliament, and it is important that we are now debating a bill in the chamber today.

Although I and other committee members have spent months preparing and scrutinising the bill, there are many people who have waited nearly four decades to finally receive some level of closure on this issue. We are all familiar with the statistics. Around 1,350 arrests were made during the miners strike of 1984-85, with around 400 of those leading to convictions. However, those of us who witnessed the strikes know that mere statistics do not come close to capturing the turbulent times that we witnessed or how deeply the strikes scarred not just individuals but whole communities.

The pardon that the bill seeks to provide will not right every wrong of the past, but it will come close to ensuring that there is some closure. It is important that we pass the bill, because it is a meaningful step in the right direction, and I welcome that. Although the bill may be quite small, there are no doubt several aspects of it that require further debate.

One of the key issues of the debate has been whether the scope of what is offered under section 2 is wide enough. It is important to ensure that a pardon is granted where it would be appropriate. However, as with all legislation, a delicate balance is required. To that end, I welcome the cabinet secretary's commitment to take a cautious approach to considering any extension to the offences that are listed under section 2.

Although it is important to specify which offences fall within the scope of the bill, it is also important that we set out where the offences took place. As it stands, some of the language in section 1 requires clarity. I hope that the Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary will look at that as the bill progresses.

The Law Society of Scotland has pointed out that the inclusion of terms such as

“picket, demonstration, or other similar gathering”

to describe the settings in which offences took place risks undermining the purpose of the bill and could lead to certain individuals mistakenly believing that they will be issued with a pardon. Therefore, it is important that all that is considered as the bill progresses to stage 2.

I also acknowledge that there have been multiple calls for compensation payments to be included as part of the bill's provisions, and I have no doubt that those calls will continue to be made as we progress. However, on that issue, I highlight the findings of the committee's stage 1 report, which concluded that including a compensation scheme in the bill would risk delaying its passage, which is the last thing that we want to do. A fair compensation scheme would likely require the creation of an independent scheme. The operation of such a scheme would depend on historical evidence, which is pretty patchy and incomplete, because time has moved on. As they should, discussions regarding compensation for the events of 1984-85 will no doubt continue to take place, and we will look at that as the bill goes forward. As I stated earlier, the bill has been a long time in coming, so any further delay would be regrettable.

The Scottish Conservatives support the general principles of the bill. From John Scott QC's independent review, it is clear that, in some circumstances, there was justification for the crimes that related to the miners strike, so, in our approach to the pardon, it is correct for us to look at those circumstances, while ensuring that certain criteria are met. The details of those criteria will need to be looked at as the bill progresses to stages 2 and 3.

I look forward to the opportunity to scrutinise any amendments to ensure that the bill serves its purpose, follows its course and is not interrupted. I look forward to the next stages of the bill, because it is very important to many individuals and communities.

15:53

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To be a member of this Parliament is to hold in our hands a great privilege. We are sent here to make a difference, to do the right thing and to look to the future but also to understand our past, to provide new hope and to honour old debts.

With this bill, we cannot turn back the clock. All those lives that were destroyed by the brutality of the dispute cannot be restored, the families that were ripped apart cannot be put back together, and all those years that were lost cannot be refunded, but we can and must right historical wrongs.

In 1984-85, the whole might of the state was thrown against the miners, against their trade union, against their families and communities and against their very way of life, so now, all these years later, it is time for the whole might of the state to be thrown behind the miners, behind their communities and behind their families. That is why

we and the miners' union say that an honest and dignified response to what happened all those years ago is to establish, through this bill, the principle of a compensation scheme.

I have to say to the cabinet secretary and the Government that the lack of such a scheme is a glaring omission from the bill, and the excuses for that are many, various and often at odds with each other. It is that employment law and industrial relations are not devolved, or even that this Parliament did not exist in 1984. It is that, on the one hand, this Parliament is not competent, or, on the other, that time is of the essence.

However, if it is competent for this Parliament to pardon the miners for what happened in 1984-85, it must be competent for this Parliament to compensate the miners for what happened in 1984-85. After all, the bill is not about the application of employment law during the strike; it is about the application of criminal law during the strike. It comes about because striking miners were arrested in Scotland, by Scottish police officers. They were prosecuted in Scotland, by Scottish procurators fiscal. They were convicted in Scotland, by Scottish sheriffs in Scottish courts. It was that—in the words of the Scott inquiry—

“arbitrary application of the criminal law”

that led to the “disproportionate, excessive and unreasonable” treatment of the miners in Scotland, which we must now address.

The cabinet secretary has said on the record:

“Policing in Scotland followed a different path”.—[*Official Report, Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee*, 8 February 2022, c 14.]

It did. If you were a striking miner in Scotland, you were twice as likely to be arrested and three times as likely to be dismissed as miners in other coalfields. We cannot turn our back on those facts.

It is of course another fact that the Scottish Parliament did not exist at the time of the strike. However, in 2017, this Parliament, in an act of compassion and humanity, born out of a sense that an injustice had been done, set up the Scottish infected blood support scheme to compensate people who were infected with hepatitis C and HIV, going back not to 1984 but to 1974.

When we are told that the addition of a compensation scheme would unduly delay the bill, I say that, if the past two years has taught us anything, it is that legislation and compensation can be introduced in double-quick time when political will, parliamentary force and popular consent are behind it.

Let me turn finally to the scope of the pardon. The Government bill covers only those who were arrested on picket lines, at demonstrations or

while travelling to and from them. That is to wholly misunderstand what happened back then. Police harassment was not confined to the picket lines, and the strike did not start and stop at the colliery gates. Miners did not just sit at home when they were not on picket duty. They were out agitating, educating and organising. Many of them and their supporters were arrested and convicted for activities relating to the strike in the community, which is why they must be pardoned too.

