



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

Wednesday 25 May 2022

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot) or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

---

Wednesday 25 May 2022

CONTENTS

	Col.
<b>PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME</b> .....	1
<b>HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE</b> .....	1
Alcohol Minimum Unit Pricing .....	1
Women's Health Screening (Waiting Times) (Glasgow) .....	2
Specialist Services (Miscarriage and Pregnancy Complications) .....	4
Covid-19 (Mental Health and Wellbeing) .....	6
Delayed Discharge .....	8
Dermatology Services (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde) .....	10
<b>SOCIAL JUSTICE, HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT</b> .....	12
Interlinked Fire Alarms (Installation) .....	12
Covid-19 (Evictions) .....	13
Social Security Scotland (Staffing) .....	14
Social Security Scotland (Benefits Delivery) .....	16
Social Security Benefits (Roll-out) .....	18
Social Wellbeing (Discussions) .....	20
Housing Strategy (Dementia-friendly Homes) .....	21
<b>COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING</b> .....	23
<i>Motion moved—[Tom Arthur].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Douglas Lumsden].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Daniel Johnson].</i>	
The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur) .....	23
Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con) .....	29
Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab) .....	33
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD) .....	36
Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP) .....	38
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con) .....	41
Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP) .....	43
Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab) .....	45
Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) .....	47
Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green) .....	49
Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP) .....	52
Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con) .....	54
Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab) .....	57
Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP) .....	59
Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab) .....	61
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con) .....	63
Tom Arthur .....	66
<b>POINT OF ORDER</b> .....	71
<b>BUSINESS MOTION</b> .....	72
<i>Motion moved—[George Adam]—and agreed to.</i>	
<b>PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS</b> .....	74
<i>Motions moved—[George Adam].</i>	
<b>DECISION TIME</b> .....	75
<b>SOLAR ENERGY</b> .....	79
<i>Motion debated—[Fergus Ewing].</i>	
Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP) .....	79
Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP) .....	82
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con) .....	84
Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab) .....	86
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green) .....	87
Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP) .....	89
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con) .....	90
Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab) .....	92
Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con) .....	94

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP) ..... 96  
The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie)..... 98

---

# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 25 May 2022

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Health and Social Care

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is health and social care. Members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or enter the letter R in the chat function. As ever, I would appreciate short and succinct questions and answers to match.

#### Alcohol Minimum Unit Pricing

**1. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the impact of minimum unit pricing of alcohol. (S6O-01118)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** Public Health Scotland is leading a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of minimum unit pricing of alcohol, details of which can be found on its website. The evaluation is taking place over a five-year period, and a final report will be produced in 2023.

The evaluation covers the impact of minimum unit pricing in four outcome areas: implementation and compliance, the alcoholic drinks industry, consumption and health, and social harms. As the evaluation is on-going, it would be premature for us to draw conclusions from the findings of the reports that Public Health Scotland has published so far.

**John Mason:** Some charities have been calling for a 65p minimum unit price. Does the Government think that that is a possibility?

**Maree Todd:** The on-going work on the level of the minimum unit price is still under way. It is important that that work be carried out thoroughly in order to ensure that any change to the level has a robust evidence base.

We know that the pandemic has changed the drinking behaviour of some people—none more so than those who were already drinking heavily before it began. There is more work to be done to understand better the continuing impact of the pandemic on alcohol-related harm. That goes much wider than the impact on MUP; it also encompasses the impact on treatment and

support services. It is too early to know whether the changes in drinking behaviours during the pandemic are temporary or not. That will be relevant to a review of the price.

With regard to reviewing the level of MUP, it is currently too early in the process for us to make a decision on what level the price might be set at, or to say when that might happen. The legislative procedure to change the minimum unit price requires a Scottish statutory instrument that is subject to affirmative procedure. As John Mason will know, that means detailed scrutiny. It is important that we take the time to get it right, so there will be a full public consultation on the matter. I will provide more detail on timings once officials have worked through the details.

**Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** Many people and organisations, including Labour members, have called for a social responsibility levy to tackle problems relating to alcohol and drug misuse, yet the powers in the Alcohol Etc (Scotland) Act 2010 have not been used in that way.

Last week, I met Alcohol Focus Scotland, which has called for more work to explore what can be done to ensure that money that is raised through initiatives such as minimum unit pricing can be spent not by the producers but on health interventions. What further action is the Government taking in that regard?

**Maree Todd:** As Paul O'Kane will be aware, we have already achieved a number of things. Minimum unit pricing is one policy, but we have taken a number of other actions. For example, we have lowered the drink-driving limit, introduced the multibuy discount ban and increased the number of alcohol brief interventions. We are currently evaluating all those policy inventions.

As I said, there has been a significant change in drinking behaviour during the pandemic. We need to interrogate that and try to understand it better, while evaluating all the measures that we have taken, in order to find a way forward.

Nonetheless, I absolutely agree with Paul O'Kane that although we have done a lot of work over the years to tackle the unhealthy relationship that Scotland has with alcohol, it is still a significant problem for us. During the first year of the pandemic, 23 people's deaths a week were directly related to alcohol. There is, therefore, much more work to be done, and I am willing to consider all options.

#### Women's Health Screening (Waiting Times) (Glasgow)

**2. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is

to reports of long waiting times for women's health screening in Glasgow. (S6O-01119)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** Following the temporary suspension of all adult screening programmes in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19, the programmes have since resumed safely, and in a phased way that initially prioritised higher-risk screening participants.

The Scottish breast screening programme is doing work to increase screening capacity, including through deployment of additional mobile units and additional appointments in evenings and at weekends. Recently published annual statistics show that uptake in the recommended age range of 50 to 70 has exceeded pre-Covid levels, having risen to 75.1 per cent, which is above the 70 per cent performance target.

With respect to cervical screening, participants on the non-routine, or higher-risk, pathway are receiving screening invitations at the same time as they would have done pre-Covid. Those who are on the routine pathway now receive invitations up to around six months later than they would have done pre-Covid. The programme will continue to monitor that and look for opportunities to improve it.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy:** The most recent available data shows that more than two thirds of people are waiting more than 12 weeks for gynaecology appointments, which is beyond the treatment time guarantee, and that almost 60 per cent are being left to wait even longer—16 weeks for some, and we do not know how much longer beyond that.

Does the minister think that it is acceptable for women to wait so long? Will the Government publish more data on women who have waited beyond 16 weeks? Will it set out what it will do to support health boards to reduce waiting times?

**Maree Todd:** That question takes us away from the territory of screening and into the territory of diagnostics. The screening programme has recovered well from its pause, I have to say, but the entire national health service system is suffering the impact of a pandemic that we are still coping with daily.

I am aware that some NHS boards are experiencing longer-than-usual waiting times for procedures including colposcopies. That is concerning, but we are regularly reviewing waiting lists, and clinical experts are involved in that assessment in order to ensure that people are seen as early as possible and according to their level of risk.

In recognition of the challenges that are faced by health boards, we have agreed additional

funding to address capacity challenges and increased waiting times for colposcopy. As part of the NHS recovery, we are doing that for all other fields as well.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Tess White has a supplementary.

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** Leading health charities have in recent days called on the Scottish National Party-Green Government to urgently appoint a women's health champion, as was promised last August. There is no time to lose. That is why I am extremely concerned that the appointment might not be made for another two years. Can the minister tell us, in black and white, when exactly that role will be established, so that women can access the healthcare and treatment that we deserve?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before the minister answers, I will repeat the lead question, which was:

"To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports of long waiting times for women's health screening in Glasgow."

The supplementary obviously goes well wide of that. However, I appreciate that it has been asked, and whether the minister wishes to give a short response to it is up to her.

**Maree Todd:** I will give a very short response. When we set out the women's health plan, the appointment of women's champions was a medium-term ambition. We are absolutely on schedule to achieve that within the timescales that we set out in the plan.

### **Specialist Services (Miscarriage and Pregnancy Complications)**

**3. Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government when the scoping exercise into the availability of specialist services within national health service boards for miscarriage and unexpected pregnancy complications will be completed. (S6O-01120)

**The Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport (Maree Todd):** All NHS boards have been contacted in relation to the scoping exercise into the availability in NHS boards of specialist services for miscarriage and unexpected pregnancy complications. A lead professional for each board has been appointed. The scoping questionnaire will be sent to all NHS boards by the end of this month, and the deadline for all completed responses is the end of June. The results will then be analysed over the summer.

**Monica Lennon:** I appreciate that update from the minister. It has been three months since we met my constituent Louise Caldwell to discuss progress. I am a bit concerned that the

questionnaire has not gone out yet, but I hope that the work will be completed by June.

Is the minister confident that the Government will have compassionate miscarriage services in place in every health board by the end of 2023, as was promised? Will she join me in paying tribute again to Louise Caldwell, who has single-handedly brought the matter to Parliament's attention and is in touch with thousands of women in Scotland who need that action now?

**Maree Todd:** I certainly will join Monica Lennon in her tribute to Ms Caldwell. One of the incredible privileges of this job is that we meet people at the most difficult times in their lives when they use their experiences to improve things for people who come after them. Ms Caldwell is in exactly that category. It was a privilege and a pleasure to meet her. My officials have been in on-going contact with her.

With regard to timescales, it is very difficult at the moment to be absolutely certain; we do not know what is going to happen in relation to the pandemic over the summer, the winter or the next year. Our intention is certainly to stick to the original timescales, if we can, and as much as that is practical.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Pre-eclampsia affects 6 per cent of pregnancies and can, if it is undetected, prove to be fatal for mother and child. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommends that the NHS carries out four simple placental growth factor tests to diagnose pre-eclampsia. However, previous scoping work has identified a potential issue with the suitability of laboratory services and facilities in Scotland. Will the Scottish Government commit to resolving the issue as soon as possible, so that expectant mothers in Scotland can be offered those crucial tests and have their babies in safety?

**Maree Todd:** I am grateful to Kenneth Gibson for highlighting the importance of early intervention and of diagnosis and treatment of pre-eclampsia. I understand exactly how worrying pregnancy-related complications can be for women and their loved ones. We are committed to ensuring that all women receive high-quality safe maternity care.

As the member knows, we have tasked the Scottish Perinatal Network with examining adoption of placental growth factor testing for pre-eclampsia in Scotland, following the draft NICE guidance that was published for consultation in March. The draft guidance includes reference to two further placental growth factor tests, which takes the total number of tests available to four. The network's first steps will be to understand how, in practical terms, the additional tests can be conducted, and then to identify any challenges to

implementation. Work is under way on that. I will be more than happy to write to the member with an update, following further scoping activity.

#### **Covid-19 (Mental Health and Wellbeing)**

4. **Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address any mental health and wellbeing issues arising from people experiencing loneliness, in part due to restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-01121)

**The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart):** The Scottish Government recognises that social isolation and loneliness are public health issues that have been exacerbated by the pandemic and the associated restrictions. During the pandemic, we issued a wide range of advice on maintaining positive mental wellbeing, for example, through our "Clear Your Head" campaign and on the NHS Inform website.

On 7 May, I announced £15 million for year 2 of the communities mental health and wellbeing fund for adults. That follows on from the £21 million that was provided in 2021-22, and it will support small-scale community projects to improve mental health and wellbeing and to address issues such as social isolation and loneliness.

The Government is investing £10 million over the current parliamentary session to tackle social isolation and loneliness more broadly. Of that funding, £1 million has been allocated for immediate work by organisations that tackle social isolation and loneliness, including through helplines, befriending and practical support.

**Christine Grahame:** I thank the minister for his very full answer. Given that there have been significant impacts on the mental health of older people in particular, many of whom were isolated for long periods during the pandemic, and that they are now even more isolated and stressed as they struggle on their pensions to cope with the rise in inflation to 9 per cent, does the minister agree that it is high time that the Tory Government took immediate action to raise the state pension and ensure that the 40 per cent of pensioners who do not claim pension credit get it? Does the minister agree that that would certainly improve their mental health and wellbeing?

**Kevin Stewart:** I absolutely agree. It is well past time that the United Kingdom Government introduced an emergency budget to protect the most vulnerable people in our society, not least our pensioners. Rumours abound that, in the face of the crisis that centres on number 10 over Sue Gray's party report, which was released earlier today, the UK Government might finally take some action tomorrow. Time will tell whether that

actually happens and whether any announcement is remotely sufficient. It is time for the UK Government to take cognisance of people's real difficulties during the cost of living crisis and the impact that those are having on their mental health and wellbeing.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** Although the pandemic undoubtedly exacerbated feelings of loneliness among much of the population, a huge benefit to many people's physical and mental health was the ability to access and use green space. Given that a consequence of the Government's poor record on health inequalities is that fewer people from our most deprived areas visit the outdoors regularly, will the minister update Parliament on cross-departmental Scottish Government plans to make outdoor spaces accessible to all and to close the gap in use between our most deprived communities and our least deprived communities?

**Kevin Stewart:** I am well aware of the value of green spaces in our communities and of how beneficial they have been to people during the pandemic in particular.

As a former planning minister, I assure Ms Mochan that cross-Government work is being done on these issues. I am sure that she, and others in the chamber, will be cognisant of our plans for 20-minute neighbourhoods and our work to ensure that local people have a say in their neighbourhoods through local place plans. I am quite sure that the public will make their views known about the valuable role of green spaces in our society.

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** Can the minister outline what support is available specifically for rural communities, such as those in the north-east, where specialist mental health facilities might not be available locally and where accessible public transport connections are not sufficient or even available to enable people to easily access services based elsewhere?

**Kevin Stewart:** Although there are many positives about rural life, we also recognise that there can be challenges relating to rural isolation. Those might be increasingly felt by those in remote communities, as a result of the pandemic.

We are working in partnership with the National Rural Mental Health Forum to ensure that those communities have equal and timely access to mental health support and services. Our community mental health and wellbeing fund for adults has provided support for projects that tackle social isolation across our country, including in rural communities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 5 has been withdrawn.

## Delayed Discharge

**6. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what recent assessment it has made of delayed discharge in the national health service. (S6O-01123)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** We are constantly closely monitoring the delayed discharge position through the collection of daily management information received from health and social care partnerships across the country. I continue to meet weekly with selected health boards and their local authority and partnership colleagues, alongside the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care, to discuss issues and actions taken to address the delays.

Health and social care partnerships are fully committed to reducing delays, and they continue to work tirelessly to support hospital discharges. However, the whole health and social care system remains under significant pressure as more people come through hospitals who need high levels of care and support to go home.

Our discharge without delay improvement programme—which is backed by £5 million-worth of funding—continues to progress across Scotland with the key aim of improving patient flow through, and discharge from, hospital.

**Craig Hoy:** In February 2015, the then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport said that she wanted to

“eradicate delayed discharge out of the system,”

yet we are seven years on and the situation is worse, not better. In fact, since that failed promise was made, the equivalent of more than 10,000 years—yes, 10,000 years—of delayed days have been spent in hospital by people who are ready to go home. Does it remain the Government's aim to eradicate delayed discharge, and if so, by when?

**Humza Yousaf:** I gently point out to Craig Hoy that something significant has happened since 2015, during the last couple of years, that has exacerbated pressure on social care and acute sites: the pandemic. That has not only affected Scotland, of course; it is happening in health and social care systems across the United Kingdom. For example, the rate of delayed discharge in England is almost double what it is in Scotland. I give that example simply to point to the fact that issues related to the pandemic have had an effect on health services across the country.

We will continue to invest. I have announced more than £300 million to help with winter pressures. A significant proportion of that is recurring funding, and much of it went into social care and improving the delayed discharge situation.



The number of delayed discharges is far too high, so we will continue to take action to reduce it. Of course, we would like to get to a position where nobody is delayed in our hospitals, so we will continue to invest in that and I will leave Craig Hoy to come up with no solutions and grumble from a sedentary position.

**Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** I hope not to grumble from a sedentary position.

Since Nicola Sturgeon became First Minister seven and a half years ago, £960 million has been wasted on delayed discharge. I acknowledge that the cabinet secretary provided additional funding, but that was done some time ago and it does not seem to be working because delayed discharge is still going in the wrong direction. When does the cabinet secretary expect to see improvement, and when will delayed discharge be ended—or is that going to be another abandoned promise?

**Humza Yousaf:** No. We will continue to work hard to reduce delayed discharge. If it was not for the funding that I mentioned, the situation would be far worse than it currently is. In March of this year, the total number of delayed discharges in Scotland was 1,836. The latest figures show an improvement in that picture, but the number is still far too high. Jackie Baillie and I do not disagree on that.

However, there is not a panacea or a simple solution to the problem. If there was, I suspect that Governments across the United Kingdom—including in Labour-run Wales—would have figured one out by now.

We are working hard to invest in social care. That is why we have provided funding to increase the pay for adult social care workers in Scotland, which will be part of the solution. We will continue to invest, and I hope that we will continue to see the trajectory of delayed discharges moving in the right direction.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** We are talking about another typical grand promise by the Scottish National Party that has not been delivered. It promised to eradicate delayed discharges completely; we were told that they would be all gone. That was long before the pandemic. Therefore, there is no point in the cabinet secretary pointing at England, the Opposition and everybody else when he is in charge of the policy and has failed to deliver it.

No progress is being made; in fact, we are going backwards on delayed discharges. When will the Government minister accept that the promise to eradicate delayed discharges has not been delivered? When will he deliver a policy that actually works?

**Humza Yousaf:** We are not going in the wrong direction. As I mentioned, in March of this year, the total number of delayed discharges was 1,836. The figure is now below that, and we hope to continue to make progress in the right direction. Willie Rennie, Jackie Baillie, Craig Hoy and I probably all agree that those numbers are still far too high.

We will continue to invest—as I have done, by putting in more than £300 million of winter funding, much of which is recurring and much of which is going into social care—to help to provide solutions. I will not take lectures from a Liberal Democrat about broken promises.

### **Dermatology Services (NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde)**

7. **Bob Doris:** To ask the Scottish Government what provision exists to provide an in-patient specialist dermatology service for patients within NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. (S6O-01124)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf):** The requirement for in-patient dermatology bed provision has significantly decreased over recent years, with a trend towards focusing on ambulatory care. A number of enhancements have been made to the ambulatory care services across NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to reflect that trend.

However, although in-patient dermatology admissions have fallen significantly, arrangements are in place to ensure that any patient who is clinically assessed as requiring in-patient treatment can still be admitted to hospital. Such patients will be admitted to an in-patient medical bed and managed by the dermatology medical and nursing team.

As part of recovery plans and remobilisation, the specialty will continue to review the best provision of care, although it should be noted that, regardless of the outcome, there will be a continuing commitment to meet patients' needs and expectations, including through the provision of in-patient care for dermatology patients, when that is clinically indicated.

**Bob Doris:** I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer but, unfortunately, the reality on the ground might be a wee bitty different. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde no longer has any dedicated in-patient dermatology beds. That means that the quality of life, the work and the mental health of my constituent who suffers from severe atopic eczema have deteriorated dramatically.

The elimination of dedicated specialist beds at the Queen Elizabeth university hospital puts my constituent in a much inferior position for what is out-patient day care at the Glasgow royal

infirmery. I have asked NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde to urgently review the provision of specialist dedicated beds. Will the cabinet secretary look at the issue, too, contact NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and ask it to seriously consider the review that I am calling for?

**Humza Yousaf:** I will, of course, have a conversation with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde about the issue that Bob Doris has raised. My understanding is that if any patient is clinically assessed as needing in-patient care, such care will be provided. Bob Doris's constituent has had a different experience. It seems as though he has already contacted the health board, but he is welcome to raise the issue with me.

It might not be appropriate to carve out speciality beds where the demand is relatively low—notwithstanding the impact that the condition that Bob Doris mentioned has on his constituent. It should be the case that if anyone is clinically assessed as needing in-patient care, that will be managed and speciality dermatology services will be provided to them. I will be happy to pick up the detail of that with Bob Doris.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** Bob Doris makes a great point about how dermatology issues affect mental health and quality of life. That applies not just to Bob Doris's constituent, but to everyone.

More than one in 10 dermatology patients have to wait more than a year for an out-patient appointment. We know that the use of images in referrals to dermatology departments speeds up the process, but only five health boards are using such a system. Why are all of them not doing so? Why is the use of images in referrals not already a national standard?

**Humza Yousaf:** Sandesh Gulhane makes an important point. I will work with health boards up and down the country to make sure that we speed up the use of technology. We saw that during the pandemic, but it should not have taken a pandemic for us to make sure that the Near Me video technology was in place when accessing general practitioner services. I will make sure that a conversation is held with every health board about how we can speed up the pace of the use of technology for dermatology services.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 8 was not lodged.

That concludes portfolio questions on health and social care. We will now move onto the next portfolio after a short pause so that front-bench teams can change their position if they wish.

## Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next portfolio is social justice, housing and local government. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should please press their request-to-speak button or enter the letter R in the chat function during the relevant question.

Again, I make a plea for succinct questions and answers to match, otherwise I will not be able to take all the questions.

### Interlinked Fire Alarms (Installation)

1. **Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on whether the reasonable period of time for households to install interlinked fire alarms in line with the new legislation has now passed. (S6O-01126)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** The legislation improves fire safety and ensures that the same level of protection applies to all homes. What is a reasonable period will depend on individual circumstances, which is why it is not defined in legislation, including in the case of the new fire alarms standard. On 21 January 2022, the Scottish Government, in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, published a statement confirming that local authorities will take a proportionate and measured approach to compliance.

**Russell Findlay:** We have a law that came into force more than four months ago. It was rushed through in defiance of warnings from Conservative members and many others, but we still do not have a date on which people risk being criminalised for non-compliance. Will the cabinet secretary commit to providing some form of date or guidance? If not, will she give us guidance as to when she might be able to do that, on behalf of all the people who do not know what the situation is going to be?

**Shona Robison:** Russell Findlay will have heard my first answer, which was that what is a reasonable period will depend on individual circumstances—it is not uncommon for that phrase to be used in legislation. The period is not defined in other legislation and it is not defined in the new fire alarms standard. Local authorities have a broad statutory responsibility to tackle substandard housing in their areas, and they have said that they will take a light-touch approach.

It is disappointing that Russell Findlay portrayed the Opposition's defiance to the legislation as being something of merit. Alasdair Perry, from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, said:

“Having the earliest possible warning of a fire in the home can and has saved lives and property. Having interlinked alarms installed will allow everyone, anywhere in the house to take action as quickly as possible.”

Why would anyone want to oppose that and make a virtue of opposing it? I find it difficult to understand that.

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary has said that local authorities have a duty to enforce and uphold the new standard for fire alarm systems. Have all local authorities enforced that standard for their own tenants?

**Shona Robison:** As I understand it, there has been a high level of compliance with the new standard among local authorities and registered social landlords. A small number of properties are still to be done, but the intention is to get to 100 per cent compliance as quickly as possible. Good progress has been made, and I would be happy to write to Mark Griffin with the latest figures if he would find that helpful.

### Covid-19 (Evictions)

**2. Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the number of people facing eviction in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. (S6O-01127)

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants’ Rights (Patrick Harvie):** The latest data show that eviction action by landlords in both the private and social rented sectors reduced significantly and remained at a low level throughout the worst of the pandemic. Private sector evictions have recently started to return to pre-pandemic levels, but the level of social rented sector cases remains substantially lower than pre-pandemic levels.

We are committed to providing increased stability, quality and affordability in renting. That is why, through our new deal for tenants, we are taking forward reform including strengthened tenant rights, rent controls and a new regulator for the private rented sector.

**Foyso Choudhury:** In recent weeks, the Social Justice and Social Security Committee has heard evidence that sheriff officers are making up for lost time since the pandemic. The committee has also heard about the remarkable cost of the eviction process for local authorities—in a relatively simple case, it is an estimated £24,000 to evict people who must then be rehoused in temporary accommodation anyway. It is surely better for all to avoid that situation. What is the Scottish Government doing to minimise evictions and work with local authorities and others to support people who are in danger of eviction?

**Patrick Harvie:** I share Mr Choudhury’s concern about the issue—as we all do, I hope. However, it is overstating the case to say that people are “making up for lost time”. As I said, the level of social rented sector evictions remains low compared with pre-pandemic levels. Private rented sector eviction actions have started to return to pre-pandemic levels, but they are certainly not above those levels.

On the immediate action that is being taken, as Mr Choudhury will know, the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill will put on a permanent footing two measures that were introduced on a temporary basis: pre-action protocols for the private rented sector and all repossession grounds being discretionary, so that all the circumstances of both the landlord and the tenant must be taken into account. I hope that the chamber will welcome that.

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** Does the minister welcome—as I do—the fact that the measures that improved fairness in the private sector during the pandemic have been incorporated into part 4 of the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill, which will ensure a better balance between the rights of tenants and the rights of landlords? Does he welcome the fact that that move is supported by Shelter Scotland, Citizens Advice Scotland, Living Rent, Public Health Scotland and Police Scotland?

**Patrick Harvie:** Yes, indeed. As I said, making the measures permanent is a very positive step. The wider proposals that were set out in our new deal for tenants consultation made clear the Government’s commitment to seeing improvements in the rented sector, to ensure that people are treated fairly and can access good-quality property. Putting the provisions on a permanent footing is an important step towards achieving that.

All eviction grounds for council and housing association tenancies have been discretionary for 20 years, so the provisions also contribute to our aim of developing a more unified approach across all forms of renting. They will reduce the gap in outcomes between the social and private rented sectors, as we recognise that adequate housing is a human right for all.

### Social Security Scotland (Staffing)

**3. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what the implications are for Social Security Scotland of the redeployment of staff to the agency from the Department for Work and Pensions. (S6O-01128)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** There are no current plans to redeploy any DWP staff to Social

Security Scotland. Furthermore, since Social Security Scotland was created, in 2018, no staff have been redeployed to it from the DWP.

**Richard Leonard:** I thank the minister for that reply, although I think that it is quite shocking. The Public and Commercial Services Union, which represents DWP workers, has quite rightly mounted a campaign to save their jobs and avert the closures, under the banner “First we were clapped, then we were scrapped”. In November 2021, Boris Johnson went so far as to call them “miracle workers”. He might be in need of a miracle worker himself, now that the Sue Gray report has been published.

Last week, the Auditor General for Scotland produced a report on Social Security Scotland. In it—I hope that the Minister will listen to this—he said that

“timescales are challenging and substantial risks remain, including ... getting operational staffing in place.”

He spoke of

“a high, and increased, reliance on contractor staff ... around 47 per cent.”

He said that that was

“driven mainly by ongoing challenges with recruiting staff with the relevant skills and experience needed.”

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Could we have a question, please, Mr Leonard?

**Richard Leonard:** Can the minister reassure Parliament and those 64 DWP workers in Aberdeen and the 101 DWP workers in Kirkcaldy who are facing redundancy that, rather than send in the partnership action for continuing employment team, the Government will enter meaningful talks with PCS and the DWP to transfer and redeploy those workers?

**Ben Macpherson:** I am not a DWP minister, so I cannot be held accountable for the UK Government’s actions, as Mr Leonard will be aware. However, we are recruiting significantly to Social Security Scotland as it scales up, building on the significant achievements that were acknowledged in Audit Scotland’s report, and as it continues to roll out new Scottish benefits and undertake significant case transfer.

As of 31 December 2021, Social Security Scotland employed more than 1,900 staff. The member will be aware that we expect to employ more than 3,500 full-time equivalent staff across Scotland by March 2023. Of course, those vacancies will be open to everyone who wishes to apply for them. Indeed, there has been further recruitment since Audit Scotland undertook its investigation and analysis to prepare its important report.

We continue to recruit, and we have adequate staffing to serve the people of Scotland as things stand. We look forward to welcoming more people to Social Security Scotland as we continue to take the devolved benefits programme forward.

**Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** We all agree that the UK Government’s decision to close 42 DWP offices, putting 1,100 jobs on the line, is a staggering situation during a cost of living crisis. Does the minister agree that the UK Government should rethink its plans and put hard-working staff and DWP service users first, categorically ruling out any further closures and redundancies?

**Ben Macpherson:** Yes, I do think that. I should have acknowledged that in my answer to Mr Leonard as well as in my answer to Mr Kidd.

Furthermore, Social Security Scotland has well-established links with Skills Development Scotland, which runs PACE. That partnership provides support in the case of large-scale redundancies, which may be needed should the UK Government proceed with these closures—which, of course, we do not want.

As I said, Social Security Scotland is also in the process of recruiting across a range of roles. It will work with all relevant partners to understand the situation that has been raised by Bill Kidd and Richard Leonard and to actively promote vacancies to anyone who is facing redundancy. Social Security Scotland has experience of working with other partners in the civil service with a view to supporting positive outcomes for people who find themselves facing redundancy. At the same time, it is appropriately diligent in its operations.

#### **Social Security Scotland (Benefits Delivery)**

4. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its assessment is of Social Security Scotland’s efficiency in delivering benefits. (S6O-01129)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** The Scottish Government has designed a social security system that is straightforward for people who are applying for benefits either online or by other means that suit them best. Also, when considering disability benefit applications, we aim to get decisions right first time much more regularly than the DWP has, thereby reducing the need for lengthy and inefficient appeals processes. A great deal of thought has gone into improving our system in that regard compared with the DWP.

It is worth noting that, in its client survey, 92 per cent of respondents rated their overall experience of Social Security Scotland as “very good” or “good”. In addition, when case transfer is

complete, the agency's operating costs will be comparable to those of the DWP.

**Jeremy Balfour:** I hope that the minister is aware that there has, of late, been an issue with incredibly slow processing times for many of the devolved benefits. For example, in January this year, the average processing time for a best start grant was 30 days—the longest ever. How will the minister address the snail's pace processing times?

**Ben Macpherson:** Mr Balfour is inaccurate in his description of the agency's performance because, as the client survey has evidenced, people's experience of applying to and dealing with the agency is very positive.

We are always looking to improve the efficiency and client experience of our services—for example, we are putting a lot of investment and thought into automating benefits. Child winter heating assistance is already automated, low-income winter heating assistance will be automated, and no one will have to reapply for our disability benefits, because they will be automatically transferred from the DWP to Social Security Scotland.

We will also automate two of our family payments—the best start grant early learning payment and the best start grant school-age payment—in line with the Scottish child payment, where we already have the information to do so. A lot of work is going on to continue to improve the system, but efficiency is already at the heart of everything that we do.

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** The minister mentioned Audit Scotland's report, which I also welcome. It highlights the Scottish Government's significant achievement in the scale and pace of delivering those benefits. Will the minister provide more detail on what the Audit Scotland report says about the experiences of people who engage with the new Social Security Scotland system?

**Ben Macpherson:** I encourage all members to read the report, which praises our approach to ensuring that people help to design our social security system every step of the way. In relation to the people who use our new Social Security System, the report states:

"There is a conscious focus on the needs of service users, building on the principles of dignity, fairness, and respect. People are positive about their experiences of engaging with Social Security Scotland."

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** There are currently only a few thousand cases for the adult disability payment, but that is due to rise quickly in the next five years to almost 500,000 cases. People depend on that money, so how confident is the minister that everyone will get their

money on time, when the ramp-up starts this summer?

**Ben Macpherson:** Mr Rennie makes very important points about the scale-up as we go through the different phases of the pilot. We are in phase 1, and there will be two further pilot phases before a national roll-out at the end of August. That is why we continue to undertake recruitment and refine our systems, so that people who apply for benefits receive a good service and a much better experience than they would with the DWP as they go through their application process.

We will initiate case transfer for adult disability payment from 13 June, and there are regulations before Parliament on that at the moment. That will begin the process of delivering for the clients who are applying and those who are being case-transferred in. We are focused on making sure that that is done as safely and securely as possible to serve the people of Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 5 has been withdrawn.

### Social Security Benefits (Roll-out)

**6. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the roll-out of social security benefits. (S6O-01131)

**The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson):** Social Security Scotland delivers 12 benefits, seven of which are completely new forms of financial support that are not available elsewhere in the United Kingdom, and they support low-income families, carers and disabled people.

As Audit Scotland stated last week, that has been a significant achievement in challenging circumstances. This year, Social Security Scotland will ensure that £3.9 billion in payments reach around 1 million people, as well as preparing for further benefits that are due to be delivered and transferring around 700,000 cases from the Department for Work and Pensions.

I will say more about that to Parliament in our debate tomorrow.

**Pam Gosal:** Audit Scotland's report last week forecast that the adult disability payment case load will increase from 20,000 in 2022-23 to 475,000 by 2026-27. Considering the numerous delays to the roll-out of devolved benefits, can the minister guarantee that the Scottish Government is fully equipped to respond to the rapidly increasing case load?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, I understand that you dealt with that subject in response to Willie Rennie's supplementary question, but if you have anything further to add in

light of the specific framing of Ms Gosal's supplementary, please go ahead.

**Ben Macpherson:** Thank you, Presiding Officer. To elaborate on my first answer, the Audit Scotland report was complimentary about what has been achieved so far in very challenging circumstances, including the pandemic.

Parliament should be mindful that, during the pandemic, both the Scottish Government and the UK Government had to reprioritise resources and delay some of what we were doing. The delivery of devolved social security is a joint programme with the UK Government—with the Department for Work and Pensions, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the Scotland Office. When it comes to what we do next and what we still have to deliver, engagement between the two Governments is very important to doing that successfully and we are committed to working constructively with the UK Government as we do that and as we undertake case transfer.

The fact that we have delivered 12 benefits—seven of which are new—is remarkable progress, as is acknowledged in the Audit Scotland report. We have introduced benefits that were not in the programme when the Scottish Parliament passed the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, so progress has been significant, and I look forward to the debate on this tomorrow.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can take two supplementaries, if we have brief questions with brief answers to match.

**Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP):** Regarding the forthcoming roll-out of adult disability benefit in Glasgow, I am already hearing from my constituents, who are welcoming the “no requirement to reapply” feature. Does the minister agree that, once the benefit has been set up, that feature will provide reassurance and dignity to people in receipt of the benefit?

**Ben Macpherson:** Yes, it will, and that stands in contrast to the UK Government's managed migration to universal credit, where people will need to reapply without any support.

We will safely and securely transfer 700,000 adults and children from the DWP to Social Security Scotland. That transfer is already under way. Each and every one of those people will be transferred automatically, with no need whatsoever to reapply. We will contact them about their transfer both before and after it happens, to keep them informed. That is a key part of our approach to the adult disability payment, which also removes degrading DWP-style assessments, which so many disabled people told us they found distressing and intrusive.

**Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab):** What progress has the Government made in developing a leaving fund for women fleeing domestic violence?

**Ben Macpherson:** I am happy to consult the ministers who are responsible for that area and to supply an answer to Pam Duncan-Glancy in writing.

### Social Wellbeing (Discussions)

**7. Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the local government minister has had with local authorities regarding services to promote social wellbeing. (S6O-01132)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** I regularly meet representatives of local authorities and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to discuss a wide range of issues as part of our commitment to working in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland.

We have a joint programme board with local government to oversee work to achieve the Covid recovery strategy, which has a fundamental focus on tackling inequalities and improving wellbeing for everyone in our communities. We are working closely on the creation of our child poverty action plan and local delivery plans as part of our national mission to tackle child poverty.

**Jim Fairlie:** Does the cabinet secretary agree that the emphasis that is placed on the holistic social wellbeing approach by the newly elected Scottish National Party administration in Perth and Kinross Council is a positive and promising example of how local government can put the Scottish Government's vision of a wellbeing economy into practice at all levels, and suitably adapt it to the needs of the local community?

**Shona Robison:** I am delighted that the new SNP administration in Perth and Kinross is embedding social wellbeing in its local approach. To support more local councils and regions to embed the wellbeing economy approach into their local strategies, we have committed to publishing a wellbeing economy framework. I am sure that the Scottish Government will have a lot to learn from Perth and Kinross, as will other councils.

**Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con):** The decision by the SNP-Green Government to cut more than £250 million of council funding is clearly impacting on the ability to deliver local advice services. What assessment have ministers made of the loss of advice services, because those services are so important to our fellow citizens—including in Perth and Kinross, where they might also face cuts?

**Shona Robison:** This Government has increased funding to advice services because we understand the importance of ensuring that people get access to the advice that they need, particularly in these times.

I would add that it is a bit rich for Miles Briggs to talk about local government funding. We have delivered a 3.6 per cent cash-terms revenue budget increase to Scotland's councils between 2013 and 2020. Over that same period, English local authorities faced a cash-terms revenue cut of 14.7 per cent.

The Local Government Association has just set out in its "Spending review submission 2021" that English councils have already dealt with a £15 billion real-terms reduction to core government funding between 2010 and 2020. Miles Briggs says one thing when his party is in Opposition, and then, of course the Conservative Party does a completely different thing when it is in Government.

#### **Housing Strategy (Dementia-friendly Homes)**

**8. Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how its housing strategy will support local authorities with developing dementia-friendly homes. (S6O-01133)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government (Shona Robison):** As set out in "Housing to 2040", our aim is for everyone to have a safe, high quality home that is affordable and meets their needs in the place where they want to be. That is why our affordable housing supply programme is already supporting the provision of dementia-friendly homes in communities across the country, where that has been identified as a strategic priority by local authorities. North Lanarkshire Council, for example, recently completed 27 new homes at Caledonian Avenue, Bellshill, using best-practice principles for dementia design, backed by almost £1.6 million of Scottish Government investment.

**Meghan Gallacher:** Approximately 90,000 people are living with dementia in Scotland, with roughly 20,000 people diagnosed each year. Due to Scottish National Party council cuts, care and repair services have been reduced or scrapped in local authority areas including North Lanarkshire Council, while other local authorities provide only a basic level of service to people who are living with dementia.

Given the need for more dementia-friendly homes, does the cabinet secretary agree that care and repair services are essential, so that people can live at home, and independently, for as long as possible? Does she also agree that cutting local authority budgets impacts the most vulnerable in our communities?

**Shona Robison:** If Meghan Gallacher had been listening to my previous answer, she would have heard what I said about local government funding and that we have given an increase. Times are tough and, in a fixed budget, we have to give a fair settlement to local government, but we also have to fund social security benefits—of course, the Conservatives supported the doubling of the Scottish child payment. We have to balance all those things. I am not aware that the Conservatives came forward with any amendments to the budget asking for an increase in local government funding. I may be mistaken about that, but I do not think that they did.

On the important issue of people with dementia, of course care and repair services are important, as is the range of services that support people with dementia. However, I said to Meghan Gallacher that, through our affordable housing supply programme, the Scottish Government is directly providing £1.6 million in funding to make sure that homes in the North Lanarkshire Council area and others are fit for purpose for people who have dementia. That is something that we are happy to do, and to support across other local authority areas. It is not factually correct to say that we are not investing in dementia services, because I have clearly demonstrated that we are.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes portfolio questions on social justice, housing and local government.

There will be a short pause before we move to the next item of business.

## Community Wealth Building

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

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-04580, in the name of Tom Arthur, on community wealth building—delivering transformation in Scotland's local and regional economies. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button now.

14:54

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** I am delighted to open the first debate on community wealth building to be held in the Scottish Parliament.

Last week, I had the pleasure of meeting Ted Howard at an event hosted in Edinburgh by the Economic Development Association Scotland. Ted is the co-founder and president of the Democracy Collaborative, an economic think tank that is based in the United States. The Democracy Collaborative created the community wealth building approach, with much of the model's early application and learning taking place in the city of Cleveland, Ohio. That city's challenge with the impact of deindustrialisation warranted radical and creative thinking. In developing community wealth building, a way was devised to harness the power of public spend and assets to grow new co-operative businesses and create new jobs. In turn, that helped to empower and revitalise people and communities.

Let me be clear: community wealth building is not just for cities; it is an integrated approach to local and regional economic development, suitable for ventilation across Scotland.

Scotland is at the forefront of advancing the model, with interest growing rapidly across the world. In fact, last week, Ted Howard said:

"Your country is fast becoming a global leader in the movement of community wealth building."

Having noted the model's origins, I want to set out how the model works and why the Scottish Government and a growing number of Scotland's local authorities and their partners have adopted it. However, before I do that, it is worth reflecting on the fact that our new national strategy for economic transformation highlights Scotland's extraordinary economic potential. Crucially, NSET also recognises the challenges that we face as a society and sets out a decade-long plan to develop the wellbeing economy where prosperity and economy share equal billing.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I have sat in this chamber for 10 years now, and I have

repeatedly heard speeches such as this one. As a Liberal, I love discussing all this kind of stuff, but, at some point, we need to deliver. If we look back over the past 15 years, the record is pretty woeful. Surely, we should be discussing actually making things work, rather than having these lofty debates.

**Tom Arthur:** I suggest that Willie Rennie buckles up and listens to the rest of the speech.

We need to take a broader view of what a prosperous economy, society and country are, moving beyond traditional measures of growth and avoiding the pitfalls that are associated with a reliance on trickle-down economic benefits reaching communities.

Collectively, and as consensually as possible, we all need to ensure that our economy functions to make businesses thrive, with the ultimate aim of enabling a society that puts people and the environment at the heart of its highest ambitions.

Our 2021 programme for government commits the Scottish Government to the introduction of a community wealth building bill during this session of Parliament. I want to work with colleagues from across the chamber to ensure that legislative change can help to simplify the economic development landscape and enable community wealth building to advance.

### **Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):**

I am grateful for the minister's commitment to the ideas that he is talking about. However, he would have to acknowledge that, despite the seven references in NSET to community wealth building, there is little in there about what is actually meant by that, or the resources that will be applied. Will establishing meanings and applying resources be a key part of the work that he is discussing?

**Tom Arthur:** I will come on to some of those issues as my remarks progress.

As the word spreads about community wealth building, some partners have expressed the view that Scotland is good at this sort of activity. Many successful programmes and initiatives in regeneration and procurement, for example, have enabled and continue to enable the revitalisation of communities, the creation of new jobs and the placing of land and property assets in the hands of communities.

Community wealth building is not intended to be a replacement for current efforts to grow or regenerate our local and regional economies. It is a refinement of current practice that can help the public, private, third and community sectors to act in concert on the economy of a place by taking a full-system approach—

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** Will the member take an intervention?



**Tom Arthur:** I am sorry, but I need to make some progress.

Community wealth building can combine the resources of all anchor partners, be they project resources or mainstream budgets, and it can provide a joined-up and streamlined prism for jointly co-ordinating economic planning and delivery.

The model represents a practical focus on economic development in real communities, with the potential to deliver a progressive wellbeing economy for Scotland; more and better fair work opportunities; business growth and the emergence of new co-operative and employee-owned models; more community-owned assets; more stable local populations enabled by new economic opportunities; and shorter supply chains supporting net zero ambitions.

The Scottish Government wants to use community wealth building as a means of rewiring how we foster local and regional economies. The model is a relatively new one, but it is not a rebranding of previous approaches or a high-level mission statement. Community wealth building is a new organising principle that is also a hard-headed, practical and operable economic development model.