In the end, this is a matter of political conviction and moral judgment. The miners were wrongly criminalised—miners such as Jim Tierney, John Mitchell, Alex Bennett, the late Doddie McShane and Bob Young, who is here in the public gallery today, and miners' wives, partners, sisters and daughters, such as Angela Farrell, and Janet and Nicola Regan, who are also here at the Parliament today. Women might not have been criminally convicted, but they were socially and economically condemned by what happened. Society owes those miners and their families a debt. In the words of Alex Bennett,

“It's not compensation. It's what we're due”.

To those MSPs who are hawking about this issue, the question that you must ask yourselves in the coming weeks is this. If not now, when? If not us, who? This is about our soul as a nation and our values as a society. It is about who we are. This is the only chance that we have. Do not leave this as unfinished business. Do not settle for mediocrity. Extend the pardon, pay compensation and let us at last secure justice for the miners. [Applause.]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you very much indeed, Mr Leonard. I advise those in the public gallery that participating—and that includes applauding—is not permitted.

We move to the open debate.

15:59

Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): As the MSP for Cowdenbeath, it is a privilege for me to be called to speak in the debate. Having been a member of the Scottish Government justice team when the decision to proceed with the independent review by John Scott was announced in June 2018, I am very pleased indeed that we have now reached this stage, for it is beyond doubt that the scars of the 1984-85 miners strike are still felt deeply by former mining communities in my constituency and, of course, in other parts of Scotland.

The strike involved a unique set of circumstances that saw entire communities defending their way of life and their jobs against a UK Tory Government that seemed determined to

bring them to their knees by deploying the forces of the state to that end. In that regard, it seems beyond doubt that the direct employer, the National Coal Board, operated an entirely arbitrary and unjustified policy on dismissal, frequently without reinstatement, for what were, in the main part, relatively minor acts of public disorder that were punished by modest financial penalties imposed by a court. As was narrated in the John Scott review, some miners were even dismissed notwithstanding the fact that they had been only admonished in court, found not guilty, subject to a not proven verdict, or, indeed, not even brought to court at all.

Dismissal brought with it financial hardship, with loss of income, loss of pension rights and difficulties for many in obtaining future employment. However, above all that, miners and their families lost their good name and their respectability and, as honest and hard-working men doing a dirty and dangerous job, perhaps that loss was the deepest cut for them to bear. The corrosive and bitter scars that were left impacted greatly on once-proud mining communities, which felt abandoned by the state and totally disrespected.

The fact that it is the Scottish National Party Scottish Government that has acted to recognise those wrongs by way of a pardon must be commended.

In the brief time that I have left, I wish to raise two specific issues as regards the scope of the bill, in terms of who it covers and what it covers.

The first issue concerns incidents that took place in the community but anent the miners strike. As we have heard, such incidents would not be caught by the bill as it is drafted. I believe that such an approach is unnecessarily restrictive and does not properly reflect the unique circumstances of the times.

Indeed, as a constituent—who was, incidentally, the youngest miner to be sacked during the miners strike—pointed out to me recently, any such breaches of the peace at that time resulted in dismissal, whereas if the same type of incident had occurred outwith the context of the miners strike, the miner would not have lost his job, his livelihood and his good name.

I note that the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee supports such an extension of the scope of the bill, and it is very welcome that the cabinet secretary has undertaken to reflect further on that matter.

The second issue concerns the matter of some form of financial redress. Although I understand—not least as a lawyer—the considerable legal and practical challenges that are involved, I urge further reflection on that, too. It is beyond doubt

that miners suffered financial hardship as a result of the unique set of circumstances of the miners strike of 1984-85; that the circumstances are deemed to be unique, as borne out by the fact that the Scottish Government is proceeding with a pardons bill; that, self-evidently, such financial hardship was borne by people living in already deprived communities; that, for the most part, there would appear to be a relatively small subset of individuals who would be covered; and, finally, that there would appear to be precedent for the general principle of financial redress from the state.

The scars of the 1984-1985 miners strike are deep. The sense of injustice is palpable. The wrong that was suffered by mining communities lives on to this day. Therefore, for all those miners and their families, including the Benarty six, and for all those former mining communities, I will be proud to vote for the bill at stage 1.

16:04

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I begin by paying tribute to the former miners who are here today, and whom I had the pleasure of meeting this morning. One of them is Gerry Farrell, who worked in Lanarkshire and Fife and was fortunate not to have been convicted during the strike. He told of one close call when he escaped the clutches of a policeman by leaping on to the back of a passing bin lorry. Gerry, like the other men and women who are here today, is not a criminal. These people were hard-working people who took great pride in their jobs and communities.

I do not sit on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, so I do not have the knowledge that today's other speakers have, but I am glad that cross-party consensus has been achieved and that, after years of hard work by many people, we are debating the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill.

As is so often the case, the more one looks at the matter, the more its complexities emerge. Those complexities are much greater than my short contribution will allow me to address, but the committee has wrestled with a series of issues, including patchy records, the ultimate scope and legal delivery of a pardon and the unresolved question of possible compensation. However, the consensus that we see today speaks to a healthy ability to look at such a divisive matter in a non-partisan way. As Alexander Stewart put it, a pardon will not right every wrong of the past, nor will it close every wound, but it is the right thing to do.

What struck me the most when I heard from the former miners this morning was the way in which

the strike caused so much division. It set police officers against miners, friends against friends and neighbours against neighbours. Gerry told me that some Lanarkshire steel workers were hostile to the miners strike over fears that it could threaten their own livelihoods. I was only 11 years old during the strike, but I recall the images of violence on TV news.

I should declare an interest, as I am a member of a trade union, the National Union of Journalists. Although I do not even begin to claim to be able to understand the suffering of Scotland's mining communities, I have been involved in industrial action. As a journalist, I stood on a picket line for two weeks. It was peaceful and nobody wanted to be there. We chose to forfeit our wages because we shared a powerful belief that what we were doing was the right thing to do and that making a stand was the only way to save jobs and preserve a newspaper group with a proud history of serving Scots.