The model relies on five pillars of activity. The first is spending and is about how the public sector procures with the private and third sectors and uses its wider investment power.

The workforce pillar is all about ensuring that the conditions that are attached to current and future jobs adhere to what, in Scotland, we call the fair work first principles.

With the inclusive ownership pillar, the model seeks to grow employee-owned and co-operative businesses that offer employees a deep stake in the place where they work.

The objective of the land and property pillar is to identify new opportunities for community ownership of assets, or at least a clear focus on providing local communities with the material economic benefit from the use of land.

Finally, the model has a pillar that is focused on flows of finance or borrowing, with the emphasis on attracting more ethical lending to help local and regional businesses grow.

I turn to some examples of progress that has been made with the model. In doing so, I will embark on a whistle-stop tour from the north-east United States to the north-east of England before returning home to Scotland.

In Cleveland, six anchor institutions—including Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Clinic—with the support of the city

government, helped to incubate a network of three employee-owned co-operatives that employ residents from low-income communities. The Evergreen co-ops grow food, are engaged in community energy projects and provide laundry services to a range of anchor organisations. Employees benefit from a living wage and a profit share scheme.

Inspired by what it saw in the US, Preston in England took up the mantle, creating 1,600 additional jobs, as well as achieving an additional £70 million of net investment in the city's economy from anchor institutions and £200 million for the regional economy.

Over the past few years, those examples have inspired local authorities and their partners in Scotland to advance community wealth building. We are supporting the work of five pilot areas—in Clackmannanshire, the south of Scotland, the Western Isles, the Tay cities and Fife, and the Glasgow city region—all of which have developed and begun implementing their community wealth building action plans.

Our Covid recovery strategy commits the Scottish Government to working with all local authorities to develop action plans. Through the Ayrshire growth deal, we are investing £3 million in community wealth building to support businesses and communities across the region to enhance local supply chains, ensure fair work and maximise local assets. The region has benefited from North Ayrshire Council's trailblazing work as the first council in Scotland to adopt community wealth building.

During a recent visit to the Western Isles, I spoke to people in the village of North Tolsta, who explained how the revenue from a community-owned wind turbine was being used to support a number of local jobs and important community organisations in the village.

I met Glasgow city region representatives to hear about progress in vacant and derelict land and procurement practices, and I was heartened to hear that individual local authorities are driving community wealth building in their localities as well as through a collaborative regional approach. By establishing a pipeline of planned construction work, the Glasgow city region has been able to generate employment opportunities, including quality apprenticeships for local people.

South of Scotland Enterprise recently updated me about its work with local registered social landlords to develop local supply chains for green retrofitting of housing stock.

In meetings with Clackmannanshire and Fife councils, I have heard about their work, which focuses on, respectively, employability and

developing supply chains that will create more local employment opportunities.

Finally, I recently attended a Community Land Scotland parliamentary reception, which highlighted the fantastic work that is under way in Scotland to promote community ownership of land and the benefits that can be derived for local economies and communities.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Will the minister give way?

**Tom Arthur:** Very briefly.

**Liz Smith:** The minister is quite right about some of the really good things that are happening across the areas that he has mentioned. However, does he accept the very strong points that Audit Scotland recently made about the importance of transparency over where that money is being spent and the extent to which the projects are delivering? Delivery has to be very clearly measured so that the public can actually see what benefits have been accruing to them.

**Tom Arthur:** I take Liz Smith's point. With community wealth building, our commitments on developing wellbeing economy metrics will be important. Community wealth building is a model that can deliver on the aspirations and ideals of the wellbeing economy.

As I move towards closing my remarks, I want to touch on the work of the Scottish Land Commission, which has launched community wealth building guidance that sets out practical actions that public bodies can take to use and manage land productively and in the public interest.

Our local authorities are driving the agenda, but other sectors and anchor public bodies are looking to embed the approach in their practice and engagement with local partners, including NHS Scotland, the police and fire services as well as our further and higher education institutions.

My proposition is that there is little to disagree with on this exciting new approach. Basically, it is about making our existing spend work harder to create fairer and more resilient local and regional economies. Community wealth building is about making all of the money work for local communities. The principles that underpin the model will increasingly influence the way in which the Scottish Government invests.

I turn to the development of legislation. During my discussions with the pilot areas and other key stakeholders, a number of potential barriers and impediments to the advancement of community wealth building have been raised. Earlier this month, I chaired the first meeting of the new community wealth building bill steering group. A broad cross-section of public, private and third

sector partners have been invited to help develop and refine our legislative proposition. I also want to work with colleagues in the chamber and, where relevant, the United Kingdom Government as consensually as possible to ensure the continued success of community wealth building.

I am keen that development of the legislation is influenced by those with experience on the ground, so that we build on that knowledge and enthusiasm. That extends to ensuring that we measure progress, the model's operation and the results and outputs, such as business growth, new job creation and having more land in community ownership. We also need to focus on gathering evidence about the beneficial long-term impacts of community wealth building.

Community wealth building can help to transform local and regional economies across Scotland. It can protect and create good jobs, and it can revive underutilised assets in our town centres and rural and island economies, unleashing the dynamism of community ownership and ensuring that local communities have a greater stake in their local economy. As Ted Howard says, Scotland is "becoming a global leader" in this field. We must be ambitious, bold and innovative in developing legislation to ensure that we realise the opportunity to unlock the potential of businesses and communities across Scotland, thereby creating a stronger, fairer and greener economy.

At an event recently, I was struck by a quote that I think was originally from Albert Einstein, who said:

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

In rethinking our economy over the next decade, community wealth building can make a pivotal contribution.

This is perhaps not as erudite as an Einstein quote, but I was informed recently that, on an album released by the American band REM one year after I was born, there is a song called "Cuyahoga". The song's themes include repairing a damaged environment and the importance of community. The first line goes:

"Let's put our heads together and start a new country up".

I like the radical sentiment. The interesting connection is that the Cuyahoga River runs right through the centre of Cleveland, Ohio, which is the home of community wealth building. Creating Scotland's future economy needs all of us to be radical and creative, and I think that community wealth building has a key role to play in creating that future.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the huge potential of Community Wealth Building as a practical, place-based economic development model that can help transform local and regional economies to deliver a Wellbeing Economy for Scotland; agrees that Community Wealth Building can deliver more and better jobs, business growth, community-owned assets and shorter supply chains supporting net zero ambitions; welcomes the progress made by public, private and third sectors in implementing Community Wealth Building in Scotland so far; notes that the 2021 Programme for Government and recent National Strategy for Economic Transformation confirmed plans to introduce legislation on Community Wealth Building during the current Parliamentary session; believes that this provides an important opportunity to think creatively and innovatively about the interconnections and interdependencies between the economy, environment and society, and supports plans for wide engagement on this legislation.

15:08

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland)**

**(Con):** This is a hugely important debate for communities right across Scotland. Community wealth building provides opportunities for delivering a prosperous society for all our citizens, and I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives and to reaffirm our party's support for the ambitions that community wealth building seeks to achieve. Although those ambitions are laudable, the Government must ensure that, where public money is to be allocated, it represents value to the public purse and substantial outcomes for our people.

The Scottish Conservative amendment recognises the importance of community wealth building and seeks to ensure that constitutional differences are put aside and focus is given to working collaboratively with the UK Government to ensure that our collective ambitions are realised for the whole of Scotland. I find it strange, however, that the devolved Government has brought the debate to the Parliament at this time. Yes, it is important, but the issue is only one part of growing our economy and, without a proper coherent strategy and economic growth, I am afraid that the debate will not bring the required changes.

The Scottish National Party's report card on the economy makes for grim reading. Alex Salmond's promise of 28,000 green jobs by 2020 has failed miserably; it is yet another broken promise from the SNP Government. We have also seen much public money being pumped into Burntisland Fabrications, for example, with little or nothing to show for it. Communities have been failed.

We have the smelter at Lochaber, where millions of pounds of taxpayers' cash have been put at risk—perhaps illegally—and thousands of jobs were promised. However, once again, we

have very little to show for it. Communities have been failed.

We also have the ferry fiasco, where millions of pounds have been pumped in to purchase two ferries with no guarantee, no design, no windows, no end date, no liquefied petroleum gas storage and no proper procurement trail. Furthermore, delivery is years late. Communities have been failed.

Now we have the SNP's latest pet project, ScotRail. When we discuss transforming local and regional economies, let us think about the damage that is being caused by having no transport system at certain times of the day.

The rail dispute is causing havoc across Scotland and having a huge impact on the events and hospitality industry just at the time that it is trying to recover from more than two years of disruption. The dispute will cause businesses to fail and jobs to be lost. How will that help our local communities?

Today, the Scottish hospitality group has called for an urgent review of the temporary train timetable. I say temporary, but nobody in the Government can seem to define what "temporary" means. The group has said that the revised timetable is a threat to public safety as customers and staff will struggle to get home at night.

There is little use in creating good well-paid jobs if people cannot get to those jobs because of poor or non-existent public transport, as might be the case now, depending on the time of day. We are now living in a society in which people are being forced to drive to work. However, if people cannot drive or cannot afford a car, I am not sure what they are meant to do.

The rail dispute is costing jobs and this devolved Government needs to act. How ironic it is that we now have the Greens in Government at a time when rail fares are increasing and services are being slashed. No wonder Green MSPs do not want to comment on the mess in which they are complicit.

In my region, we have the oil and gas industry. That was once seen as the cornerstone of the independence argument, but the industry is being thrown under the bus by the SNP-Green coalition. How will that attitude help those communities in the north-east of Scotland, which are seeing their opportunities swept away by the hostility that this devolved Government is demonstrating?

Perhaps the minister will focus on that list of economic failures when he is summing up. Those failures are damaging our communities, but no doubt that will be glossed over as the Government congratulates itself. It needs to get its head out of

the sand and see the damage that it is doing to the economy as a whole.

The principles of community wealth building have the potential to be transformational for many communities up and down the country. It is strange, however, that the Government's motion makes no mention of the huge elephant in the room: the funding of local government.

The briefing note from the Improvement Service states that local government has a huge role to play as an anchor institution; as a strategic partner of other anchor institutions that might already be a part of local community planning structures; and as a partner of the Scottish Government, developing policies and enabling measures. Local authorities have a huge role to play in economic growth and community wealth building. They are closest to our communities and they understand local needs best of all. However, this year, local government had a real-terms cut of £251 million to its core budget.

Of course, economic development is not a statutory service for councils. Because statutory services are protected, it is vital functions such as economic development that must shoulder the bulk of the cuts. That seems to be the way of this centralising devolved Government: short-sightedness that will have a detrimental effect on all our communities and a negative impact on our long-term economic prosperity.

The Scottish Government talks about partnership with local government, but it is not a partnership; it is a dictatorship.

**Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP):** The member will recognise that my constituency and Ayrshire have definitely not been afforded a just transition over the years. Does the member welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has committed £3 million to community wealth building as part of the Ayrshire growth deal? That will build on the work that has already been done. Over the past decade, East Ayrshire Council has put all its money into ensuring that local producers are supported when procuring school meals.

**Douglas Lumsden:** I absolutely agree. That is one of the reasons why local government needs to be funded correctly. Without proper funding, it is harder for local government to play a vital role.

The devolved Government dictates to local authorities what it wants, and local government simply has to fall in line. That is why the Scottish Government is so against the levelling up funds. Those funds allow local government to bid in directly without the controlling, centralising hand of the Scottish Government. Our citizens do not care where the money is coming from to provide

investment and jobs in our communities—they just want the investment to happen.

We have seen truly ambitious plans and historic funding from the UK Government throughout the pandemic, but more importantly, as we move from our response into recovery, it is vital that we ensure that communities can rebuild following the economic and social devastation that the pandemic has left behind.

That investment from the UK Government is levelling up communities across the whole UK, as set out in the £4.8 billion levelling up fund. Although that additional investment has been focused on strategically significant projects, the UK Government has rightly recognised that more targeted funding that empowers local communities is also required. The community ownership fund that the UK Government has unveiled provides an additional £150 million for communities across the UK, enabling them to own and manage community assets at risk of closure. That investment will place significant decision-making powers at the heart of our communities.

In summary, the Conservatives and the SNP Government are not miles apart on the vital issue that we are discussing. As I acknowledged in my opening remarks, we agree on the ambition of securing long-term economic security and prosperity across our communities, and we agree that we want to implement policies that improve outcomes for individuals and families. Where we seem to disagree with the Government is that we want the Scottish Government and the UK Government to work collaboratively and constructively in achieving those results.

We all know that the SNP likes nothing better than spin and grievance, but it cannot cover up the economic incompetence and recklessness that it has demonstrated. All our indicators show that Scotland is falling behind the rest of the UK, but this devolved Government tries to take no responsibility. We have seen it pass the buck so many times, often to local government. We have to recognise that local government has a huge role to play in the community wealth building agenda, but in order for it to do so, it needs to be funded correctly.

The way that this devolved Government treats our local government partners is a disgrace. Let us get behind our local government colleagues and give them the tools and the autonomy that they require to do their jobs. That will benefit our communities across Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-04580.3, to insert at end:

“; agrees that the economic success of Scotland relies on both the UK and Scottish governments working together to develop a set of economic strategies that will deliver a

more prosperous society for all; welcomes the UK Government's £150 million Community Ownership Fund and encourages Scotland's communities to bid for this funding, and believes that the huge potential of Community Wealth Building is being held back by the unwillingness of the Scottish Government to sufficiently invest in local government."

15:17

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** If we were being frank and honest, and if we went around the chamber and asked every member what they meant by "community wealth building", we would probably find a lot of very different answers. If we went outside the chamber to the street, we might find that people did not know what we were talking about at all. Perhaps the biggest challenge is to establish a consensus and a common understanding, because without that, we cannot make community wealth building successful.

However, let us be clear: in the coming years, we face huge economic challenges. We have still not understood the full costs of Covid, let alone begun to address recovery. We are in the midst of a cost of living emergency, as many Scots face spiralling costs for their heating and travel and to feed themselves.

Before those new unexpected challenges, we have the challenge of meeting our climate change targets, which creates an imperative to overhaul our economy. That need is urgent and—to be frank—it is not clear to me that either the investment or the plans are in place to enable us to meet our 2030 targets.

We need big ideas, and community wealth building could be one of those ideas. I make it clear that, beyond the challenges that I have set out, there are communities up and down Scotland that have never recovered from the loss of once-proud industries such as steel, shipbuilding, mining and manufacturing. We need answers that can address both the most recent issues and those enduring ones, which we in Scotland know only too well. We need big and bold ideas to rebuild and remake our economy. Community wealth building can and should be at the heart of that change, but we need greater clarity from the Scottish Government on its intentions and on the resources that it will bring to bear.

As I said in my intervention on the minister, there were seven mentions of community wealth building in the economic transformation plan, but there was very little clarity on what is meant by that. That clarity is what we need if we are going to make progress. I listened carefully to the minister's speech, but we heard no detail about how community wealth building will proceed, what it means in a Scottish context as opposed to

broader examples and what the first steps will truly be.

**Tom Arthur:** Will the member give way?

**Daniel Johnson:** Yes—I would be grateful for more detail.

**Tom Arthur:** I am very grateful to Mr Johnson for giving way. The key approach is to recognise that this is bottom up. Local communities are the driver and local authorities are clearly a key anchor institution, as are health boards, further education and industry.

We have the established five-pillar model. We have the work that is going on in Ayrshire, which started in North Ayrshire and now involves all the local authorities in Ayrshire, plus the health board, the Third Sector Interface in North Ayrshire and the college. We have the pilot areas, and other local authorities are pursuing their own areas.

The action that we are taking in the short term is to support all local authorities to develop community wealth building action plans. Different areas are understandably focused on different pillars, but from that learning and through consultation, the objective will be that the legislation that we introduce in the Parliament later in this session will seek to remove barriers and impediments that those who are on the front line have identified, and to consolidate gains.

I hope that that helps to clarify some of the points. The key aspect is the five-pillar model that has been in place North Ayrshire and the wider Ayrshire region for some time.

**Daniel Johnson:** I am grateful for that lengthy intervention. It provides some clarity, but I think that we need to go further. If we look at examples, both here in Scotland in North Ayrshire and elsewhere, we see that a firm commitment needs investment as well as intent. It goes beyond simply removing barriers and looks at changing the institutional frameworks.

Community wealth building, when done properly, has the capacity to make change, but it has to have that focus. We currently have good examples, even closer to home, that we might not consider to be community wealth building, such as the Edinburgh Solar Co-operative. Even Lothian Buses is a great example of municipal ownership.

We must learn the lessons, both recent and in the past. I would take small issue with the statement that community wealth building is a brand new concept. I firmly believe that the values at the heart of it are ensuring that assets and economic means serve and are accountable to those who depend on them, and those values are absolutely vital. They are enduring Labour values: ensuring that the means of production are as

widely held as possible for the benefit of the many, not the few.

We will support the Government motion, but our amendment seeks to ensure that it has meaning and purpose.

We will not support the Conservative amendment, however, for two reasons. First, its focus on local authority funding is somewhat dangerous. This cannot be viewed as a substitute for local authority funding; it must be additional to it. What is more, I do not think that the levelling-up funding—which is a poor substitute for the funding that it replaces—is worth supporting at all. Ultimately, it rings somewhat hollow to hear arguments about local authority funding from a party that has cut by half the funding for local authorities in England.

We must go further. We have a cluttered landscape of agencies and disconnected initiatives when it comes to regional economic development. To be truly successful, it must be embedded at that scale. At the moment, city region deals have little accountability and little joined-up action with the local authorities in their areas. If we are to be successful, we must have that regional lens, because Scotland's regional economic inequalities are gross and unjust.

There is a short distance of 60 miles between Dundee and Edinburgh, but we see huge inequalities between them—as much as 30 per cent in terms of the hourly output per worker. That might be a narrow and cold economic measure, but it reflects real differences in wages, life opportunities and the ability of people to feed themselves and their families.

Going further, we must also look to infrastructure and transport. In some ways, I am disappointed that the Liberal Democrat amendment was not selected because, ultimately, we can do all these things. We can create the jobs, but if people do not have the ability to travel to those jobs, they will serve little purpose. Infrastructure and transport are absolutely key—a point that I believe that my colleague Pauline McNeill will elaborate on further. The track record of the current Scottish Government is not a good one. We see the public transport system in meltdown because of the Government's failure to plan and to invest. It is not just about the two ferries that it cannot build; it is about the many other ferries that it should have been building over the past decade, which, frankly, it has failed to do.

In summary, we cautiously welcome the Government's enthusiasm for community wealth building. However, a huge amount of detail is still needed. There must be a commitment to provide long-term resources; community wealth building should not be just another fad or tick-box exercise.

Ultimately, we must embed community wealth building at local, regional and national levels. Quite simply, community wealth building is not ambitious enough; we need to have ambition for national wealth building.

I move amendment S6M-04580.1, to insert at end:

“; believes that the Scottish Government should provide more detail to its Community Wealth Building proposals to ensure it is embedded within a clear regional economic framework and a coherent and ambitious industrial strategy to support post-pandemic economic development and local job creation; further believes that the necessary legislative, institutional change and investment must be available to deliver the Community Wealth Building that Scotland needs and that can be translated into regional and national growth, and calls on the Scottish Government to revise all public procurement policies to ensure that Community Wealth Building is embedded at every level.”

15:25

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I am trying not to be grumpy, but I have to say that SNP ministers love these kinds of debates. They craftily entice us to daydream about the future, to think big, to think out of the box and to look at the stars—to think about things other than what is going on in our country right now—in a desperate attempt to distract us. Today, we get the promise of pilots and action plans; all we need now is a working group and another consultation and then we will have the full set. However, we should look at the reality.

**Tom Arthur:** In case Mr Rennie misheard me, I note that I did not give a promise of pilots—the pilots already exist. This is happening and has been happening for years. There has been £3 million of investment in the Ayrshire growth deal. I want to reassure Mr Rennie and disabuse him of any notion that this is simply a mission statement or rhetoric. The work is happening on the ground, and we are deepening and accelerating it.

**Willie Rennie:** Well, that excites me greatly. I am ecstatic that the minister has now got the pilots actually working. What about doing stuff?

What about doing stuff up in Lochaber? We were promised 2,000 jobs on the back of the £586 million financial guarantee that was provided to GFG Alliance Ltd for the aluminium smelter. What do we have? We have a handful of jobs—nowhere near the 2,000 that were promised.

The First Minister went to Fort William and promised that there would be a community land transaction, which is exactly what the minister was talking about today. Jahama Estates Mamore Holdings Ltd, as it is known, was supposed to benefit the people who live on or near the estate. I will tell the minister what we have had so far: the

transfer of a quarter-acre car park. That is not community wealth building.

Let us take offshore renewables. The Scottish Government sold ScotWind on the cheap. The value of the successful bids in Scotland is far below what we have managed to get elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In this country, we got £100,000 per square kilometre. Round 4 in England and Wales achieved £879 million, which is £361,000 per square kilometre—almost four times as much as we got here. The leases here were sold off on the cheap.

**Daniel Johnson:** My understanding is that, in relation to value, the leases were sold off for just 5 per cent of the total revenues that will be generated. Does Willie Rennie agree that we have little more than platitudes from the Government in relation to securing supply chains? Is that not a failure of national wealth building, right there?

**Willie Rennie:** Absolutely. What is worse is that the Government has lumped together all the contracts in a massive leasing round. What does that mean? It means that the work will go abroad, because we will not be able to ramp up the capacity or the workforce to meet demand. There will be a massive glut of work all at the same time. That is hardly community wealth building.

We cannot even manage to build the 54 jackets for the Neart na Gaoithe wind farm in the Forth. We are getting to build just eight jackets. What is even worse is that, as well as jackets being shipped in from the other side of the planet, we are having to ship in workers from Portugal to build those eight jackets in Fife. That is a disgrace; it is not community wealth building. While workers in Methil and Leven are paying, through their electricity bills, for the wind farm to be built, the work is being shipped in from abroad, and so are the workers. That is not community wealth building.

We can look at what Reform Scotland said this week about the big, grand promise—for what has felt like decades—of the Scottish National Investment Bank. Ross Brown, from the University of St Andrews, said that the Government is going to have to make up its mind whether it is a green infrastructure development bank or whether it will invest in communities and small businesses. He said:

“The two are very different objectives and using the same instrument to achieve both seems at best ill-advised and at worst foolhardy.”

That is not investing in our communities, and it is certainly not community wealth building.

Depriving our island communities of their first chance for a decent summer tourism season because of the calamity of the ferry services is also not community wealth building. Bookings will

be cancelled because people cannot be sure that they can get to our islands. Just as people on our islands get an opportunity to build some wealth in their communities, it is snatched away from them by an incompetent Government that cannot build two ferries. As a result, people on the islands lose out.

Then, there are the rail services. Across Scotland, 700 rail services have been cancelled by the Government within weeks of it taking control of the trains. Communities across Scotland will have community wealth building opportunities snatched away from them because the Government cannot even run a train service.

That all sounds negative, but it is the reality for people in our communities, so while we have these lofty debates and look to the stars about community wealth building with a grand plan and wonderful pilots, people are suffering. The Parliament needs to keep its feet on the ground and to understand what is happening in our communities, because if it does not it will quickly become out of touch. I am afraid that the Government is already out of touch if it thinks that this debate is a substitute for delivery of services in our communities. Let us get real and have a proper debate about real things.

15:31

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** Community wealth building is real for many people, and they will be absolutely insulted by what we just heard from Willie Rennie.

The idea of community wealth building has come as part of the development of a new economic growth model of wellbeing, in which we take a more rounded approach to what success looks like. It embraces the strength, ingenuity, enterprise and creativity of local people to shape and develop locally sustainable economies. That must be a way forward.

The SNP Government has supported the development of that wellbeing approach by being a founding member of Wellbeing Economy Alliance's wellbeing economy Governments partnership, and by piloting six community wealth building pilots.

We must rethink our models of growth and delivery. The pandemic, recognition of the role that local people play in our communities, the importance of local secure supply chains, economic growth and raising and spending wealth locally all provide further impetus to the agenda.

The Association for Public Service Excellence—APSE—report, “The new municipalism: Taking back entrepreneurship”, is a challenge and an opportunity for local councils, and it sits well within

community wealth building. The pioneering creative and community-led approach of SNP-run East Ayrshire Council is an excellent example of it.

The Government motion agrees that we need shorter supply chains to support net zero ambitions. In the West Lothian Council area, the Scottish Government's place-based investment fund has supported West Lothian College to develop a local skills supply chain for net zero with a passivhaus and a retrofit house to help in the expansion of locally sourced and trained skilled workers in that vital field, with almost £500,000 to construct its training centre.

The benefits of sustainability and resilience are critical to the agenda, and if the minister has not done so, I suggest that Willie Rennie and other MSPs read the Economy and Fair Work Committee's report into sustainability and resilience of supply chains, and our comments on measuring carbon miles in public procurement.

Anchor public institutions can support sustainable and resilient local sources of wealth—from food to energy. Asset ownership of community-focused buildings and energy sources means that they can be used to further community wealth building development; they are doing so already.

The minister invited us to consider what elements we can consider in developing policy and law. My first advice is to legislate only if necessary. Smart, nimble and enthusiastic policy making by inspired local leadership can often produce quicker results.

On procurement, legislation might be required to give local partners confidence to procure locally. The quest for value for money has often led to choices in favour of supply chains that are now globally vulnerable and which are not well suited to community wealth building.

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will proceed. Unlike the main spokesperson for the Conservatives, I want to address the motion.

We need leadership and partnership. The community wealth building model involves local authorities and their community planning partners ensuring that collective investment decisions focus on how local economies can be helped to grow and flourish. However, there must be a process of genuine partnership, rather than a repackaging of a centralised command and control model by councils or Government. It must be locally and community led.

Risk must be shared equitably, so we need to think differently about risk. Last week, the chief executive of Community Enterprise in Scotland,

Martin Avila, told the Economy and Fair Work Committee:

"Some of the previous Scottish Government rental guarantee schemes were there for developers to be able to take risks in order to develop new housing stock, but they were not necessarily open to community owners. We were therefore telling the private sector that its risk would be underwritten by the state, because the rental income guarantee scheme guaranteed that it would receive an income, but that was not open to socially focused organisations. Often, as a state, we say that we understand that private enterprise is risky, so we will incentivise and de-risk it, and it will get to privatise the value that is captured. However, when it comes to community organisations that want to socialise the economic value that they create, we say that we are really not sure that they can carry their plan out without failing. We have to end that false equivalence".—[*Official Report, Economy and Fair Work Committee*, 18 May 2022; c 11.]

On funding, we need to be warned about place funding that is spread thinly across individual projects that councils already wanted to support, rather than being focused on generating growth, leveraging partner and private funding, and building a local customer base.

As far as challenges are concerned, anchor projects in district heating and energy, including local solar generation and electric vehicle charging, are being developed, and local energy companies are an example of asset building as the way forward. However, the issue comes back to what is statutory and what is not, and what the capacity and capability of local councils are to resource projects with people and expertise.

Town centres matter, but each and every one is different, and leadership and skills might be found in various places. If the Government has explicitly said that business improvement districts need to be consulted on place-based funding and there is evidence that they have not been, the minister should be concerned.

When Parliament discussed our immediate recovery from the early part of the pandemic in the summer of 2020, I said that we needed not just evolution, but a revolution, in our economic thinking. The part that community wealth building is playing in the wellbeing economy drive is a revolution that is happening in plain sight, but is not often heralded as such.

Therefore, I hope that this afternoon's debate can act as a clarion call to herald that new era for Scotland. The difference is that the Scottish Government and the Scottish National Party trust the people of Scotland. We trust our communities, we put faith in them and we respect them by driving forward the community wealth building agenda. I emphasise to Mr Rennie that that agenda respects the communities of our country.



15:38

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. As members are aware, it is my belief and the belief of my party that the development of community is essential for the prosperity of Scotland. We can call that process “community wealth building”, but it is important to define what we mean by that. In my view, it involves creating an environment in which people want to live, work and play, and where the essence of community interaction—that intangible feeling of belonging—can grow. In that way, community wellbeing and, therefore, community wealth are developed.

As I have said many times, I believe that, in recent decades, the heart has been ripped out of so many communities as a policy of centralisation has been pursued by the Scottish Government, to the detriment of those communities.

We are talking about the ability of communities to come together in a shared interest, whether that is sport, art, music or drama. An issue that I have mentioned numerous times, but to which lip service has been paid, is the need for all members of a community to have the ability to turn up to watch their children participate in an activity on a Saturday morning, and for parents and friends to be able to be part of that, whether in an official capacity or otherwise.

However, community assets have been systematically ripped out or allowed to fall into disrepair, and the ability of communities to engage has been eroded. Too often these days, if people are to participate in any kind of activity, they must come home from work or school and then go somewhere else. That affects the less well off to a much greater degree.

We must look to schools much more for their facilities to become community hubs. We must open up the school estate and use it for community activity. That is surely now more important than ever. Open spaces for people to play and learn in should be in all our communities; my colleague, Liz Smith, has long championed that. Such opportunities are becoming rarer.

Connecting communities is another issue that has been allowed to drift. It has such an impact on a community’s ability to grow and prosper.

Ever since I entered the Scottish Parliament, we in the Conservative Party have been crying out for investment in transport infrastructure, especially in the south-west of Scotland, in my case. Ministers should speak to people in the communities along the A77 and A75, not to mention the A76, A72, A71 and A70, and ask them how easy it is to get to work and to access basic service amenities. How on earth does the Scottish Government expect itself to be taken seriously discussing

community wealth building when huge swathes of the country remain ignored, with infrastructure that has not been invested in for decades? We have a Scottish Government that is so insular that it will not engage with the UK Government on its desire to make extra investment in our community infrastructure, as my colleague Douglas Lumsden pointed out.

On the train link in the south-west, I was going to suggest that it needs a significant investment to bring it up to the standard that is required, along with investing in train services generally, opening up stations and rail links, and encouraging the use of public transport. However, that is a bit of a moot point at the moment, given the fact that so few trains are running. There are two trains a day from Stranraer to Glasgow, and, in some cases, the time of last trains to busy Ayrshire stations will be brought back by hours, with some final journeys leaving Glasgow as early as 6.20. Instead of community wealth building, communities are being cut off, so when the Scottish Government has the audacity to mention net zero in its motion, we are left wondering how far out of touch with communities it really is. The only way for communities to reach out just now is by car, and those will not be electric cars because rural communities are the very last places to get electric charging points.

I want to mention public procurement, as I recognise that it was an element in Daniel Johnson’s amendment. I agree with him completely that we should invest money in the local economy wherever possible. Surely that goes without saying. However, again, it is not true for this Government. For as long as I have been a member of the Scottish Parliament, we have been debating with the Scottish Government the need to revise public procurement policy, and encouraging and cajoling it to do so, to no avail.

Specifically, the public procurement of food should be an easy win. We should support our local food producers, the rural economy and the health of our children in school, patients in hospitals and all other public office staff. It is frustrating for me to listen to Fiona Hyslop talk about East Ayrshire. East Ayrshire Council has shown us for years that that can be done and the way to do it, yet the rest of the country is not following suit. How frustrating! Here we are still importing the majority of our food, which is often of a standard that is far lower than that of local produce.

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** Does the member not recognise that that is exactly what the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill is all about? Already, 90 per cent of the red meat that goes into Scottish schools is ordered from Scottish suppliers.

**Brian Whittle:** I thank Jim Fairlie for his intervention but I must disagree with him. That is what the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill should be about, but it is an absolute shell. The Scotland Excel public procurement policy shows that something like 16 per cent of the food that we use in schools comes from Scotland, and that is an absolute shame on the Scottish Government.

Community wealth building is about so much more than pounds and pence. It is about engendering a sense of community pride and creating an environment in which people want to live, work and play. It is about giving communities the opportunity to come together and connect to other like-minded communities. If we do that, the financial wealth will follow. Sadly, the Scottish Government has shown that it is unable to grasp the meaning of community wealth building.

15:44

**Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** Community wealth building will help to build resilience in local economies and create a fairer and more secure economic future, and it will support the development of land for community benefit. As has been said, it relies on five pillars: progressive procurement, about which I will speak a bit more later; shared ownership of the local economy; socially just use of land and property; making financial power work for local places; and fair employment and just labour markets. On that final pillar, the Scottish Government's fair work first approach is very welcome, and there are many real living wage accredited employers across the country.

Scotland has been described as a global leader in the community wealth building movement. I am biased, but I believe that East Kilbride is doing well, too. We have good foundations in place from which to push forward and make the most of new opportunities, including the many enterprises that follow the principles of the community wealth building pillars.

For example, East Kilbride Credit Union offers an ethical and safe way to save, and it exists to serve the local community. We have fantastic social enterprises as well, such as the Furnishing Service, which is led by Randle Wilson. It has won many awards from Scotland Excel over the years, created many employment opportunities for young and disabled people, and diverted more than 1,000 tonnes of products from landfill.

There are many other companies in the town that are committed to employee wellbeing and fair employment practices. There are also several employee-owned businesses, including Novograf, Grossart Associates and Clansman Dynamics.

In East Kilbride, we are also lucky to have excellent public spaces such as Langlands Moss, Calderglen country park and the James Hamilton heritage loch, as well as the Glen Esk pocket park in St Leonards and the newly designated local nature reserve in Mossneuk. Between them, those areas offer amazing benefits to locals, including great walking routes, bike trails, water sports, outdoor classrooms, sports facilities and cafes. I understand that a variety of flora and fauna enjoys those areas, too. Many community groups help to protect and enhance those spaces, including the Friends of Langlands Moss and the East Kilbride development trust.

As well as community-minded organisations such as those that I have mentioned, the public sector will have a crucial role to play. From local authorities to the national health service, the large budgets that are available to public sector organisations could be used to unlock wider benefits.

That includes pension funds. When I sat on the pension board for the Strathclyde Pension Fund, we were very keen and worked alongside trade unions to make sure that the direct investment portfolio was used at local level to boost local economies and support ethical businesses, so we followed many of the principles of community wealth building.

Another way that public sector organisations can effect change is through procurement. By applying progressive procurement practices, there is a big opportunity to create local, well-paid jobs and maximise community benefit. Supply chain visibility is an important part of that. When large companies win contracts, we should be able to see where their subcontracting goes. Those processes should be open and transparent, so that we can easily identify the community benefit of big contracts.

I have spoken before about the Supplier Development Programme, which does great work with small businesses to help them to understand procurement processes and to highlight the opportunities that are available in subcontracting. Shortening the supply chain by using local enterprises delivers a clear benefit in local communities, through employment opportunities and business growth. It also supports us in reaching our climate targets, by reducing the carbon footprint of products. The proposed community wealth building bill could help by developing procurement practices to support local economies and small businesses. *[Interruption.]* No, I would like to make progress. The bill would also encourage school canteens and hospitals to use more locally produced food.

Community wealth building offers us great opportunities to improve our local communities,

support fair employment, take a place-based approach to the economy and deliver on our climate targets. A big thing for me is the use of progressive procurement in the public sector, so that big contracts support local and ethical businesses and create and protect good-quality jobs.

If we take anything from the experience of the pandemic, it should be the beliefs that we can effect real change, that we should protect and enhance our local spaces and that we must build a fairer and more secure economic future. By putting the emphasis on the local, community wealth building is the key to that.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Richard Leonard, to be followed by Alasdair Allan.

15:50

**Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):** There is a climate emergency. People are working for the economy, but the economy is not working for the people. We have massive inequalities in income, wealth and power, which are growing ever wider. In one of the wealthiest nations in the history of the world, life expectancy is not going up—it is going down. One in four children in Scotland is living in grinding poverty, and yet two out of three of those children are being brought up in households where at least one adult is in work. What a shocking indictment of our low pay economy; what a shocking indictment of capitalism; and what a shocking indictment of the SNP-Green Government Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work who—on £98,000 a year—took to the BBC at the weekend to lecture the working people of Scotland to be sensible and to exercise pay restraint! Shame on him.

I have long argued that building an economic strategy around foreign direct investment is a catastrophic error. According to the Scottish Government's own latest annual business statistics, 82 per cent of all large businesses in Scotland, accounting for 65 per cent of employment and three quarters of all turnover, now have their ultimate base—their headquarters, their ownership—outside Scotland. That is not a mark of economic strength but a sign of parlous economic weakness. We have a branch plant economy in which far too much of the wealth that is generated is extracted and then exported.

That is precisely why a community wealth building approach to economic development is now more critical than ever. That is why it needs to move from the fringe to the mainstream. It is not a refinement that we need, which is what the minister said—it is a revolution. That is why simply trying to create a pro-growth, pro-business, post-

Brexit environment is to fundamentally misunderstand both the scale of the challenge that we face and the direction that the economy now needs to go in.

Let me be as plain to Government ministers as I can be.

**Jim Fairlie:** I am confused by what the member just said. Is he actually against business?

**Richard Leonard:** No. I am in favour of business building from the bottom up. The problem with the member's party's Government policy is that, for too long, it has been reliant on foreign direct investment as the only engine of growth. We should be looking to the people, we should be looking to local businesses and we should be looking to the wealth that is in our communities as the basis for economic development, because traditional solutions will not work. We need an economic plan—a jobs-first industrial strategy that is investment led, people centred and net zero and manufacturing driven. We need a new economic strategy of state intervention to secure popular control rather than simply popular intervention to secure state control.

Let me give a practical example of community wealth building. For nearly two decades, we have had a land reform act that gives communities the statutory right to buy the land that they live on. So, the time is long overdue for an industrial reform act that gives working people a statutory right to buy the business or enterprise that they work in, because why should not the people who create the wealth own the wealth that they create? It is my intention to bring a bill to Parliament that will seek to deliver that in due course, because I firmly believe that the time has come when we need to be radical in our thinking, transformative in our vision and resolute in our action. That means using the financial firepower that we already have, such as our pension funds.

Strathclyde Pension Fund is the second-biggest local government fund in the UK, with assets worth £26 billion, and yet it could undertake so much more primary investment activity locally instead of relying so much on secondary investment activity and the buying and selling of stocks and shares that benefit economies on the other side of the world.

We should use the financial firepower of public procurement, where we spend £13 billion a year in Scotland, but again, far too much of that ends up in the hands of large global corporations, too many of which are registered in tax havens.

We need a new path that is based on the principles of economic, social and environmental justice, because we and the people who we represent know that the rigged way that our

economy is run and the unequal share-out of the fruits of their labour is not the natural order.

We know and they know that there is an alternative way of organising the economic system. We caught a glimpse of the possibilities of community wealth building in North Ayrshire; we know what has worked in Preston; and we have seen the benefits internationally in Cleveland, Ohio.

Let us make community and worker ownership, climate and social justice, equality and democracy, decentralisation and diversity central to the kind of economy that we want to build after the pandemic, so that every job is a green job and the whole economy is a social economy. Let us not merely debate it; let us go out there and do it.

15:56

**Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):**

This debate is timely. For many decades, wage stagnation, low productivity and huge wealth inequalities have often seemed like entrenched features of the Scottish economy. As we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, there has never been a more important time to examine our approaches to local economic development.

Contrary to some of what we have heard this afternoon, what has been outlined by the minister on community wealth building is a people-centred approach to local economic development that redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people.

The Scottish Government is working with five areas, including my constituency of Na h-Eileanan an Iar, to produce bespoke community wealth building action plans. Community wealth building is underpinned by five central principles: progressive procurement; fair employment and just labour markets; shared ownership of the local economy; socially just use of land and property; and making financial power work for local places.

In many ways, it is difficult to think of a part of the country that is more suited to the ideas behind community wealth building than my constituency. The Western Isles has the highest rate of living wage employers anywhere in Scotland. Its strong tradition of crofting encourages durable links between communities and the land, and it has been a trailblazer for community land ownership, with a significant 70 per cent of people living on community-owned estates.

Community land ownership has to be an essential aspect of any community wealth building strategy that we talk about. There are people—perhaps even members of the Scottish Parliament—who would argue that the way that

land is used is far more important than how it is owned.

However, community wealth building recognises the intertwined nature of land ownership and land use. Different forms of ownership come with different forms of management that in turn determine how land is used. I can think of countless examples in my constituency that illustrate that. For example, the West Harris Trust has done fantastic work since the community bought the land from the Scottish Government in 2010.

At that time, the population of the area was unsustainable; a very low proportion of residents were of working age and 35 per cent of the housing stock was self-catering cottages or holiday homes. The trust wanted to attract young families into the area and focused on creating employment and housing prospects for them.

Although those problems of fragility have certainly not gone away, since 2010 the trust has created opportunities for small local businesses to flourish, sold housing plots and enabled the construction of new housing units for rented social housing, and as part of a shared equity scheme, it has created jobs in the trust itself and a further 20 jobs at its purpose-built arts, food and entertainment centre.

Those numbers may sound small, but in a community the size of west Harris, they have a disproportionate impact. As a major employer, the trust provides a range of opportunities for local suppliers and—crucially, and this is where the relevance is—it ensures that all the income that it derives from its facilities is reinvested back into the community for local projects.

That has all had a real impact, with a 20 per cent increase in population since the trust was established.

In contrast to west Harris—this comes back to my point about the relevance to this debate of community ownership of estates—is another community in my constituency, Great Bernera. It faces similar demographic challenges to Harris, and its people have no less a sense of community and no less a wealth of talent to draw upon. However, unlike west Harris, the island remains in absentee private ownership, despite the best efforts of the Great Bernera Community Development Trust.

While the community landlord in west Harris is a driver of development, in Bernera, I have heard complaints from constituents about demands for large sums of money before the landlord will allow legitimate transactions in relation to tenancies to proceed; he raises objections to planning permission for new housing and refuses to engage

with crofters seeking to exercise their legal right to buy their crofts.

Local residents say that those actions are prohibiting the island's development and hastening its depopulation. The island has already lost its local shop and school in recent years, while the community has been unsuccessfully trying to persuade the absentee landlord to co-operate with its buyout efforts.

That is why land ownership matters in the context of the debate that we are having about investing in communities. The best people to decide the future of our communities across Scotland are the people who live in those communities.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** What would the member say to those communities that have strongly opposed planning applications, only for their decisions to be subsequently overturned by the SNP Scottish Government? We are talking about 400 instances in the past few years and that number is increasing year on year. What does the member say to those communities, whose voices are not being heard?

**Alasdair Allan:** I would have thought that the voices within communities are heard through the planning application process, and that process has always given a role to ministers.

As an MSP representing part of the Highlands and Islands, I am heartily sick of one or two people with little or no connection with the region trying to impose on communities their notions about what the land should be used for. With the expected growth of natural capital markets and the increasing number of businesses and organisations perhaps seeking to become "green lairds", it will be more important than ever for us to do as the minister is setting out today—to guard against models of ownership that do not have local communities at their heart.