We must look to the future, and issuing pardons is the right approach, but I agree with the cabinet secretary about the need to be cautious about the exact nature of the offences that will qualify. I hope that the Government will look at the matter in a considered way that will neither hinder community reconciliation nor leave our justice system with a precedent that could have unintended consequences.

The introduction of the bill should look to heal the divisions from the 1980s and recognise the dignity of Scotland's proud coal miners and their families. It should also serve to remind us of the dangers of a divided society.

16:08

Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP): I, too, thank the former miners who have given evidence in the journey of the bill, the independent review group led by John Scott QC, Neil Findlay for his work, and the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee for its work on the stage 1 scrutiny and report.

Collectively as an industrial sector, miners were on the receiving end of a politically motivated, Government-instigated industrial dispute that led to the proactive economic decimation and social dislocation of coalfield communities. I grew up in Ayrshire and have represented West Lothian in Parliament for many years, so I am acutely aware, personally, of the hardships that were caused. The 1980s miners strike was one of the factors that led me into active politics as a teenager, as it did many of my generation.

I am the former member of the SNP Scottish Government Cabinet who proposed using the collective automatic pardon mechanism to break

through some of the complications that were endangering the initiation of this legislation and, ultimately, the pardon that it will deliver—a small, but important role. I also speak as the granddaughter of a miner whom I never met, who died from lung disease. He worked on the land but was sent down the pits during the second world war and died when my mother was only 15. The mining communities experienced an unjust energy transition, with generational unemployment and the poverty and health problems that that brought. Those problems stayed and, in some cases, remain decades after the 1980s.

The stage 1 report and the cabinet secretary's response are considered. If, when working with the NUM on data protection issues, a letter or written statement could be issued, it should be. The report makes good points about family members and the wider geography and scope of offences, and I am pleased that, in the justice secretary's reply, he shows that he is prepared to look at the committee's recommendations. I stress that the committee notes:

"the Scottish Government went further than the recommendations of the Independent Review Group in the offences included and, in doing so, has captured the most common offences committed during strike-related activity."

As an MSP, I have been asked by former miners to pursue the one-sided pension arrangements from which the UK Government has made more than £4 billion. That matter must be addressed urgently. They have asked me to support the work of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, so the committee's recommendation that the Scottish Government should support that work is welcome. They have also asked me to pursue industrial claims for white finger.

Almost 20 years ago, as a Lothian MSP, I met a group of former miners in the Heatherbell Inn in Fauldhouse to help with their industrial white finger claims. It was January—dark, cold and bleak. Those miners, many of whom were in their 70s or 80s, apologised for the fact that there were not as many of them there to meet me as they had wanted there to be. The reason was that a funeral was taking place that day in Fauldhouse of a former miner who had died and never seen his claim met. Those elderly and industrially injured miners apologised to me, but it is the generations of long-gone politicians and people who have benefited from the fruits of the miners' labour, often to their terrible cost, who should be apologising to them.

We cannot right all the political wrongs of the former state Government, but the current UK Government should conduct a public inquiry to examine, among other things, policing and any opportunities for compensation. However, we must not hold up the bill. Those Fauldhouse former

miners whom I met must all be long dead now, but there are other miners who have convictions, and their families, who are still with us, and I want them to receive the automatic pardon. We must agree to the general principles of the bill.

16:12

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I thank the committee and clerks for their work in bringing the report to the Parliament, and I thank all those who gave evidence.

As colleagues across the chamber have passionately said, for the miners, their families and the local communities whose jobs and incomes were devastated, the mine closures and strike have impacted on their lives and wellbeing ever since. I well remember, as a Labour student, supporting miners and their families, raising money to enable them to buy food and survive the strike. When the strike started, in March 1984, nearly 94 per cent of the just over 13,000 miners in Scotland went on strike, which was a huge response to what was happening.

When I met former miners last month in Danderhall, they were absolutely clear that they welcome the bill, but they said that it needs to be amended to ensure that the people who are pardoned, or their surviving relatives, are properly informed so that they know that they have been pardoned.

I welcome the committee's recommendation that the Scottish Government consider extending the definition in section 4 to ensure that friends and families of people who were involved in supporting the strike are also pardoned, given the massive impact of the strike on people's lives.

Pardons should be granted for all but the most serious offences, such as serious acts of physical violence towards another human. As other members have said, an injustice took place.

There should also be an extension to the circumstances of how or where an offence that led to conviction took place. Currently, the bill covers people who were taking part in or travelling to or from an official picket or demonstration, but there are people who were arrested and convicted for crimes in the community that were all about the miners strike, and they will not be pardoned. We need more than a symbolic pardon.

The report is really well put together. However, I was disappointed that, although the committee understood the powerful arguments for compensating miners, it did not support adding compensation to the bill, because it would be difficult and could delay the bill. I say to the committee that miners and their families have surely waited long enough. The strike was 37

years ago, and some of the people who would have received a pardon are no longer with us.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you. I have only a short time.

Many of the miners got industrial injuries and diseases that they have had to live with. They all lost their jobs, and, for many, the impact of the strike meant that they could not get a job in their community. They lost out on redundancy payments and pension rights, and their prospects were prejudiced because they had a conviction. Even if someone was found by an industrial tribunal to have been dismissed unfairly, that did not lead to them getting their job back or the financial compensation that they deserved.

As the Law Society for Scotland says in its briefing, the strike

"has left divisive and long-lasting impacts upon individuals, their families and the communities involved. Since that time there have been questions raised about political interference, policing, fairness and how the courts dealt with miners who were accused of crimes resulting from the strikes."

The strike was almost four decades ago. Let us make sure that the bill goes through. If there are powerful arguments for compensation or financial redress, as Annabelle Ewing said in the very effective point that she made earlier, then, as Richard Leonard said, if not now, when? Surely it is up to us to get it right. A pardon would be very much welcomed, but surely it must be backed up by action and compensation or financial redress and an inquiry to address the injustice that was meted out to people simply for standing up for their communities. Let us not kick the issue of compensation into touch.