16:02

**Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** The UK is one of the most unequal countries in the world, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Vast amounts of wealth and assets are held by a small number of people. Indeed, *The Sunday Times* rich list shows that the number of billionaires in the UK is at an all-time high. There are 177 billionaires—people who saw their wealth rise by 9.4 per cent over the past year.

Scotland's top 10 billionaires have a combined wealth of over £23 billion. At a time when so many people are way beyond facing the choice between heating their homes and eating—they can afford

neither—it is clear that our economic system is broken.

Current models of economic development have failed to redistribute wealth and to provide adequately for all people in all our communities. Our economy is far from well, so today's debate is both welcome and important.

Community wealth building will not fix all our economy's ills, but it is an attempt to roll back one of the most damaging Thatcherite initiatives of the 1980s—that of moving public spending from something that should benefit the public to something that benefited the big corporations that were invited to tender for public services. Compulsory competitive tendering has resulted in the funnelling of money out of our communities. For too long, we have heard that bundling contracts creates efficiency, that the cheapest bid is the best and that the public pound should be used to increase private profits, not public good. Enough.

We know that we need to be more resilient and that strong, resourceful and innovative communities are better able to organise and work together to look out for each other and improve the lives of all their members. Community wealth building offers a meaningful way to support that work, and we are not starting from scratch. We can build on the social solidarity that developed in many places during the pandemic, and we can put community organising and wealth building at the heart of our plans for a green recovery.

We must do that as we continue to deal with the pandemic and, of course, tackle climate breakdown. We must do it in a way that builds the foundations of a new economy—one that is focused on community wealth.

In other words, we want to re-establish a community-based way of life: one that sees the value in, and of, society; one that increases economic self-reliance and local control over people's environments and their decision-making structures; and one that sees the connections and interdependencies between the economy, our environment and our society.

That approach means that people and their labour must matter more than capital. Our local and regional economies must recognise that people matter more than corporate bottom lines. We cannot let the market and capital call all the shots if we want to build community wealth. Thriving local and regional economies require local ownership, whereby the control and economic advantages are spread more broadly—for example, through co-operative, community or employee ownership models. That guards against the extraction of wealth on behalf of those at the top.

Earlier, the minister highlighted the importance of grass-roots engagement and participation to community wealth building. We need active participation in strong and robust democratic structures, because, despite what neoliberalism tells us, communities are not made up of isolated individuals who are engaged in civic life only as passive consumers. Localising investment and capital circulation matters, too. When goods and services are produced and purchased locally, that money stays in the community for longer, because local businesses are more likely to spend locally. That translates into greater local prosperity, greater community stability and a tighter-knit network of local people and businesses, which are all key to building community wealth. Imagine if we used our collective community wealth for good, rather than to fuel the casino economy that does little to provide for all.

However, building community is about much more than just having money circulating locally; it is about the power that comes from building lasting relationships of mutual support. Fostering effective collaboration between anchor organisations, local government and neighbourhood residents is not just a matter of convenience or capacity; it is utterly intrinsic to the project of community wealth building.

Place really matters, but place making does not happen by accident. Places need coherent strategies in order that local assets work to build local wealth. In addition, as others have mentioned, there need to be coherent connections to transport and other infrastructure that is vital to community survival.

In closing, I record my thanks to organisations including Community Land Scotland, the Development Trusts Association Scotland and Community Enterprise in Scotland for highlighting the vital work of anchor organisations. I thank them, too, for highlighting what we can learn from other community-focused legislation that the Parliament has passed and for pointing out the need to now make things happen to a timescale that does not lead to drift and disinterest.

Last week, Pauline Smith from the Development Trusts Association Scotland told the Economy and Fair Work Committee that

“we are not reinventing the wheel here. Different terminology is used ... Development trusts, CEIS and other agencies have supported those organisations to create community wealth and make things happen in their communities. To be honest, I think that we just need to work together, and we all have a part to play.”—[*Official Report, Economy and Fair Work Committee*, 18 May; c 8.]

Let us just get on with it.

16:08

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate.

When I looked into the work of the Democracy Collaborative, which is led by Ted Howard, I realised the huge potential of community wealth building. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but the bottom-up approach centres around democratic ownership of the economy and community self-determination. I am saying that it is not just a one-size-fits-all approach, because what happens in the central belt and in Glasgow will be different from what happens in rural areas such as the south-west of Scotland.

I lived in California for many years, where I witnessed wealth inequalities and the consequences. The Democracy Collaborative has outlined what I want to see in Scotland—wealth redistribution and benefit to our communities. That approach is in sharp contrast to what the UK Government is doing with its hard-right, individualist policies. By its fundamental design, today's corporate capitalist system takes wealth that would otherwise reside in local communities and concentrates it in the hands of a small elite. The Office for National Statistics reported that there are an estimated 27.8 million households in the UK and that 263,000 of them control 45 per cent of our country's wealth.

Ted Howard's model of community wealth building proposes an economic model with more local, good-quality jobs; improved access to public contracts for local businesses, which is particularly important for our agriculture and forestry community; more land being placed in community ownership; and support being offered to businesses that are exploring employee ownership.

Community wealth building supports renewable energy development, with the wealth that is generated being distributed back to the community. For me, that means the potential to develop renewable offshore energy in the south-west—perhaps in the Solway Firth. I would be interested in exploring that potential in the next round of ScotWind licences. When I visited Eyemouth harbour last year, it was evident that high-value jobs worth millions of pounds had been and will be brought to the community through renewable energy investment.

When it comes to how money is spent and how services are commissioned by our institutions, cost is often the dominant determining factor in who gets the contract. Environmental credentials, social value and decent employment conditions tend to be weaker considerations. We need that to change.

As others have said, with community wealth building we can create legal change in our procurement processes. That can ensure that small local and medium-sized enterprises and employee-owned businesses support local jobs and have a greater tendency to recirculate wealth directly to our communities. For example, it can allow our agriculture community to provide local produce to our schools, hospitals, social care settings, prisons and other institutions, which is something that I have been pursuing in my area but in relation to which I have faced local bureaucratic barriers. Therefore, I welcome the Government's commitment to reforming procurement processes, and I ask for a commitment that that will be taken forward at pace.

Ahead of the debate, I spoke with Rob Davidson, the community wealth building manager with South of Scotland Enterprise. The minister has described some of the work that SOSE has already done with registered social landlords. SOSE hit the ground running at the beginning of the pandemic, giving practical support to businesses fae Selkirk to Stranraer to promote community wealth principles.

**Finlay Carson:** Does the member welcome the UK Government's community ownership fund, which has seen £175,000 being spent on New Galloway town hall and £300,000 going to Whithorn ReBuild?

**Emma Harper:** I welcome some of the funding, but I do not like the fact that the money is going to places in relation to subject areas that are devolved to the Scottish Government. I would ask whether the member is happy that this place is being tramped upon in devolved areas by the UK Government.

SOSE is working with Stranraer Furniture Project in relation to the Community Reuse shop, led by project manager Paul Smith, to support that social enterprise to grow and expand. It is also incorporating fair work practices. From a phone call this morning, I know that the Furniture Project now has 22 employees and is working to the wider benefit of the community. I encourage members to look at the wide range of activities that Paul Smith and his team are undertaking.

In Castle Douglas, Stewartry Care, a provider of homecare with almost 100 employees, is beginning a Democracy Collaborative model of employee ownership. That is already happening. Some members are saying that we are looking at the stars and that this is a pie-in-the-sky idea, but that is not the case—it is happening on the ground, right now. With SOSE's help, Stewartry Care is encouraging employees to take leadership and ownership roles in the company.

One final example of a Dumfries and Galloway community wealth building trailblazer is Jas P Wilson, a forestry equipment manufacturer and distributor in Dalbeattie. The company has donated a car to the local first responders, so that they do not have to use their own car, it has financed premises for a local playgroup and it has supported the local theatre group, the Birchvale Players, in its move to new premises.

All those companies demonstrate how community wealth building is already working across Dumfries and Galloway. I welcome these examples across the south of Scotland, and I invite the minister to come and visit any of them, if his diary allows.

Community wealth building is a practical, place-based and focused model that can play a central role in growing Scotland's wellbeing economy. A community wealth building approach puts an emphasis on local people and on ownership, with a view to growing the number of people who have a genuine stake in the economy. I want more people and local communities in Scotland to have a bigger stake in our economy, share the ownership and build resilience to create a fairer and more secure economic future.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** I gently remind all members that they should remain in the chamber for at least two speeches after they have made their speeches. I will not name and shame, but periodically these reminders are useful.

16:15

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** It goes without saying that anything that helps Scotland's economy has to be warmly welcomed, particularly if support is being provided at a local level, and, yes, community wealth building is a step towards achieving that goal.

The core principles of community wealth building include procurement, whereby people are encouraged to buy and spend locally in order to support businesses in their area and, importantly, protect and, if possible, create new employment opportunities.

Community wealth building can bring positive moves towards improved use of land and assets to ensure that our communities and businesses make better use of land and property to support regeneration opportunities.

In plural ownership, wealth that is generated in a specific area will remain there to support new and existing businesses, including social and community enterprises, co-operatives and employee-owned businesses. That is particularly important in rural areas where, far too often,

projects create short-term employment and benefit but the wealth that is generated—for example, with wind farms and forestry—soon leaves the region.

On the Conservative side of the chamber, we welcome schemes that support community wealth building, many of which are supported through the UK Government's local support schemes, such as the shared prosperity and levelling up funds. Those schemes provide local communities with a greater say on where funds should be spent and which projects need to be supported.

That is a great improvement on local funding, compared to the SNP's cuts to local budgets and its centralising of decisions, because such schemes effectively give local communities their voices back—and rightly so. Local communities absolutely need their voices to be listened to, because the SNP Government is ignoring them by overturning nearly 400 local planning decisions since 2017.

**Tom Arthur:** The member raised that point earlier in an intervention about the planning appeals process. This is not a loaded question, because I genuinely want to know—in all sincerity, does he think that there should be an appeals process in the planning system?

**Finlay Carson:** I absolutely do, but the problem is that a disproportionate number of locally made decisions are subsequently overturned by the Scottish Government. Since 2017, nearly 400 decisions have been overturned and there were more last year than ever before.

Increasingly, we are witnessing the SNP Government ring fencing more of Scottish councils' budgets, and the ring-fenced amount now stands at more than half a billion pounds. That is hardly democracy.

Council budgets are being continually squeezed. For example, Dumfries and Galloway Council faces an estimated £12.8 million funding gap for the coming year.

Therefore, it is little wonder that councils of all political persuasions have welcomed the UK Government's introduction of a variety of schemes, such as the levelling up scheme, which will provide £1.5 billion to support city and growth deals in every part of this country, including the Borderlands inclusive growth deal—a unique, cross-border collaboration that will deliver a multimillion-pound investment to Dumfries and Galloway over the next 10 years.

**Emma Harper:** Does the member not think that it is a bit disproportionate that the Scottish Government has given £20 million more for the Borderlands growth deal than the UK Government

has invested? Is that levelling up or is that just losing out?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Finlay Carson, I can give you the time back.

**Finlay Carson:** I think that Emma Harper must be confused. There is a difference in the funding because the Scottish Government spends on devolved issues and the UK Government spends on reserved issues. I thought that Ms Harper might have known that.

The levelling up scheme aims to improve the long-term prosperity of our communities while enhancing the environment.

**Fiona Hyslop:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Finlay Carson:** I am sorry, but I have taken enough interventions.

Aspects of the deal, which is worth £425 million, are still being developed, but the projects, which I am sure Emma Harper will welcome, include the Stranraer marina redevelopment, the redevelopment of the former nuclear power station at Chapelcross and the creation of the dairy nexus by the Scottish Rural University College at its Barony campus, which will develop long-term innovative solutions for forage-based dairy farming.

Money will also be spent on the 7stanes network of mountain bike trails. In addition, Borderlands will improve connectivity and deliver skills and innovation that will ultimately support the longer-term resilience of towns and communities in my region.

As members will appreciate, there is great excitement surrounding the potential of the growth deal, and rightly so, in an area that has repeatedly been starved of any proper investment. It is anticipated that the Borderlands deal will deliver an additional 5,500 jobs, attract more than 4 million extra tourists, unlock investment and boost the region's economy by £1.1 billion.

The UK community renewal fund and the UK community ownership fund are other prime examples that have worked for Dumfries and Galloway. Plans to create a 21st century village—a development that promises to become a world-class visitor attraction in Dumfries—have moved closer after securing £1.4 million of funding. The project will result in nearly 500 new carbon-neutral and age-friendly homes being built on the Crichton site.

Projects in New Galloway and Whithorn have been successful in the first bidding round for the national community ownership fund. As I said, there is £175,000 for New Galloway town hall and £300,000 towards the rebuild of Whithorn town



hall. Both those projects support the social wellbeing of communities that are vital in the fabric of my constituency, through protecting facilities that would otherwise be at risk.

Furthermore, it is estimated that Dumfries and Galloway will receive more than £6.7 million to support projects that range from supporting adults who lack basic numeracy skills to helping young people into jobs and allowing residents to fulfil their potential.

The UK and Scottish Governments are working together on those projects. In the Ayrshire growth deal, the Scottish and UK Governments have contributed equally to the £103 million. As we have heard, £3 million is going to implement community wealth building.

Sadly, however, that co-operation is not universal. It is very disappointing that, despite a funding commitment from the UK Government as a result of the union connectivity review, the Scottish Government has so far failed to meet the UK Government in relation to bringing much-needed funding to improve the A75, which is critical in connecting communities and businesses in the south of Scotland.

The UK Government is taking positive steps to drive forward local and regional economies and directly deliver to local communities. The SNP Government should follow that example.

16:22

**Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab):** The phrase “community wealth building” risks being meaningless if the policies that are linked to it do nothing to alleviate the suffering that is being caused by the cost of living crisis. Currently, the economy simply is not working for a significant number of people and, as members have said, that has to change. What happened to the rhetoric at the beginning of the pandemic about building back better? We do not hear much about that now, and we have not even started down the path of changing the things that need to change. Although I see the potential of Ted Howard’s Cleveland model, in all honesty, I fail to see how Scotland is leading on that—I genuinely do not see it.

One sharp reminder that we need to radically alter the way in which the economy is structured is that, in the UK, inflation is at 9 per cent, with soaring energy bills, and there does not seem to be an end in sight. Escalating energy prices disproportionately impact on people with lower incomes, as Maggie Chapman and Richard Leonard said. The UK has the highest levels of inflation and the highest energy prices in Europe, and other G7 countries are doing a lot more to protect people from price increases. It is right to point out that context to the debate.

I acknowledge that there are pockets of success around the country but, generally, I just see a lot of failures. The fact that the Scottish Government so easily abandoned its plans for a publicly owned energy company tells me that the community wealth building strategy completely lacks ambition. We have not heard a good enough rationale for why the alternative plans have not been discussed or well developed.

The Scottish Government has to step up to the plate if it wants to match a wealth building strategy with the actual problems that people face today. We are heading for another staggering rise in the so-called energy price cap in October to £2,800, and a further 12 million households across the UK going into fuel poverty—members will be familiar with those figures. The big energy companies, which made profits of £1 billion in 2020, all deny that they can make those profits available, even in the short term, to help people who need it.

The regulator needs to toughen up and force energy companies to spend some of their profits on directly cutting bills. However, I also believe that we in Scotland could do a lot more. There is not enough time to talk about that today, but giving Energy Action Scotland a bigger role suggests to me that there are devolved aspects that we could bring into play.

The Scottish Government must give urgent support to community-owned renewable co-operatives. There is theoretical support for that—I do not think that there is an ideological divide on that point—but that must be at the heart of community wealth building. Co-operative models of ownership are vital. At this point, I declare an interest as a member of the Co-operative Party.

Communities that host renewable energy projects must benefit from those schemes. I support the Scottish Co-operative Party’s calls on the Scottish Government to give preferential treatment to genuinely community-owned renewables, by giving planning exemptions or tax breaks for example. That seems to me to fit in with a community wealth building strategy.

We have heard from other members that Preston adopted a community wealth building approach in 2011. That appears to have been highly successful because, between 2012-13 and 2016-17, the amount that was spent locally in Preston almost tripled from £38 million to £112 million. Therefore, we know that such policies can be successful. I also note that Preston has managed to halve its unemployment rate.

That success is of interest to me and to the minister. I thank the minister in advance for agreeing to meet me to discuss the issue. However, prior to that meeting, I want to use this opportunity to talk about Glasgow.

Glasgow needs a similar level of renewal to Preston. As the motion says, city regions are critical for economic development and building back, if we believe that that is what we are doing. I have been calling for an economic development agency for Glasgow for some time. I do not think that Scotland's biggest city will recover from the many problems that it has had without something overarching being in place.

I am sure that I do not need to spell out Glasgow's problems. However, at the moment, there are simply no answers to those problems. An announcement was made about the Clyde metro. That is a non-existent transport project currently—we are not likely to see that for 25 years. Huge damage has been done to the taxi trade, which I believe is an integral part of public transport. No one is listening to taxi drivers. We have lost huge numbers of jobs in hospitality. Ministers in other Government departments do not even seem to be interested in engaging with Glasgow airport. I note that, without an airport that has connectivity, a city region cannot be economically viable. I do not understand why the Scottish Government is not joining the dots.

I go back to the question of young people, who have been at the sharp end of the pandemic in Glasgow and across the country. Research shows that there have been lasting consequences for young adults—that is, those from the age of 19 to 34. I have a request for the minister: if the community wealth building strategy is central to the Government's overarching aim, it must link that closely to what needs to be done to get young people back on track so that they have careers and protected quality jobs.

16:28

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the Government's motion.

Anyone in the chamber or watching the debate who is familiar with the north-east of Scotland, where my constituency is located, is very likely to have friends or family members who have a relationship with the oil and gas sector, which has been the mainstay of the north-east economy for many decades. People might also know that more than £300 billion—and counting—in tax revenue has flowed from the North Sea oil and gas sector to the UK Treasury over the sector's lifetime.

The energy sector has been, and continues to be, a lifeline for the north-east and beyond, and although there have been unintended consequences, such as high house price and recruitment challenges, including for nurses, teachers and police officers, the economic benefit has been vast.

Today, the sector retains a modified footprint, and we await with anticipation the north-east playing its part in our just transition, which will harness the skills, talent and experience of the oil and gas workforce, underpinning our national journey to net zero. Members may ask what all that has to do with community wealth building. In my view, the answer is, "Quite a lot."

Earlier this week, I listened to an inspiring presentation by Ted Howard, who is president of the Democracy Collaborative. Like Emma Harper, I was drawn to the philosophy of community wealth building: transforming local and regional economies to deliver a true wellbeing economy.

In his presentation, Ted Howard spoke about the challenges of using traditional strategies to support economic development in urban areas, which are often simply—as he put it—a "zero sum game", predicated on the concept that markets reign supreme; that rooting jobs locally is irrelevant in a global economy; and that the benefits of economic growth will eventually trickle down. He outlined how we need to move beyond economies that are shaped and driven by the needs of investors, in which working people are considered simply a cost on a balance sheet, and towards an option that centres the economy around people and their needs and the communities in which they live: community wealth building. As the daughter of a local greengrocer, I did not need much persuading.

I caveat Ted Howard's observations by noting that they relate to the US economy; however, they started to resonate with me in the context of the north-east. Listening to his perspective, I started to think about the legacy of oil and gas through a different lens. I realised that, as we stand on the brink of an energy transition, we have an opportunity to transform our places in a way that puts an emphasis on local people and on ownership, thereby growing the number of people who have a genuine stake in their local economy.

As a constituency MSP, I have spoken to many local organisations, groups and charities that have benefited from corporate support as energy sector businesses sought to fulfil their social responsibility role in the region. The arts and creative culture, food banks and apprenticeships have all been supported by the oil and gas sector and are all contributing to community wealth building—we perhaps just did not call it that. I refer to the point that Daniel Johnson made in that regard in his opening remarks.

Last year, Aberdeen city benefited from a £1 million award through the Scottish Government place-based investment programme fund, which supported a range of projects. Those included, in my constituency, the fabulous Greystone Bay visitor centre, which was awarded £50,000—it

offers the best views over the city, including dolphin watching; an off-grid cafe that uses hybrid energy and circular rainwater treatment technology; and contemporary outdoor, creative and educational programmes. Inchgarth Community Centre was given the Queen's award for voluntary service, and it is now benefiting from a £400,000 award for its expansion. Those are living examples of a community wealth building approach that seeks to help local businesses and communities have a bigger stake in how their local economy functions.

My constituency hosts a wide range of small and medium-sized businesses that have been an integral part of the oil and gas supply chain. They include a local timber merchant that makes pallets for the offshore sector and a wholesaler that supplies the corporate hospitality sector, to name but two. Both businesses want to diversify into new markets, thereby supporting local green jobs, retaining wealth in the community and shortening the supply chain.

The Robert Gordon University report, "Making the Switch", which was published just last week, states that, with the north-east of Scotland hosting "the largest energy skills cluster in the UK",

the region has a critical role to play in our energy transition. However, it is vital that our energy transition has at its heart a commitment to energy justice, through which we can seek to restructure our local economies in a way that tackles social, economic and environmental injustices while building wealth in our communities.