Those families and their children and communities are still suffering now. Let us amend the bill so that it delivers the justice that our former mining communities deserve.

16:16

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): First, I direct members to my declaration in the register of member's interests, which states that I am vice-chair of the National Mining Museum of Scotland.

I thank the committee, the clerks and everybody who has been involved in the bill. I am particularly pleased to be speaking in the debate today. To many, the miners strike of 1984 to 1985 happened a very long time ago, but in my constituency of Midlothian North and Musselburgh, the aftermath lives on to this day. It is hard to adequately convey

the economic devastation and social unravelling that the response to the miners strike created. A whole culture and way of life was destroyed.

In every nook and cranny of my constituency, people are served with reminders of our industrial mining past, from the National Mining Museum of Scotland itself to memorials in our streets and parks, to the very street names, and to the miners welfare clubs. Miners strikes are not just another topic for the history books; they serve as an important reminder to what many in Scotland went through under Margaret Thatcher's draconian rule. The bloody-minded determination to destroy the miners as a political and economic presence was overwhelming in its blind focus.

Many of the miners who were involved have now passed on as age takes its toll. However, even today, when I speak to ex-miners and their families, the strikes remain raw and divisive in our communities. Families remain divided, with feelings running high between those who were on strike and those who chose to take a different path.

The two superpits, Bilston Glen and Monktonhall, were located in what is my constituency today. At their peak, 1,800 workers were employed at each pit, and both saw violence flare frequently during the strike.

There is little doubt in my mind that mining was an industry that had seen its heyday. It was in decline, but the brutally confrontational approach that Thatcher and her Tory Government took was unforgivable. Clashes between striking miners and police were unnecessary. Neither were truly to blame; each side was trapped or coerced into actions that they did not plan to be part of. Confrontation is never the way forward, but Thatcher did not want to find a negotiated way forward; she wanted to win.

The Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill is so important to our mining communities because it brings justice to those who have faced stigma, and wipes out the stain of lawbreaking for so many decent miners who were simply caught up in the unholy mess and did not truly realise the consequence that it would have for them. It is about restoring dignity to those who were convicted and, I hope, bringing a sense of closure to the lingering feelings of injustice.

It is important that we get the bill right. To be pardoned, criteria A or B as set out in the bill must be met. Information about meeting the criteria must be presented clearly to ensure that people understand what the pardon entails and to ensure that there is no confusion about who the pardon applies to.

I am proud that the SNP Government is the first Government in the UK to propose such a bill. It

provides an opportunity for the UK Government to follow in the steps of the Scottish Government. The UK Tory Government has a chance not only to extend the pardon to miners in other parts of the UK but to address the concerns that have been raised about political interference, policing, fairness and how the courts dealt with miners who were accused of crimes as a result of the strike.

I believe that the UK Government needs to hold a full public inquiry. I recognise that many of the issues around potential financial compensation are reserved to the UK Government, and I call for that to be reviewed as part of the inquiry, if Westminster agrees to address that important issue on behalf of miners elsewhere in the UK.

The mines may have closed, but their legacy remains in Scotland's mining communities. The bill has justice and fairness at its heart, and rights a wrong that should never have happened. There should be no delay in preventing this Parliament from doing just that, which is why members should support the general principles of the bill.

16:21

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I begin by thanking the miners, family members and friends who spoke so movingly at the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee in recent months. Please know that your voices have been heard; I hope that we can do you justice.

On behalf of the Scottish Greens, I welcome the bill. It is a whole-hearted welcome but one that is tinged with sadness. The legislation ought to be UK-wide; it ought to represent an apology by those who are properly accountable; and it ought to have come long ago, at a time when it could have provided real redress to those who were so bitterly wounded by a deep injustice.

However, we are here, present in this moment, in this place, and it is our duty and our privilege to speak, once again, for the miners. It may be that the bill is a gesture, but gestures matter. They are how we, as human beings, communicate what is important to us, what we feel and what we share.

The miners strike defined a generation. It was ruthlessly exploited by Margaret Thatcher for her ideological war on the trade union movement but, for the workers and communities who were caught up in the dispute, it was a devastating era of violence, betrayal and division. Local police officers found themselves facing down family members and friends, which created wounds that, in some cases, never healed.

The bill matters because it acknowledges the past and the harm that has been done. In some cases, that harm was deliberate; in others, it was

inadvertent, careless or callous, poisoned by a toxic and persistent ideology. We do not have to be personally or institutionally culpable to share, as a society, a common responsibility to address that harm. That is true of many historical and continuing injustices, including colonialism and fossil fuel capitalism, and it is true of oppressions locally as well as globally.

Scotland's era of coal is over, but the scars from the strike are still raw in our communities. The bill recognises the continuing hurt that is suffered by miners and their families and friends. Such suffering, which involves lives, health, relationships, reputations and livelihoods being broken or jeopardised, does not go away.

The bill and the discussions that we have had about it remind us—sadly, we need reminding—that policing by consent must be a foundational reality, not a comfortable fiction.

The discussion of the bill also reminds us of the importance of trade union solidarity. Trade unions exist to protect their workers, and they will rightly protect jobs and terms and conditions whenever they can. We must allow that right to be exercised without fear of violence. That means that we, as leaders, and all those who are employers, must remember the obligations that we have to employees—the bosses of P&O would have done well to remember that recently.

Although the collective and posthumous pardon that the bill seeks to offer is welcome, as we remember and look back on the events and actions that made the bill necessary, we must learn from the mistakes that were made and pledge to never repeat them.

Mining communities were left with no source of hope. Where was the rebuilding and the investment in those areas and their communities' assets as the mines were closed? Where was the job creation and the retraining for people who were left on the industrial scrap heap? There was none. In fact, quite the opposite was the case—at the time, it was engineered so that many of the workers concerned would never work again.