Last year, I spoke in a members' business debate about plans to transform a local green space in my constituency into an energy transition zone. Economic growth is essential; however, much of the debate at that point was industry focused. There is now a need for a community-orientated perspective, through which areas are developed in a consensual way to meet both community and industry needs.

I very much look forward to being part of the delivery of the community wealth building model that is being developed by the Scottish Government, in the north-east context—bringing industry, local authorities and others together; thinking out of the box; and enabling an approach to energy transition that has truly building community wealth at its heart.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to closing speeches. I call Katy Clark, who has around six minutes.

16:35

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the Scottish Government lodging the motion for

debate today; I also welcome the wide-ranging debate. As Daniel Johnson said at the beginning of the debate, most people across the country probably do not know what community wealth building is. I hope that today's debate has spread some information on what it is about. A number of speakers have spoken about the core principles of community wealth building: progressive procurement; fair employment; shared ownership; the just use of land; and financial decisions that benefit the local community.

The debate is not a new one, in that it is fundamentally about power, wealth and how decisions are made. As a number of speakers have said, those are not new issues. However, for community wealth building to work and to be real, there will need to be fundamental changes to how government at all levels makes decisions and policy. That is one reason why, in our amendment, Labour calls on the Scottish Government to look at

"all public procurement policies to ensure that"

the community wealth building agenda

"is embedded at every level".

Much of the debate today has been about local initiatives and local government, but the Scottish Government really needs to look at its own practices as part of this agenda. A number of speakers have spoken about that.

Not all the challenges that we face are by any means within the Scottish Government's control. Pauline McNeill was correct to point out the backdrop of a financial crisis that is going to hurt every community and most individuals in this country, through the cost of living crisis and the energy crisis.

**Craig Hoy:** Will the member join me in welcoming the UK Government's levelling up funding, which is delivering £100 million in Paisley, £20 million in Aberdeen and £38 million in Glasgow? Does that not show the strength of the union in actually investing in Scotland's communities?

**Katy Clark:** I welcome any investment in communities that helps put money and power in the hands of ordinary people, from whichever part of government it comes. I think that all of us should welcome any initiative from any part of government that is a positive policy. If the member does not mind, however, I do not think that this is the place for such party-political points. I make the point that many of the criticisms that he puts to the Scottish Government are criticisms that can be fairly put to the UK Government.

I will move on. I have spoken a bit about the huge challenges that our communities face, and a number of speakers have pointed out the challenge of poverty. The pandemic has been a

period in which we have seen the wealth of the richest increase, and a number of speakers—including Maggie Chapman, who spoke about *The Sunday Times* rich list—have also spoken about that. The reality is that inequality in Scotland has increased over the past 10 years. According to Public Health Scotland, the difference in life expectancy between the poorest and richest areas is 26 years for men and 22 years for women. That is the backdrop for our discussion in today's debate. We are right to say that the community wealth building agenda is one that helps to address some of those issues, because this debate is about wealth and power.

Globalisation—which, in many ways, is the opposite of some of the principles of community wealth building that we have discussed today—often sucks the life out of our economies. Importing all our plastic toys from China is the complete opposite of community wealth building.

A number of speakers, including Fiona Hyslop and Audrey Nicoll, were right to talk about local initiatives in their communities. A number of speakers talked about energy initiatives—whether that be municipal ownership and production of energy, the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative or the building of solar and wind farms in North Ayrshire—that are about building capacity locally, generating power locally and keeping wealth local. Fundamentally, the debate is about how our economy is organised. Collette Stevenson was correct to point out the supply chain issues relating to transparency in procurement processes, and the need for ethical procurement that prioritises local jobs.

We need a people-centred approach to local economic development in Scotland that redirects wealth back into local economies and that places control and benefits in the hands of local people. We need a local-first approach to all procurement at both local and Scottish Government levels. I look forward to the rest of the debate and to the minister's response.

16:41

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** Despite the handful of fairly robust exchanges this afternoon—which I thought took the SNP by surprise a little bit—we can all agree that some basic principles are required to make this policy work well.

First, community engagement must be strong and based on an approach that includes the views of local people and that establishes mutual trust. Both those points matter in tandem. How often have local communities encountered difficulties when their views have been undermined? My colleague Finlay Carson pointed out that, when

developers put their claim on various community assets, the Scottish Government often supports the developers and overturns community projects. For example, since 2017, the Scottish Government has overturned 383 of 824 planning applications, so there is a real need to build trust in a level playing field and to appreciate the vast wealth of local knowledge, which can often go a very long way in ensuring that local communities make the best use of their potential.

Secondly, in relation to employment, investment and growth, the community wealth ambitions can complement those of the levelling up agenda. I think that Daniel Johnson said that it is about substitution. No, it is not; they complement one another. Indeed, I would argue that, together, they are the essential components of exactly the same policy ambitions. It is important to stress that, especially at a time of considerable financial stringency, the general public desperately want the Westminster Government, the Holyrood Government and local government to work together. They are tired of the endless bickering and sniping; they just want things getting done to benefit their local communities.

The public also want to know that they are getting value for money. Audit Scotland has come back to that point many times in recent months, because, as yet, there is not sufficient transparency, accountability and scrutiny when it comes to how money is spent.

**Daniel Johnson:** I totally agree with Liz Smith's point about transparency. One of the problems is that it does not feel as though any money is being committed to this policy, let alone there being the opportunity for transparency. Does she agree?

**Liz Smith:** I do not entirely agree, because some money has been provided. Various members have given examples of some money having been committed. However, Daniel Johnson is right that we do not have enough detail, as he said in his speech. We need much more detail. However, Audit Scotland persistently makes the point that we are not able to scrutinise exactly where money is being spent. Daniel Johnson sits on the Finance and Public Administration Committee, as do I, and the Scottish Government must address that big issue.

I will also say something about the evidence that the Finance and Public Administration Committee has taken about the national performance framework during recent weeks. The NPF is very different in scope to the community wealth initiative, but it also has the improvement of wellbeing in our local communities at its heart. Therein lies a big challenge: the principles of the framework are all agreed, but the practice of delivery is a very different matter.

One of the most interesting points that has been mentioned by many of the stakeholders who have given evidence to our committee, is this: how can a national framework function effectively at the same time as ensuring that there is diversity in local delivery? There is a dilemma about how we manage state objectives alongside local priorities. On two occasions, the committee was told that the debate is more about how far the state should intervene and not countermand local, individual initiatives. That dilemma has to be addressed.

Very senior people in local government told us that there are already some good lines of communication among local authorities about sharing good practice across communities, but that there is also an understanding that what works well in one community might not be successful in another. That is another reason why we need flexibility and diversity, and it is a strong message, because if you want to drive success you have to promote the devolution of power to local communities. Get big Government out of the way, as well as people who are interfering in what local communities want to do and know how to do best.

We agree that a government policy framework that supports the creation of jobs, local investment, economic growth and the infrastructure that Brian Whittle spoke about so eloquently, needs to be provided. If that infrastructure is not there—if we do not have sports communities and local infrastructure to get people to specific places—we can forget about community empowerment.

Much of this is based on the increasing willingness of people to be part of their community—to shop and procure basic provisions locally and to use local services. During the pandemic, that happened out of necessity, but we need to ensure that that shift is permanent. We need to do that not only because it is of considerable benefit to those running local businesses, but also because of demographic movement. We know first hand from Scottish Fiscal Commission statistics that Scotland has major challenges with demographic imbalance, and anything that we can do to help local communities become more vibrant and help our more deprived and remote areas is good news. If local businesses flourish, so does the local population, who will be encouraged to stay.

Yesterday, the Finance and Public Administration Committee took evidence from local government—just as we did in Glasgow and Dundee a few weeks ago—and the strong message that emanates from local government is that local people need to decide on their own future. Ring fencing should be used less, so that there is more flexibility and autonomy for local

authorities to spend money in line with their priorities and what they know works best. In his opening speech, Douglas Lumsden set out that local government funding is critical to this area of policymaking because, if we constrain that funding, the autonomy of local government becomes a serious issue.

Fiona Hyslop seemed very surprised by Willie Rennie's intervention, but he is right: there are so many important things that we need to spend time debating. In his speech, he mentioned railways, ferries and, I think, BiFab—and I agree with him absolutely, but this is important, too—

**Fiona Hyslop:** Will the member give way?

**Liz Smith:** I will not, because I think that I need to finish. Do I?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You do need to wind up.

**Liz Smith:** Sorry, Ms Hyslop.

We need to debate those things, but the debate would benefit greatly from some of the greater detail that the Scottish Government has promised. The Scottish Conservatives are content to support the motion, but our support is contingent on ensuring that there is an infrastructure around the policy to make it work well, so that it can complement so many other policies. I do not think that the public cares whether that comes from Westminster, Holyrood or local government; they just want it to work.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I invite Tom Arthur to respond to the debate. I would be grateful if you could take us up to just before decision time, minister.

16:49

**Tom Arthur:** I thank colleagues across the chamber for their contributions. Although we have come some way on our journey on community wealth building, we still have a long way to go, and we have an opportunity to accelerate and intensify that process. This afternoon's debate, which is the first debate on community wealth building that we have had in the Scottish Parliament, offered an opportunity for a collective brainstorming session in which people could bring forward their ideas on what they would like to be addressed in legislation and on what they thought community wealth building could do for their constituencies and regions and, beyond that, what it could do for Scotland as a whole.

**Katy Clark:** The minister will be aware that, in our amendment, we call on the Scottish Government to look at all public procurement policies to ensure that community wealth building is embedded at every level. Is the Scottish

Government doing work to look at its own contracts and procurement policies to ensure that the community wealth building agenda is being fully recognised and embedded in those?

**Tom Arthur:** Yes, and I am happy to confirm that we will support the Labour amendment at decision time.

Katy Clark touched on the fundamental point in this debate when she said that, fundamentally, it is about how we organise our economy. Many members addressed a wide array of areas around community empowerment, asset transfers and land reform, all of which are related to and deeply connected with the community wealth building agenda. Fundamentally, the concept of community wealth building is quite radical—indeed, as Fiona Hyslop said, it involves a “revolution” in how we organise our economy and move from a failed model of having to redistribute to one in which we predistribute. That will not be easy, but it is a prize worth pursuing.

**Craig Hoy:** The minister talks about the organisation of the economy. Is a properly running rail service not vital to the proper running of the economy and to the creation of employment, wealth and growth? Can he tell the people of Dunbar how they will build their economy when they have no ScotRail services?

**Tom Arthur:** I recognise that the issue that Mr Hoy raises is a hugely significant one that has been the subject of much debate and many questions in Parliament. I have approximately eight minutes left to talk about the community wealth building agenda, and that is what I want to focus my remarks on. It is not that I do not recognise the importance of Mr Hoy’s point, but I want to use the opportunity that has been afforded to me to address the points that members have raised on community wealth building.

The point that Daniel Johnson made about the need for clarity and further information is one that I take seriously. As someone who has been immersed in the community wealth building agenda, I recognise that it can be easy to assume that people have a certain level of familiarity with and knowledge of the concept, and that work needs to be undertaken to achieve that.

However, it is important to recognise that a lot of what constitutes community wealth building is already taking place. I spoke about “a refinement” of the approach, but that was in recognition of the fact that a lot of work is already under way. It is important that, by having engagement and dialogue, we help a lot of businesses, public bodies and third sector organisations recognise that they are already participating in the community wealth building agenda—to self-identify, so to speak. The Government is doing

work, in partnership with others, to help to articulate more clearly and in practical terms what “community wealth building” means. I repeat that I take Daniel Johnson’s point seriously.

Although Mr Rennie raised a lot of important issues, I was genuinely disappointed when he suggested that we should be discussing “real” issues, the implication being that community wealth building is not a real issue. I came across some quite inspiring words:

“Our community-focus will decentralise power, build wealth, help communities be involved in decisions at an early stage and respect the choices they make for their neighbourhoods. We support the people-centred wealth building agenda.”

That is from page 8 of the Scottish Liberal Democrats’ manifesto at the local government elections a few weeks ago.

**Willie Rennie:** Will the minister give way?

**Tom Arthur:** I am sorry, but I have listened to enough of Mr Rennie this afternoon. He had his opportunity and he chose to pursue an agenda that was not really related to the substance of the motion.

I thought that Fiona Hyslop’s speech was excellent. It provided exactly the kind of constructive challenge that Government requires on this agenda and made the key point that we should not legislate for the sake of legislating, but should make sure that what we put forward is nimble and adds genuine value.

That is why we are taking such a collaborative approach to developing the legislation. The Parliament has had the opportunity to have a debate this afternoon. The bill steering group involves a wide range of partners, and we will have direct engagement with local authorities and with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Eventually, we will also have a public consultation. We will have all of that before we introduce a bill in Parliament. That will give us an opportunity to identify what the key priorities and issues are that require a legislative remedy.

Fiona Hyslop also made an important point on the need for equity around our threshold and tolerance for risk—with private enterprise, and less so with community enterprise. I have been reflecting on that. In Scotland, we seem to have a culture in which we can be very quick to jump down each other’s throats to point out what is perceived as failure, but failure and mistakes are part of the learning process. Many community organisations that have taken ownership of assets have had to go through a learning process. They have had false starts, and faced difficulties and barriers, but by going through that process, they have accumulated knowledge, expertise and wisdom, which have allowed them to succeed and

to pass on that information and share it with their peer groups and communities. We have to be tolerant and bear in mind the fact that, in a community entrepreneurial culture, we need to give people the space to have their vision and to make mistakes, but we also need to support them to continue to take things forward.

**Douglas Lumsden:** If the minister is part of a Government that really wants to learn from mistakes, why do we not have a proper inquiry into the ferry fiasco?

**Tom Arthur:** The member raises an important point but, again, I am going to focus on the substance of the motion that we are debating.

Alasdair Allan spoke powerfully about the role of land ownership and that will—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, could you make your remarks through your microphone?

**Tom Arthur:** I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer.

We have a new land reform bill coming up in this session, so that will be relevant. As land and property are one of the five pillars of the community wealth building model, we will have to consider how we can provide further support. There will be an opportunity for ideas to be passed on through the consultation engagement as we consider the legislation.

Maggie Chapman spoke powerfully about our broken economic model, as did Richard Leonard, who spoke about wealth inequality and how the community wealth building model can deliver community resilience.

A number of members touched on the experience of the pandemic, when we saw a level of solidarity and communitarianism that had been absent for some time. As we emerge from the pandemic—this picks up on Pauline McNeill's points—we ought not to lose track of the vision that we had at the start of the pandemic when we committed ourselves to learning from the experience and addressing the fundamental inequalities in society.

Community wealth building is not going to be a silver bullet and provide all the answers itself, but it can play a significant part by driving fundamental change at the local and regional levels. That can have an aggregate effect nationally and can transform the economy of Scotland overall.

Some tangential issues were raised around planning, but that is an important matter. Liz Smith made the point that it is important for this to be done in partnership with communities and not to communities. On the operation of the planning system, the reality is that the vast majority of planning applications are considered at the local

level. Those that are appealed are considered by independent reporters. If members want to give me ideas for reform, I am happy to listen to them, but the key is to have more community engagement earlier in the planning process during the development of local development plans, through using the measures that are in place in the local place plans, for which regulations were laid earlier this year. That is also a part of the community wealth building agenda.

Audrey Nicoll and others spoke powerfully on the just transition. As the constituency MSP for Renfrewshire South, which includes Linwood, I know about the legacy of an unjust transition, as do my constituents. Community wealth building principles are important because, if we are to have a successful just transition, we have to take people with us. We have to recognise that if ownership of that is not centred locally and rooted in the community, it can be easy for money to disappear with other incentives. With more community control of assets and an economy that is rooted in the community, wealth is circulated locally and it is more resilient. That is intrinsically linked to what we are seeking to do with a just transition.

**Brian Whittle:** Does the minister recognise that increasing ring fencing in council budgets is strangling the ability of councils to make decisions locally?

**Tom Arthur:** The vast majority of money that local authorities have is under their control. The specific issue of ring fencing is being considered as part of the resource spending review.

There is much that I would like to say in addition to what I have said already, but I will conclude by thanking members across the chamber for what has been a very stimulating and informative debate—the first of many that we will have on community wealth building. Clearly, there are members in this place who have a real passion for the model and the ideals and principles that inform it. My door is open and I am keen to meet members and discuss how we can take forward this shared agenda together. I believe that it has the potential to be absolutely transformative for the people whom we are elected to serve.

## Point of Order

17:00

**Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In his answer to my question earlier today, Ben Macpherson stated that the facts that I quoted were wrong. The information came from a Social Security Scotland report of February this year. How do I correct the *Official Report* to show that those facts were actually correct? Can you encourage ministers and cabinet secretaries to read reports rather than make up facts?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** Thank you, Mr Balfour. As you and probably everyone now knows, that is not a point of order. There are ways for members who need or wish to correct the *Official Report* to do so.

## Business Motion

17:01

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-04614, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. [*Interruption.*] Can we have a bit of quiet, please?

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 31 May 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: Investing in Scotland's Future

*followed by* Criminal Justice Committee, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and Social Justice and Social Security Committee Debate: Tackling Drug Deaths and Drug Harm

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.10 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 1 June 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm General Questions

2.20 pm First Minister's Questions

3.05 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Justice and Veterans;  
Finance and Economy;  
Education and Skills

*followed by* Motion on the Platinum Jubilee

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Tuesday 7 June 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* Scottish Government Business

*followed by* Committee Announcements



*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 Wednesday 8 June 2022  
 2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Covid Recovery and Parliamentary  
 Business;  
 Net Zero, Energy and Transport  
*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist  
 Party Business  
*followed by* Business Motions  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)  
 5.10 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 Thursday 9 June 2022  
 11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 11.40 am General Questions  
 12.00 pm First Minister's Questions  
*followed by* Members' Business  
 2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
 Rural Affairs and Islands  
*followed by* Scottish Government Business  
*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions  
 5.00 pm Decision Time  
*followed by* Members' Business

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 30 May 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:01

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 (Consequential Provisions) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 11 to 19 February 2023 (inclusive), 1 to 16 April 2023 (inclusive), 1 July to 27 August 2023 (inclusive), 7 to 22 October 2023 (inclusive), 23 December 2023 to 7 January 2024 (inclusive).— [George Adam]

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

## Decision Time

17:02

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** There are four questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-04580.3, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04580, in the name of Tom Arthur, on community wealth building—delivering transformation in Scotland's local and regional economies, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There will be a division. I suspend the meeting to allow members to get on to the voting system.

17:02

*Meeting suspended.*

17:06

*On resuming—*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We come to the division on amendment S6M-04580.3, in the name of Douglas Lumsden. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

**Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no, but my system did not connect.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you. That vote will be recorded.

**Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, Ms Villalba. That will be recorded.

**For**

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Lockhart, Dean (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**Against**

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Dr Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)  
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)  
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)  
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)  
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)

(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)  
 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)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SfNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-04580.3, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04580, in the name of Tom Arthur, on community wealth building—delivering transformation in Scotland’s local and regional economies, is: For 31, Against 87, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-04580.1, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-04580, in the name of Tom Arthur, on community wealth building—delivering transformation in Scotland’s local and regional economies, be agreed to.

*Amendment agreed to.*

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that motion S6M-04580, in the name of Tom Arthur, on community wealth building—delivering transformation in Scotland’s local and regional economies, as amended, be agreed to.

*Motion, as amended, agreed to.*

That the Parliament recognises the huge potential of Community Wealth Building as a practical, place-based economic development model that can help transform local and regional economies to deliver a Wellbeing Economy for Scotland; agrees that Community Wealth Building can deliver more and better jobs, business growth, community-owned assets and shorter supply chains supporting net zero ambitions; welcomes the progress made by public,

private and third sectors in implementing Community Wealth Building in Scotland so far; notes that the 2021 Programme for Government and recent National Strategy for Economic Transformation confirmed plans to introduce legislation on Community Wealth Building during the current Parliamentary session; believes that this provides an important opportunity to think creatively and innovatively about the interconnections and interdependencies between the economy, environment and society; supports plans for wide engagement on this legislation; believes that the Scottish Government should provide more detail to its Community Wealth Building proposals to ensure it is embedded within a clear regional economic framework and a coherent and ambitious industrial strategy to support post-pandemic economic development and local job creation; further believes that the necessary legislative, institutional change and investment must be available to deliver the Community Wealth Building that Scotland needs and that can be translated into regional and national growth, and calls on the Scottish Government to revise all public procurement policies to ensure that Community Wealth Building is embedded at every level.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I propose to ask a single question on the two Parliamentary Bureau motions. Does any member object?

There being no objections, the final question is, that motion S6M-04615, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, and motion S6M-04616, on parliamentary recess dates, both in the name of George Adam, be agreed to.

*Motions agreed to.*

That the Parliament agrees that the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 (Consequential Provisions) Order 2022 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees the following parliamentary recess dates under Rule 2.3.1: 11 to 19 February 2023 (inclusive), 1 to 16 April 2023 (inclusive), 1 July to 27 August 2023 (inclusive), 7 to 22 October 2023 (inclusive), 23 December 2023 to 7 January 2024 (inclusive).

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time. There will be a short pause before we move to members’ business. I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so as quickly and as quietly as possible.