That is a serious dereliction of duty by any Government, and the Conservatives should hang their heads in shame for willingly creating whole communities of people who were unable to work. They were the victims of a Government ideology that put markets before lives. We cannot allow that to happen again.

As we begin the next energy transition that we must undertake, we must ensure that we take a strategic approach that recognises industries that are in decline and invests in alternative jobs and retraining before the crisis point. It is a pernicious lie to tell workers in those industries that their job is forever. As we move beyond the era of high-

carbon industries, as we must do to survive, further industrial decline must be pre-empted by investment in a just transition, community assets and an alternative future. It is up to us to bring hope.

Although we still have work to do on the scope of the bill and on its provisions on financial redress and public inquiries, the fact that we will all vote for it at stage 1 today should, I trust, give us all some hope.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Christine Grahame, who is the final speaker in the open debate. Again, you have a generous four minutes, Ms Grahame.

16:26

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I like the word “generous”—thank you, Presiding Officer.

First, I thank the former miners and families whom I had the privilege of meeting earlier today. Unfortunately, I probably talked too much, as usual.

My interest in the matter stems not only from my memories of 40 years ago and the images of police on horseback charging into lines of demonstrating miners, but from having the National Mining Museum Scotland in my constituency. It is in Newtongrange, which has neat lines of miners' cottages on First Street, Second Street, Third Street and so on. My constituency also includes Gorebridge, which has a memorial to miners who lost their lives in the pits over the years, and the Shottstown miners welfare club in Penicuik.

All that means that the landscape and sense of community of Scotland's mining past are literally never out of my sight. I also think of my mother, a Derbyshire woman and the daughter of a Welsh miner who died prematurely of an injury sustained in the pit. My mother never let us forget the hardships of the job, and the fact that he left behind 10 orphaned children, including her.

I also witnessed the events of 1984-85 in daily news bulletins. I saw the severity of Thatcher's assaults on the mining communities and the union leadership taking on the Tory Government when coal was stockpiled high. None of that prepared me for mass policing and the sight of police charging on horseback into men and women who were defending their communities and livelihoods. Those officers were often shipped in from outside the community, because the police dared not use local officers.

During the strike, 1,300 or more people were charged and more than 400 were convicted, usually of breach of the peace or obstructing the

police. As has been said, those convictions stand to this day, so the bill is much to be welcomed. However, a pardon does not remove the note of a conviction from the record. I will come to that later. I absolutely agree with a symbolic and collective blanket pardon. I note others' comments that the Scottish Government should try to identify surviving individuals or family members to let them know that miners might qualify. We need a publicity campaign to ensure that they are aware of their rights, which the Government is doing partly through the NUM.

I note that the Government has recognised that miners' wives and families who were directly involved in the dispute may also have received convictions and should perhaps be encompassed by the bill. I am glad that that door is open.

I note that there is currently a limit on the locus. The issue of the locus is extremely difficult. The Law Society has said that the current definition, which uses the wording "other similar gathering", is difficult. Thompsons Solicitors has suggested that the phrase should be

"activities connected with the miners' strike",

but that is quite broad. That issue has to be teased out. I am listening carefully to the idea that the locus should be limited to the picket line and travel to picket lines.

I certainly agree that the UK must hold an inquiry into all that took place and, in particular, into whether there was political interference in policing and the judiciary.

I am hugely sympathetic to what Labour members have said on compensation. However, the problem is that, if we provide compensation from our budget, that would come out of the budgets that keep our health service and education and justice systems going. I note that £4.4 billion has been taken from the miners' pension fund by the UK Government, which has not put in a penny. We must not let the UK Government off the hook, either for that or for the responsibility to pay out for something that was its fault.

Richard Leonard: Many of us spoke in the members' business debate that Christine Grahame brought to the chamber on the subject of the robbery of the miners' pension scheme by the UK Treasury, so she has our whole-hearted support on that. However, the question that she has to ask herself is: if we do not make any provision to redress the hardship that has been inflicted on the mining communities, does she expect Priti Patel and Boris Johnson to do so? I do not.

Christine Grahame: I am with the member much of the way, but I am reluctant, not because

the miners do not deserve compensation or should not get it but because we would have to take money from the budgets that deliver our health and education services to pay for something that was wholly the political fault of the UK Government. The issue that I have is that the money would come from other ordinary people's pockets and services.

I will finish shortly, because you have been very generous, Presiding Officer. I note that the Historical Sexual Offences (Pardons and Disregards) (Scotland) Act 2018 had similar policy objectives, although it was about something that was once illegal becoming legal. However, there was a second condition in that act that is not in the bill. The 2018 act put in place a scheme to enable a person who had been convicted of a historical sexual offence to apply to have that conviction disregarded, so that it would never be disclosed as, for example, part of an enhanced disclosure check.

That brings me to the observations of the Law Society in that regard. It noted:

"the Bill specifically stresses that a pardon will not affect any conviction or sentence, nor will it give rise to any right or entitlement or liability."

There is an issue there. People think that, by being granted this omnipresent pardon, their conviction will be expunged from their record, but it will not. I ask the Scottish Government, if the bill does not expunge the conviction, as it managed in the 2018 act with a similar pardon, why can we not put something in the bill so that miners have on their record a note that shows that they have been granted a pardon?

16:32

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I begin by giving special thanks to my party colleague Richard Leonard, who has gone above and beyond to keep the need for a bill of this sort in the public eye and to achieve historic justice for the miners. Despite their vast contribution to the culture and economy of this country, they remain underappreciated and in many cases criminalised simply for standing up for their right to a livelihood. I also bring solidarity from Pam Duncan-Glancy, who hoped to close the debate for us but is isolating.

What happened to the miners must never happen again, but I fear, given the abominable treatment of P&O workers in recent weeks, that we are only stepping backwards as a country on labour relations, which is all the more reason to set a precedent with the bill.

The legacy of the miners strike and the way that workers and their families were treated lives long in the memories of many people in my home

region of Ayrshire, as other members have mentioned in relation to their regions. It is simply not possible to grow up here without knowing about how those communities were treated and the painful experiences that they suffered. That is true of my generation, who saw it at first hand, and of the young people growing up today.

It is important to remember that the strike and the movement affected many parts of the UK, and the solidarity that was shared among those communities from South Yorkshire to Fife remains to this day. I assure members that taking this step to recognise that injustice will be well received in many parts of this island. For as long as the prolonged injustice remains in place, I will see it as a key part of my responsibility to ensure that it is addressed. As such, although in general my party and I agree with the principles of the bill, there is still a lot missing and a lot of work to be done.

Why does the bill not cover those who stood in solidarity with the miners? They should be treated with respect and admiration for what they did for their communities; they should not simply be written out of history. Further, and perhaps most important of all, why does the bill not include a provision for compensation? Surely, that is basic common sense. It was bad enough that those workers had their jobs torn away from them, but to be locked up for it and receive nothing in return is truly unacceptable.

I applaud the fact that the Scottish Government is finally willing to take the credit for pardoning the miners, but it should be equally prepared to make that clear through adequate compensation, as any other victim might expect. The excuse that the Parliament did not exist at the time cannot be countenanced; that is a cheap get-out and, if Scotland is truly to set an example for the UK and beyond, here is a perfect opportunity for it to do so. As the bill progresses, my party will demand that its scope is widened to include all the aforementioned.

An apology without serious accountability and compensation is not worthy of the name. The Parliament must support an automatic pardon. That is the decent and human thing to do, and I believe that the public expects no less.

I close by reiterating that Scottish Labour wholeheartedly supports many of the principles of the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill; however, our work has just begun. The bill should be introduced as a testament to all those who have fought the historical injustice that was committed during the strike—not just so that they can begin to get the justice that they deserve but as a marker to future generations that we will not again allow such a thing to happen in our name.

However, as I have said, the bill as it stands does not go far enough. Action is required to redress the sins of the past, and serious compensation is needed. Those unfair convictions have cost people in so many ways. Although money cannot entirely salve the wounds, it would go some way towards qualifying the reality of the pain that was felt by so many in those days. It is the least that we in this Parliament can do.

16:36

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to close the debate for the Scottish Conservatives. The importance of the pardon is clear from the presence in the gallery of the miners and their families, whom I met this morning, and from the contributions from members across the chamber, such as my colleague Russell Findlay, who pointed out that the men and women who are here today are not criminals but hard-working people who took great pride in their jobs and in their communities. Keith Brown acknowledged the powerful testimonies that we heard at first hand from witnesses, and the fact that the miners strikes were divisive in many ways.

Joe FitzPatrick mentioned that the evidence from witnesses to the committee was invaluable. He also highlighted the fact that the impact from the miners strike was being felt in communities generations later, and that the bill should not be delayed. Richard Leonard highlighted the need to do the right thing in the Parliament, to understand the past and to put the wrongs right.

Annabelle Ewing mentioned that she was pleased to see the bill reach this point. It is beyond doubt that the scars are felt deeply in her community and across Scotland. Fiona Hyslop spoke as the granddaughter of a miner, and stressed that the miners' communities experienced problems—including health problems, poverty and many more—that remain after decades. Sarah Boyack mentioned how the miners strike impacted on lives and wellbeing. We must make sure that the bill goes through, because four decades have passed.

Colin Beattie said that the strikes remain raw and divisive in the communities, and that there must be a sense of closure. Maggie Chapman spoke about how the bill matters, and said that the voices have been heard and that she hopes that the bill brings some kind of justice. Christine Grahame spoke about her personal experience of how her family was affected.

We must not forget that the miners strike was one of the most powerful and divisive industrial disputes in living memory. For many, those memories are still raw, as we have heard. I was very young, as my colleague Russell Findlay said

he was, when the strikes took place. Of course, I saw the news coverage, and I heard about the strikes. What I did not know was the extent to which they divided society. However, I now sit on the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, so I have had the privilege of listening at first hand to the voices of the people who stood on either side and I have learned a great deal about the incalculable damage that was done.

I would like to extend my gratitude to all those who came forward to share their personal experiences and to acknowledge those who are no longer with us, but to whom the pardon will apply nonetheless. As my colleague Alexander Stewart said, the bill is symbolic, and I believe that it will go a long way towards bringing reconciliation between those who were fighting to protect their jobs and livelihoods and those who were upholding the law in circumstances that they had never encountered before.

As one witness pointed out, we may never know the full consequences of the strike. However, we know enough to say that some of the convictions were unjust. I will therefore be pleased to support the general principles of the bill at decision time, in order to provide an automatic pardon for miners who were convicted of certain offences relating to the miners strike of 1984 to 1985.

As many colleagues and the Scottish Government have rightly pointed out, evidence of convictions from the strike is sparse, with surviving police and court records few and far between. Therefore, in this instance, we believe that an automatic pardon will be the most effective way of ensuring justice for those affected.

Our scrutiny of the bill involved many evidence sessions with witnesses, following which discussions extended to the scope of offences included in the pardon. We have heard about the scope several times in the chamber today, and it is important that it is considered very carefully. There is a balance to be struck on the issue, and we will work with the Scottish Government to ensure that the scope of the bill includes everything that should be pardoned, without overreaching.

As I said earlier, residual impacts from the dispute ran into other aspects of life. Witnesses from both sides talked about the way that the dispute tore families apart. The secondary impacts are evident and we do not require statistics to back that up.

In response to questions, some witnesses said that the bill should provide a compensation payment for those who fall within the scope of the pardon. That has been mentioned by members across the chamber today. However, I agree with the committee's overall finding that such a move is not within the remit of the pardon—

Christine Grahame: Will the member take an intervention?

Pam Gosal: I am sorry. I have a few more points to make and I am wrapping up.

The pardon is largely symbolic, and aims for reconciliation, not compensation. Further to that, it would be difficult and impractical to obtain the required evidence, which would only serve to delay the much-needed pardon. It has been echoed in the chamber today that we must not delay the pardon.

The Scottish Conservatives are satisfied with the general principles of the bill and believe that it will go a long way in healing the divisions of the past—even if, for many of those affected, it will not be enough to fully heal these wounds.

We believe, first, that it is only right that individuals who were unfairly convicted receive a pardon; secondly, that the scope of the pardon should remain limited to how it is presented in the bill; and, last but not least, that the Scottish Government should carefully examine the scope of offences included in the bill to ensure that they strike a fair balance and seek to bring about reconciliation.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary to wind up the debate.

16:43

Keith Brown: I thank the members who contributed to the debate, which has been interesting, often constructive and sometimes challenging, as we would expect, given the subject matter.

I am encouraged by the lead committee's endorsement of the bill's general principles, which has been reflected in the debate.

I recognise that the debate, together with the stage 1 report, has covered a broad range of fundamental questions. Does the pardon cover the right people? Does the pardon cover the right offences? Does the bill cover the right circumstances where such offences were considered to have taken place? How do we best ensure that those who are most likely to benefit are aware of the pardon?

Does the bill deliver the objectives that the Parliament seeks? What can be done to support former mining communities, as a legacy of the strike and the demise of the coal mining industry? What can be done collectively to press the UK Government to consider undertaking a full UK-wide inquiry into the events of the strike?

It would be very unusual, at stage 1, for any bill to achieve complete consensus, and it seems unlikely that we will have that consensus when we

get to the end of the bill process. That is unfortunate, but I am heartened to hear so much support in principle for the pardon that the bill seeks to deliver.

I have listened carefully to the points raised in the debate and welcome the opportunity to address some of those now. There were excellent contributions, including from the convener of the committee, Joe FitzPatrick, and from Alexander Stewart, Richard Leonard—I will come back to his comments in a second—and Annabelle Ewing, who talked about the effect on her community. Russell Findlay mentioned that, as a trade unionist, he had been on strike, too. I and many members will have been on strike, but none of us, when striking, will have seen the impact that the miners strike had on the people directly involved in it.

Fiona Hyslop and Christine Grahame gave us a good idea of how the issue reaches into virtually every family in Scotland, because of the prevalence of mining throughout our communities. Sarah Boyack, Maggie Chapman and Christine Grahame all spoke very powerfully. Pam Gosal mentioned the extent to which this is a symbolic pardon. The reasons for that are laid out by the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee, which we asked to look at that. We need to ensure that everyone who needs to be included is included without having to go through an application process. That was the rationale behind what we did.

Richard Leonard's contribution was basically a broad-based attack on the Scottish Government that leaves an overall consensus looking highly unlikely, which is unfortunate. In Wales last week, I spoke to a number of representatives of the Welsh Parliament, who were hearing about the bill for the first time and thought that it was a fantastic initiative. They were also certain—as I was, wrongly—that we would have a consensus in Scotland on the issue, because it will have a big effect. The lack of consensus, or the extent to which we accuse each other of hawking or whatever, will undermine the effects of the pardon. That would be most unfortunate. It may be that we are the only Administration in the UK to agree to an automatic pardon. It would be unfortunate, to say the least, if the impact of the pardon is undermined by divisions between the parties in the chamber. However, I accept that that may be inevitable.

On the issue of compensation, there is a simple fact that cannot be wished away and is anything but hawking. In terms of employment practices and pensions, one of the factors, which a number of members mentioned, is the political direction of the strike and the way in which it was managed. I well remember that, having been a student in 1984

and in support of the strike. There is also the political direction of the National Coal Board. It does not have the records and has no way of getting that information. It is really important that the reserved powers that would be necessary to validate and approve compensation payments are brought to bear in relation to this matter.

I am more than willing to listen to the suggestions of the committee and other members. I should say that the offences that we seek to cover—breach of the peace and so on—will cover 95 per cent of the convictions. However, I am aware that people might want us to consider one or two other areas, and I am more than happy to do that as we go forward.

It was generally a good debate—it is clear that people feel strongly about the issue. The passion with which members spoke shows that something that happened 40 years ago still resonates today.

I acknowledge that we might not agree entirely on various aspects of the issue or even on some of the points that are made, but I know that those points are often well intentioned. I hope that, whatever divides us, there will be general support in principle for the pardon. As has been mentioned, we have, in the way in which the pardon is being brought about, gone further than the independent review group, which had in mind the idea that the process should be as easy as possible for those who would benefit from a pardon.

That would rule out the idea of a lengthy application process. As the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee pointed out, that means that we must make every effort to ensure that people are aware of the pardon. We have undertaken to ensure that that will happen. If other members have suggestions about how we can go further on that, I am more than willing to listen to them.

Looking ahead, the challenge for us all will be in refining the detail of the bill in ways that enhance it rather than dilute its main purpose, which is to try to restore dignity to the former miners and to help to heal the longstanding wounds in our mining communities. We probably all know miners who had convictions who had never been in trouble with the law before and would never have thought that they would have such a conviction. Those people have felt—wrongly—a sense of shame over the years about having that conviction. That is what the bill seeks to address—it is about reconciliation.

We should keep in view the striking miners who fought passionately for their livelihoods—as did their communities—and those who supported them, as well as the police officers who were

doing their job and seeking to uphold the law in very difficult circumstances.

If the Parliament is content to approve the principles of the bill, I will be happy to work with members and the committee as best I can to ensure that the bill achieves what we want it to achieve. I will also seek to reach agreement on those issues where there is still some division among us, even if it is not possible to get unanimity. That will be for the Parliament to decide.

The bill is important and allows Scotland to lead the way in publicly acknowledging the hardship endured in mining communities all those years ago and in taking action to restore the dignity of former miners that is so deserved. I commend the motion to the Parliament.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the Miners' Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. There will be a brief pause before we move on to the next item of business.

Point of Order

16:56

Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Time is of the essence, as energy prices are going up tomorrow, and people are trying to submit their meter readings to their companies. However, all the energy companies' websites have crashed today and are currently down. Can the Scottish Government intervene to ask them to extend the process for a few days?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That is not a point of order, Ms Brown.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I would be grateful if members could ensure that they are in the chamber for items of business in which they are involved.

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-03904, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Up-rating) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.—[George Adam]

16:57

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Members will recall that Willie Rennie spoke on last week's social security SSI, so I will not repeat all the arguments and analysis that he set out at that time. However, I confirm that the Scottish Liberal Democrats cannot support this twinned SSI for the same reason, in that it increases disability benefits by only 3.1 per cent. That is well behind the 6 per cent increase that is being applied to other benefits. Indeed, the Office for Budget Responsibility now warns that inflation could peak at 9 per cent at the end of this year.

If the Scottish Government had got its act together in the devolution of those benefits, disabled people could have got more help with the cost of living crisis. Instead, they remain in the old system, seven years after all parties in the chamber agreed that powers should be devolved. That was the Scottish National Party Government's choice and timetable, and the result is that disabled people are being left out in the cold. For that reason, Scottish Liberal Democrats cannot vote for the SSI.

16:58

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): First, I offer my sincere apologies for the delay, Presiding Officer.

As I set out to Mr Rennie recently, the Scottish Government is delivering disability payments under an agency agreement with the Department for Work and Pensions. We are uprating those benefits—the child disability payment and the adult disability payment—by 3.1 per cent, in line with the September consumer prices index. The reason for that is that, while we launch our benefits—the adult disability payment is our 12th benefit—and undertake case transfer into our system, it is extremely important that we do not create a two-tier system, and that Scottish recipients of working-age disability living allowance, child disability living allowance and the

personal independence payment receive the same rates of payment as those on the Scottish child disability payment and adult disability payment benefits. Until the transfer process is complete, we cannot diverge from the DWP's approach.

The hyperbole that was used by Mr Cole-Hamilton—and, previously, by Mr Rennie—is unfortunate. The Parliament passed the Social Security Act (Scotland) 2018. Since then, we have created our new agency, which is performing well. We have delivered 12 benefits, seven of which are available only in Scotland and not in the rest of the United Kingdom. It has been a remarkable process of significant achievement and delivery, through a pandemic during which both Governments—not just the Scottish Government, but the UK Government—had to consider priorities and resources. In that period, we delivered the Scottish child payment, which is not available in the rest of the UK. I know that that benefit is supported across the chamber.

We all want social security in Scotland to work, so it is important that we deal in accuracy, clarity and context. It would be better for the Liberal Democrats to participate positively and constructively in a shared agenda to deliver social security in Scotland. Mr Cole-Hamilton has never requested a meeting with me on social security, but he would be welcome to do so. If he would like a meeting, I can apprise him of the reality of the situation and the achievements of the Scottish Government.

I urge members to support the SSI.

The Presiding Officer: The question on the 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 Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-03862 and S6M-03903, on committee membership, S6M-03863, on substitution on committees, and S6M-03905, on suspension and variation of standing orders.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Graeme Dey be appointed to replace James Dornan as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Fergus Ewing as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Marie McNair be appointed to replace Graeme Dey as a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Paul McLennan be appointed to replace Marie McNair as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee;

Fergus Ewing be appointed to replace Ruth Maguire as a

member of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Annie Wells be appointed to replace Meghan Gallacher as a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that—

Graeme Dey be appointed to replace Fergus Ewing as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee;

Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Emma Roddick as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Stuart McMillan be appointed to replace James Dornan as the Scottish National Party substitute on the COVID-19 Recovery Committee;

Fergus Ewing be appointed to replace Alasdair Allan as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that, with effect from 1 April 2022, for the purposes of committee meetings up to 1 July 2022—

(a) in Rule 6.3A.1 after “member” the words “or members” be inserted;

(b) Rule 6.3A.2 be suspended;

(c) in Rule 6.3A.4 the first sentence be suspended;

(d) after Rule 6.3A.5(d) be inserted “(e) a political party withdraws in writing to the Bureau that nomination of the member or members nominated for the purposes of committee meetings up to 1 July 2022.”; and

(e) in Rule 12.1.15 the words “(other than a committee substitute)” be omitted in both instances where they occur.—[George Adam]

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

Decision Time

17:01

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are three questions to be put as a result of today’s business. The first question is, that motion S6M-03864, in the name of Keith Brown, on the Miners’ Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Miners’ Strike (Pardons) (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-03904, 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.

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

17:02

Meeting suspended.

17:08

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: The question is, that motion S6M-03904, in the name of George Adam, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
rose—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Mason, I ask you just to wait until the vote is completed. Thank you.

The vote is now closed.

John Mason has a point of order.

John Mason: I apologise, Presiding Officer—I have never had to do this before. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Mason. 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)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)

Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 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)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 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)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 109, Against 0, Abstentions 4.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Social Security (Up-rating) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on the remaining four Parliamentary Bureau motions. As no member has objected, the final question is, that motions S6M-03862, S6M-03903, S6M-03863 and S6M-03905, in the name of George Adam, on committee membership, substitution on committees and suspension and variation of standing orders, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

Graeme Dey be appointed to replace James Dornan as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Ruth Maguire be appointed to replace Fergus Ewing as a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee;

Marie McNair be appointed to replace Graeme Dey as a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee;

Paul McLennan be appointed to replace Marie McNair as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee;

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(d) after Rule 6.3A.5(d) be inserted “(e) a political party withdraws in writing to the Bureau that nomination of the member or members nominated for the purposes of committee meetings up to 1 July 2022.”; and

(e) in Rule 12.1.15 the words “(other than a committee substitute)” be omitted in both instances where they occur.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:10.

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