## Solar Energy

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-2299 in the name of Fergus Ewing on Scotland's fair share, the potential of solar energy in Scotland. This debate will be concluded without any questions 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 welcomes Solar Energy Scotland's policy agenda, *Scotland's fair share: Solar's role in achieving net zero in Scotland*, published in the run-up to COP26, which sets out the potential for solar energy to play a much greater role in Scotland's low-carbon energy mix; understands that Scotland has levels of solar irradiation that can be effectively captured and that, compared to other nearby countries on the same latitude, such as Denmark, Scotland is behind in equivalent levels of solar technology deployment; considers that a number of policy matters within the control of the Scottish Government, including permitted development rights and business rates, could help the sector grow significantly; recognises what it sees as the ability of solar energy systems to work as a good companion to wind to make more effective, efficient use of the electricity grid and storage network; considers that, due to reported projections for solar to be the UK's cheapest form of energy this decade, and to have the unique capability to be deployed at all scales, solar is vital to supporting an affordable energy mix, and a just transition, and notes the calls on the Scottish Government to urgently assess the potential for a 2030 solar deployment target of a minimum of 4GW, and accompanying policy changes to embrace and enable this low-cost mature technology, to help tackle the climate emergency and provide investment and jobs in communities up and down the country, including in the Inverness and Nairn constituency.

17:11

**Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP):** I am most grateful to all the members who signed my motion, and those who have who stayed on will participate in the debate. In fact, believe it or not, this is the first-ever full debate on solar energy in the Scottish Parliament. That might be because, Scotland's weather being what it is, most people assume that the ways to harness renewable energy here are better if they involve the wind and the rain. However, that is not so. Although—to coin, or, perhaps, adapt a phrase—Scotland will never become the Saudi Arabia of solar energy, we nonetheless have an enormous resource that is simply not being used.

I am indebted to Solar Energy Scotland, which has provided an excellent briefing paper called "Scotland's Fair Share: Solar's role in achieving net zero in Scotland", for this illustration of that resource. It said:

"If all the sun's energy that hits the island of Hoy could be collected this would meet all of Scotland's energy needs".

Solar can generate both electricity and heat. It is modular, so it can be deployed on a micro or a macro scale. It combines well with other resources, particularly wind and hydro—after all, the sun often shines when the wind does not blow.

The purpose of the debate is to shine some light on solar—excuse the pun; it was, indeed, pretty poor—but also more seriously to encourage the Scottish Government to support its development with high ambition, strong resolution and, which is most important of all, in my experience as a minister, hard graft.

First, solar is now the cheapest form of energy, prices having fallen by 60 per cent in the past 10 years. Secondly, Scotland will need a flourishing solar sector to help to tackle fuel poverty. Thirdly, solar can help to secure energy independence at a time of international instability and, finally, it can help to reduce our carbon emissions. Once set up, solar panels will operate at minimal costs for in excess of 30 years. Solar Energy Scotland calls on the Scottish Government in its energy strategy review to set a target of 4GW of solar energy by 2030, and a higher ambition of 6GW. If we did so, and I hope that the minister will indicate whether he is inclined to do so, we would be mirroring the European Union commitment, because it is for 600GW by 2030. The EU says that its policy is for a

"Massive, rapid deployment of renewable energy"

and that

"Solar energy will be the kingpin of this effort".

It says that

"Panel by panel, the infinite energy of the sun will help reduce our dependence on fossil fuels."

Moreover, according to Solar Energy Scotland, that achievement, would bring in more than 8,500 jobs to Scotland. Solar should become a major component of our energy provision. The opportunity exists now and it should be grasped.

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** I am grateful to Fergus Ewing for taking my intervention and I congratulate him on securing the debate.

The benefits that Fergus Ewing has highlighted are ones that I think will increasingly become recognised. We have just concluded a debate about community wealth building. Given the cost, the job opportunities and the revenue potential that exists, does he see solar energy as a real example of where community wealth building could be anchored?

**Fergus Ewing:** The member is right. Furthermore, I read today that Turkey has saved

\$7 billion by using wind and solar power to replace imported fossil fuels.

The asks are as follows: to extend permitted development rights to up to 5MW for rooftop solar projects; to exempt onsite solar and storage from business rates, or at least to put solar on a level playing field with gas-powered combined heat and power; to enable farmers, crofters and landowners to benefit by making claims under a new greening measure to equip them with solar power, which would get things moving, not least in Mr McArthur's constituency; to support solar in land-use strategies; and, lastly, to set up a ministerially chaired working group with industry representatives to drive all of that forward.

In England and Wales, commercial-scale rooftop solar projects do not typically require full planning permission. That might explain why the sector has experienced rapid expansion there. That also needs to be the case in Scotland. Interestingly, the EU is committed to shortening to three months the length of time for solar approvals for rooftop installations. I hope that our esteemed planners are listening.

Here in Scotland, we should surely match the EU's high levels of ambition. A working group on solar energy that was established and chaired by an energy minister would be a great way to take that forward, working with industry.

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** Manufacturing could be a significant bottleneck, particularly bearing in mind our shortage of manufacturing skills. What is Mr Ewing's view on our manufacturing capability for solar production?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will give you a bit of time back for the interventions, Mr Ewing.

**Fergus Ewing:** Tess White has raised an important point. It is a fact that most solar panels are manufactured not in Scotland or, indeed, in Europe but in China. That can change, but I suspect that economies of scale would make that difficult. I think that there is a need for Scotland to have a skills strategy to go along with what we might do in this area. That, too, should mirror the EU's policy, which is forward looking, in this regard.

The United Kingdom Government has an important role, through the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. That role is, essentially, to ensure that there is fairer and more sufficient grid capacity, and to ensure that consumers, particularly in the Highlands and Islands, are not hit so hard.

I will curtail my remarks to avoid incurring your wrath, Presiding Officer, and skip on to the conclusion.

We can make swift progress if there is the will—ministerial will, to be frank. That means rooftop solar on public and commercial buildings. That is the low-hanging fruit—albeit at high altitudes, so to speak. Let us make that happen. Grid rules can be changed if Ofgem has the will and backing of the United Kingdom Government. I have not seen much sign of that, but that does not mean that there is any reason why it should not happen. It should.

We also need farmers and crofters to be empowered to go green in a real way through extension of the greening scheme. Regulations for small businesses need to be simplified.

In conclusion, I strongly encourage the Scottish Government to embrace the power of the sun and thereby to grant Scotland a greener, cheaper and brighter future.

17:19

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** I congratulate my colleague Fergus Ewing on securing this evening's important debate and on his excellent opening speech.

Currently, solar power is underutilised in Scotland's energy mix. It now presents a significant renewable opportunity as we transition to net zero. For too long, Scotland was seen as being unfavourable for solar energy generation due to the misconception that electricity-generating solar photovoltaic cells need heat and cloudless skies to produce energy. In fact, what is required is light or solar irradiance—in other words the amount of electromagnetic radiation received from the sun per square metre. The core technology is hardly new. My former colleague Colin Campbell had solar panels fitted on his Kilbarchan roof way back in 1984. Although the cost was astronomical at the time, he has not had an electricity bill in two decades.

Despite their great potential, geothermal and hydro power may take years to develop. However, solar energy, as Fergus Ewing's motion makes clear, is uniquely capable of deployment to the scale required and is the cheapest form of renewable energy at this time, with great job-creating potential. Developments can be planned, panels constructed and installed relatively quickly and easily, for example, through the adoption of rooftop solar panels for households and small and medium-sized enterprises.

I therefore agree with Solar Energy Scotland's calls for the sector to be given greater attention. Under European Commission plans, all new buildings in the bloc might soon be fitted with solar roof panels to turbocharge a drive for renewable energy. That would reduce the demand for fossil fuels, particularly Russian oil and gas. I actually

suggested such a measure to the Australian Government way back in 2003. However, at the time it was considered that photovoltaic cell efficiency was not high enough to justify the cost in those days, when climate change was not a consideration.

Solar technology has advanced significantly over the past two decades and, when I wrote to the minister just last month on the subject, his positive response was that such a measure will be explored in the forthcoming housing bill. I welcome that. Indeed, we already see solar panels in local authority and housing association new builds.

In the meantime, there are other policy changes that the Scottish and UK Governments can make to stimulate investment in solar energy. As was argued by Fergus Ewing, aligning Scotland with England and Wales on permitted development rights and business rates for solar power projects would almost certainly lead to an increase in installations across the commercial and industrial sector. Scottish ministers have already indicated that they will review the rules for solar installations as part of wider changes to permitted developments.

With regard to ground-mounted large-scale facilities that generate solar power and feed it into the grid, Solar Energy Scotland's report is clear that there are few natural constraints in Scotland, although two proposed developments in my constituency are meeting some local opposition.

Unfortunately, it is still the case that renewable energy firms pay massive fees to connect to the national grid. In fact, Scottish generators pay the highest grid connection rates in Europe. It costs £7.36 per megawatt hour in the north of Scotland and £4.70 per megawatt hour in the south, whereas in much of England and Wales it costs only 49p and, in southern England, generators are actually paid to connect to the grid. Therefore, I ask the minister to again demand of the UK Government that it lower transmission charges, which are the biggest barrier to Scotland delivering on its renewables potential. Of course, it would help if Tory, Liberal Democrat and Labour MSPs—whose Governments introduced and maintain the discriminatory charges—also spoke out on Scotland's behalf.

The solar industry believes that agricultural policy inadvertently disincentivises use of farmland for solar power generation because it does not entitle farmers to greening payments under the basic payment scheme. However, I feel uneasy about extending the same reward to farmers for energy generation that they receive for producing crops at a time when one of Europe's major bread baskets has been impacted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On Monday, Ian Wright of the Food and Drink Sector Council said that there is no

proper plan in the UK for a future with disrupted food supplies. In that context, agrivoltaics—use of farmland for simultaneous production of crops and generation of power—has shown promise in East Asia and is being trialled in Europe. Installed directly above crops, panels protect against hail or frost, provide shade and increase the electrical yield of photovoltaic panels. Roll-out should be actively researched and considered in Scotland.

Solar energy must be integral part of our climate emergency response. Solar Energy Scotland's requests are reasonable and straightforward, and I trust that the Scottish Government will help to make them a reality, thereby enabling Scotland's solar industry to really take off. We all want Scotland to be a front runner in renewable energy generation.

I urge the Scottish Government to be ambitious and to consider solutions that are being trialled elsewhere, including fitting solar panels in all new buildings and exploring the promise of agrivoltaics.

17:24

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** I congratulate Fergus Ewing on bringing the debate to the Parliament. It is not before time. I have genuinely never understood why solar does not feature more in projections of our future renewable energy mix as we aim to transition to net zero by 2045.

Happily, the industry seems to be powering on nevertheless. In April 2020, so much solar energy was produced that it met almost 30 per cent of United Kingdom electricity demand. The north-east recently celebrated the potential St Fergus solar farm, which could be the UK's largest solar project if built, powering 15,000 homes and 20,000 electric vehicles per year and, crucially, offsetting 720,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide over 40 years. Also in my region, we have Mackie's of Scotland, which has 7,000 solar panels that help it to generate twice as much energy as it uses. The rest is sold into the grid as green energy.

The motion mentions the Scottish Government's role and that is where we need to see action to avoid being left behind. Our friends elsewhere are seizing the opportunity. For example, Germany has announced plans to install 200GW of solar energy by 2035. Portugal is looking to build a 12,000 panel floating solar park to power around 1,500 households. The Danes are already running seasonal thermal storage facilities to store solar generated power.

It is not surprising that that is happening. Fergus Ewing pointed out that the cost of rooftop solar has fallen by about 60 per cent since 2010 and he will know that the cost of utility-scale solar has fallen by 88 per cent in the same period. To

respond to Liam McArthur's intervention, if Scotland realised Solar Energy UK's ambition of producing 6GW by 2030, nearly 9,000 jobs could be created. That would aid the fair and managed transition of workers from other industries, particularly in the north-east.

I am surprised that the Scottish Government has set a legally binding target of net zero by 2045, which is five years earlier than the UK's target, yet has failed to set out how it intends to achieve that using this technology, even though it has the levers to do so, as the motion rightly states. It has also failed to make much progress. According to Solar Energy UK, at the end of 2020, Scotland had only 3 per cent of the UK's total deployed solar generation capacity. Furthermore, I lodged a parliamentary question and discovered from the answer that four-fifths of Scottish Government buildings are not fitted with solar panels. That is awful. We have huge estates of public buildings, as Fergus Ewing rightly said, including the NHS and our schools. I cannot understand why the Scottish Government has been so slow to grasp this opportunity.

That matters, not least because the Scottish Government has to be developing its supply chain now. Tess White's intervention was absolutely spot on. None of this will work if we do not also have the competent skills base to design, build, install and maintain the infrastructure, whether by transition from other industries or developing new skills through our schools and further and higher education institutions. That is why I support the motion, because I am afraid that the Scottish Government has been caught napping here. To reach net zero we need ambition, effective planning and strategising.

**Graeme Dey** *rose*—

**Liam Kerr:** I am afraid that I am right at the end of my time, Mr Dey.

The evidence suggests that hitherto the Government has been quicker on knee-jerk, playing-to-the-gallery announcements, such as Kenny Gibson's giving only half the picture on transmission charges, rather than a full consideration of how all energy generation technologies can work together as part of the energy mix in a managed transition to net zero.

The motion is right. The levers to make this happen sit firmly within the control of the Scottish Government and it is imperative that it acts urgently to assess deployment and policy changes to embrace and enable this low-cost, mature technology. Thank you.

17:28

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Fergus Ewing for lodging his timely motion. We all know that the clock is ticking if we are to stop the climate emergency becoming a climate catastrophe. Our energy policy is absolutely key to that journey to net zero.

Labour believes that that policy needs four goals at its heart. The first should be to reduce our energy waste by properly insulating existing properties and building new ones to zero-carbon standards, so that they do not require retrofitting in the future.

The second goal should be a programme of mass decarbonising heating, but one in which the burden does not land on the shoulders of those who can least afford it.

The third goal should be to achieve a balanced energy supply from variable sources. That includes not just a rapid growth in renewables, but a recognition of the need for better energy security. By 2050, half of our demand will still be met by oil and gas and there will still be a need for a low-carbon baseload energy—which means that we need a grown-up debate on nuclear power.

The fourth goal should be a growth in renewables that goes beyond the recent focus on onshore wind and better delivers opportunities for offshore wind and, of course, for solar energy, which makes Fergus Ewing's motion and the subject of the debate all the more important.

As Fergus Ewing acknowledges, Scotland is behind other countries on solar technology deployment. At the end of 2020, Scotland had only around 3 per cent of the UK's total deployed solar generation capacity—far below the per capita level for the rest of the UK. That untapped potential means that there is a unique opportunity for growth.

That is why Labour very much supports the call from Solar Energy UK for the Scottish Government to commit to and, more importantly, to put in place the actions needed to deliver a 2030 Scottish solar deployment ambition of 4GW to 6GW, with further growth in the following decade as we move to achieve net zero by 2045. That is why we backed the national planning framework for not just delivering warm words in support of renewables, as the current draft does, but giving clear and practical direction, such as raising and, indeed, removing the threshold of permitted development rights. That is why we want to see fiscal measures to support more solar energy being used to power our public buildings and the reform of business rates to incentivise larger installations. Otherwise, we risk continuing to fall behind the rest of the UK, where that reform is taking place.

Having that ambition and, importantly, those practical measures to grow solar energy, along with investment from a Scottish renewables fund that Labour has called for—using the £700 million from the ScotWind leasing round—would mean that we could grow Scotland's renewable energy supply chains, so that the growth in solar energy leads to a growth in Scottish jobs. Solar Energy UK has said that solar power could create more than 8,500 new jobs in Scotland by the end of the decade, but that will happen only if we do not keep repeating the mistakes of the past.

Fergus Ewing was right to say that perhaps Scotland's climate means that we will not become the Saudi Arabia of solar power, but the problem is that the past promises that we would become the Saudi Arabia of renewables jobs have fallen flat, as fewer than a quarter of the promised 120,000 jobs in renewables have been created. The recent ScotWind round that leased Scotland's sea beds on the cheap failed to include legally binding guarantees on jobs. Those opportunities and profits were also leased almost entirely to overseas-owned multinationals. Scotland will get none of the billions of profit and a pitiful level of rent. That was a missed opportunity. Ninety-nine per cent of Scotland's onshore wind is also in the hands of private businesses.

Increasing untapped opportunities from solar energy production presents a chance to do things differently, to create genuine opportunities for a new approach when it comes to ownership, including more community and co-operatively owned local renewable energy projects. That would ensure that the jobs, the profits and other benefits are returned directly to the local community. A good example of that is the Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative. It owns and operates 30 solar panels throughout Edinburgh and the profits from those are invested in community projects across the city that promote sustainability and renewable energy, including a grant scheme for community-focused organisations.

As a Co-operative Party MSP, that is a model that I very much support as part of a genuine, just transition to cleaner, greener energy policy; an ambition that we all need to grasp.

17:33

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I apologise to the chamber if I need to leave before the end of the debate as I am hosting a reception in the Parliament.

I, too, offer warm thanks to Fergus Ewing for introducing the debate. I cannot believe that this is the first time since devolution that the Scottish Parliament has debated solar, but that perhaps

emphasises the fact that it has been something of a Cinderella technology for many years.

The reduction in costs that we are starting to see should now usher in a new solar revolution and the Scottish Government should make solar a strong building block of its forthcoming energy strategy this autumn. The installed Scottish solar capacity of 380MW is clearly just a fraction of the 4GW to 6GW that is possible, but that potential will not be realised without, in effect, a new deal for solar, including changes to planning, building standards, non-domestic rates, grid access and agricultural subsidies that Mr Ewing and others have already outlined.

Targets have worked for energy generation in Scotland since the early days of devolution, sending clear signals to investors. Setting a solar target should be considered in the forthcoming energy strategy. I also hope that Ofgem will facilitate the investment in the grid that is needed to allow all of Scotland's renewables to make their contribution to UK climate and energy targets. We cannot afford to be pitting one technology against another.

While the national planning framework 4 elevates the consideration of climate change to the top of planners' minds, it is not yet consistent on the detail, with policy 19 on renewables being a problem that the planning minister has committed to fixing. Permitted development policy, which has already been mentioned, is a case in point. There are some artificial limits in Scotland on what solar can be installed on a roof space without requiring a planning application. There are challenges here and there is much policy that needs to be tidied up.

With electricity costs set to rise even further, for many households solar will be the most important technology that could be installed to directly reduce electricity bills. The most effective way to empower householders is to turn consumers into generators. At a time when all decarbonisation pathways, from transport to heating, rely heavily on electricity, solar gives householders the opportunity to be masters of an entire domestic electricity system in their homes, incorporating smart meters, smart car chargers, water heating and household batteries to enable people to balance supply and demand, ultimately reducing dependency on the national grid.

Thus far, though, solar installations have by and large been piecemeal and individual householder led. Installers tell me that the Home Energy Scotland system for accessing finance can be bureaucratic and time-consuming. We need to see a change here and the street by street, community by community roll-out of solar would help to meet the scale of the opportunity. I hope that the forthcoming local heat and energy efficiency



strategies will be able to plan for how this could be achieved in each council area.

There is good precedent. During the early days of the feed-in tariff, Stirling Council installed solar on most of its socially rented housing stock, to the point that you could easily count the number of council houses in any street by their solar rooftops. However, the fact that most owner-occupied houses in those streets remain without solar, shows that the roll-out has been far from universal so far. Families need support right now; they need that roll-out street by street rather than by the individual application process that we have seen so far.

Solar has the brightest of futures, but it will take tweaks, reforms and renewed leadership at both local and national levels to ensure that every part of Scotland benefits.

17:37

**Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP):** I, too, thank Fergus Ewing for securing the debate. Like many others in the chamber, and Mr Ruskell, I am surprised to find that this is the first parliamentary debate on solar energy. I can assure Mr Ewing, however, that while it may not have been discussed here in the chamber, the cross-party group on science and technology has held events and hosted speakers on solar power and opportunities over the past 10 years. Those have included Professor Neil Robertson, who is currently chair of molecular materials at the University of Edinburgh and director of the Scottish Institute for Solar Energy Research, or SISER. I am proud to say that Professor Robertson grew up in Coltness, in my constituency of Motherwell and Wishaw.

I attended the “Transforming Scotland with solar energy” event in the Scottish Parliament in May 2014 and attended a SISER conference at the University of Strathclyde in my role as vice-convenor of the cross-party group on science and technology.

Like Mr Ewing, I see huge potential for Scotland in this area, for reducing carbon emissions, achieving net zero and for the creation of job opportunities as part of a just transition. With energy security at the forefront of our concerns, due to the war in Ukraine and the soaring prices that contribute to the cost of living crisis, and alongside the environmental imperative, we must consider and act on a solar future for Scotland.

An analysis piece in *New Scientist* just last month, by Michael Le Page, posited that the current updated UK energy security strategy would not provide enough energy or security going forward. He questioned the UK Government policy of ignoring quick wins like insulation, solar and

onshore wind installations, instead favouring expensive nuclear power over renewables. To me, this approach does not stack up against our shared climate commitments and I do not believe that more nuclear is the way forward. The current UK strategy favours expensive nuclear power over what are the cheapest forms of energy available in the UK, as was demonstrated by Mr Ewing.

**Liam Kerr:** Does the member not concede that nuclear is one of the cheapest forms of energy generation once you scale it over the number of years it produces?

**Clare Adamson:** No, I do not; I think that the lead time for building new nuclear installations will virtually wipe out those benefits. We have the ability to do solar and onshore wind now and they are the cheapest and most easily accessible ways forward. Why wait 10 to 15 years for low-carbon energy, when it can be done now at a fraction of the cost and time?

Scotland can do better, for the sake of our environment and our finances. Solar research and technology are increasing and improving at an exponential rate. I remember Professor Robertson telling me that he had been an early adopter of solar—much like our colleague, Mr Campbell—in his domestic home when feed-in tariffs were at a premium but, because of the rapid increases in the efficiency of photovoltaic cells, the newer installations were as financially beneficial as his own. So much more energy was being generated just a few short years later. The incredible speed of research and development in solar has made its way into domestic products.

For those who think only of solar panels in solar fields or retrofitted to buildings, the number of construction innovations must be understood. Those include solar roof tiles, solar bricks and even solar windows—which I saw myself in Taiwan—which have USB charging points on the window frames. There are endless possibilities, and the innovations exist. Just as silicon overtook cadmium panels, the development of perovskite tandem panels could reduce the carbon footprint even further. Research from Cornell University has shown that it can reduce the payback time of 1.52 years for current silicone panels to only 0.35 years with the development of these new panels, which have yet to make it to market, although I am sure that they will.

As *New Scientist* stated in its leader in March 2022, titled “Europe must tackle its energy crisis now or face a painful winter”, energy and solar power should be turbocharged.

17:42

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I add my congratulations to Fergus Ewing on securing

time in the chamber to debate this very important topic.

As has been said, solar energy is in many ways the poor relation in renewables when we compare it to wind. While the shape of a white wind turbine has become synonymous with Scotland's move towards renewable energy, solar has been markedly less visible. Perhaps it is only natural that Scotland's weather would bring the wind turbine more to mind than the solar panel, but in a way that symbolises the problem. It is a regularly repeated myth that solar does not work in Scotland because we do not get enough sunny days. Indeed, today the sun is shining and the wind is blowing—the rain has been falling too but, unfortunately, we have yet to harness that source of energy. The idea that solar systems require strong direct sunlight to generate electricity is not based in fact. Solar does not require direct sunlight to generate power. At one point in February 2022, solar was providing more than 20 per cent of the UK's energy.

We can project the electricity generation of the yield from a solar system annually accurately by using known sunrise and sunset times to calculate daylight hours. Solar Energy Scotland reports that solar systems could last for more than 30 years with professional maintenance. Solar is distinct from many other forms of renewables and in many ways is a far more flexible technology than wind or hydro. Although it is just about possible for an individual house owner or building owner to install a wind turbine on their property, it is an option that is really only available to farmers or owners of large industrial sites. However, solar panels can be easily integrated into individual homes when they are built or retrofitted into older buildings, as well as being deployed at substantial scale on solar farms.

Solar supports other sectors to diversify their incomes and create secure livelihoods. For example, we can talk about agriculture and installing solar farms on fallow land. Fallowing, as we know, helps to regenerate soil quality in order to increase productivity later, and biodiversity increases while land lays fallow. Solar farms on fallow land create productivity where it otherwise would not be and help the farmer to reduce their energy costs and improve the sustainability of their operations.

Every assessment of our ability to meet our targets for net zero recognises the need for a diverse range of technologies and energy sources. There is a serious risk that we are inadvertently or otherwise putting our net zero eggs in a small number of technological baskets and leaving others with great long-term potential behind—for example, tidal energy, home heating systems other than heat pumps, such as hydrogen, and the

next generation of nuclear power, especially small modular nuclear reactors and advanced modular nuclear reactors. The cheapest electricity that is being generated now in the UK is generated from existing nuclear plants.

**Mark Ruskell:** Does the member not acknowledge that, if the Romans had had nuclear power, we would still be looking after the waste? Is he prepared to factor in the costs of the several millennia of work needed to deal with nuclear waste?

**Brian Whittle:** It is quite apt that Mark Ruskell mentions the Romans because, frankly, when it comes to nuclear energy he is living in the past. The innovation in nuclear is so much more advanced, especially around small modular nuclear reactors.

Innovation thrives in an environment where there is a genuine diversity of ideas and approaches and, if the Scottish Government does not show that it is open to a broad range of solutions to the challenge of climate change, opting instead to give certain technologies substantially more prominence, researchers and businesses will not have the confidence to invest in anything else.

It is a stark fact that, in all likelihood, none of the infrastructure generating our electricity today will still be doing so in 2050. Scotland's nuclear capacity will be gone and the existing wind assets and natural gas power stations will have reached the end of their design life. We must take a wide approach; we must support innovation as part of that and we must give greater backing to solar energy.

I thank Fergus Ewing once again for bringing the debate to the chamber.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call the next speaker, I advise that, due to 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 it by up to 30 minutes. I invite Fergus Ewing to move a motion without notice.

*Motion moved,*

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

*Motion agreed to.*

17:47

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to speak in this extended debate. I congratulate Fergus Ewing, not only on securing the debate and getting this time in the chamber—and bringing some unexpected sunshine with him—but on the fact that so many members have taken part. That is encouraging and I have

certainly learned a few things in the debate already.

When I saw that the motion and debate had been secured, I felt motivated to come and take part and listen tonight because of the work that I am doing with colleagues on the Net Zero Energy and Transport Committee—Liam Kerr and Mark Ruskell are also members. We are currently running an energy crisis inquiry looking at what needs to be done in the here and now as well as at longer-term actions. We will report on that shortly.

I was struck by comments that we heard from the fuel poverty charity Energy Action Scotland just a few weeks ago. It said that, unless the UK Government and the Scottish Government take bolder action now, there will be

“a catastrophic loss of life”—[*Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee*, 26 April 2022; c 23]

this winter. I think that that is something that is very much in the minds of all of us when we think about our casework—the emails from people reaching out to us for help and assurance. I come to this thinking very much about the cost of living crisis and how that interacts with the climate and nature emergencies.

The young people of Scotland very much keep our feet to the fire on this. It is a pleasure to be back doing school visits and hearing from young people. Before the 26th United Nations climate change conference of the parties—COP26—I was doing a lot of that work. I have to say to all colleagues and all parties—I do so from the back benches; I do not get to speak in the chamber very often now—that we cannot just retreat to our party lines, our slogans and the usual banter. This is much more serious than any of that. We have to work together.

The Government has a massive job to do, as all Governments do, and the Net Zero Energy and Transport Committee has a very important role to play. In that committee, we try to leave our party politics at the door in order to work together. We need more of these debates because, frankly, since COP26 finished I feel like we have gone back to our business-as-usual approach, and we cannot have that. Quite often, the very important issues, as we are discussing tonight, are left to members’ business debates when they should be given Government time and Opposition party time. Let us look at that.

**Liam Kerr:** I welcome Monica Lennon’s comments. I think that she is absolutely right on that, but does that not mean that the member has to acknowledge the importance of nuclear energy and oil and gas in providing base load while we transition to renewables?

**Monica Lennon:** Maybe Liam Kerr wants to bring forward his own members’ business debate to get into that issue in much more detail. Tonight is about solar energy and, clearly, we need a robust plan for that. We need to get on with it, as the opportunity has been spelled out to all of us.

We have to look at where we are seeing pioneering work already. The solar farms in North Ayrshire, which have been pioneered by Scottish Labour, have not really been mentioned tonight. Hopefully, that work will continue and that innovation and good practice will be shared throughout Scotland. The work in North Ayrshire ties in nicely with the community wealth building agenda that we heard about in the chamber earlier. I congratulate Councillor Joe Cullinane on that work. It is pioneering and it also helps people with their energy bills.

There is groundbreaking work out there but, when I look at my emails and at what people are getting in touch with me about, I see that they do not want business as usual. That is why we had a digital day of action on Friday to stop the Jackdaw gas field. Liam Kerr is happy to see the Jackdaw gas field and the Cambo oilfield approved, but we cannot continue like that.

We want to see more democratic control of energy. The system in the market has completely failed. When we heard from the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets in the committee inquiry recently, we found out that there is just no protection for consumers. We all know that we cannot continue as we are. We need to work together during the transition. I know that I am out of time, but I took a brief intervention. The points about planning, skills and so on are very relevant. The message that we are hearing from our constituents, young and old, is that the future is ours to create, and we just have to get on and do it. The time to act is now.

17:51

**Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** I may not be able to stay until the very end of the debate because it has been heavily oversubscribed and we are running over. I think that that is recognition of the importance of this issue. I congratulate Fergus Ewing on securing the debate, but I also say that it shames each and every one of us that, in 23 years of devolution, this is the first time we have debated this issue in the chamber. The strength of feeling that we have heard across the various parties shows how important it is. It should not have taken 23 years, but it is right that we join tonight to look at the opportunities in Scotland.

I asked to speak tonight for a couple of reasons. One is to put on record on the chamber floor what

I put down in a motion that has been supported across political parties, which is to celebrate and recognise the amazing achievement of AES Solar in Moray on receiving the Queen's award for enterprise in the sustainable development category. George Goudsmit and his team do outstanding work in Moray from their base in Forres. AES Solar is one of the oldest solar energy companies in western Europe and it has provided solar panels for our own Parliament building. In the last year, it has increased the number of employees from 22 to 32. It is a local business that goes from strength to strength. I was very proud to see it recognised as a recipient of the Queen's award for enterprise, and I know that that pride was shared by George and all his staff. It was a richly deserved award.

In the short time that we have available, I also want to elaborate on some of the points that have been mentioned throughout the debate, and I am sure that the minister will respond to them. We have heard from a number of speakers about permitted developments and about non-domestic rates. I want to look at that a bit more in the round, because I think that we have heard from across the chamber that people believe that we should see changes there. What would those changes mean? Currently in Scotland, solar PV is subject to planning at 50kW, yet in England the level is already 20 times greater, at 1MW. The UK Government is currently looking, as part of its energy security strategy, to consult on further simplifying planning for solar. Already there is a gap and there is a risk that that gap could widen even further.

I understand from a briefing that I received for this debate that solar currently sits in phase 4 of the Scottish permitted development rights review. The fact that phase 2 has only just been released means that we could be years away from being part of the change that we have seen in England since 2015. I say that constructively to the minister, as I think that we have heard from around the chamber that this is an area that all parties would like to see movement on.

**Monica Lennon:** As Douglas Ross mentioned planning, does he agree that we need to properly resource our planning authorities? There has been around a 20 per cent reduction in the planning workforce and some of the technical skills that we have heard about tonight are very important. Does he agree that we have to support local government?

Presiding Officer, I should have said at the start that I, too, may have to leave before the end of the debate. Thank you for your permission to do that.

**Douglas Ross:** I thank Monica Lennon for that constructive intervention. I agree, and I speak as a former chairman of the Moray Council planning

committee. That was a role that I thoroughly enjoyed and one that is hugely important. These are complex issues and, to ensure that members have the best possible information to determine applications, it is right that they have the full support and backing of officers.

Finally, in my last couple of seconds, I want to mention a very good briefing about skills that we all received ahead of today's debate, because as well as the changes to permitted development and NDR, skills are an issue that has come up. I want to give the final word to a constituent of mine, Josh King, who works for AES Solar and is the Solar Energy Scotland vice-chair. His words, I think, are very important:

"The potential for solar in Scotland is huge, but a clear ambition and stable policy are vital to capitalise on the opportunity. Solar can be rapidly deployed at all scales, and the recent surge in demand—which we expect to continue—is already leading to a serious skills gap. We need to focus on skilled apprenticeships, as well as upskilling and retraining those transitioning from traditional energy and engineering industries. The roles are ready and waiting."

I hope that we all agree with those words and I hope that the minister can respond to them in summing up.

17:56

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** I thank Fergus Ewing for bringing forward the debate tonight. As co-convenor of the cross-party group on renewable energy, I am delighted to see our renewables sector continuing to grow in strength.

I was also delighted to see the publication of Solar Energy Scotland's policy paper, "Scotland's Fair Share: Solar's role in achieving net zero in Scotland", which Douglas Ross mentioned. Only yesterday, we saw the energy price cap rise to a proposed £2,800. We need to scale up our renewables capability as quickly as we can.

I declare an interest: I live in Dunbar—sunny Dunny, as it is known—which is officially the sunniest place in Scotland. Therefore, I claim the national headquarters for Dunbar.

In its paper, Solar Energy Scotland calls on the Scottish Government to commit to a minimum target of 4GW of solar energy across the country by 2030, and to declare, as we have heard, an ambition to achieve 6GW. We have heard that forecast is for 6GW, with 3.5GW of deployment coming from ground-mounted solar, 1.5GW from domestic rooftops and 1GW from commercial rooftops.

Twelve years ago, in 2010, when I was council leader in East Lothian, we submitted plans for a £10 million investment in solar panels on our council buildings. Unfortunately, there was a

change in administration and the proposal did not go forward at that stage. However, local authorities need to lead on this agenda.

Solar Energy Scotland further states:

“A specific solar deployment target of 4 to 6GW would ensure that solar technologies deliver their fair share of the clean energy required for Scotland to achieve its leading and legally binding commitments to 2030 on the way to a net zero economy by 2045.”

In the minister’s winding-up speech tonight, it would be good if he would comment on the policy requests in the paper and on whether Scottish Government would support an independent Scottish solar strategy.

The Solar Energy Scotland paper sets out the organisation’s policy asks, which are for a formal minimum target of 4GW, and an upper ambition of 6GW, of solar power in Scotland by 2030.

We have heard about building regulations, which are incredibly important. Planning rules should extend permitted development rights to rooftop solar projects of up to 5MW, and we should support a green recovery by exempting on-site solar and storage from non-domestic rates.

The other key point that I want to mention is investment in natural capital. Farmers and landowners should be permitted to claim for solar projects on agricultural land under the basic payment scheme if they can meet natural capital and biodiversity objectives. Grid infrastructure costs should spread the cost of electricity grid reinforcement between solar, energy storage and wind generation technologies.

The paper mentions the broader benefits in our move towards a just transition. The solar energy sector can create resilient, long-term and sustainable jobs. Solar Energy Scotland analysis suggests that deploying 6GW of solar in Scotland could support at least 3,000 full-time equivalent skilled and high-quality jobs, with the potential for many more throughout the supply chain, thus making a wider economic impact. There is also major job creation potential in emerging energy storage technology. I am fortunate to have Sunamp in my area. Sunamp is an innovative battery storage company that has recently received support from the Scottish National Investment Bank. There are real opportunities for that sector to grow, too.

Solar and storage technologies can be quickly deployed, so committing to a Scottish solar deployment target would mean that the Scottish Government could rapidly deliver skilled high-quality jobs to rural and other parts of the country in weeks, rather than years.

Solar also has the potential to provide employment for North Sea offshore workers and

for those involved in the decommissioning of Torness in my area, which would require vocational and other training support from the Government.

Solar can expand our industrial sector. Scotland has an established solar supply chain that involves a wide range of companies that work on design, manufacturing, distribution and project development, among other things. There is a real opportunity to expand the supply chain further. Solar Energy Scotland estimates that deploying 4GW would lead to a minimum of around £2.5 billion of economic activity in the areas that I have mentioned.

Supporting the sector would send out a very clear signal to Scottish companies and give them confidence to invest in their workforce and operations, thereby expanding the supply chain and helping to diversify the Scottish economy. Such support would also reduce pressure on the grid. Solar Energy Scotland recommends

“a move to a smarter, more decentralised system of power generation and use”,

which would mean

“maximising the potential of local, ‘onsite’ generation”

Scotland has major solar resource potential. Policy decisions in the next few months and years can provide confidence so that there is the necessary investment in the sector and the impetus for skills agencies, colleges and universities to prepare the skills base to move the sector forward.

I have already met Solar Energy Scotland, and I look forward to continuing working with it to maximise the opportunities for the sector and to build on our incredible renewables success story in Scotland.

18:01

**The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants’ Rights (Patrick Harvie):** I join members in congratulating Fergus Ewing on bringing the debate to the chamber. The level of interest and enthusiasm for the topic that members across the chamber have shown is extremely positive.

The Scottish Government has been clear that the climate emergency is the biggest threat that our world faces. We must set right the terrible mistakes of previous generations and rapidly transition away from fossil fuels, slash our emissions and prevent the catastrophic impacts of climate change from threatening not only human civilisation but the rest of the living world around us. Scotland is taking leading action to combat climate change, with emissions already down by more than 50 per cent by 2019, but we have much

more to do if we are to make up for recent missed targets. The energy transition is a critical part of that.

Last year, Scotland generated enough renewable electricity to power all households in Scotland for almost three years. However, the scale of the challenge means that we have much more to do. The Scottish Government is taking action through our ScotWind announcement, our onshore wind policy statement and our commitment to measures such as active travel and reducing car kilometres. It is also crucial that we do not repeat other mistakes of the past and that we ensure a managed and fair transition to net zero.

The Scottish Government recognises the great importance of energy that is generated from solar in contributing to the decarbonisation of Scotland's energy supply and helping us to reach net zero by 2045. I have no doubt that solar will play an important and growing role in our decarbonisation goals. It also has the potential to lower costs for individuals and communities.

**Liam Kerr:** I think that that is a very important point. I hope that there will be many people watching who are interested in joining us on the solar journey. However, does the minister's Government offer any financial support so that people can access solar technology? If not, might such support be possible?

**Patrick Harvie:** I will come on to that.

Around 400MW of solar PV is currently operational in Scotland. In 2020, it generated 353GWH of electricity. As of June last year, projects worth a further 352MW were in the pipeline. Solar is growing, and I hear very clearly the appetite of members across the chamber for us to support the sector to grow faster.

Solar is a versatile technology; it interacts well with other renewables. For example, it plays a key role in off-grid communities such as Fair Isle, where £1.5 million of Scottish Government funding helped to fund electricity generation based on three wind turbines, solar and battery storage, providing the island with 24-hour electricity for the first time.

We are keen to understand more about what solar can do. We are undertaking research, which will be published this year, to examine the extent to which building-level storage can help reduce household energy costs. That is not specific to solar alone, but it will look at pairing solar PV with storage.

On funding, the Scottish Government offers a number of support mechanisms to enable the deployment of solar, which is already helping consumers and communities to reduce their

carbon emissions and their energy bills. The schemes also recognise the potential for the decarbonisation of not only electricity but heat. For example, the Scottish Government's social housing net zero heat fund supports social landlords across Scotland to install air-source heat pumps alongside solar panels and battery storage.

**Fergus Ewing:** Will the minister give way?

**Patrick Harvie:** I ask the member to let me finish my point.

The combination of these three technologies helps to reduce carbon emissions and bills. It also smoothes out demand, reducing potential strain on the network, and makes homes more resilient to potential power outages. It combines all those benefits in the way that Mark Ruskell described, and it has great potential.

**Fergus Ewing:** I thank the minister for giving way and I agree very much with what he said. Would he address some of the specific asks that I included in my speech, which I notified him of yesterday? In particular, I refer to the need for swift action and the desirability of adopting the measures that are in place in England to enable—typically without planning permission—rooftop solar. That would allow us to make swift progress, and I wonder whether it is in the minister's plans.

**Patrick Harvie:** I am aware that the planning minister has met with Solar Energy Scotland, which I am sure would have raised that issue. I am responding as the minister responsible for zero carbon buildings, but the planning minister, the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport and others are actively engaged in this agenda as well.

I will give another couple of examples of where this work is already taking place. Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership is installing measures that are similar to the combined technologies that I described in 100 of its off-gas homes, replacing inefficient and carbon-intensive heating. Those tenants are expected to benefit from a reduction of up to 60 per cent in their energy bills. I hope that people around the country who are facing the cost of living crisis see that as evidence that the transition can be made to work in people's interests.

The Scottish Government's community and renewable energy scheme provides funding and specialist advice for communities that are taking such projects forward. The example noted by Colin Smyth of the provision of £100,000 to Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative saw solar PV—along with battery storage—installed across 24 public buildings owned by the City of Edinburgh Council. All the additional income that is generated from those solar panels is allocated to a local community benefit fund, helping to

ensure lasting economic and social benefit for those communities. In all those ways, solar renewables can be used in conjunction with other technologies to maximise efficiency and benefit.

Stirling Council has been installing solar PV on to its social housing since 2012. The Scottish Government has helped that programme with additional funding under both the decarbonisation fund for social housing and funding from the area-based schemes. That has led to more than 4,200 installations to date, with 40,000 solar panels installed in the Stirling area and an average annual saving to households of hundreds of pounds per household. The council is now installing battery storage alongside the PV, giving additional savings.

Members have emphasised some UK measures, such as grid connection costs, and the cabinet secretary met Ofgem just today to make the case once again.

Scotland has huge potential for solar energy and I again thank Fergus Ewing for raising the issue in the chamber. I am very pleased by the strong appetite for faster action. The Scottish Government is working with the solar industry. We welcome the work that it has done and the proposals that it has put to us, which our officials are engaging with. Permitted development rights are under review, and I will make sure that the planning minister is clear about the strong appetite of members across the chamber for action to be taken as quickly as possible. As we committed to in the Bute house agreement, we plan to publish an updated solar vision, detailing our future objectives, as part of the energy strategy refresh, which is due later this year. We will continue to work with the industry and with members across the chamber as that vision is developed. The strength of view that has been expressed has been heard very clearly and will be at the forefront of our minds as we complete that work in the coming months.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Thank you, minister. That concludes the debate. I close this meeting of Parliament.

*Meeting closed at 18:10.*





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

---

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

---

All documents are available on  
the Scottish Parliament website at:

[www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers  
is available here:

[www.parliament.scot/documents](http://www.parliament.scot/documents)

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact  
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: [sp.info@parliament.scot](mailto:sp.info@parliament.scot)

---



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba