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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 24 November 2022

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

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The first item of business is general question time. Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Disabled People (Right to Dedicated Accessible Spaces)

2. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on the right of disabled people to dedicated accessible spaces. (S6O-01598)

The Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care (Kevin Stewart): Our Strategy “A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People” sets out a commitment to have places that are accessible to everyone. We are working with disabled people’s organisations to develop our new strategy and are listening to learn what barriers disabled people face and to find solutions. We have made significant progress in advancing disability equality in many areas, including by delivering 1,124 homes for disabled people.

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities, businesses and organisations are responsible for making reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of disabled people; we expect all relevant organisations to comply with the requirements of the act.

Jeremy Balfour: Active travel measures and new pedestrianised areas can sometimes make the built environment less accessible for disabled people by leading to the removal of blue badge parking bays, unclear demarcation of cycle lanes and pavements and more clutter and street furniture in pedestrianised areas.

Does the minister agree that any alterations to our urban areas must not come at the expense of the disabled community and that true progress can be made only if we leave no one behind?

Kevin Stewart: I agree with Jeremy Balfour. Our accessible travel framework is there to help ensure that more disabled people make successful door-to-door journeys more often. We want to see disabled people being more involved in the design, development and improvement of transport policies, services and infrastructure. I know that there is good practice in many places and that disabled people are being involved in the design of new places, ensuring, as Mr Balfour

highlighted, that we have the right number of disabled parking spaces and that areas are truly accessible.

The Government will continue to listen to the voices of those with lived experience and of disabled people in order to get this right.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): A lot of work remains to be done. I recently joined disability campaigner Robert West for a tour of St Andrews. We went through thoroughfare after thoroughfare and over many crossings without finding dropped kerbs in many locations. Even next to disability parking bays, there were no dropped kerbs.

It is a quarter of a century since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. I have heard what the minister has said so far, but what practical steps can be taken so that we can see progress in the next few years?

Kevin Stewart: My plaudits go to Mr Rennie for going out with his constituent to see exactly where the difficulties lie. I have done similar things myself, with a blind constituent in particular, to see the difficulties that disabled people face.

Local authorities should ensure that they are taking due cognisance of the needs of disabled people in their areas. I hope that Fife Council will listen to people such as Mr Rennie’s constituent so that we can get this right.

Mr Rennie makes a good point about poor access to disability parking spaces. It is my expectation that, when those are being designed and planned, local authorities and regional transport partnerships will look at the whole area and not only at the spaces themselves.

NHS Lothian and NHS Borders (Meetings)

3. **Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government when it last met NHS Lothian and NHS Borders. (S6O-01599)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Ministers and Scottish Government officials regularly meet representatives of all health boards, including NHS Borders and NHS Lothian. Indeed, I met the leadership of NHS Lothian on Monday.

Christine Grahame: The cabinet secretary will be aware of the trial involving NHS Grampian, a local energy charity and an energy innovation hub. The health board has identified at least 300 people who require assistance with their energy bills because of their serious ill health and related requirements.

I have a constituent who is at home on life-support equipment, and their monthly bill will rise

from £347 to £624 on 1 December and to over £1,000 next year. Does the cabinet secretary consider that other health boards should follow NHS Grampian and consider such interventions?

Humza Yousaf: I know about the important pilot project at NHS Grampian that Christine Grahame highlights and I will make sure that it has been put on the radar of every single health board chair and chief executive.

Having spoken to our chairs and chief executives about the issue, which has been raised by parliamentarians right across the chamber, we know how important any additional support can be during this very difficult cost crisis.

NHS Lothian and NHS Borders advise me that they have arrangements in place to help with energy cost support for some patients, but I will make sure that the pilot that Christine Grahame referenced is put on their radar.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I am glad that the cabinet secretary met NHS Lothian on Monday. He will have heard about the staffing challenges that are still keeping the Edington hospital closed. What specific help has the Scottish Government offered NHS Lothian with regard to its challenges with recruitment?

Humza Yousaf: Significant support has been given to all our health boards, including NHS Lothian. With NHS Lothian, a lot of our support has concentrated on the social care space. We know that delayed discharges are far too high, particularly in the city of Edinburgh, so we are working extensively on that. We have asked Elma Murray, who I am sure the member will know, to provide some additional support—which is in addition to national Government support—to the health board, the health and social care partnership and the City of Edinburgh Council.

We are working really intensively. It looks like there has been some initial positive movement in delayed discharges in Edinburgh city. We know that, if we can free up that capacity, it helps to free up some of the workload, and we hope that, in time, it will help to free up staff to be able to go back into other community assets such as the Edington hospital, which the member mentioned.

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Meetings)

4. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met COSLA and what issues were discussed. (S6O-01600)

The Minister for Social Security and Local Government (Ben Macpherson): The Scottish Government engages regularly with COSLA at both official and ministerial levels to discuss a wide range of issues as part of our shared

commitment to working in partnership with local government to improve outcomes for the people and communities of Scotland.

Other ministers have met COSLA in recent days and weeks. I last met COSLA on 11 October to discuss the child disability and adult disability payments as well as data sharing between Social Security Scotland and local government. I am also scheduled to meet the presidential team in the coming weeks to discuss a wide range of issues, including the new deal for local government.

Neil Bibby: I thank the minister for his answer. The failure to properly resource local councils has created protracted pay disputes all over the country, meaning that refuse is piling up on our streets and, today, schoolchildren are locked out of their classrooms. Our town halls are now facing even more tough decisions against a backdrop of rising costs, which means cuts to public services in our communities.

Does the minister recognise that the Government's failure to provide any funding for pay settlements in the 2021-22 local government settlement was the principal reason for the disputes this year? Will the Government commit to properly funding councils in West Scotland in 2022-23 so that they can make a fair pay offer to their hard-working employees, who are struggling with the cost of living crisis, and ensure that people have the services that they deserve?

Ben Macpherson: As I mentioned in my first answer, the Scottish Government works in partnership with local government as two spheres of government that are equally committed to collaboration and serving the people of Scotland.

The outcome of the resource spending review earlier this year meant that, despite the very challenging circumstances, we have provided the local government revenue budget with an extra £100 million in cash terms. The £120 million that was added at stage 2 of the 2022-23 Scottish budget bill has also been baselined in the local government settlement for future years.

Within the limited resources of the Scottish Government's budget and the nature of the powers and flexibilities that it has, the Scottish Government has consistently been committed to providing local government with as fair a settlement as is practical and reasonable, as well as meeting all the other obligations that we have.

I encourage Neil Bibby to engage with finance ministers in a spirit of collaboration, because the issues that are faced across the country require that.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Here in the capital, the number of people who have died while homeless has increased by nearly 150 per cent

over the past four years. Shelter Scotland has said that the situation points towards “public services failing people”, and a “broken housing system”. The situation is simply not acceptable, and the City of Edinburgh Council does not have the resources to deliver a solution. As a fellow Edinburgh MSP, I ask the minister a very simple question: will he act today to declare a homelessness emergency here in the capital?

Ben Macpherson: I appreciate the wide-ranging nature of this question.

As a Lothian MSP, Miles Briggs is active in this space. As a constituency MSP, I am aware of the pressures on the housing market and on housing capacity here in the capital city, as is my colleague Shona Robison, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government.

Within the Scottish Government, there is a strong commitment to building more affordable housing. More than 112,000 affordable homes have been built across the country since 2007. Action has been taken on short-term lets, to increase the capacity in the city. Of course, the Conservatives did not support that. Recently, we took action on rents. There has been a multitude of actions, including in trying to improve provision for homeless people in Scotland and committing to reducing homelessness. We will continue with that work.

If Miles Briggs has any constructive suggestions, he should send them to the cabinet secretary.

National Health Service Dentistry (Dumfries and Galloway)

5. Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what urgent action it is taking to stabilise NHS dentistry services in Dumfries and Galloway. (S6O-01601)

The Minister for Public Health, Women’s Health and Sport (Maree Todd): We understand that, in certain remote and rural areas, such as Dumfries and Galloway, access to NHS dentistry remains challenging. The service concerns that are experienced by NHS Dumfries and Galloway are driven by workforce and capacity issues, given enhanced immigration controls on European Union labour following Brexit and the exacerbation of historical difficulties by backlogs from the pandemic.

We have already put in place additional recruitment and retention incentives to maximise the opportunities for newly qualified dentists to work in areas such as Dumfries and Galloway, and we continue to work with all health boards to deliver their responsibility for NHS dental services in their area.

A record number of people—more than 95 per cent of the population—are currently registered with an NHS dentist.

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, minister.

Maree Todd: Across key treatments, levels of activity in NHS dental services are comparable to those that were last seen before the pandemic restrictions were introduced.

Oliver Mundell: The minister says access is “challenging”, but access is non-existent: Thornhill has closed, Gretna has closed and Castle Douglas has closed. NHS dentistry in the region is collapsing. The minister was warned that that was the case on 23 February, during a Conservative-led debate in the Parliament. No meaningful additional action has taken place since then.

Does the minister not feel even a tad of shame that, in 2022, in Scottish National Party Scotland, the ability to see a dentist is based on the ability to pay? What will it take for this rotten Government to end the decay?

Maree Todd: I will be absolutely clear. Not one dental practice that was providing NHS dental services prior to the pandemic has closed due to financial failure. That is because of the level of support that was provided throughout the pandemic and during this post-pandemic recovery period, which totals more than £150 million. We put that in in order to maintain the capacity and capability of NHS dentistry.

Officials meet the board regularly, and are in advanced discussions on how to maintain NHS capacity. For example, they are exploring with the board the prospect of a comprehensive suite of Scottish dental access initiative grants across the areas in which NHS dental provision has recently been lost. Those grants offer £100,000 towards establishing a new surgery, with £25,000 per additional surgery.

However, I must say—

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, minister.

Maree Todd: Historically, this is an area that has proven to be challenging for the board in attracting suitably qualified dental professionals. Existential forces, such as the significant loss of EU workers as a consequence of Brexit, are, invariably, having a disproportionate impact in areas such as Dumfries and Galloway.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Like Oliver Mundell, I have been contacted by many people from across Dumfries and Galloway, and from other parts of South Scotland, so I know that the situation is challenging and that the impact has been exacerbated by Brexit. Can the minister provide an update on the rural visa pilot scheme in relation to dentists, and will she agree to meet me

to discuss access to NHS dentistry in Dumfries and Galloway?

Maree Todd: I thank the member for that question and would be happy to meet her to discuss the issue.

We have been particularly successful in growing the dental workforce in Scotland—from 2007 to 2022, it has increased by 32 per cent, despite the challenging pandemic period. However, with disruptions to the education and training of dentists and the challenges of Brexit, we face difficulties.

The situation is accentuated with regulated professions such as dentistry. For example, overseas dentists are required to sit examinations with the General Dental Council before they are able to work as dentist. We are pressing the GDC and the UK Government to expand the capacity for examinations.

National Health Service Recovery Plan (Diagnostics for Thrombosis)

6. Natalie Don (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how measures set out in the NHS recovery plan will support innovation and capacity in diagnostics for thrombosis. (S6O-01602)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Humza Yousaf): Our NHS recovery plan is clear that innovation, the redesign of services and continually identifying new ways to increase our capacity are all integral to the recovery of NHS services. That includes increasing diagnostic capacity, including diagnostics for thrombosis and similar artery and vein clotting conditions.

Our specialist diagnostic services are split between imaging services, such as magnetic resonance imaging and computed tomography scans. To support delivery towards increasing capacity by 78,000 this year, we have secured seven mobile MRI scanners and five mobile CT scanners across Scotland, which is helping to reduce waits.

Natalie Don: Symptoms of deep vein thrombosis include swelling, a throbbing pain—normally in one leg—and red or darkened skin around the painful area. I know from the experience of one of my constituents that it can be extremely debilitating. Will the cabinet secretary join me in emphasising the importance of raising awareness of the symptoms of deep vein thrombosis?

Humza Yousaf: Yes, I would be happy to do that, and I think there may be more that we can do on the communication of the symptoms and what people should be aware of when it comes to DVT and other artery and clotting conditions.

The member will know that a lot of our public health messaging during the pandemic was, understandably, focused on Covid, but that focus has reduced as we have moved to a different phase of the pandemic. It is therefore important that we should look at what more we can do, particularly on DVT.

Housing (Private Sector Rents)

7. Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address high private sector rents. (S6O-01603)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): The Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022, which came into force on 28 October, included a rent cap to protect tenants from high rent increases.

Alongside that, we are committed to introducing an effective national system of private sector rent controls by the end of 2025, and to doing so in a robust way that provides lasting benefit to tenants. We are also providing up to £86 million-worth of housing support this year, building on the £39 million-worth of additional funding that has already been provided to protect tenants as a result of the pandemic.

Mercedes Villalba: I thank the minister for his support for Labour's rent-freeze policy. It is vital that that stays in place until we have a national system of rent control to bring rents down, because long-term underinvestment in council housing and the history of poor regulation of the private rental sector has allowed private landlords to cash in on the housing crisis while claiming that they provide a public service. Let us be clear: that is not philanthropy—it is exploitation. Will the minister commit to finally ending the two-tier system of rented housing in Scotland by capping private rents in line with social rent levels?

Patrick Harvie: I am glad that the Labour Party supports the measures that the Scottish Government brought to Parliament, which have not been replicated by any Government in any other part of the UK.

The member is well aware that emergency legislation must, by definition, be temporary and that its on-going necessity must be reviewed to ensure that the provisions remain proportionate to the situation. For that reason, the measures will initially apply for a six-month period. However, the act also includes powers to extend the measures for two further six-month periods, subject to parliamentary approval, if circumstances show that to be necessary. The act also includes provisions to temporarily change the rent adjudication

process if that is necessary to support the transition away from the emergency measures.

Those measures, alongside the direct support that I mentioned in my first answer and the Scottish Government's strong track record on providing social housing, demonstrate that the Scottish Government has the best track record of any Government in any part of the UK in supporting tenants in these difficult times.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

NHS Leaders (Meeting)

1. **Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** On Monday, minutes obtained by the BBC revealed that national health service leaders in Scotland had held secret talks about privatising parts of the NHS. They discussed a two-tier health service in which patients would have to pay for treatment and prescriptions. Those plans are completely against the founding principles of our NHS. The First Minister likes to scaremonger about NHS privatisation, but it seems like it is already on the table in the Scottish National Party-run health service here in Scotland. Now, the First Minister denies it, but is she denying that those conversations took place? Is she denying that NHS chiefs discussed a two-tiered system in Scotland's NHS? Apparently, she finds that funny. Is she saying—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Let us be clear from the outset that we are going to conduct ourselves in a courteous and respectful manner. We will hear one another when we are speaking. One at a time.

Douglas Ross: I ask the First Minister, on this important issue, whether she is denying that those conversations took place. Is she denying that NHS chiefs discussed a two-tier system in Scotland's NHS, or is she saying that the minutes of the meeting are wrong?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, it is—what is the best word to describe it?—bold for a Conservative to come here and talk about privatisation of the national health service. The Conservatives have done more than any other party in these islands—at times, they have had stiff competition from Labour—to privatise the NHS.

I am intrigued by Douglas Ross's line of questioning. I did an interview on Monday in which I addressed the comments in the minute. The minute is there. I was not denying then that the conversation had taken place, and I am not denying it now. It was a meeting of some leading NHS directors. As a point of fact, it was not a meeting of NHS board chief executives. The meeting involved conversations, not—to use another word that Douglas Ross used—"plans".

I will let Douglas Ross into what should not be a secret, but it is clear that he does not understand this. NHS leaders, however much respect I have for them—I have considerable respect for them—do not make Government policy. The Government makes Government policy, and the founding

principles of the national health service, which this Government has done more than any to protect and to enhance are not and—as long as I am First Minister—never will be up for discussion.

Douglas Ross: I think that it is very bold for Nicola Sturgeon to compare Scotland with other parts of the United Kingdom on privatisation when we know that, in Scotland, private treatment has gone up by 84 per cent since the start of the pandemic, whereas in the rest of the UK, the figure is half of that. Private treatment has increased by 84 per cent here in Scotland and by less than half of that in the rest of the UK.

As the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care passes the First Minister some notes, which she passes back again—those were clearly no use, Humza—let us look at what the document said.

The Presiding Officer: Mr Ross.

Douglas Ross: It said that health boards had the “green light” from the leadership to come up with and present their ideas for reforms. It is reported that the document said:

“areas which were previously not viable options are now possibilities”.

Will the First Minister reveal what areas that she would not consider before are now on the table? Given that she has said that the ultimate decision would lie with Government ministers, who gave NHS chiefs the green light to consider these plans?

The First Minister: Can you imagine what Douglas Ross’s reaction would be if I tried to dictate to NHS leaders what they were or were not allowed to discuss in their meetings? Let us just imagine that for a second.

In direct answer to Mr Ross’s question, none of these plans—actually, they are not plans; they are ideas—that would have any impact on the founding principles of the national health service is being discussed or remotely considered by this Government. That cannot be clearer. Certainly here in Scotland, it is Government that makes Government policy.

Douglas Ross talked about figures around private health funding. Let me give him some facts on that matter. For example, for people who self-fund private care, the figure in Wales is 30 per cent higher per head than it is in Scotland—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but Douglas Ross introduced the comparison between Scotland and the rest of the UK. In England, where, just in case anyone has forgotten—though I am sure that they have not—the Conservatives are in government, that figure is 15 per cent higher per head than it is in Scotland.

Let us look at NHS use of the private sector. In Scotland, total spend on use of the independent sector represents 0.5 per cent of the total front-line health budget. In England, where the Conservatives are in power, that figure is almost 7 per cent, or £12.2 billion.

This Government will take no lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to privatising the national health service. In fact, this Government will take no lessons from the Conservatives on the NHS—full stop.

Douglas Ross: Sadly, in Sturgeon’s Scotland, no one is getting any lessons today, because the teachers are on strike.

Let us go back to the figures. The First Minister did not dispute that, since the start of the pandemic, private treatments in Scotland have increased by 84 per cent, while in the rest of the United Kingdom, the increase has been 39 per cent.

I go back to the point that I was making: someone gave the green light within the Government. We would usually expect that green light to come from the health secretary or the First Minister, but there has clearly been a complete breakdown of communication between NHS chiefs and the SNP. The First Minister has stood up today and literally rubbished the meeting of NHS chiefs, saying that they are completely wrong. They are apparently acting on their own, without ministerial direction—that is what the First Minister has said—but the reports clearly state that NHS chiefs here in Scotland are worried about the prospect of a two-tier NHS.

If the First Minister is to be believed, NHS chiefs are not listening to the health secretary but are going off to try to fix the NHS on their own, with no Government oversight. Is this not just another confirmation that Humza Yousaf is out of control with Scotland’s NHS?

The Presiding Officer: Before the First Minister responds, I remind members of the requirement to always address one another respectfully.

The First Minister: Respectfully, Presiding Officer, even by Douglas Ross’s own standards, this is a pretty lame and pathetic line of questioning. He talks about a two-tier health service, but perhaps he is talking about the one that already exists where the Conservatives are in government in England. There will not be a two-tier health service while this Government is in office in Scotland, because we are committed to the founding principles of the national health service and always will be. NHS leaders are entitled to discuss what they want, but they do not make Government policy. The Government makes Government policy—I could not be clearer about that.

I was health secretary in the early years of this Government, so I know that this is the Government that reversed the privatisation of our health service where it had taken place. I was the health secretary who brought Stracathro hospital back into the public sector after Labour had privatised it, and we were the Government that ended the contracting out of cleaning and catering services and which moved away from the ruinously expensive Tory-Labour public-private partnership/private finance initiative contracts. Of course, we were also the Government that ended prescription charges in Scotland. We did that, because we support the founding principles of the NHS, and we always will.

Douglas Ross: Last week, Nicola Sturgeon stood up and said that we should trust her, not a shipbuilding expert who had advised the United Nations. This week, we have to believe Nicola Sturgeon, not NHS chiefs who run our service here in Scotland.

According to the First Minister, Humza Yousaf has not lost control, yet nurses are on strike for the first time ever, we have waiting times at record highs, people cannot see their general practitioners, and health chiefs are warning of a two-tier system in our NHS. It is quite clear that the First Minister is in complete denial about how badly her health secretary is handling the NHS crisis, about the scale of privatisation in the health service that she oversees and about Humza Yousaf's two-tier system, which is already becoming the norm in Scotland.

Nicola Sturgeon has become so distracted, focusing on her own political priorities, that she no longer realises just how bad the situation has got here in Scotland.

The minutes of the meeting of NHS chiefs claim that there is a “disconnect” between what is happening on the front line and what the health secretary thinks is happening. They accuse Humza Yousaf of being “divorced from reality”. They are right, are they not?

The First Minister: They are not. I will set out some facts about the NHS. There is higher funding for the national health service in Scotland than there is for England's Tory-run national health service; there is higher staffing per head of population in Scotland than there is in England; and, of course, thanks to the dedication of every worker who works in it, NHS Scotland is better performing than the NHS in other parts of the UK.

Douglas Ross: Divorced from reality.

The First Minister: This Government will always work to protect the founding principles of the health service, which is more than can be said—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: When the First Minister is responding to a question, I want us to ensure that we can hear only the First Minister's voice.

The First Minister: As I was saying, that is more than can be said for Douglas Ross. He says that he wants some reality. I will give him some.

Last year, an amendment was passed in the House of Lords that would have protected the NHS by explicitly excluding it from trade deals that could undermine its founding principles. Tory MPs in the House of Commons voted to remove that protection. Guess who one of those Tory MPs was—Douglas Ross. Even when he gets the chance, he does not stand up for the principles of the national health service. This Government always will.

Healthcare (Private Provision)

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** On Monday, the BBC revealed that the national health service crisis created by this Government had got so bad that health leaders had discussed charging for treatment. In response, the health secretary said that that was “abhorrent”. However, the truth is that there is already a two-tier healthcare system in Scotland. Can the First Minister tell the chamber how many procedures were carried out in private hospitals in Scotland in the past year?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will provide that precise figure, but, as I have just said to Douglas Ross, the number of people who self-fund for private care in Scotland is significantly lower than it is in England—actually, it is even more significantly lower in Scotland than it is in Wales, where Labour is in power. That is the reality, because we protect our national health service in these difficult times, and we always will.

Anas Sarwar talks about paying for treatment. I repeat: this is the Government that abolished prescription charges—something that Labour had many opportunities over many years to do but failed completely to do. Just as I will take no lessons about the founding principles of the national health service from the Conservatives, I will take none from Labour.

Anas Sarwar: Perhaps the First Minister will take lessons from the people who are having to actually pay for treatment in Scotland. In the past year, more than 39,000 patients were treated privately in Scotland. That does not include the many private treatments that were carried out in individual clinics such as dental surgeries. The number of people now paying for treatment without health insurance has increased by 72 per cent. Often, those are people who are forced to borrow money, turn to family and friends or even remortgage their homes to get healthcare that should be free at the point of need.

I know that the First Minister does not like facts, but let us look at the facts. Almost 2,000 people have gone private for endoscopies and colonoscopies. Those treatments cost an average of £1,195 privately. More than 7,800 people have gone private for cataract surgery, the average cost of which is £2,660. A staggering 3,500 people have had a hip or knee replacement in a private hospital. The average cost of that is £12,500.

Those figures make it clear that, under the Scottish National Party, healthcare in Scotland is already a two-tier system. Does the First Minister accept that that goes against the founding principles of our national health service as a universal healthcare system free at the point of need?

The First Minister: No, I do not accept that, and I do not accept that we have a two-tier health system in Scotland. We will always act to protect the founding principles of the NHS, and we have done more than any other Government to achieve that.

The one thing that was completely missing from Anas Sarwar's question, of course, was reference to a global pandemic that caused the cancellation and pausing of elective services in our national health service for a considerable period of time. That is why we have seen an increase in those figures in recent years. However, those figures remain significantly below the comparable figures in England and Wales. Let me remind Anas Sarwar that his own party is in government and running the national health service in Wales.

As we continue to progress the NHS recovery plan and get more operations done within waiting times in the national health service, we will continue to see the benefits of NHS care free at the point of need for everyone across Scotland.

Anas Sarwar: The First Minister's response is to deny the facts. It is not a good enough excuse to say that, because there was a pandemic, that made it okay for people to have to go private and pay for treatment.

The First Minister denies that we have a two-tier system. In 2021, 40 per cent of all hip and knee replacements in Scotland were paid for privately. Some 3,430 people paid to get a hip or knee replacement privately. Our NHS is at risk because of the Government's choices and the Government's crisis. After 15 years in government, there is no one else to blame. Take responsibility for your record. Hospital beds have been cut, and nursing and midwifery training places have been cut. There are record long waits in accident and emergency. Some 750,000 Scots are on an NHS waiting list, and people are being forced to go into debt to go private. That undermines the very principles of our national health service, which is

the Labour Party's and our country's greatest-ever public service achievement. Does it not get clearer every single day that our NHS is not safe in SNP hands?

The First Minister: We have record numbers of people working in our national health service. There are significantly more than there were when this Government took office and there are significantly more proportionately than there are in any other part of the United Kingdom, including in Wales, where Labour is in government.

On how we are responding, Anas Sarwar says that the pandemic should not be used as an excuse. I agree with that, but its impact on our national health service cannot be ignored. In all the figures that he quotes, he takes no account of the impact of a global pandemic on our national health service.

What are we doing? We are building up the capacity of our NHS. In response to Douglas Ross's questions, I referred to one of the things that I did when I was health secretary. I brought back into public ownership Stracathro hospital, which had been privatised by the last Labour Administration. *[Interruption.]* Jackie Baillie was, of course, a member of that Administration. Earlier this year, we brought another private sector hospital—Carrick Glen hospital in Ayrshire—into public ownership. That facility will be developed to become one of our new national treatment centres.

We are building up the elective capacity of our NHS to treat more people. That is the practical action that the Government is taking. We will take that action and we always will take that action while we protect the founding principles of our national health service.

The Presiding Officer: I intend to take general and constituency supplementary questions after question 7. I ask members who have already pressed their request-to-speak buttons to not repress them, please. However, members who want to ask a supplementary to questions 3 to 7 should press their buttons at the appropriate point, please.

Emergency Response to Flooding (North-east Scotland)

3. Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what assessment the Scottish Government has made of the emergency response to flooding in the north-east of Scotland in recent days. (S6F-01565)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): First, my thoughts are with the family and friends of Hazel Nairn, who remains missing after the recent flooding, and I know that there has been some distressing news on that this morning.

The Scottish Government's resilience room was activated throughout the flooding incident to support the local response. Transport Scotland also activated its multi-agency response team and the Transport Scotland resilience room. We will now work with partners to reflect on the response and to ensure that we take on board any lessons learned and build them into contingency planning and response arrangements for the future.

As the clean-up continues, I take this opportunity to thank our emergency services and all local resilience partners, including the voluntary sector, for their on-going work to ensure that the communities that have been most affected are kept safe and get the support that they urgently need.

Tess White: I associate myself with those remarks from the First Minister. I pay tribute to Hazel Nairn, who tragically went missing during Friday's adverse weather. As the search continues, my thoughts are with her family and the responders on the ground.

In Brechin, two of the pumps belonging to the town's £16 million flood defences failed, flooding homes and causing extensive damage. Villagers raised concerns with me about the safety of an electrical substation in Inchbair, which was half-submerged in water for days. Communities rallied together over the weekend, but improvements need to be made to the organisation of the emergency response to such weather events.

How will the Scottish Government work with local resilience partnerships to expedite that process and reassure people in my region that every possible step has been taken to protect them?

The First Minister: I thank Tess White for raising those issues, which are extremely important to any community that is affected by severe weather incidents. Specifically on the important issue of Brechin, the main flood defence in Brechin, which contains the South Esk river, held. That is despite river levels provisionally reported by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency as being the highest ever on record. It is worth pointing out that, had those defences not been in place, there would have been widespread and potentially dangerous flooding of an estimated 332 properties—beyond anything yet experienced by Brechin.

However, two of the three pump stations that remove surface water from River Street, from run-off and other sources, did not start automatically when water was detected. As soon as that issue was identified, a council officer attended and, at that stage, the pumps were successfully started.

We work closely with local resilience partnerships and it is important that we do so. Any

time there is a severe weather incident such as this one, we ensure that any appropriate lessons are learned; that will be the case here and it will be done as quickly as possible. If the member could pass on to the Government any issues raised by locals about concerns that I have not touched on today, we will ensure that those issues are fed into that process of reflection and learning.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland)

(Lab): We are already seeing the effects of the climate emergency, with further extreme weather events becoming more likely. The National Infrastructure Commission has argued that governments should set resilience standards, which operators would be required to meet. The United Kingdom Government is set to introduce a national resilience strategy, so will the First Minister make the case for the development of resilience standards for vital public infrastructure?

The First Minister: I am happy to look into that and of course it is important that those principles are included in all the work that the Scottish Government does as well.

The member is right to raise the issue of the climate emergency, because these severe weather events are being caused by climate change, and it is really important that everything that we do recognises that. The climate emergency is central to all our infrastructure planning work and it is important that we continue to develop our work in that way. However, I will certainly ask the minister concerned to write to the member with further detail on how we will liaise with the UK Government in relation to that particular proposal.

Gender-based Violence

4. **Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the First Minister what steps the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that gender-based violence is being tackled in Scotland, in light of the start tomorrow of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. (S6F-01563)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Violence against women and girls is abhorrent. That is why our equally safe strategy to address violence against women and girls is so vital.

We have already strengthened legislation, taken action to address the social drivers that perpetuate gender-based violence and invested record levels of funding in front-line services and supporting survivors. The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 criminalises coercive and controlling behaviour, and we have taken forward work to ensure that people who are working in the public sector can confidently and sensitively work with people who have been affected by violence

against women and girls through the equally safe in practice initiative.

The delivering equally safe fund will provide £19 million this year to support more than 120 projects that focus on early intervention, prevention and support services.

Evelyn Tweed: Research continues to show an enormous prevalence of gender-based violence in all areas of life. For example, the Trades Union Congress found that more than half of women in the workplace have experienced sexual harassment but that 80 per cent of them did not report it. What is the Government doing to ensure that misogynistic abuse is taken seriously and that survivors feel able to report it?

The First Minister: This is an extremely important issue. Baroness Helena Kennedy's report on misogyny and the criminal law, which was commissioned by the Government and published earlier this year, made several recommendations on gaps in the law that could be addressed by new criminal offences to tackle misogynistic behaviour. Some of those recommendations are controversial, and we are committed to consulting on proposals that would give effect to them in this parliamentary year.

The TUC's report underscores the importance of ensuring that victims of misogynistic behaviour feel empowered to report it with confidence that their concerns will be taken seriously by their employers and, where criminal activity is alleged, by the police.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): This week, a United Nations expert on violence against women has condemned the Scottish National Party's gender recognition reforms. The UN expert claimed that the bill could allow violent males to access women-only spaces, posing a risk to the safety of both women and trans women. The expert appealed to the Scottish Government to set aside more time to consider the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill's possible unintended consequences. Does the First Minister agree with the UN expert that the bill should be postponed so that those legitimate concerns about women's safety can be addressed?

The First Minister: I believe that people who are responsible for violent attacks against women are those who perpetrate those attacks. Where, as is very often the case, those are violent men, it is violent men who we should be focusing on. They continue to pose the biggest risk to women, and I do not believe that we should further stigmatise the trans community because of the actions of violent men. At the moment, violent men who want to access women-only spaces do not need a gender recognition certificate to do that. Let us

focus on the problem. When the problem is violent men, that is what we should focus on.

We will respond in full to the comments that were made by the person from the UN, although I am not sure that they were quite as they were characterised in the question. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government will respond in detail to the issues that were raised. Many of those issues have already been discussed and addressed by the Parliament during stages 1 and 2 of the consideration of the bill. Of course, the Parliament will shortly have the opportunity to discuss the bill again during stage 3 of the legislative process.

Mobile Phones for Prisoners (Cost)

5. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister how much the Scottish Prison Service has spent on providing free mobile phones to all prisoners. (S6F-01572)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): At the start of the pandemic, we took the decision to provide mobile phones to people in custody to allow them to maintain vital family communication, including, and perhaps especially, with children during what was an incredibly challenging period when normal visiting was not possible. Between then and April 2022, the amount that has been spent is £4.12 million.

Russell Findlay: The First Minister's Government is slashing budgets for our cops, courts and prisons. We get that money is tight, so how on earth can mobile phones for prisoners at a cost of £4 million and rising be a priority? Taxpayers' money should be spent on front-line services, not freebies for criminals. The phones have been misused nearly 5,000 times. They have been used to order firebombings, for drug dealing and to threaten crime victims. Prison officers tell me that Scottish National Party-issued phones are putting them in danger by fuelling violence between inmates. When will the First Minister bin this costly and dangerous policy?

The First Minister: Russell Findlay is right about one thing: budgets are extremely tight. They are tight because of Tory economic mismanagement and Tory erosion of our budgets.

On the issue at hand, prison is about punishment, yes, but it should also be about rehabilitation. It is important that we do not lose focus on that. Mobile phone provision, which I think—I will be corrected if I am wrong—is something that the United Kingdom Government did during the pandemic, too, is about ensuring connections between prisoners and families, including children. That is important to rehabilitation, and rehabilitation is important to reducing offending and reoffending.

We will continue to consider all these issues carefully, but we will consider them in the context of a justice system that punishes criminals—that is extremely important—and which also seeks to rehabilitate people who commit crimes and to reduce reoffending, which is in the overall interest of communities across the country.

The Presiding Officer: I call Stephanie Callaghan to ask question 6. [*Interruption.*] I suspend business for a moment.

12:31

Meeting suspended.

12:31

On resuming—

Independence Referendum (Supreme Court Decision)

6. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the Supreme Court decision regarding legislating on an independence referendum. (S6F-01564)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): Although I am of course disappointed by it, I respect and accept the Supreme Court's judgment on the Lord Advocate's reference regarding the Scottish Parliament's powers to legislate for an independence referendum. However, the denial of democracy by Westminster parties demonstrates beyond any doubt that the notion of the United Kingdom as a voluntary partnership of nations is not now a reality, if it ever was.

It of course remains open to the UK Government to respect democracy and reach an agreement with the Scottish Government for a lawful, constitutional and democratic referendum. However, regardless of attempts by Westminster to block democracy, I will always work to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard and that the future of Scotland is always in Scotland's hands.

Stephanie Callaghan: Yesterday's ruling has profound implications for the UK and Scotland's democracy, and in particular, as the First Minister says, for the notion of the UK being a voluntary partnership of nations. If the UK Government wants to evidence that it is a voluntary union, all that it has to do is to stop standing in the way of democracy, come to the table and reach an agreement with the Scottish Government on holding a legal referendum. Why does the First Minister think that it is continuing to shy away from doing so?

The First Minister: It is quite simple: unionist Westminster politicians want to silence Scotland's

voice, because they are scared of what Scotland might say. Any politician who was confident of their case and of being able to persuade others of their case would not be trying to block democracy; they would be embracing it. I think that we know everything that we need to know about the views of Westminster unionist parties from their determination to block Scotland's democracy, but it will not prevail.

Unionist politicians with critical faculties and, perhaps, the power of independent thinking probably understand that yesterday's judgment raises profoundly uncomfortable questions about the basis and future of the United Kingdom. Any partnership in which one partner needs the consent of another to choose its future is not voluntary or even a partnership.

Within the UK right now, it is the case that England could decide to become independent, but Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland supposedly cannot. That is not a partnership—it is not voluntary and it is not equal. However, Scotland's voice will not be silenced. Scotland's future is up to the people of Scotland, and that will always be the case.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Douglas Ross keeps saying that no one on these benches is asked, "How would you stay in the union?" The answer is simple—if a party wins an election with that in its manifesto, it will get to dictate the terms.

With that in mind, this Scottish Parliament has the biggest-ever majority for an independence referendum in the history of devolution, but it has been blocked from enacting that mandate. Can the First Minister inform the Parliament whether she has had any indication from the UK Government as to how the people of Scotland can exercise their democratic right and have a choice in their future?

The First Minister: The mandate for an independence referendum in this Parliament is undeniable. There is a clear majority for that and, on any other measure of democracy in any other country, we would not have politicians seeking to deny that. I stand ready to discuss the issue with the UK Government at any time, but I fully anticipate that its democracy denial will continue, at least in the short term, because it is scared of the outcome of a democratic process.

I watched Douglas Ross and others squirming on that issue yesterday on television. On the one hand, they were trying to say that the United Kingdom is a voluntary union but, on the other hand, they were gleefully trying to defend the fact that Scotland has no way of choosing a different future. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

Please answer briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister: It is not democratic and it is not sustainable. Let us have a proper process and let the people of Scotland decide our own future.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): When asked by Glenn Campbell, during a BBC debate two days before the Holyrood election, what voters who want Nicola Sturgeon as First Minister but do not want independence should do, the First Minister confidently said:

“They should vote for me”.

Why are her colleagues now claiming that those voters support independence? Is that the same deep-seated duplicity that we can expect in any de facto independence referendum at the next general election? *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, members.

Briefly, First Minister.

The First Minister: Briefly, if the Tories are now reduced to suggesting that people in Scotland did not know that I supported a referendum, the Tories are even more desperate than I thought that they were.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): He was quoting your own words.

The First Minister: Douglas Ross says that Craig Hoy was just quoting my own words. If the Tories do not think that my words were clear enough in the election last year, how about their words? The Tory message could not have been clearer. They said that, if the Scottish National Party won the election, there would be a referendum, and that the only way to stop that was to vote Tory. That seems pretty clear to me. Guess what—the SNP won the election, so it is time to have a referendum.

Ukrainian Refugees (Accommodation)

7. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to ensure that refugees from Ukraine have suitable accommodation on arrival in Scotland. (S6F-01560)

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): With more than 21,500 arrivals from Ukraine with a Scottish sponsor, Scotland continues to provide sanctuary to more displaced people from Ukraine per head than any other part of the United Kingdom, and I thank people across Scotland for their efforts in achieving that.

Of course, our priority is to ensure that the immediate needs of those who arrive are met, but we are clear that we do not want anyone to spend more time than is absolutely necessary in welcome accommodation. Although we are

ensuring that we have that temporary welcome accommodation, which is safe and suitable, we are also taking a number of actions that are focused on providing sustainable longer-term accommodation for those who are here and those who are still arriving. That will include a new Scotland-led host recruitment campaign, which will launch at the end of the month.

Sarah Boyack: I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests.

The First Minister will be aware of the acute housing crisis in Edinburgh. The current contract for MS Victoria is due to end in January 2023. Figures that have been published by the Scottish Government show that more than 1,200 people are currently on the ship, so how will the Scottish Government ensure that the capacity that is provided by the ship is retained? Will she urgently look to expand the criteria for the largely unspent £50 million housing fund for local authorities, to include purchasing property from the market and working with agents to retrofit buildings? Will the First Minister confirm continued funding for the city's welcome hub?

The First Minister: Yes, we will continue to provide support. These are very real issues, and Sarah Boyack is right to raise them. They are issues that all countries that have stepped up to help Ukrainians are facing right now. I was speaking with the Taoiseach at the British-Irish Council a couple of weeks ago, and I know that the Republic of Ireland is dealing with those issues too, as is the Welsh Government and the United Kingdom Government in respect of England.

It is right that we have welcomed as many Ukrainians as possible, and it is right that we now work through those challenges. I know that Neil Gray is keeping members and Parliament as a whole updated. The £50 million longer-term resettlement fund is important, and we will continue to look at the eligibility for that. It is helping us to bring void properties back into use. We are also investing heavily in our wider affordable housing programme and will continue to do so.

In relation to people who have been displaced from Ukraine, we will continue to work with the City of Edinburgh Council and local authorities across Scotland to ensure that that support can continue. I take the opportunity to put on record my thanks to local councils, which have done fantastic work on that.

These are not easy challenges for any Government to navigate, but we have a moral obligation to do so and we will continue to work hard to ensure that we are doing right by those from Ukraine who need our support, help and welcome.

Private Finance Initiative (Contract Costs)

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): As members know, because it is part of the United Kingdom, Scotland's budget is tied to the poor decisions that are made by the Tory Government at Westminster. However, there is another strain on public finances in Scotland; namely, repayment of debts from private finance initiatives, which were designed by the Tories and rolled out by an enthusiastic Labour Party.

Will the First Minister set out the current annual bill for Scotland's health service from Labour's decision to build hospitals, including University hospital Hairmyres in my East Kilbride constituency, using that reckless and costly scheme, as well as any impacts of the current cost crisis on those debts?

The Presiding Officer: For clarity, this is general and constituency supplementaries, for those who did not know.

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): The question highlights one of the ironies of previous lines of questioning at this First Minister's question time.

Since 2006-07, the cumulative bill to taxpayers for ruinously expensive Tory-Labour PFI and public-private partnership contracts is £3.2 billion, which is £2 billion over and above the initial capital value of the projects, with costs increasing due to inflation.

Every year, we are paying more than £250 million for the contracts that were commenced under previous Administrations, which include Hairmyres hospital. The record of this Government, in line with our record of protecting the national health service, is one of unpicking Tory-Labour PFI and PPP contracts.

Domestic Abuse (Justice System)

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Last year, Adrienne McCartney spoke to the *Sunday Post* and shared her harrowing story about how, time after time, the police and prosecutors let her down in a case of domestic abuse. Last Sunday, the *Sunday Post* revealed that, sadly, Adrienne has since passed away. Her solicitor said:

"She should be here today and the fact that she is not is an indictment of the system and how it addresses domestic abuse."

One leading academic believes that the number of people who are dying as a result of domestic abuse could, due to ill health and suicide, be six times higher than official statistics. Given that this week in Parliament we are putting such a focus on the elimination of violence against women, why is the justice system in Scotland currently failing so many vulnerable women, and what legislation is

the First Minister and her Government proposing to introduce to address those horrific crimes against women?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I take the opportunity to convey my deep heartfelt sympathies to the family and friends of Adrienne McCartney.

Police and prosecutors operate independently of Government, so I will not go into details that would stray into their independent roles. I will say, and have said many times before, that I do not believe that Scotland—or any country, for that matter—yet does enough when it comes to preventing and responding to domestic abuse. The justice system has a very large part to play in that, but—I reflected on this earlier—we need to do more to tackle the behaviours that cause domestic abuse in order to prevent it in the first place. The Lord Advocate is a big advocate for and champion of doing that. The justice system also has to respond better to support victims of domestic abuse; I know that that is a real priority for her.

More widely, I have already spoken about the Helena Kennedy report on misogyny. We also have proposals from Lady Dorrian in relation to how the justice system deals with cases of sexual violence and sexual offences, which will include domestic abuse. The Government will take forward many of those proposals in legislative form during the remainder of this parliamentary session. Some of them will be controversial, so I expect very rigorous debate and scrutiny in Parliament. However, I hope that, as we consider those proposals, Jamie Greene's very good question will stay in our minds, and that we find ways to unite to make the necessary improvements to our justice system so that victims of domestic abuse are not let down, as they are too often, here in Scotland and across the world.

Breast Cancer Screening (Resumption)

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): The breast cancer screening programme was paused for all women during the pandemic, and has been paused even longer for women over 70. It appears that a further restriction has been applied, and that women over 75 are being denied breast cancer screening. A constituent who raised that with me describes the decision as "discriminatory" and "ageist". Can the First Minister advise whether that restriction is just in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, or does it apply Scotland-wide? If it does, will she reverse that decision?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I will ask the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care to write to Jackie Baillie with the detail on that; it is important that we make sure that the detail is right.

The restoration of breast cancer screening for the age groups for which screening is advised has already happened. For the older age groups, which are screened on a self-referral basis, it has been restored in a phased way. I will come back to Jackie Baillie, via the health secretary, with the details.

I will say one thing finally, as the person who is responsible for all the decisions that were taken during the pandemic. Those decisions were not taken lightly. The decision to pause the screening programme, including the breast cancer screening programme, was one that I know was agonised over by the then chief medical officer and by others who were responsible for those decisions.

It is important that we get this right and that we prioritise those for whom breast screening is recommended, which is what has been done. As part of the overall recovery plan for the national health service, our priority is to get all services back to functioning as they were before the pandemic, as people have a right to expect.

Preplanned Funerals (Company Bankruptcies)

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Following United Kingdom regulations for funeral-planning companies being adopted by the Financial Conduct Authority, a number of companies have gone into administration, including Safe Hands Funeral Plans and One Life Funeral Planning. Some of my constituents are worried about whether they will get any of their money back. Research shows that such savings schemes are overwhelmingly used by the most financially vulnerable people.

Can the First Minister offer any advice or point to support that is available for people who are affected? Has the Scottish Government had any engagement with the UK Government on calls for a UK support scheme to be set up?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): I thank Clare Adamson for raising an issue that is not just important but is extremely sensitive. We welcomed regulation of the sector, for which we had been pressing the UK Government for some time. The UK Government's action, however welcome it is, has come rather late—too late for some people.

I understand that Dignity Funerals is currently honouring plans that were made with Safe Hands Funeral Plans, and I welcome that support. Of course, regulation is a reserved matter, so I encourage the UK Government to look at the situation and consider whether it should provide additional support. If Clare Adamson wishes to pass on details of her affected constituents, I will ensure that the relevant minister looks at the issue and raises it with the UK Government. The Scottish Government also provides support for

funeral costs through the funeral support payment; I encourage anyone who might be eligible to apply.

Teacher Safety (Aberdeen)

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): In February, I asked what action the Government was taking after a survey showed that nearly half of our dedicated hardworking teachers in Aberdeen were considering quitting due to high levels of physical and verbal abuse. At best, the First Minister's answer was vague and non-committal. Yesterday evening, following the escalation of physical and verbal violence at Northfield academy in Aberdeen, teachers there voted in favour of industrial action over concerns about the safety of staff.

Teachers should never be subjected to violence, whether it is verbal or physical. As nothing has apparently changed since February, I ask again: what is the Government doing now to stop that appalling abuse?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): No teacher should ever experience abuse in the classroom. I hope that that unites us across the chamber.

The employers of teachers are local authorities. I expect them to have support in place for teachers and to support teachers' wellbeing. I know that local authorities take that seriously. I will meet the president of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities later today, when we will happily discuss what more the Scottish Government can do to support that.

It is vital that we support teachers in a range of ways—and, indeed, that we support other public sector workers and workers generally who interact with the public, to ensure that they are free and safe from abuse or attacks.

Net Zero Energy

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Following her correction to the *Official Report* on net energy consumption, will the First Minister's new understanding of the facts cause the Scottish Government to reconsider its stance on all forms of net zero energy—for example, nuclear power in the south of Scotland which, as the First Minister can see, plays a vital role in energy security?

The First Minister (Nicola Sturgeon): My understanding of Scotland's energy potential is as it has always been. Scotland is blessed with vast renewable energy potential. The Government will focus not just on talking it up instead of talking it down, as so many of the other parties in the chamber do, but on supporting growth of renewable energy, offshore and on-shore wind, and green hydrogen energy.

The fact of the matter is that Scotland is one of the luckiest countries in the world when it comes to energy. It is our job to maximise that potential.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): That concludes First Minister's question time. There will be a brief suspension to enable people to leave the gallery and chamber quietly.

12:52

Meeting suspended.

12:53

On resuming—

Renewable Energy Sector (Economic Impact)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): I ask those people who are leaving the chamber and the public gallery to do so as quickly and quietly as possible, as Parliament is still in session.

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-06229, in the name of Paul McLennan, on "The Economic Impact of Scotland's Renewable Energy Sector—2022 Update". The debate will be concluded without any questions being put. As ever, I invite members who wish to participate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible.

I call Paul McLennan to open the debate. You have around seven minutes.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of *The Economic Impact of Scotland's Renewable Energy Sector – 2022 Update*, by Scottish Renewables and the Fraser of Allander Institute, which it understands provides the latest economic output and job figures for Scotland's renewables energy industry; understands that the report demonstrates that Scotland's renewable energy industry and its supply chain supported more than 27,000 full time equivalent jobs, and that onshore wind supported the most employment across Scotland's economy from the renewable energy sector, with 10,120 full time equivalent roles, followed by offshore wind with 6,735 full-time equivalent roles, and hydropower with 4,395 full-time equivalent roles; highlights the report's findings that Scotland's renewable energy industry generated £5.6 billion of output in 2020; considers that the report found onshore wind had the largest estimated economic output, generating nearly £2.5 billion, with offshore wind and hydropower both supporting more than £1.1 billion output, and welcomes what it sees as the strength of Scotland's renewable energy industry and the energy security, economic, environmental and social benefits that it brings to communities across Scotland, including in East Lothian.

12:54

Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP): I am delighted to introduce this members' business debate on "The Economic Impact of Scotland's Renewable Energy Sector—2022 Update". I will talk about the report in more detail later, but I want to lead with the work that is on-going in East Lothian.

A few months after being elected, I set up the East Lothian energy forum, which recognises the sustainable job opportunities that East Lothian has already and whose number will continue to grow. The forum has four clear workstreams: supply, skills, community benefits and logistics.

East Lothian has existing connections to the grid at Cockenzie, where the Inch Cape wind farm has the potential for 1GW. Seagreen, with its 1.5GW potential, will also be brought on shore at Cockenzie. Merrick Bank, with its 4GW potential, will have its grid connection at Torness. That is 6GW to 7GW being brought on shore in East Lothian alone.

Neart na Gaoithe wind farm, with its 450MW capacity, has its substation in Dunbar and its grid connection in Torness, in my constituency. I met with NnG yesterday. The project currently has more than 100 direct jobs in its Edinburgh office and far more throughout the supply chain. In addition, there will be 50 direct new jobs, which will exist for the full 25 years of the wind farm, at the operations and maintenance base in Eyemouth, just south of East Lothian, on land owned by the Eyemouth Harbour Trust. That base is due to be officially opened in January 2023.

EDF Renewables and its partners the ESB Group are committed to using Scottish suppliers for NnG and have a track record of doing so already. Working alongside NnG's tier 1 contractors, businesses can be confident that the Scottish supply chain can play a big part in the delivery of the project. NnG is working closely with tier 1 preferred suppliers to encourage them to use Scottish suppliers for work packages at tier 2 and below.

Other projects in East Lothian include the eastern link, a £1.3 billion project jointly managed by SP Energy Networks and National Grid electricity transmission. The project links Dunbar to Hawthorn Pit in County Durham. Again in East Lothian, Fred Olsen Renewables will re-power and extend its Crystal Rig wind farm. Aikengall community wind farm also contributes to the local community.

In the past few weeks, I have agreed a £1 million fuel poverty fund, launching on 1 December, that will help those who are most in need in East Lothian. The world-leading thermal storage company Adin Sunamp was recently awarded £10 million by the Scottish National Investment Bank.

I have also had further discussions about hydrogen, solar and other possible energy sources and about ScotWind, to look at how East Lothian can assist in some of those success stories. Tarmac's cement works will also require innovative solutions to meet its net zero commitments. We can see in the constituency the benefit that renewable power is already having and will continue to have.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I thank Mr McLennan for the work that he is doing in the cross-party group on the development of

renewable energy. Does he agree that, if we are to achieve the maximum potential for renewable energy in Scotland, there must be a focus on speeding up the processes for obtaining permissions, licences and consents, not only for development both on and offshore, but for good connections? Without those permissions, licences, consents and agreements, projects can often be delayed for a long time, threatening the good work that Mr McLennan is advocating.

Paul McLennan: I agree with the member. That issue was discussed by the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee when it considered the introduction of national planning framework 4 and the importance of resourcing Marine Scotland, in particular. It is vitally important.

I will now speak about the report "The Economic Impact of Scotland's Renewable Energy Sector". The report presents estimates of the economic impact of Scotland's renewable energy industry. One key factor is the use of more reliable data. I know that that has been picked up on by the Office for National Statistics, and I would like to hear the minister pick up on that, too.

Scotland's renewable energy industry and its supply chain supported more than 27,000 full-time equivalent jobs and generated £5.6 billion of output in 2020. The latest available figures show that onshore wind supported most employment in the renewables sector, with 10,124 full-time equivalent roles. That was followed by offshore wind, which had 6,735 roles and hydro power, which had 4,395 roles. If we include spillover impacts, which are the economic activities stimulated across the wider economy, onshore wind had the biggest output, generating almost £2.5 billion, with offshore wind and hydro power both supporting more than £1.1 billion of output.

To demonstrate how Scotland's renewable energy industry is growing in our progress towards a cleaner, cheaper and more resilient energy system, Scottish Renewables has urged the United Kingdom and Scottish Governments to develop stronger data on the renewable energy sector.

What are the key next steps to grow Scotland's renewable energy sector and economy? In its briefing, Scottish Renewables recommends that the following steps be taken to ensure continued growth in jobs in, and economic output from, the renewables sector. We need to continue to establish a

"Low-Carbon Industrial Strategy to drive forward renewables-led investment and a just transition for Scottish clean energy suppliers and manufacturers."

Scotland needs to develop the existing renewables industrial strategy, and the supply

chain needs to increase its capacity to deliver the required skills and manufacturing to service all our renewable energy projects. The delivery of such a strategy will provide clear direction for the renewables industry and the supply chain, ensuring that our net zero ambitions are achieved while delivering fresh economic opportunities and new jobs.

Returning to the point that Fergus Ewing made, I note that Scottish Renewables states that we need to

“Complete the National Planning Framework 4 reforms”

to ensure that we have a net zero-driven planning system that is focused on tackling the climate emergency through the deployment of renewable energy. Scottish Renewables was at the NPF4 meeting on Tuesday and it warmly welcomed that as a major step towards achieving a net zero-driven planning system. Adopting the revised NPF4 will also help to drive new investment, deliver on our net zero ambitions and help to achieve energy security for Scotland.

Scottish Renewables states that we need

“a Rural Clean Heat Fund to ignite a transformation of renewable heating solutions for Scotland’s island and rural communities.”

A third of East Lothian is rural. With readily deployable solutions being available, the Government must move at pace to introduce clean heat technologies into rural communities, ensuring that the expertise of tradespeople is developed and sustained, and that is before we talk about retrofitting. Doing that will allow us to phase out high-carbon heating across Scotland’s countryside, delivering new investment, tackling fuel poverty and supporting net zero island and rural communities.

We need to enhance the role that Scottish ports play in building a low-carbon economy through a net zero ports and infrastructure programme. I have had the pleasure of meeting both the Cromarty Firth and Aberdeen ports and seeing the fantastic work that is being carried out there. All ports must be supported to build the essential supply chain and manufacturing base for offshore renewables.

We need to complete an onshore wind sector deal with the industry to deliver the 12GW of additional onshore wind power that Scotland will need by 2030 in order to achieve net zero. Onshore wind is a tried and tested technology that can provide low-cost power, helping to keep consumer bills down and supporting the competitiveness of our renewable energy industry.

We need to support the immediate growth of Scottish renewable energy suppliers by working with them in the near term on net zero projects to

assist with the success of local supply chain companies.

With a short-term offshore wind pipeline of 6.9GW and potential for more than 10GW of onshore wind, the existing pipeline of renewable energy projects that need to be delivered is extensive. We need to prepare for the future project pipeline, increasing the economic opportunities of projects and meeting the increased demand for low-carbon technologies while boosting green jobs and skills.

In conclusion, let us look ahead to a bright future for our renewables sector, creating local jobs, building supply chains and moving Scotland to net zero.

13:02

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Paul McLennan on securing this debate and bringing the issue to the chamber. The Scottish Renewables and Fraser of Allander Institute report certainly presents our renewable energy sector in a positive light. The sector and its supply chain generate £2.5 billion of gross value added and £5.6 billion of economic growth, and they support more than 27,000 jobs, 16,000 of which come from our onshore and offshore wind sector.

However, more must be done to extend investment and job creation outside wind. We must ensure that Scotland has a wide portfolio in the renewables sector. If we continue to put all our renewables eggs in one basket, we will never be fully energy secure. With onshore wind alone generating £2.5 billion, Scotland’s existing wind energy investments should be used to drive investment in other renewable technologies.

Industry experts are in agreement. Jason Higgs, energy transition leader for PwC, said:

“Scotland is facing a continuous rise in the demand for electricity which must be met with a huge increase in low carbon energy generation, new ways of working and a more efficient whole system approach”.

There are, for example, great opportunities in solar. Scotland’s solar industry is now fully subsidy free, with installation companies thriving. Solar Energy Scotland has said that, if the Scottish Government was to set a 2030 deployment ambition of 4GW to 6GW of solar energy capacity, the industry could support nearly 9,000 jobs.

Fergus Ewing: Will Graham Simpson give way on that point?

Graham Simpson: Yes, I will, because I noticed a motion from Fergus Ewing earlier on this very subject.

Fergus Ewing: I am most grateful to Graham Simpson, and I agree with his remarks on solar power. There was cross-party support for a motion that I lodged recently on the ambition that he described.

Does he agree that some low-hanging fruit can be achieved quite early? For example, the widespread application of solar panels to public buildings would reduce the cost of electricity to the public sector, thereby achieving massive savings as well as contributing to our net zero targets.

Graham Simpson: I completely agree with Fergus Ewing's excellent point. I have had discussions with people at Glasgow airport, for example, who want to have quite a big solar farm but who are frustrated by the planning system, which has been mentioned by Paul McLennan. We need to unblock such things.

Hydrogen, too, would benefit from additional investment and ambition. Many of the skills requirements for the hydrogen industry align with existing skills in our oil and gas industry. Given funding for projects such as the £9.4 million hydrogen storage facility in Glasgow, ground-breaking schemes could easily be established across the country. Hydrogen is part of the future.

I will say something about the importance of education and skills in renewables. Organisations such as Skills Development Scotland have raised concerns that labour force demand within the industry will not be met, due to market uncertainty. Recruitment of and investment in our graduates continues to be stagnant. Across the UK, we have a green energy skills gap of 200,000 people. Those things cannot be solved by energy companies on their own. The Government must take steps to ensure that young people have the skills for those jobs.

Finally, I will mention small and medium-sized enterprises. Much of the revenue that is generated by the renewables sector comes from large firms. A recent report from the Royal Bank of Scotland details a £22 billion economic boost by 2030 if we meet our net zero targets, and it says that SMEs could cater for 53 per cent of that but that the number of people who work in renewables to deliver infrastructure would have to more than double in order for that to be achieved.

There are lots of opportunities in the sector. That is something that we can all get behind.

13:08

Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): I thank Paul McLennan for leading the debate. Scotland recognises the emergency that our climate faces. We have an ambitious net zero target, and our transition to a

clean energy system is well under way. My colleagues have already mentioned the Fraser of Allander Institute report, which highlights that the economic impact of Scotland's renewable energy industry is not limited to the economic activity of the sector but extends beyond it.

Renewables projects create jobs for people throughout the supply chain, from research and design to the maintenance and development of energy storage systems—all of which have a knock-on impact on local economies right across Scotland, from my constituency of Uddingston and Bellshill to Orkney. Although the renewables sector is flourishing with creative thinking and ambitious policy making, we can support further growth across all renewables, creating massive opportunities for new industries, jobs, training and skills.

I will focus on the Scottish solar industry. Solar is the most democratised form of energy—it goes on the rooftops of homes and businesses and, undoubtedly, has strong potential for reducing fuel poverty, with targeted deployment. However, I argue that it is Scotland's most underutilised renewable resource, despite being the cheapest energy source that is available to Scottish people at a time of rapidly rising costs. The untapped potential of Scottish solar means that there is a unique opportunity for major growth.

If we look at Denmark, for example, we will see the brightness of the opportunity. Although Denmark is on a similar latitude to Scotland, Danish solar generation contributes nearly five times as much to the Danish electricity mix, on a percentage basis, as Scottish solar does to Scottish electricity. To capitalise on the sunny prospectus that solar can provide Scotland, Scotland needs to be bolder, as other nations have been, and that includes setting a target for solar energy generation. Analysis of UK, United States and European Union employment data shows that, if the Scottish Government set a 2030 deployment ambition of 4GW to 6GW of solar energy capacity, the industry could support 9,000 new jobs.

I look forward to the cabinet secretary's update on Scotland's solar vision within the energy strategy and just transition plan that is due later this year. I hope that the strategy will include a clearly defined gigawatt target that is in line with other countries' ambitious targets, as called for in Solar Energy Scotland's paper "Scotland's Fair Share: Solar's role in achieving net-zero in Scotland".

Although setting gigawatt targets is essential to provide industry confidence and drive investment, it is just as important that we transform ourselves into a green-skills powerhouse, as others have mentioned, and address our current and future

skills gaps. Solar Energy Scotland's vice chair, Josh King, has stated:

"The potential for solar in Scotland is huge, but a clear ambition and stable policy are vital to capitalise on the opportunity."

During a recent meeting with solar business Emtec Energy, which is in my constituency, it reiterated the ever-increasing demand for green skills in Scotland's solar industry. I was told that our culture places too much focus on university degrees and that there remains a societal barrier to viewing apprenticeships as equal. There is a continued need for the industry to partner with secondary, higher and tertiary education institutions to think creatively about routes into renewable energy.

The Edinburgh Climate Change Institute recommends splitting green jobs into three categories: new and emerging jobs, existing jobs requiring enhanced skills and existing jobs that are now more in demand. I applaud those definitions, as it is only when we develop policies and initiatives to target each unique category and attract talent for the present and the future that we can unleash the economic potential of our renewables sector.

As we all know, the transformation of how we power our society is set to accelerate over the coming years, and solar energy, as well as the renewables sector more broadly, will play a key role in supporting the Scottish Government to achieve its net zero targets while helping to target fuel poverty and energy insecurity.

Scotland can be proud of its renewable sector. Our natural resources, education and skills and creativity mean that the outlook is good, the foundations are strong and the potential is enormous.

13:12

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Paul McLennan for lodging his motion, particularly given the timeliness of the debate. Another conference of the parties has just ended, and climate change is in the news, but once again our world leaders have failed to recognise that it is not some future crisis; it is here and now, and it will get worse the more their inaction continues, with those who can least afford it being the hardest hit.

Just as we need to act with more urgency internationally, we need to do so at home, too, and in a way that delivers a just transition. At the very heart of that action needs to be a jobs-led drive for renewables. As we have heard, the Fraser of Allander Institute report "The Economic Impact of Scotland's Renewable Energy Sector" highlights the progress to date. An estimated 27,000 full-time equivalent jobs contributed more than £5.6 billion

of output in 2020, but the Scottish Government's low-carbon economic strategy in 2010 promised 130,000 jobs by 2020. We were told that we would be the Saudi Arabia of renewables.

What can we do to make that happen? If we consider which sectors can tackle Scotland's sluggish economic growth and create a greener and fairer country with good secure jobs wherever people live in the country, we find that all roads lead to renewables. Our net zero targets are not a barrier to economic growth; they are actually the path to it. However, to achieve that, we need to break down barriers. Labour has consistently called for a proper industrial strategy that is focused on four missions: delivering clean power, harnessing data for the public good and building a more caring and a more resilient economy.

One of the last acts of the UK Government's Industrial Strategy Council was to publish a really informative report on the drive for coronavirus vaccines. The report set out how industrial policy was absolutely instrumental in supporting the brilliance of our scientists to deliver those vaccines. It mentioned the targeted investment in life sciences over many years, the strategic procurement and advance purchase of the vaccine and the convening power of the state to bring everyone together—public, private and voluntary sector partners—to co-create and co-deliver that industrial policy.

An industrial strategy involves prioritising which industries to focus on. Imagine what would happen if we brought the same industrial policy focus to renewables as was brought to Covid vaccines. We could have clear targets, such as the target of 12GW of additional onshore wind by 2030 that Scottish Renewables has called for, and the target of 4GW to 6GW of solar capacity, which Stephanie Callaghan mentioned. Crucially, we need a clear commitment to invest in suppliers to build capacity and capability, including of our ports, the importance of which Paul McLennan highlighted, so that the supply chain jobs come to Scottish firms.

That is why Labour has consistently called for proper conditionality when it comes to leasing our sea beds in connection with offshore wind, and for all the funds that come from the recent ScotWind leasing to be ring fenced for a renewables fund that can be used to invest in making our supply chains ready to deliver.

Data is a key part of any industrial strategy. I was struck by the fact that the Fraser of Allander Institute mentioned in its report that its figures were estimates, because we do not even define the renewable energy sector in national statistics, never mind collect the data. How can we understand where skills shortages are if we do not have better and more open data on jobs? How do

we ensure that economic growth is inclusive and benefits all of Scotland if we cannot even tell how many renewables jobs there are in my South Scotland region because we do not collect such geographical data?

There are many other barriers to break down to ensure that the positive words in NPF4 on renewables translate to delivery on the ground. For example, we must ensure, as Fergus Ewing mentioned, that consent is given at pace, by Marine Scotland in the case of offshore wind, and by our underresourced council planning departments in the case of onshore wind.

We must also ensure that we help to build capacity in our supply chains by setting out an energy route map, with timelines for a steady stream of work that will give supply chain companies the confidence to invest. If we do that, the prize will be great. We can learn from the mistakes of the past and fulfil the enormous potential of renewables, thereby maximising not only the cut in emissions that we need to deliver to meet our climate targets but the economic benefits, so that we can deliver the genuine jobs-led just transition that everybody wants.

13:17

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I welcome the debate, which my colleague Paul McLennan initiated in response to the Fraser of Allander Institute's report, "The Economic Impact of Scotland's Renewable Energy Sector".

I, too, have been concerned for some time about the weakness of data collection in relation to Scottish business and the economy, so I am glad that the issue features in the report. I also acknowledge that, although there are reasons to be impressed by the progress that has been made in Scotland, such as the 27,000 jobs and £5.6 billion of output that have been mentioned, the data provides no grounds for complacency. There remains much to be done, and I add my voice to the calls for more utilisation of solar energy, among others.

A recent analysis from Landfall Strategy Group indicated that the prospects for the renewable energy sector are huge and that the current output could eventually be dwarfed. Indeed, the potential is there for the sector to be economically even more significant than the oil and gas sector if policy development is effective, investment is supported and focused appropriately, and the necessary supply chains are developed.

It would help if the Scottish Parliament had the comprehensive range of powers that is needed to address all the matters involved. Currently, fundamental powers, such as those relating to taxation policy, energy policy and the ability to

borrow to invest are located at Westminster. Imagine what could be done if all parties here agreed that those powers over Scotland's renewable energy future should be vested here for the benefit of Scotland.

Given that much has still to be done, I would like to introduce an important area that has been mentioned, which relates to data definition and collection requirements. In that context, I agree with the Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz, who wrote in 2019:

"Getting the measure right is crucially important. If we measure the wrong thing, we will do the wrong thing. If our measures tell us everything is fine when it really isn't, we will be complacent."

If we are truly interested in impact, it is not good enough to simply extend what has historically been gathered in other sectors and then do the same for the renewables sector. We need to develop and capture new metrics that encourage wellbeing.

Also, as I have consistently argued, we need impact data disaggregated by sex. I can see no reason why the creativity and dynamism of women should not feature strongly in the renewables sector. Capturing the right data will be only the start of ensuring that women are at the heart of the just transition in the sector as it develops.

Some people have argued that part of the problem is that the renewables sector is seen as a market rather than a sector in its own right. Tragically, we have been reliant on data gathered for other sectors—from construction to professional services, forestry and shipping. Therefore, we must collect the right data to inform policy making. I agree with a similar view expressed by members and Scottish Renewables.

In data collection and in ensuring that women and wellbeing are at the heart of all policies, we have a joint mission ahead to which I look forward to contributing.

13:20

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I thank Paul McLennan for giving us all the opportunity not only to celebrate the progress that we have made so far with renewables in Scotland but to look at what is in store for the next chapter.

The report that we are debating is a useful baseline. It captures the jobs and economic benefit delivered in Scotland to date, but, in the years to come, we will look back at today's figures and see just how small they were in comparison to what will be achieved. I will focus my contribution on the onshore wind sector and the need to not

forget about onshore wind but double down on its progress in the years ahead.

Onshore wind continues to deliver the lion's share of the economic benefit of renewables in Scotland. It remains the lowest-cost renewable energy and, dispersed across Scotland, onshore wind farms continue to provide predictable supply at a time when electricity demand for heating and transport continues to rise.

Year on year, the carbon content of our electricity generation is falling, largely due to onshore wind. With that, in turn, the climate impact of every electric vehicle and heat pump falls. Step by step, turbine by turbine, we are decarbonising electricity, largely with onshore wind and almost without noticing.

Meanwhile, from Shetland to the Borders, wind farms continue to provide community financial benefit and, with new projects, there will be new opportunities for that benefit to spread more widely and to grow in value. Outside our national scenic areas, wind farms also provide the opportunity for investment in nature restoration, public access and economic diversification at scale in our uplands.

Public support for onshore wind remains consistently high and grows locally once communities have had the experience of hosting turbines. After nearly three decades, we now have a flourishing ecosystem of Scotland-based developers, subcontractors and specialists who are ready to support the next stage of growth in onshore wind. The real challenge will be to match that sector with an equally strong domestic supply chain for wind farm component manufacturing.

The renewed commitment to onshore wind in the Bute house agreement will help to provide certainty to manufacturers and others that there is a strong market and a supportive environment for investment in Scotland. A target of 12GW of additional onshore wind by 2030 backed up by planning reforms and a strong policy statement is the start of a sector deal that will drive investment. Let us remind ourselves that the sector is incredible. It has smashed every energy target that has been set at Holyrood since devolution. It is ready to meet the hardest challenge that it has been set to date.

That growth needs to take place at a scale that has never been seen before in Scotland. The pace of new development will need to speed up. We cannot afford to have wind farm projects languishing in the planning system for seven years, as has been the case recently. We are in a climate emergency. Good wind farm proposals in the right places need to be fast tracked through a streamlined planning process. We no longer have

time to wait. The planning system must allow those machines to fight climate change.

However, it is not just new sites and new projects that are needed. Existing wind farms need to be repowered quickly with newer, more productive turbines. Repowering alone means another 600MW to 800MW every year for the next 15 to 20 years, so it is a huge mission. It will be our children who work on those wind farms, just as the hydro schemes from our grandparents' generations are still spinning and creating employment today.

Endless renewable technologies supporting enduring jobs for generations to come: that will be the renewables story told by future reports. We just need to focus and realise that vision.

13:24

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): I start by thanking Paul McLennan for lodging the motion and all members who participated in the debate for their contributions.

As others have said, the debate comes at a time when Scotland is tackling the twin issues of energy security and the cost of living crisis. In that context, we are pushing ahead at pace with our just transition to a net zero energy system and economy, so that we can play our role in tackling climate change and boost jobs and prosperity in Scotland.

Again as others have said, we are very lucky that we have a rich renewables endowment, which means that we can not only generate enough cheap green electricity in the times ahead to power Scotland's economy and get away from the high energy prices that we are experiencing, but export electricity to our neighbours, supporting jobs here in Scotland. As Paul McLennan said in his opening speech, the sector is already supporting jobs in his East Lothian constituency and the wider region. That all contributes towards the decarbonisation ambitions of our partners, internationally and across these islands.

The scale and pace of change are unprecedented, which offers exciting opportunities to develop green jobs and a green supply chain.

The report highlights that the deployment of renewable energy technologies is paramount in the drive towards ending Scotland's contribution to climate change, while bringing considerable benefits to our economy. The report also shows that the sector's potential is vast in terms of gross value added and jobs. I am grateful to the Scottish Renewables Forum Ltd for commissioning that important work, which is helping bolster the

evidence base as we drive forward the just energy transition.

The just energy transition—I am speaking as the just transition minister—is a key priority for the Scottish Government. Scotland's natural resources mean that we are uniquely positioned to take advantage of the global shift to renewables through a just transition that delivers for people, places and communities in Scotland. We are taking steps to decarbonise the energy system to maximise the benefits of the energy transition for communities across Scotland, while responding to the twin challenges of energy security and the cost of living crisis.

I am clear that the energy transition must deliver for the people of Scotland. A key part of that is ensuring that the renewables sector, and the broader supply chain that supports it, grows in a way that secures high-quality, well-paid green jobs across communities in the country and supports energy affordability for people and businesses. As many members are aware, we will consult soon on a draft energy strategy and just transition plan that will set out, and seek views on, how we will realise those aims and many of the aspirations that have been expressed by members during the debate.

Scotland already has many of the skills that are needed to facilitate the energy sector's transition to net zero. Our national strategy for economic transformation recognises skills as a critical ambition, and we are investing in the sector's net zero transformation. Scotland needs access to an agile offshore energy workforce, so that people can transition more easily between roles in the offshore energy sectors. We know that that will not be a one-way transition, and people must be able to work flexibly across sectors. That is why, through the just transition fund, we recently announced funding of £5 million to OPITO—the Offshore Petroleum Industry Training Organisation—for a digital offshore energy skills passport, which will empower offshore workers to utilise their existing certification. Many members in the chamber have called for that measure.

We are also delivering a range of upskilling and retraining programmes, including individual training accounts and the flexible workforce development fund, and in 2021, we launched the green jobs workforce academy. We are also investing £75 million through the energy transition fund to support jobs and provide regional growth, and our green jobs fund will invest up to £100 million.

ScotWind is a huge initiative on the horizon, and knowledge and experience of our oil and gas sector and its supply chain will be crucial for Scotland in developing floating offshore wind technologies. ScotWind is the world's largest commercial round for floating offshore wind. It will

raise more than £750 million in revenues for Scotland and deliver several billion pounds more in rental revenues when projects become operational.

We already have a clear pipeline of projects throughout this decade, and a significant pipeline of projects will come from the ScotWind offshore wind leasing round. That is a huge economic opportunity for Scotland. We have had numerous meetings with representatives of the ScotWind projects, and we welcome the collective commitment that has been made to invest more than £28 billion in the Scottish supply chain across the 20 proposed ScotWind projects that have secured lease options.

There are already benefits across the country, including in areas such as East Lothian, which Paul McLennan represents. Community wind farms there are funding the BeGreen Dunbar energy advice centre, for example, which supports residents of Dunbar with energy-saving technologies and funding for eco-friendly community groups.

I will quickly touch on a couple of other areas that members mentioned. Stephanie Callaghan and others mentioned the exciting potential for solar energy. I assure members that the Bute house agreement between the Scottish Green Party and the Scottish National Party mentions solar properly—if I recall—and it will have a much bigger, renewed focus in the forthcoming draft energy strategy, which will go out for consultation.

Hydrogen was mentioned by many members. The growth of renewables and of the hydrogen economy are very much complementary. We need a strong renewables sector and domestic supply chain to support the development of Scotland's hydrogen economy. We think that that is a massive opportunity not only for jobs here in Scotland but for Scotland's exports to other countries, as there is a lot more potential demand for hydrogen across countries on the European continent, particularly in response to the energy crisis and to Putin's war in Ukraine and its consequences.

I should also mention onshore wind. Mark Ruskell highlighted its importance, as did other members. We have a draft onshore wind policy statement, which includes a new ambition for an additional 8 to 12GW of onshore wind to be installed, for a total of 20GW overall by 2030. That is a pretty substantial ambition, which follows a long consultation process. We will publish the final statement with a decision on the 2030 ambition soon, and we will ensure that the benefits flow to our communities and the Scottish supply chain. We can see that there have been significant levels of community benefit across Scotland from onshore wind projects, amounting to tens of

millions of pounds, and we want to ensure that that is increased in the years ahead.

I have outlined that we will publish our refreshed energy strategy for consultation, alongside our first just transition plan for energy. That will demonstrate how we will deliver for the people of Scotland, supporting our transition to a net zero energy system.

I again thank Paul McLennan for bringing this important and timely topic to the chamber for debate today.

13:32

Meeting suspended.

14:15

On resuming—

Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Question Time

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body question time. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or indicate so in the chat function by entering the letters RTS. As ever, I make a plea for succinct questions, and answers to match.

Staff Cost Provision 2023-24

1. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will reject the annual survey of hours and earnings and average weekly earnings average of 4.2 per cent for uprating the staff cost provision in financial year 2023-24. (S6O-01610)

Jackson Carlaw (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The SPCB is responsible for funding the members' expenses scheme and for determining which indices are used to uprate the overall provisions, including staff cost provision. Individual MSPs, as employers, determine any salary increase for their staff within the overall staff cost provision.

As part of the annual budget cycle, the SPCB considers the indexation for uprating of all provisions, including staff cost provision. Although the basket of ASHE and AWE indices has been adopted in recent years as a steadier basis for any increase, that is a matter for SPCB judgment rather than automatic application, as we thoroughly consider all factors for financial year 2023-24.

The SPCB will submit its 2023-24 budget for consideration at the Finance and Public Administration Committee on 10 January. A bit like the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I might know but I am not able to say what the conclusion of our deliberations might be, but we will be determining the indices for all provisions in the coming weeks.

Paul Sweeney: I thank Mr Carlaw for his response. I am sure that the bond markets will be listening to whatever decisions are eventually arrived at.

We can all agree that MSPs' offices make a tangible difference to constituents and provide a vital public service. I have found that all members strive to provide a decent pay settlement for staff, but the fact is that that frontier needs to increase in

line with the cost of living. Given the unprecedented cost of living crisis that we face, will the SPCB meet the GMB's Scottish Parliament staff branch as a matter of urgency to discuss its pay proposal in good faith and to agree an appropriate award for members' staff?

Jackson Carlaw: I think that this touches on the subject matter of Pam Duncan-Glancy's question, too, but I have to tell the member that the answer is no. The SPCB will not meet the trade unions, because it is not competent for us to do so. We are not the employer of MSP staff; MSPs themselves are the employers. Our responsibility is to set the framework within which salary increases can be agreed, but it is for individual members, either on their own or in concert with colleagues, to agree the level of increase.

Cross-party Groups (Access to Broadcasting Services)

2. Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what discussions have taken place to consider providing cross-party groups with access to broadcasting services in committee rooms. (S6O-01605)

Claire Baker (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): Our discussion of this matter is somewhat limited by the fact that the code of conduct for members specifies that broadcasting facilities cannot be used for CPGs. However, the SPCB recognises some of the benefits that have come from CPGs meeting virtually. Updated hybrid equipment is now available for meetings. Up to 20 rooms in the Parliament can facilitate meetings in that way, and the equipment can be operated without the broadcasting team. However, they would be happy to demonstrate the self-operated facilities, with drop-in sessions planned for next month.

Miles Briggs: I declare an interest as co-convenor of the cancer and chronic pain CPGs. A high number of incredibly ill or disabled people would like to attend meetings of both groups, but as we have moved back to holding in-person meetings, the numbers have reduced. Could we look into having a pilot project in which CPGs could, in future, use the broadcasting facilities in committee rooms to broadcast on the Parliament channel?

Claire Baker: The member will be disappointed to hear this, but it is not possible to facilitate the type of meeting that he has suggested. The members' code of conduct limits the use of facilities, and there are practical issues to take into account such as limited resources and staff time.

However, the Teams technology that is being used can bring in thousands of participants, and it

is possible to record meetings for upload at a future point. I appreciate that the member will be disappointed by that response, but he might be persuaded that the alternative that I am proposing will result in the same outcome. I am happy to discuss the matter with the member.

Party-political Activity on the Parliamentary Estate (Guidance)

3. Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what guidance is available to MSPs regarding undertaking party-political activity on the parliamentary estate. (S6O-01608)

Maggie Chapman (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): As the member will be aware, the code of conduct for members requires all members to abide by the SPCB's policies. All policies direct that parliamentary resources are provided by the SPCB to support members to carry out their parliamentary duties and must not be used to any significant extent for any other purpose, including party-political purposes.

Parliamentary resources include office equipment and furniture; information technology and mail systems; meeting rooms; and expenses paid to support members in carrying out their parliamentary duties, whether they are met under the members' expenses scheme, through financial assistance to non-Executive parties or directly by the SPCB.

The SPCB has various policies and guidance in place to advise members about appropriate activity on the parliamentary estate or when making use of parliamentary resources. That includes, for example, specific policies and guidance on the use of meeting rooms and photography on the Parliament estate. The SPCB appreciates that there can sometimes be a fine line between something that is parliamentary and something that is party political, and members must use their judgment accordingly.

When there is any doubt, members are encouraged to seek advice from the contact points provided in the appropriate policies before undertaking any such activity.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I reiterate what I said. We have eight questions on the *Business Bulletin* and, if we have answers as long as that to each question, there is no way that we will get to number 8.

Stuart McMillan: A Scottish Conservatives event for Conservative councillors and Conservative group leaders was held in the members' room on 8 November. Can the SPCB clarify whether political meetings and events are allowed to be held on the parliamentary estate?

Maggie Chapman: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on any specific use of the parliamentary estate or resources at this point. If the member has any concerns about any such use of the parliamentary estate, he should follow due process and raise a complaint through the appropriate channels in order that that may be looked into and addressed.

Staff Cost Provision 2023-24 (Consultation with Trade Unions)

4. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether it will consult MSP staff trade unions before deciding on uprating the staff cost provision in the 2023-24 financial year. (S6O-01609)

Jackson Carlaw (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): In the interests of time, I refer Ms Duncan-Glancy to the answer that I gave in response to Mr Sweeney's supplementary question.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I thank the member for that referral back to a previous answer.

I am sure that I speak for all of us in the chamber when I say that our staff do an outstanding job, and I thank all of them—particularly my team—on the record. They all, too, face a cost of living crisis. The GMB branch and I recognise what the member said earlier about there being no formal relationship between the SPCB and MSP staff, but it is a fact that the staff cost provision allows for annual cost of living increases, and it is a basic principle of fair work that trade unions are involved in negotiations. Therefore, could the SPCB, as it plays a key role in this, find some way to engage in good faith with the unions, so that they can answer some of the questions that the SPCB might have?

Jackson Carlaw: The SPCB has had detailed and robust discussions on all the issues affecting the indices that will be applied when we uprate salaries in the next annual budget. However, it is the case that we are not an employer, and the scheme—which was agreed by Parliament—is quite clear that it places a responsibility on us to uprate the scheme annually, using a relevant index, as part of the budget setting. I repeat that individual MSP employers can, of course, consult trade unions and agree any cost of living award that they wish, as long as it is affordable within the overall capped provision. In fact, the SPCB is aware that many members made awards that exceeded the inflationary uplift in the scheme itself.

I might anticipate a question that is coming later, as it is relevant to Ms Duncan-Glancy's question, by saying that the SPCB is currently considering what financial assistance can be provided to

members' staff. That includes the sort of one-off non-consolidated payments that other employers, including His Majesty the King, have made recently. We have had a constructive discussion about that today, and we will communicate our intended course of action as soon as possible after our discussions conclude.

Room for Contemplation (Access during Recess)

5. Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether provision can be made for access to the room for contemplation for evening events held during recess. (S6O-01572)

Maggie Chapman (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): The room for contemplation is accessible to building passholders at all times of the day, including during recess. Visitors who wish to use the room must be accompanied by a passholder.

The corporate body policy is that, should an attendee at an evening member-sponsored event request to use the room for contemplation, an event assistant will support that request and escort the person to and from the room. During recess, member-sponsored events are paused.

Foysoil Choudhury: When I hosted an event for faith groups during the October recess, attendees were forced to pray in the reception, as they were not able to access the room for contemplation. I understand that parliamentary opening hours are curtailed during recess but, as long as members are able to host events that extend outside those hours, surely it makes sense to allow members and their guests to have access to the room for the duration of such an event.

Maggie Chapman: For meetings that members have arranged to be held in the Holyrood campus—it sounds as though the meeting that Foysoil Choudhury mentioned was one such meeting—the member or their representative passholder will be responsible for supporting the meeting attendees with access to the room for contemplation. There should be access to the room for contemplation as long as people are accompanied by a passholder.

Recycling

6. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body whether MSPs and their staff are putting their rubbish in the correct bins for recycling or otherwise. (S6O-01607)

Christine Grahame (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): I thank John Mason for his rubbish question. [*Laughter.*] Apologies—I thank him for his question on rubbish. I also thank my

colleagues for their efforts in segregating materials for recycling. We achieved a recycling rate of 81 per cent in 2021-22, which is a significantly higher rate than most public sector bodies achieved.

John Mason: I think that many of us want to recycle, but there is some confusion. For example, where does paper stop and cardboard begin? Can plastic bags be recycled with plastic bottles? I am holding in my hand a Tetra Pak product that was bought in the canteen. It says that it should be recycled, but I do not know where to put it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that props of any kind are not welcome in the chamber.

Christine Grahame: I am trying to find out where the answer to that question is. Members could just fill in time a little bit.

All recycling bins are colour coded, and they include the text and symbols recommended by Zero Waste Scotland, which is the not-for-profit environmental organisation funded by the Scottish Government and the European regional development fund. John Mason can therefore check on its website. Those standard colours, symbols and texts should be consistent across Scotland, and they help individuals, including Mr Mason, to recognise the same bin and waste streams at home, work, and out and about. There is also a guide to our recycling bin system on our intranet site, and there are regular communications about waste and recycling.

I am sure that Mr Mason will improve.

Home Working Allowance (Withdrawal)

7. Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body how it will support any members' staff who are dealing with added financial challenges and pressures after the home working allowance payment was discontinued in October. (S6O-01611)

Jackson Carlaw (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): At the risk of recycling an answer, the corporate body is committed to supporting members' staff with the cost of living and is actively considering a suite of measures to support staff. The corporate body believes that that is the right thing to do at this very difficult time, and it recognises that that is an urgent priority for staff.

I remind members that, should they require their staff to work from home, they may qualify for tax relief and that, in such circumstances, members should advise their staff to contact HM Revenue and Customs directly.

Neil Bibby: I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a member of GMB Scotland.

GMB Scotland has highlighted that all members of staff, particularly those who work from home, face significant additional pressures this winter, with increasing energy bills. Staff members have received a blog with advice on saving money, such as changing to LED light bulbs, but they need direct financial help during the cost of living crisis.

I welcome that that is being considered by the SPCB. The home working allowance was welcome, but we need to go further. Can I ask that any cost of living support payment goes above and beyond the previous home working allowance so that it can meet the scale of the challenge that people are facing with the cost of living crisis?

Jackson Carlaw: As I said in response to an earlier question, we are considering that very issue at the moment. We have had constructive discussions over a number of meetings of the corporate body and I hope that we will soon be able to communicate the outcome of those discussions to members. In addition to those arrangements, the corporate body is considering other measures, which include independent financial advice, financial wellbeing workshops, and providing links to organisations that can provide further advice and support. However, the particular item to which Mr Bibby refers should be communicated to members in early course.

Safety (MSPs)

8. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body what steps it is taking to improve safety for MSPs both within the Parliament and outwith the parliamentary estate. (S6O-01606)

Claire Baker (Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body): We take members' personal safety very seriously and, with the advice of our specialist security partners, the corporate body has introduced a range of measures to support members both when working at Parliament and when away from the main estate. We keep safety measures under review to ensure that they remain proportionate to the risks that members face.

Martin Whitfield: Recently, security people undertook research, or outreach, with MSPs. Is the SPCB satisfied with the response and uptake following that?

Claire Baker: The numbers have been quite positive—100 members have taken the opportunity to have a survey of their constituency or regional offices and, so far, 38 members have had home security surveys.

I assure members that sufficient funding is available for each member should they wish to pursue a security survey and I would encourage members to apply to the corporate body. I am

grateful to the member for helping us to promote the scheme and to make sure that members know that it is available and it is fully funded.

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Today was a good example of such security issues. I sat barely a few feet away from today's protest during First Minister's question time. I am acutely aware that we need to be an open Parliament and allow public access as much as possible and although I appreciate that physical security checks are in place for visitors, what more can be done by the Parliament to ensure the physical protection of members, especially those who are sitting at the back of the chamber near the public gallery, who are particularly vulnerable to protests? Thankfully, in this case, it was just a verbal protest, not a physical one.

Claire Baker: As the member recognises, the corporate body is keen for the Parliament to remain open and accessible. It is always about achieving the appropriate balance. We obviously had an incident in Parliament today that we will reflect on, and I thank the member for raising the issue.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: On a point of order, Presiding Officer—I forgot to mention earlier that, as listed in the register of members' interests, I am a member of GMB Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Duncan-Glancy.

That concludes SPCB question time and there will be a brief pause before we move on to the next item of business to allow front-bench teams to change position.

Portfolio Question Time

Net Zero, Energy and Transport

14:33

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is portfolio question time, and the portfolio is net zero, energy and transport. If a member wishes to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question or enter "RTS" in the chat function during the relevant question. Again, in order to get in as many members as possible, I would appreciate succinct questions, with answers to match.

Renewables Revolution (Benefits to Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley)

1. **Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how its proposed renewables revolution will benefit the Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley constituency. (S6O-01589)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): We are committed to working across society to deliver lasting action that secures a just transition to climate resilience and net zero for Scotland. That includes ensuring that communities derive maximum benefit from the renewables revolution. For example, our ScotWind programme will deliver initial lease options agreement revenues of over £750 million for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

In the Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley constituency, more than £7 million in investment has been provided through the Ayrshire growth deal, with £1.2 million allocated for the support of the installation of low-carbon heating and electricity generation. That has enabled more than 100 homes to access low-carbon heating.

Willie Coffey: The renewables revolution is certainly under way and Scotland has well and truly hit the jackpot. Local people in my constituency support the programme, welcoming the impact on the climate, but look to see what the direct benefits for them will be beyond the obvious. Can the minister offer a glimpse of what a net zero future will look like, in terms of offering more local jobs for local people, more community ownership, perhaps a share in energy companies' profits and, ultimately, the prospect of energy bills falling as a result of Scotland's energy bonanza?

Richard Lochhead: Willie Coffey has raised issues that get right to the heart of the just transition to net zero. The just transition must deliver green jobs, and I was delighted to see the

report that was produced by the University of Warwick, the University of Strathclyde and Skills Development Scotland that says that there are up to 100,000 green jobs in Scotland. That shows that there has been good progress towards one of the key aims of the just transition.

Willie Coffey is correct that we must use our abundance of energy resources to deliver cheaper electricity and energy for the people of Scotland and its business community. Over the coming years, we have the potential to produce several times the amount of energy that we need as a country, which should bring the cost of energy and electricity down.

I assure the member that community ownership and the other issues that he has raised will be addressed in the forthcoming refresh of the energy strategy, which will go out for consultation. As part of that consultation, the first just transition plan for energy will be published, and it will address the issues that Willie Coffey has raised. In the meantime, we have seen that onshore wind developments have had significant benefits for communities around Scotland. However, there is a lot more to be achieved.

Climate Change (Role of Hydrogen)

2. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Friends of the Earth Scotland report, "Hydrogen's Role in Scotland's Climate Journey". (S6O-01590)

The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government is fully committed to growing our hydrogen sector. Our support for hydrogen is underpinned by a broad evidence base, including our hydrogen policy statement and the draft hydrogen action plan, as well as findings from the Climate Change Committee and reports from the International Energy Agency. Our position that the growth of renewables and hydrogen is complementary is shared by key stakeholders such as Scottish Renewables. A systems approach combining increased renewable electricity, energy efficiency and hydrogen will be required to deliver net zero. I will publish our final hydrogen action plan before the end of the year.

John Mason: The Friends of the Earth report is somewhat sceptical about hydrogen, but does the minister agree that green hydrogen is by far the best type of hydrogen and that there are specific uses, such as longer-term storage, industrial uses and, perhaps, remote rail lines, where hydrogen could be best?

Richard Lochhead: Green hydrogen, taking advantage of Scotland's massive renewable

energy resources, will be a key plank of our hydrogen strategy going forward. However, our priority is to get as much renewable hydrogen into the energy system as quickly as possible, while also supporting the establishment of low-carbon hydrogen production at scale in the 2020s. That will also be linked to carbon capture and storage.

As a Government, we are convinced that hydrogen, alongside renewable electricity, will play an extremely important part in our energy system going forward. Electrification will do the heavy lifting in our march towards net zero, but there are parts of our economy and energy system that are very difficult to electrify. Hydrogen, in all its forms, could provide a solution for some sectors such as heavy-duty on and off-road transport, shipping, aviation, industrial high-temperature heat and, potentially, some parts of our domestic heating systems. Clearly, we are on a new journey, and we will look at the variety of types of renewable energy that are out there.

Foysoil Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): At First Minister's question time, the First Minister said in reply to my colleague Martin Whitfield that the Scottish Government would focus on the growth of both hydrogen and green hydrogen as part of Scotland's renewable energy mix. Given that the Friends of the Earth Scotland report highlights problems with hydrogen and green hydrogen, can the Scottish Government assure me that its focus will be on the forms of energy that we can rely on for our transition to net zero?

Richard Lochhead: Our policy is based on exploiting the massive opportunities that hydrogen offers, not only from its use in Scotland but from its export to other countries, particularly those on the European continent, given the energy crisis and the expected increase in demand there for hydrogen, which could be produced in Scotland. Our policy is to support green hydrogen—renewable and low-carbon hydrogen—which will be necessary, as I said in my remarks to John Mason, for certain industries in Scotland. That will offer great opportunities. We must learn as we go. Green hydrogen, in particular, is a huge opportunity for Scotland.

A9 Dualling (Procurement)

3. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it expects the sections of the A9 trunk road from Perth to Inverness, on which made orders have been confirmed to create dual carriageways, to progress to procurement. (S6O-01591)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): The A9 dualling programme comprises 11 projects. Of those, two projects are now open to use, one project is in procurement and seven of the remaining eight projects have had ministerial

decisions confirmed to complete statutory processes. Only one project has not yet commenced statutory processes.

Work is on-going to determine the most suitable procurement options for the remaining sections, which involves consideration of issues such as how the works can be delivered most efficiently by the industry while minimising disruption to road users. I will update the Parliament on the outcomes of that work when it is complete.

Murdo Fraser: I thank the minister for her response, and I welcome the progress that has already been made on the A9 dualling. However, as the minister is well aware, in the course of this year, there have already been no fewer than 12 fatalities on the single-carriageway sections of the A9 between Perth and Inverness. Those tragedies make the case far more eloquently than I could for why the dualling programme must be completed.

There is now a large number of sections in which the legal processes have been completed; therefore, the only delay to moving to procurement is a decision from the Government, and the communities along the route and the people who use the road want to know when the programme will proceed. Will the minister give us an update on when those vital works will commence and when they will be completed?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Murdo Fraser for his question and for his time yesterday, when we met, along with a group of cross-party MSPs, following the debate that was held a couple of weeks ago on the short-term urgent measures that I intend to introduce to enhance road safety on the A9.

Murdo Fraser raises a number of questions. It is worth recognising that we have already invested approximately £431 million to date, including on the delivery of the dual stretches between Kincaig and Dalraddy and between Luncarty and Pass of Birnam, which opened in September 2017 and August 2021, respectively.

Murdo Fraser will understand that there is now urgent and important work on-going to look at the procurement options for the remaining sections of the A9, as I alluded to in my response to his first question. That is a complex exercise that considers a number of factors, including how the project can be delivered most efficiently by the industry. I will be happy to update him and the Parliament as soon as I have had that advice from Transport Scotland.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I thank the minister for her considerable attention to this matter. There are, indeed, four sections of the road that are now ready to go to procurement: the Tay crossing, Pitlochry, Dalnaspidal and Dalwhinnie. Together, those four sections amount to 35km in length. It would be a massive proof

positive of the Scottish Government's clear commitment to delivering our dualling pledge if those sections now went to procurement. I understand that there might be capacity issues in the industry. What stage of preparation is Transport Scotland now at in considering how to progress the four sections to dualling and whether to do the work on the sections concurrently instead of consecutively?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Fergus Ewing for his question and note his considerable constituency interest in the matter.

I think that it would be helpful to summarise the sections of the route that remain outstanding. The Pass of Birnam to Tay crossing project has been the subject of a co-creative process. The project is progressing towards an announcement of the preferred route—that is expected in the coming months.

The made orders for the Tay crossing to Ballinluig project have been published. The project will complete the final stage of its statutory processes when the land has been vested. The Pitlochry to Killiecrankie section is at the same stage as that.

The Killiecrankie to Glen Garry project has received a ministerial decision confirming that orders should be made. The made orders for the Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie project have been published. The Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore section is at the same stage as that. The Crubenmore to Kincaig project has received a ministerial decision confirming that orders should be made, which is the same for the Dalraddy to Slochd project. It is only the Tomatin to Moy section that is in procurement at the present time.

I have not had advice on the potential to run the outstanding works concurrently. My initial observation on that suggestion might be about the disruption that it would invariably cause Fergus Ewing's constituents and other people if we were to plan all those sections at the same time. However, I will ask my Transport Scotland officials for advice on that, and I will be happy to discuss that and other details with him should he wish to do so.

Bus Driver Shortages (Support for Bus Companies)

4. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to bus companies that are currently facing driver shortages. (S6O-01592)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): There is currently a shortage of drivers for buses across the United Kingdom, which impacts on Scotland's economy and communities. To help to address that and other challenges, I have

convened a bus task force, in partnership with the industry and local authority stakeholders. At our first meeting on 29 September, we agreed a range of workstreams, including the establishment of a sub-group to focus on how we can address driver shortages. I look forward to chairing the next meeting of the task force next month.

Marie McNair: The driver shortage is having an impact on bus companies' ability to provide a full service and reliable timetables in parts of my constituency. I have been advised by one bus company that the shortage is, in part, due to recruitment issues that are related to Brexit and Covid-19. Is the minister aware that those two issues are having an impact? Can she offer any guidance on what is available to companies to help them to mitigate the issue?

Jenny Gilruth: I am, of course, aware that those two concurrent issues are having a real impact on delivery of services. Obviously, the pandemic is having an on-going impact, and we are working hard to recover from it. However, it is notable that bus patronage is down to around 60 per cent of what it was prior to the pandemic, which is having a detrimental impact on our net zero aspirations in relation to climate change.

Brexit is also a factor that is having an impact in terms of driver shortages. Of course, I have made representations to the UK Government on that matter, in relation to the shortage occupation list. At the present time, the powers over a number of factors remain reserved. I am keen for the UK Government to take part in that wider task force. I asked the previous relevant UK minister to join the group in September and have asked the new minister to join the group when it meets in December. I very much hope that that minister will be able to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have requests to ask supplementary questions from three members. I am inclined to take all three of them, if I can have brief supplementary questions and answers.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): This month, there have been 85 cancellations of Stagecoach services in North East Fife alone, and I am sure that there have been even more since I did the tally. There is no doubt that Brexit is a factor, but the Scottish Government has a huge responsibility, because we have been leading up to that point for some time. I am puzzled as to why it is only now that the task force has been established. What accelerated measures will the minister introduce to make sure that we can get drivers back on the buses, so that we can ride those services?

Jenny Gilruth: The task force has not just been established—I met larger and smaller operators

from the sector over the summer. From the outset, it is important to say that they have very different needs.

The second point to make is that we have provided significant funding to the sector throughout the pandemic—for example, we have provided up to £210 million of emergency funding to support the bus sector throughout the pandemic. At the start of the summer, I chose to extend the network support grant plus, which ran from June until October. That additional funding has been important.

I have committed to working with the sector to look at what additional funding the Scottish Government might be able to provide, but I will reflect to Mr Rennie some of the challenges that we in the Scottish Government face at the moment. We have a largely fixed budget, which has implications for other economic pressures across various portfolio areas for which I do not have responsibility.

However, the situation is deeply concerning. Again, I reflect to Mr Rennie that one of the real challenges is Brexit. Although, of course, Scotland did not vote for Brexit, we are having to try to manage some of its challenges within the confines of devolution. There is probably a divergence of views between Mr Rennie and me on that subject, but it is important to recognise that.

I am happy to continue to work with the sector on the issue, through the task force. Specifically, it has been tasked with looking at driver shortages; I look forward to hearing the reports from that work when I meet the task force in two weeks.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): Due to driver shortages, bus services across Scotland have been cancelled at short notice. Has the Government compiled or received information on the number of cancellations in recent months, in order to understand the scale of the problem across the country? If not, will the minister commit to doing so and to publishing that information, so that we know how driver shortages are affecting different areas and companies across the country?

Jenny Gilruth: Obviously, we run a deregulated bus market so, as I understand it, we do not gather that data at national level because we have a number of commercial bus operators. However, I will ask my officials in Transport Scotland whether it is possible to gather that data, as Mr Bibby has asked, and to publish it. It is a reasonable request, but there are challenges in doing that because some of the decisions are being made on a commercial basis by private operators that might not want to share the information with the Government. However, I will ask the question.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Next week, I will host an online summit

with my constituents to discuss the future of bus services, and I would be happy to share the results of that with the minister. Does the minister believe that the regulator currently has enough powers to hold the bus companies to account over minimum standards of services?

Jenny Gilruth: I understand people's frustration about the current situation, which we have heard about from a number of members today. As I mentioned, I am pressing Westminster colleagues to look at what more could be done at UK level—in particular, on the shortage occupation list—in relation to driver shortages.

Under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, bus services need to be registered with the office of the traffic commissioner for Scotland. If the commissioner considers that an operator is failing to run a service in line with its registration, she can take action against it, including by imposing fines or terms and conditions on its public service vehicle licence, or by rejecting future service applications. I would be more than happy to hear from the member about his constituents' views on the matter, following the meeting that he will convene next week.

A96 Appraisal (Progress)

5. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on progress on the A96 appraisal. (S6O-01593)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): As I said when I updated Parliament during the recent debate on essential road improvements, we are undertaking a transparent evidence-based review of the A96 corridor. The recent public consultation received nearly 5,000 responses, which generated more than 11,000 suggestions and potential opportunities for the route. Rightly, it has taken more time than was originally planned to look at and appraise all those options, but a report on the public consultation and the initial appraisal will be published by the end of the year.

Gillian Martin: I thank the minister for her answer and for her time this week in meeting me with her officials.

I am keen to know how the review report that will be published by the end of the year will show the strength of public feeling about the options. As the minister knows, a great deal of work was done on the part of the route that would bypass Inverurie as part of the A96 dualling plans. That work involved a lot of public engagement and resulted in a decision to progress with the orange route, west of Inverurie, which was welcomed by my constituents. What is the status of that route, given the pause in its development to allow the A96 review to take place, and how might the

extensive work on that section of the route be progressed in the light of the review, which I appreciate will not be published for a few weeks.

Jenny Gilruth: I welcomed the opportunity to meet Gillian Martin yesterday, and I recognise and understand her strong constituency interest in the route. It is worth saying that the substantial consultation that she mentioned and the development work on the dualling programme that was undertaken previously will not go to waste. They are proving to be extremely important in informing our understanding of the route and in supporting the evidence-based review, which—as I mentioned—will end at the end of this year, in a few weeks.

On the member's point about the strength of public feeling, I assure her that the unprecedented level of responses that were received during the consultation clearly shows the importance of the A96 corridor to the people who live and work in the north and north-east of Scotland. That feedback will be captured in the public consultation report, which will be published in the coming weeks.

I understand the member's constituency interest and the importance of the matter to her constituents. Therefore, I have asked the review's project team to meet her in her constituency to disseminate some of the review results when they are published.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): The consultation closed in June and, as we have heard, there were nearly 5,000 responses. If it is being done properly, most of the responses will be from people in the north-east and most, if not all, will say, "Dual it." We surely owe that to the 13 people who have been killed and the 180 who have been injured in just the past three years.

If the Government does not follow through on more than a decade of promises, people across the north-east will regard that as an outright abdication of responsibility. After the consultation is published, showing that the people of the north-east demand it, how quickly will dualling of the entire A96 commence?

Jenny Gilruth: As Liam Kerr knows, I recognise his constituency interest in the matter; he regularly asks questions on the topic.

It is important that we get it right. I do not want to prejudge the outcome of the appraisal, which will be published in the coming weeks, but the current plan is to fully dual the route. However, we have committed to conducting a transparent evidence-based review, so I would, as I offered to Ms Martin, be more than happy to arrange for the consultants who undertook the review to meet Mr Kerr to disseminate the results.

It is hugely important that we get this right for local communities. We had a vast response on the options that were put to the local community—we have more than 11,000 suggested options to consider and they have taken the consultants some time to work through. However, I recognise Mr Kerr's strength of feeling on the matter, so I am more than happy to ensure that the consultants engage with him. When we have the data, I will come back to Parliament with a timeline and an update on the next steps in relation to dualling the A96.

Decarbonisation of Heavy Goods Vehicles (Delivery Firms)

6. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it is assisting delivery firms to decarbonise heavy goods vehicles. (S6O-01594)

The Minister for Transport (Jenny Gilruth): I convened the zero-emission truck task force and chaired its inaugural meeting back in May this year. The group brings together leaders from road haulage, logistics, manufacturing, the energy sector, commercial finance, Government and unions, with the sole aim of putting the sector on a pathway to net zero.

We are providing £28 million of innovation funding to help companies that are involved in the development and manufacture of zero-emission heavy vehicles. That is over and above the interest-free loans that we are offering to companies to purchase electric vans.

Graham Simpson: I am aware of the work of the zero-emission truck task force, and I look forward to seeing action as a result of it.

I have been speaking to representatives of the Scottish Wholesale Association, which fell just short of the minimum entry criteria for the Department for Transport's recently closed zero-emission road freight demonstrator programme. That could have kick started the deployment of long-haul zero-emission hydrogen lorries in Scotland. Would the minister consider investing in the consortium's heavy goods vehicle trial proposal, which could help decarbonise Scotland's food and drink supply chain?

Jenny Gilruth: Mr Simpson certainly makes a worthwhile recommendation. I do not have the detail of that proposal to hand but, if Mr Simpson shares it with my private office, I would be more than happy to consider it. Our forecasts indicate that demand for hydrogen from HGVs could reach up to 1,600GW hours a year by 2035 if an affordable supply is in place. It is really important that we consider a range of opportunities, including hydrogen, for decarbonising heavy goods vehicles in particular, as well as vans.

There is also an ask here in relation to the modal shift from road to rail. Rail will have a key role to play in this regard, which is why the Government provides support through the freight facilities grant—unlike in some other parts of the United Kingdom.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Tory economics has had a hugely detrimental impact on the road haulage industry in Scotland, with rising fuel costs, Brexit paperwork, cabotage, groupage issues and driver shortages, all of which are clearly linked to the Tories' ideologically driven Brexit. Does the minister agree that contending with that myriad of issues is an unwelcome distraction for the industry as it considers its journey to net zero?

Jenny Gilruth: There is no doubt that the impacts of Brexit and of other damaging United Kingdom Government policies hit the road haulage industry hard at a time when it was also contending with a global pandemic, and we now have the impacts of the war in Ukraine, including higher fuel costs. Without the resilience that the industry has shown in that regard, the shortages that we have experienced on supermarket shelves and elsewhere would have been even more problematic.

There are longer-lasting impacts. The historical driver shortage issue in the industry, which we have already touched on today, has been exacerbated. Although the acute problems of last year have stabilised to an extent, the UK Government needs to ensure that its testing regime is more responsive to that enduring problem.

The journey to net zero was already challenging for an industry that is characterised by small and medium-sized enterprises, which account for a majority of businesses in the industry in Scotland. We are very much committed to a just transition to net zero for the industry in Scotland and for other parts of the economy, too. Our work in relation to the zero-emission truck task force will be vital in that regard.

Energy Efficiency Improvements (Glasgow Cathcart)

7. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how its recent award of £6.437 million to Glasgow City Council to deliver energy efficiency improvements to homes could benefit those in the Glasgow Cathcart constituency. (S6O-01595)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): Our area-based schemes provide funding to councils so that they can directly target fuel-poor areas and provide energy efficiency

measures to a large number of households to reduce fuel poverty. Glasgow City Council intends to use our investment this year to target 10 areas, with projects focusing on external wall insulation. The council is directing that support to areas of the city with the greatest concentration of fuel poverty and the least energy-efficient housing. Since the start of our area-based schemes, we have funded energy efficiency upgrades for more than 10,330 fuel-poor households in Glasgow.

James Dornan: Research and analysis published by the Child Poverty Action Group in August 2022 has estimated that, from January 2023, around 180,000 households in Glasgow may be in fuel poverty. Can the minister expand on how the energy efficiency measure will not only help to achieve our net zero goals but support my constituents out of fuel poverty during this cost of living crisis?

Patrick Harvie: Mr Dornan is right that the measure needs to achieve both those objectives. We are already providing significant support for households to mitigate the impact of the cost crisis. By the end of March 2023, we will have invested around £3 billion in a range of measures for households, which include support for energy bills and childcare, health and travel costs, as well as social security payments that are not available anywhere else in the United Kingdom—or are more generous than those elsewhere—such as the Scottish child payment and the bridging payment.

The Scottish child payment has been further expanded to eligible six to 15-year-olds—around 400,000 children are now eligible—and has been increased in value to £25 per week per child. That is in addition to our national fuel poverty scheme, warmer homes Scotland, which is designed to help people who live in, or are at risk of, fuel poverty.

We are doing all that with hands tied behind our backs. We cannot borrow to meet short-term challenges, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer has refused to inflation-proof the Scottish budget to support our investment in services, direct support or increases in public sector pay. We should all be conscious of how much more we could do with full powers on social security, pay and regulation of the energy market.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can squeeze in question 8 if I get brief questions and answers to match.

Fuel Poverty (Motherwell and Wishaw)

8. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what support is in place to help tackle fuel poverty in the Motherwell and Wishaw constituency, including for

people with pre-payment meters who are worried about rising energy costs. (S6O-01596)

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): We are using all our available powers to help those vulnerable consumers. We have doubled our fuel insecurity fund to £20 million this year. We have also provided an additional £1.2 million to boost advice services, which will further support pre-payment meter households.

In addition, we have allocated £119 million to deliver heat and energy efficiency measures that benefit fuel-poor households, which includes our highest-ever annual budget of £55 million for our warmer homes Scotland services and £2.9 million for North Lanarkshire Council's local delivery scheme.

Clare Adamson: At a recent cost of living event, which Marion Fellows MP and I hosted in the constituency, Citizens Advice Scotland advisers raised a concern with us that an anomaly seems to exist with regards to people on universal credit who get their money paid directly in housing benefit to their landlords: they sometimes will not receive a monthly cash transfer into their bank accounts and are excluded from the energy bill support scheme as a result. Is the Government aware of that anomaly? What redress do individuals have if they feel that that is not a correct interpretation of their UC position?

Patrick Harvie: We are aware that consumers who do not have a direct contract with an energy supplier but pay their landlords for their energy consumption are not eligible for the United Kingdom Government's energy bills support scheme. We continue to engage with the UK Government to highlight that issue. It has committed to distributing equivalent support to those consumers as soon as possible and, on 26 October, the UK Government published legislation to ensure that landlords pass on the discount to tenants who pay all-inclusive bills. It would, of course, have been more desirable if the UK Government had done so in the first instance, rather than back-fitting the measure on to the interventions that it has made. However, we will continue to maintain close dialogue with the UK Government to ensure that the changes take place.

National Drugs Mission

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-06924, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: taking concrete action to tackle stigma.

I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to please press their request-to-speak buttons. I call Angela Constance to speak to and move the motion for around 12 minutes.

15:04

The Minister for Drugs Policy (Angela Constance): Scotland still faces a public health emergency and every single life lost to drugs is as tragic as it is unacceptable and preventable.

Today, Parliament will give voice and view to the work we can and must do in Scotland to end the shame of stigma, in advance of the Scottish Government's stigma action plan, which will be published at the start of next year alongside our fuller response to the final recommendations of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce.

People who use drugs have often experienced childhood trauma. Every week, I meet people with drug problems who have been burdened with the additional trauma of being stigmatised. This week, I met with a women's lived experience reference group in Glasgow and heard of the specific challenges faced by women, particularly mothers, who use drugs. No one, be they a parent, child, friend or loved one, should be blamed, shamed or labelled. No one coping with a life-affecting health condition should have to fear losing their children because of stigma.

Let me be categorical: blame and shame have no place in our society or our system of care. No drug law, policy or practice should have the effect of undermining or violating the dignity of any person in Scotland. The truth is that stigma kills. Every day, it hurts and damages vulnerable people and those who love them. It stops people from seeking support and shoves barriers in their faces when they do. It stops people from thriving and prevents them from reaching their true potential.

Drug dependency is, in many cases, a long-term and life-affecting health condition that disproportionately impacts people in our most marginalised and vulnerable communities. We must therefore recognise that actively fighting stigma is a crucial component of a human rights-based response to Scotland's drug death crisis.

Stigma is fed by the myth that addiction is a choice and that people can stop using drugs if only they try hard enough. Some people try drugs or

use them occasionally; others use them to cope with trauma or pain. No matter the reason, no one chooses addiction.

We do have a choice, however. We must choose to actively fight stigma and not to view it as something inevitable about our country. Scotland can build a society that does not project our own fears on to people who use drugs. We can be a country that does not stigmatise or discriminate and that recognises our human duty to respond to the drug emergency with kindness and compassion. We can all learn.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Earlier this week, my staff and I attended Recovery Scotland's inaugural football competition in Motherwell. It brought together organisations that work to support individuals and it celebrated people who are on the recovery journey and who took part in the tournament. More than 70 people took part and the event brought the community together with people who are on that recovery journey. It was wonderful to see so many families supporting those people. Does the minister agree that that is an excellent way to challenge stigma and to celebrate and support those who are on the journey to recovery?

Angela Constance: I absolutely agree that visibility of the recovery community is vital in demonstrating that people can and do get better and that there is, indeed, hope. I congratulate Ms Adamson's constituents on holding that football tournament.

Scotland has begun some crucial work. The recent social attitudes survey showed that, during the past decade, attitudes towards drug use have moved away from blame and criminalisation towards compassion and understanding. Sadly, the same survey also showed that fear continues to exist and that stigma is still a part of how we as a society respond to people who use drugs.

Stigma is not only about attitudes but about how those attitudes become embedded in public services that treat people differently, on account of their drug use, from how people with other health conditions would be treated. To end that discrimination, we must take a hard and uncomfortable look at ourselves. We must actively include people who use drugs, wherever they are excluded, by working together across all sectors, not only public services.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I will talk about this in my speech, but does the minister support a greater number of general practitioners becoming involved in care? Given that GP practices are located in communities, I think that that would be a way to help to address some stigma issues.

Angela Constance: I think that GPs are crucial to providing stigma-free primary care. We can, of course, discuss that later.

I am committed to publishing a stigma action plan that will build on the principles that are set out in the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce stigma charter from 2021. The founding principle of our stigma action plan will be that this is everyone's responsibility. I know that members are aware of the limitations of the disability regulations that have been issued under the Equality Act 2010, and the task force recommended that the exemption that singles out people with substance dependency be removed. Although the power to do that does not reside in this Parliament, and I cannot change the regulations, I can continue to call on the United Kingdom Government to remove that exemption, which excludes people with drug and alcohol dependencies from the protection of the Equality Act 2010.

However, we can go beyond that. The 2010 act lays out a base level of protections, but there are further steps that we can take. We can do more. We can understand that substance dependency is a health condition. We can accept not only that people who are experiencing dependency are deserving but that they have a right to equality, dignity, respect and good health. We can choose to acknowledge that substance dependency is not a moral failing but a health condition, and we can choose to support people with that health condition just as we support other people with long-term, life-affecting conditions.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Will the minister give way?

Angela Constance: I will, but I ask the member to be brief.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I absolutely support the minister's efforts in that regard around the Equality Act 2010. Does she agree that identification is still key and that unresolved childhood trauma can lead to substance use in later life? Does she agree that we need to do more to capture and record adverse childhood experiences so that we can get help to people?

Angela Constance: In short, yes. We may debate how best we can do that, but my short answer is yes.

I will now outline the basis of the stigma action plan as a step towards our vision. It will establish a national programme with four key stones in its foundation. The first will set out what we—each of us—can do now. We own our actions, learning and language, which means that we must recognise the ways that we other and exclude people. We must challenge stigma and discrimination whenever we encounter them. In short, we must become allies.

The second action will outline concrete actions that are under way in the Scottish Government to tackle stigma internally and in statutory services. We recognise that, as an organisation, we have a long way to go. I am committed to the Scottish Government becoming an exemplar as an anti-stigma organisation and leading by example, so we are reviewing and updating our policies and ways of working across Government.

The third cornerstone will be an accreditation scheme for organisations that will aim to break down structural stigma. Organisations will be challenged to identify and remove ways of working that exclude people with problem substance use. That will include taking defined, measurable and reportable actions to remove those barriers. We want to ensure that organisations treat dependency in the same way as any other long-term, life-affecting health condition.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: I am almost out of time. I am so sorry.

The fourth platform is the delivery of a programme to tackle social stigma. We will build on the success of our stigma awareness media campaign, which took place in 2021. That work will include innovative and proactive ways of challenging public stigma and we will celebrate individuals' success in their recovery in its many forms. The national programme will encourage us all to examine our assumptions and the harms that are caused by stigma.

The Scottish Government will set a high bar. We do not want those who are affected by substance use to be discriminated against because of their health condition and we will work towards becoming a nation that does not condone the blaming, judging or shaming of people because of their health.

Scotland has set out an ambitious way forward for respecting and enhancing human rights, and the forthcoming human rights bill will give effect to a range of internationally recognised human rights in Scots law. They include the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the rights to adequate housing and an adequate standard of living.

The incorporation of those rights into Scots law, through the bill, will play an important role in tackling the stigma of substance dependency across Scotland, by ensuring that everyone's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

People who are affected by substance use should not be penalised if, as many health conditions do, it affects their ability to attend

appointments or to meet arbitrary criteria for support. We cannot punish people because they do not fit into a service model.

Through the national collaborative, people with experience of problem substance use will set out how human rights can be better implemented in the sector. Applying a human rights-based approach is about empowering people to know about and claim their rights, as well as being about preparing organisations to fulfil their obligations. It will also ensure accountability when the system fails. That will set the vision for how human dignity and rights can underpin all services that are needed by people who are affected by problem substance use. It will help to bring about the necessary shift in power and culture.

At the start of my statement, I talked about meeting many people who have experienced trauma. I have also met many people who have overcome such trauma. The power of the visibility of the recovery community is inspirational and can be a catalyst for change, as people can and do recover. However, it also reminds us that those people have overcome significant stigma in order to achieve their recovery.

We must all ensure that everyone who uses drugs is afforded the human rights and dignity that they deserve, no matter where they are in their journey. We must ensure not just that everyone is given the opportunity to achieve the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health, but that they are supported, with compassion, dignity and respect, to do so.

I look forward to contributions from across the chamber.

I move,

That the Parliament acknowledges that stigma prevents people from seeking the help and support that they need and that using language that de-humanises people is harmful; recognises that tackling stigma is everyone's responsibility and that the existence of stigma diminishes all communities as it creates unreasonable and unnecessary barriers for people in all aspects of their lives; agrees that problem drug use is a health issue and that people who experience it deserve parity of treatment as with any other long-term, life-affecting health condition; believes that every individual's experience of recovery is unique and should not be stigmatised, and that people with experience of problem drug use and their families should be treated with dignity, respect and equity; recognises that treating substance dependence as if it were included as part of the protected characteristic of disability, would contribute to a more fair and just society; supports strengthening the meaningful involvement of people with experience of problem drug use in their local communities and wider society in the development and implementation of policy; calls on all MSPs to lead by example in challenging the stigma of people who use drugs and their families, and welcomes the planned publication by the Scottish Government of a Stigma Action Plan, which should embed these principles and drive action on the stated commitments.

15:16

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): Under the Scottish National Party, the numbers of drug-related deaths have spiralled out of control. The SNP's current strategies to help those who are struggling with addiction are failing. Despite multiple SNP action plans, Scotland's drug death rate is still the highest in Europe, and it is 3.7 times higher than that of the UK as a whole. That scandal is Scotland's national shame, and we cannot go on like this. Lives are being lost, and families are being torn apart.

Everyone is unique, with a specific set of circumstances and a background that may or may not have been involved in triggering their addictive behaviour.

Time and again, when speaking to constituents, patient advocate groups and families whose loved ones are desperately trying to access rehabilitation and recovery services, I hear at first hand about the implementation gap. That gap between the aspirations and plans that have been laid down by the Scottish Government and what has actually been delivered is vast.

We do wrong by persistently and consistently having static services, unclear care, complex pathways, and processes that are clunky and anything but flexible. Flexibility is key if we are to truly have person-centred care, with the person genuinely at the heart of the delivery of services.

Constantly, I hear of frustration, exasperation and the harsh realities of the difficulties, barriers and walls that are put in people's way, preventing them from receiving quick access to rehabilitation services for alcohol or drugs. As the minister stated in her opening remarks, that reinforces stigma.

We must be clear. In March, Audit Scotland's "Drug and alcohol services: An update" found that only 35 per cent of the 60,000 people with drug problems in Scotland are in treatment, compared with 60 per cent in England. A report from drug campaigners and recovery experts claims that Scotland's politicians have "forgotten" about the drug death crisis. I want to make it clear that I have not.

The Faces & Voices of Recovery UK one-year report, published this week, states that there has been "almost no progress" towards reducing the rate of drug deaths in Scotland—the worst rate in Europe. FAVOR's "Blueprint to Save Lives" makes six key recommendations to improve the current addiction, recovery and treatment system. The recommendations are:

"Introduce a clear definition of a residential rehabilitation place ... Introduce a centralised referral and funding system to end the postcode lottery to residential rehabilitation ... Introduce guidelines to ensure that psycho-social and

mental health support is provided alongside substance management and pharmaceutical treatment ... Introduce statistics to measure the number of people waiting more than six months, 12 months and 24 months for residential rehabilitation places”.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The member talked about a person-centred approach. Residential recovery is one approach, but does she agree that a tailored approach might need to be taken depending on where a person is in Scotland—whether they are in a rural or an urban area?

Sue Webber: Yes. In the opening part of my speech, I said that everyone is unique. All individuals need tailored packages so that they are not left jumping through hoops to get support.

The fifth recommendation is:

“Introduce a Right to Recovery Bill to ensure that the Scottish Government MAT Standards are actually implemented”,

and the sixth is:

“Return to community not centralised services.”

FAVOR Scotland’s chief executive officer, Anne Marie Ward, said:

“We hoped government investment and the introduction of new guidelines would improve things but unfortunately, the system remains as broken today as it was a year ago.”

Although there has been a slight decrease in the number of drug-related deaths, it should shock us all that a disproportionate number of women are included in the drug-related deaths, and that that number is increasing. Often, those women have children, which can stop them seeking help, as they do not want to be stigmatised or risk having their children taken away. A system to enable people to access services that suit their family circumstances has been poorly developed, but that is essential if we are to save the lives of those women.

Harper house in Saltcoats, North Ayrshire, was officially opened by the First Minister this week. Last year, it was awarded more than £8 million in Scottish Government grant funding to establish a family rehabilitation service that accepts referrals from across Scotland. The facility means that parents with problematic drug or alcohol use can now enter residential rehabilitation without the fear of being separated from their children. However, only two of the 20 beds have been filled, despite the facility opening for referrals on 5 October this year. The bed numbers at the facility were pitifully low to begin with, but for only one tenth of them to be used almost two months on is deeply concerning.

I would have expected that such a service would, in advance of opening, be well publicised to alcohol and drug partnerships across the country,

and that those organisations would already have identified those most in need of the services. We would expect there to be a queue at the door, not an almost empty facility.

It seems that the SNP has learned nothing from its previous grave errors in cutting the number of rehabilitation beds across Scotland. Families whose loved ones are continuing to struggle with addiction are being let down at every turn by the SNP Government, which continues to take its eye off the ball. The implementation gap needs to be tackled urgently. The SNP needs to urgently back the Scottish Conservatives’ plan for a right to recovery bill, which would guarantee access to treatment for everyone who needs it.

It is all too easy for Nicola Sturgeon and Angela Constance to visit that facility, spin some nice rhetoric and take some photos, rather than take the bold action that is required to tackle the record numbers of drug deaths that have occurred on their watch. There continues to be an ever-widening gap between the SNP’s warm words on the drug deaths scandal and the reality.

Angela Constance: As the member acknowledged, it is important that we sing the praises of such a wonderful therapeutic environment, but does she recognise some of the practicalities involved in opening a new facility that has been progressed at speed? I visited it at the start of the summer, when building work was still going on.

Does the member also recognise that, when populating a therapeutic environment, an organisation begins with a few families and then builds up? Of course, I very much welcome her encouraging people the length and breadth of Scotland to utilise the amazing service.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Webber, I remind you that you have 30 seconds left, although I will give you some time back for taking that intervention, which will take your speaking time to nine minutes in total.

Sue Webber: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I understand the minister’s point about it being a very complex environment and the fact that it takes time to get people in that position to come to such facilities. However, my point stands. Given the long period before Harper house opened, I would have hoped that a few more families would be benefiting from the critical service that it provides, which will save lives.

There continues to be an ever-widening gap between the SNP’s warm words on the drug deaths scandal and the reality of how little action it is continuing to take. As I have said, the gap between what is said and what is delivered when it comes to the processes that people have to go

through to access such critical services is widening. The Scottish Conservatives believe that a different approach is needed to help people who are suffering from addictions, and we hope that the SNP Government will finally start listening to the front-line experts and back our proposed right to addiction recovery bill, which would guarantee treatment for those people who need it most.

I move amendment S6M-06924.1, to leave out from “calls” to end and insert:

“notes that FAVOR UK’s report, *One Year Report—Blueprint to Save Lives*, published on 21 November 2022, highlights significant challenges faced by those affected by a drug addiction, including many individuals being required to wait for years to access vital treatment; is concerned that, despite multiple action plans, Scotland still has the highest drug death rate in Europe, and 3.7 times higher than the UK as a whole; expresses concern that stigma is especially problematic amongst those with hepatitis C, with 90% of new hepatitis C infections occurring through sharing contaminated injecting equipment; urges the Scottish Government to implement the recommendations of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce, particularly in regards to the ‘no wrong door’ approach, which will stop people struggling with drug use being turned away from service providers, and calls on the Scottish Government to back the Proposed Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill, which would enshrine in law a right to treatment, so that all those affected by addiction in Scotland can get the support they need.”

15:25

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I welcome this afternoon’s debate on the national drugs mission and the action that is being taken to tackle stigma. The planned publication of a stigma action plan is welcome, albeit that it is overdue. Addressing stigma is an important aspect of the work to address Scotland’s drug deaths crisis, but we cannot consider it in isolation.

Despite the fact that the drug deaths situation was declared a public health emergency more than three years ago, we have not had the pace or scale of change that is required. National Records of Scotland publications show that there have been more than 2,500 drug-related deaths in that time. If Police Scotland’s suspected drug death figures are confirmed, it is likely that, by the end of the year, well in excess of 3,000 lives will have been lost. I know that the minister shares our great concern and our shock at those figures, but we need quicker action. The responsibility for addressing the situation and delivering improvement lies with the Government.

I agree that substance dependence requires a public health response, and although I will push the Government on delivery, I support the policy approach. We have called for an urgent response that is worthy of the status of a crisis, but there is also an active debate to be had about human rights. How do we ensure that people can access

help, be treated with humanity and be supported rather than discriminated against in society? The proposed right to recovery bill is a response to the frustration that exists with services, with the slow pace of change and with the barriers that remain to treatment and services.

We must think about the best way to secure rights to treatment and recovery. In its motion, the Government proposes the idea that substance dependence be recognised as a protected characteristic of disability under the Equality Act 2010. Section 6(5) of that act enables the Government—the UK Government, I should say—to set out exclusions, in which it has included addiction to illicit and prescription drugs. Removing that exclusion or taking action to disregard it would mean that substance dependence would be recognised as a substantial disability with a long-term impact. I support exploring how those rights can be realised in Scotland and extended to the group of people that we are talking about.

For rights to be exercised, services and treatment must be funded and accessible, with strong pathways to treatment. The best way to reduce drug-related harms, including stigma, is to ensure that people can access the full range of drug treatment services where they live. This week’s FAVOR UK report is the latest in a long line of reports that highlight the on-going problem of a postcode lottery of provision and a lack of mental health services. Rights can be seen as a way to drive change, but that is not always the case and progress can still be slow.

There are areas of progress, such as on the roll-out of naloxone provision. Along with my staff, I recently undertook training on how to recognise signs of overdose and administer naloxone in the event of an overdose. That training was provided by We Are With You at my office in Lochgelly. My office staff received the training, along with people in other organisations that use our building. The session helped to demystify and challenge some of the ideas that people have around drug use and overdose. If people are trained and carry naloxone, it becomes more normalised and something that people do not need to feel ashamed or concerned about doing.

Stigma is a significant barrier to people reaching out for help. There is the fear of not being listened to, the fear of losing children and the fear of being judged. I welcome this week’s focus on the new facility at Harper house in Saltcoats, which focuses on families and parents. As Sue Webber has recognised, for mothers who live with a substance dependency, the pressure and stress that often fall on them can be a huge barrier, and I welcome the establishment of facilities in which parents, including mothers, can be treated without

being separated from their children. I also welcome the recognition that such facilities need to be diverse and cater for everyone who needs help. We must see more of them throughout the country.

We must recognise that all treatment options are valid and that people need different support at different times in their lives. Support must be responsive and person centred, and there must be no predetermination about the support that someone needs. The weight of expectation is also heavy; indeed, it can be overwhelming for some people who are looking to access treatment.

I know that my time is limited, but I want to share a comment that I saw on Twitter today about supporting those bereaved as a result of substance use, as they, too, can experience stigma that can prevent them from accessing services, as well as increasing isolation. I hope that the plan, when it is published, recognises that families, too, experience stigma.

Turning briefly to approaches to treatment, I realise that some people will choose to be abstinent. However, although that approach benefits some people, others will benefit from medically assisted treatment and/or support relating to harm reduction. In any case, the aim is to stabilise lives and support people so that families can be kept together and that those involved remain part of their community and are not ostracised or diminished.

Our health services need to do all that they can to destigmatise services, too. GP practices are often central to communities, and those practitioners will have seen people grow up and, indeed, will have provided much of their care. The focus on centralised addiction services, which can provide crucial medical support, can be stigmatising, and I would welcome an increase in care delivered through primary care, as well as more community delivery.

When I was recently in Halifax in Canada, I visited the Direction 180 facility, a holistic centre on a high street that offers substance use services, GPs who can prescribe and other services such as wound care, peer group support and mental health services. It operates as a drop-in centre as well as a place for referral, and it has also funded a programme to recruit GPs to manage people with substance use issues in the community and to support them in continuing to deliver that care. We in Scotland should be considering that model.

Although we must act quickly to end the drug crisis, the scale of the drug-related harms in Scotland is likely to continue unless we address the underlying drivers that are highlighted in the Labour amendment. There is much that we can

agree with in the Scottish Government's motion, and we recognise that work to address stigma is being taken forward. However, the true test will be in delivery. That said, we will support the Government's motion.

I cannot support the Conservative amendment. Although it makes many points that we agree with, we still await the publication of the bill that it mentions.

I move amendment S6M-06924.2, to insert at end:

“; recognises that drug deaths and wider drug-related harms disproportionately impact on the most deprived communities; believes that tackling substance use requires policies that address poverty, deprivation and Scotland's wider health inequalities; agrees that people with an addiction should be able to access the full range of drug treatment and mental health services wherever they live; regrets the delays in fully implementing the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) standards, and agrees that the standards have an essential role to play in tackling the drug deaths crisis and wider drug-related harms; acknowledges that there is a need to know not only the number of people who have tragically lost their lives to a drug overdose, but also due to health conditions caused by long-term problematic drug use, including, for example, cardiovascular disease, end-stage liver disease, HIV or hepatitis C, and believes that such information is essential to inform policy, direct resources and save lives.”

15:32

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): It gives me pleasure to speak for my party on such an important and urgent issue. The minister knows that I want her to succeed in this matter, and I am grateful to her for the robust exchange that we had at this morning's committee meeting.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats have been campaigning for decades for problem drug use to be treated as a public health issue, largely due to the misconceptions that, unfortunately, still surround the debate, many of which we have heard already. I am gratified to hear that there is, I think, consensus in the chamber on it being a public health issue rather than a criminal justice issue, but we still have some distance to travel before the same view takes hold in communities.

I fear that, although there has been huge progress in shifting attitudes, there are people who still view addiction as a choice rather than as a debilitating disease that is born out of circumstances that, more often than not, are entirely outside one's control. As a result, those who are suffering can be ostracised from their communities, cut off from the help that they need and denied even basic human kindness. Imagine having a life-threatening illness and having to contend with all that on top of it. That would be unthinkable to most of us.

The Hepatitis C Trust has noted that, for people with hep C—which, as we know, is often contracted from sharing contaminated injecting equipment—stigma is still felt to be highly prevalent, and it makes people less likely to get tested or to present themselves for testing. As a result, the infection can go untreated for a long time, increasing its incidence or the chances of fatality. It is clear that stigma can have deadly consequences. I therefore find it positive that the Government has recognised the importance of tackling stigma, and I welcome the thrust of the motion and today's debate.

However, there is still so much more that we need to do. After all, stigma cannot be combated until we have a universal understanding and response across Scotland and all our sectors. That will require decisive, urgent and radical leadership, but our Government has, I fear, been slow in delivering that leadership.

We cannot forget the context in which we are having this debate: this Government is presiding over the worst rate of drug deaths in Europe. The rate here is three-and-a-half times higher than the rate in the rest of the UK, yet all the while this Government slashes funding for rehabilitation services. We must make no mistake: this is a uniquely Scottish problem that has been made worse on this Government's watch.

Looking forwards, our experts have long advised a shift in our public response, specifically a shift to methods of harm reduction. One such policy involves drug consumption rooms. Again, that is another issue that has galvanised political support across the chamber, in large part due to the heroic work of people such as Peter Krykant. Last year, when a drug consumption room opened in New York, trained staff were able to reverse two overdoses during its first official day of operation—those cases might otherwise have proven fatal.

The implementation of drug consumption rooms in Scotland could be game changing, which is why the Scottish Liberal Democrats continue to campaign for them. The matter now rests with the Lord Advocate, and I am gratified that the Government is persuaded of the case and is keen to find ways to implement drug consumption rooms within the terms of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

I was glad to have an exchange on the matter with the minister in the joint meeting of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Criminal Justice Committee and Health, Social Care and Sport Committee this morning. We need urgent action, and I hope that, now that the focus of the Lord Advocate has moved away from constitutional matters, we can remedy the situation immediately, because every week that goes past when we do not pilot a drug consumption room,

lives are lost. This is an important and life-saving policy, and that is why we should ask her to focus on it.

Although this year has marked the introduction of medication-assisted treatment standards into our public policy, which we welcome, there are still huge gaps in the delivery and realisation of those standards on the ground. There is a huge shortage of staff who specialise in assessing the needs of individuals and the distribution of services, and that remains a particular issue in areas of rurality, where we have empirical evidence to demonstrate that it is incredibly difficult for people to access same-day services. All that hinders the ability of staff to act quickly in providing treatment, which, again, potentially costs lives. As I mentioned earlier, it is crucial that harm-reduction strategies are adopted across all our public sectors and address all our communities, be they urban or rural.

A prevalent cause of drug-related death is the mixing of drugs with other substances that are dangerous and, often, toxic. The creation of facilities that test drugs is in the same sphere as drug consumption rooms. It recognises that a zero-tolerance approach—wishing the problem away—will not work and that, if people are going to consume drugs, we have a duty to help them to do so safely. We know that they work at large-scale social events, festivals and nightclubs, and that their use could massively reduce harm—harm that was visited on my constituency just two weeks ago, in a tragedy at a festival that took place there. What is more, those facilities have been used in parts of England and Wales, but they have never been tried in Scotland. It is crucial that we do all that we can to work with Police Scotland to provide those services. Again, that is something for the Lord Advocate to consider in terms of guidance to policing.

I conclude by noting that the reasons for drug misuse are often connected to underlying social causes linked to poverty and unresolved childhood trauma—we need to find that trauma and deal with it. In the worst cost of living crisis that our country has faced in decades, those underlying causes will have a devastating impact on those already suffering and could push more to the brink. It is, therefore, imperative that we include social care and welfare in our approach.

We need to implement policies that are empathetic and encompass the wider societal causes of drug use. Then and only then will we begin to eradicate the stigma.

15:38

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Every life lost to addiction is a tragedy, and I know that

the Scottish Government is absolutely committed to implementing approaches that we know work to save lives and reduce harm. We must remember at all times that people with a substance use disorder are family members, neighbours and people in our communities. Instead of criminalising people in our population, we need a public health approach that supports those with substance dependency and prevents unnecessary deaths.

The Scottish Government is under no illusion about the seriousness or scale of the challenges that we need to address as we pursue new, bold ideas and innovative approaches. In January 2021, the Scottish Government set out a national mission to improve lives and save lives, at the core of which is ensuring that every individual is able to access the treatment and recovery methods that they choose and which will work for them.

We must empower more people to seek support, and we must make that support more consistent, flexible and effective, and much faster. We must also help services to stick with the people whom they support.

I welcome that the Scottish Government is committed to listening to people who have real-life experience of harmful drug use, those who live or have lived with substance dependency and families who support their loved ones suffering from substance dependency. Indeed, an additional £250 million has been allocated over the next five years to improve and increase access to services for people who are affected by drug addiction. All of that is welcome.

I also welcome what the minister has just described in terms of the four pillars of a stigma action plan. Problematic substance use is a health condition, but the stigma that is associated with it can have detrimental consequences for the individual, their family and the wider community. This debate is about tackling stigma; doing so is an essential step in reducing drug-related deaths.

The Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce's paper, "A Strategy to Address the Stigmatisation of People and Communities Affected by Drug Use", describes extremely well what stigma is and who is affected. It states that the

"association between substance use and personal deficit(s) allows substance use to be portrayed as a failure of character or morals. This is an ideological framing of (problem) substance use as a solely personal issue. This justifies and re-enforces stigma."

The task force developed a stigma charter that all organisations, including businesses and community groups, can use. The charter aims to create a Scotland that is free from stigma in order to support a public health approach for problematic substance use. However, we need

more action to deal with stigma and to raise awareness of it, particularly among healthcare professionals.

Members know that I worked in the Scottish national health service prior to coming to the Parliament. I have witnessed—and I have heard recent feedback from former colleagues—that the words "junkie", "druggie", "alkie" and "jakey" are still used in healthcare. The use of those words is not acceptable, whether in a clinical area or by professionals away from the professional workplace. We should call that out.

We also need to ensure that staff are properly educated. The minister will be aware that I recently wrote to NHS Education for Scotland to see whether a relatively short online module has been or could be created—the module would not just be for professionals who work directly in alcohol and drug front-line services—to address drug-related stigma. I was interested to know whether education could be targeted at all healthcare staff—pharmacists, nurses, doctors and allied health professionals. People with substance misuse health issues will encounter healthcare that involves not solely addiction services, so tackling stigma is essential for everyone.

The response that I received from NES was a bit disappointing. It said:

"currently there is no dedicated resource solely for addressing the issue of stigma related to alcohol and drug use. However, stigma is incorporated in a number of our other resources."

On searching the online Turas education portal, I found a couple of modules with the word "stigma", but they were not alcohol or drug focused. NHS Inform has some great and comprehensive information that could simply be lifted and used, maybe even for a mandatory module. I responded to NES to seek further information and to ask for specific education to be provided on substance misuse or alcohol harm. I have also asked the minister if she would consider meeting me to discuss whether a basic, short online learning module could or should be created and delivered.

The task force's strategy document asks who should lead on the strategy to tackle stigma. Groups such as alcohol and drugs bodies are mentioned—for example, alcohol and drug partnerships, the Scottish Drugs Forum, the Scottish Recovery Consortium, Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs and the third sector; NES is also mentioned. The document states that working with mainstream services is required. It specifically mentions front-line staff and management who

“need to understand the causes and drivers of problem drug use”

and

“recognise their role in stigmatising people with a drug problem”.

That is a direct reference to mainstream services. I would be interested to hear the minister’s thoughts on that.

I welcome the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to tackle harmful drug use and reduce stigma, and I look forward to hearing the contributions of other members this afternoon.

15:44

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): When I was preparing for this speech yesterday, I was thinking about a case that I had just before the pandemic. It was the case of a constituent who had been in and out of Saughton prison, who contacted me to say that he did not want to go back to his family here in Lothian. On contacting public services, I was really shocked by their attitude towards that individual. Basically, I was told—I am paraphrasing—that I was unlucky that I had been landed with him. Specifically, he was described as a “problem junkie”. That attitude has to change in this country, so I hope that today’s debate can help with that. I welcome what Emma Harper had to say, because she made many positive suggestions on taking forward work in the area. It is not an easy thing to do, but it is something that we have to do.

I still think that homelessness and housing is an area that the Scottish Government is not building in to a solution to the drug deaths crisis. Figures that were released yesterday show that the number of estimated homeless person deaths across Lothian—my region—has, over the past three years, increased dramatically, from 26 deaths in 2019 to 63 deaths last year. The number of homelessness applications has also increased over the past three years across all the councils in my region, to more than 8,165, and the number of children in temporary accommodation in Edinburgh, as things stand today, is more than 1,000.

Those figures are nothing short of appalling, but we need to see them as part of the wider picture, because many people with problematic drug misuse are ending up in facilities where they are housed with other people with problematic drug misuse. If someone is trying to get off drugs—if they are trying to sustain their treatment—that approach does not work. That is something that the Parliament and the minister really need to consider. I raised the issue with the minister at the committees’ meeting this morning.

Six years ago, Alex Cole-Hamilton, Anas Sarwar, Monica Lennon and I, as our respective party spokespeople, called on ministers to declare a drug deaths emergency. Ministers dragged their feet for years, insisting that strategies were actually working. In the end, it was public outrage about Scotland’s drug deaths that really drove ministers to declare the public health emergency and to finally shift things. However, that happened after shameful decisions to cut funding, which had made the situation worse.

The Scottish Government’s approach to tackling drug deaths needs to be constantly improved and looked at and, as I have said, housing support and extra care need to be built in. That is lacking in current strategies.

Shelter Scotland has said, with regard to the situation—

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am grateful to Miles Briggs for recognising the work that we did collectively and collaboratively on the drug deaths emergency.

Does he recognise that the funding cut to ADPs in 2015-16 not only sent services to the wall, but meant that organisational memory was lost, it accounted for a £1.3 million cut in funding in our nation’s capital alone, and it led to an HIV outbreak in Glasgow?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you some time back.

Miles Briggs: I absolutely recognise that and, from speaking to people in services, I know that it destabilises them to this very day. Also, where services need to be redesigned, that work is still not taking place.

On the funding that has been delivered—this is something that the Audit Scotland report specifically points towards—we are not seeing the money trickle down to services and it is hard to follow the money, specifically with regard to the—

Angela Constance: In the light of his remarks, I ask Mr Briggs whether he has referred to our “National Mission on Drugs Annual Report 2021-2022”, which indicates where funding has been allocated.

Miles Briggs: I welcome that. I was going to turn specifically to policy in relation to the “no wrong door” approach and how funding can then be allocated to various organisations, especially third sector organisations. That is not clear, so it is something that I want the Government to focus on.

There are so many things from this morning’s joint meeting of three committees that I want to raise; I will mention a few of them now. First, there was a great opportunity to look towards how stigma is addressed with regard to hepatitis C

patients, especially those who are former injecting drug users. We need to do that. As one of the hep C champions, I am concerned that progress is not currently being made. Scotland was leading the world on the matter at one point, but we are falling behind, apart from in Dundee. I hope that we can address that issue, as well.

There are a few other issues. Alcohol treatment and services is one of my greatest concerns. We are seeing an increase in the number of people who are presenting with alcohol issues, and they are younger than ever before. The Scottish Government is also not taking on board medication-assisted treatment standards for alcohol, which I have raised with the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport, and am raising now with the Minister for Drugs Policy. That needs to change: we need MAT standards for alcohol treatment, because we cannot take our eye off the ball in another crisis, which is the increasing amount of alcohol misuse in Scotland. The change in alcohol use might be because of the pandemic, but I hope that it is something of which ministers are mindful. Many charities and people who are working in the area are incredibly concerned about it.

Finally, the debate around stigma is welcome. We all need to address it in our language and our public services. Most important is that we need to do that for families because, as Claire Baker pointed out, families who are trying to support loved ones with alcohol addiction often face some of the worst stigma in our society. Public services need to consider that; we need to send a message that we are on their side, and that we will support families as they try to get their loved ones into treatment and secure a future for them.

15:51

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): As I start, I gently remind the Tories that there were 3,000 drug poisoning deaths in England and Wales last year, and nearly 5,000 drug-related deaths in total, which is the highest since 1993 in those areas. However, no one in Parliament will stand up and say that that is all the Tories' fault: it is a little bit more complex than that. Forlornly, I wish that the Tories might recognise that from time to time, when they come to Parliament and blame the SNP for everything.

I will start my contribution by sharing a little of my experience when I visited an addiction support project that operates in Kilmarnock. I was invited to hear first-hand the lived experiences of people and their families—what their lives were like and, more important, what they felt would be the way forward for them.

I heard incredibly moving accounts of how people fall into taking drugs—sometimes by choice, which they freely admitted, and sometimes because of desperation and a feeling of hopelessness resulting from lack of opportunity and loss of self esteem. Those people had entered a world where false comfort was available to them, even for a few brief moments. Drugs helped them to ease the pain and to get to their next target, which was surviving until the next day. Not one of the people whom I listened to that day blamed anyone but themselves for the situation in which they found themselves: they said that it was their doing.

Family members around the table were almost living two lives—trying to cope with the normal day-to-day things that we all have to deal with and, at the same time, living with the horror of watching a loved one slowly succumbing to the overwhelming downward spiral that addiction metes out. Everyone who spoke that day had one common wish: they wanted hope that their lives could be turned around and hope that they could, even when things looked bleak, hold on and get help to save their lives at the moment when they needed it. It was as simple as that.

I have made several similar visits to other projects and the message was the same: "Please help by giving us hope that we can get through this." The folk who came to the various meetings were well aware of the stigma, which has added more to their suffering. For them to be viewed by neighbours, friends and, sometimes, even family as an addict—someone to be watched, not trusted and to be kept away from—only added to their pain. However, those people still came to the project meetings and shared their stories.

Putting lived experience at the heart of what we do is essential if we are to have any chance of turning the problem around. My colleague Angela Constance came to a project meeting a little more than a year ago, and spent several hours listening to various accounts of lived experience, for which I am grateful. I am sure that that helped her to shape the kinds of services that I know we all hope will help to turn the situation around.

When I look at all the plans that are being put in place and the ideas that are being put forward by other parties, I am encouraged that we are tackling the problem head-on. No one group here has exclusive wisdom or all the solutions. We all need to listen to and look at what others around the world are doing, too.

The £250 million that the Scottish Government has earmarked over the course of the parliamentary session has to make a difference, and the residential rehab facilities will surely help to save lives—especially the facility in Ayrshire,

which will be able to accommodate families for as long as six months.

I am grateful to the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh for its briefing and its helpful insight on and support for bold action being taken in key areas that could make a difference. Those include decriminalisation, safe consumption spaces and heroin-assisted treatment programmes. It cites the Portuguese experience since 2001 of decriminalising possession of all drugs, and notes that the annual number of deaths caused by drug overdose in that country dropped from 80 in 2001 to 16 in 2012. In Scotland last year, our figure was 1,330. I know that it is risky to make direct comparisons, but that experience surely points Scotland in a direction that would save lives, and I know that the Scottish Government is working on all options. However, we cannot do it alone.

As ever, I want to mention some of the good work that is going on in East Ayrshire—work that is providing much-needed support to local people and their families. The new Recovery Enterprises Scotland hub in Kilmarnock is staffed by people with lived experience and is open seven days a week for the people who need it. In addition, East Ayrshire health and social care partnership has established a recovery college, where people are gaining the skills that they need to give them hope for the better future—and employment—that they want. All the ingredients that people are calling out for are being delivered by people who care and who have lived experience. There is no judgment or stigma.

I end my speech where I began—by reminding members that what we need to do more than anything else is offer hope by providing the support and resources that are needed, when they are needed most. Funding and money make a big difference, but compassion is priceless.

15:57

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the debate and the Government's focus on stigma in its motion. As the minister knows, the creation of a national stigma action plan is one of 20 recommendations in the task force report, along with 139 actions, and the task force argues the importance of stigma as an underlying component in the drug deaths crisis.

Scotland consistently has the worst drug deaths figures in Europe. There are many reasons for that and, as Willie Coffey has just said, the lack of hope and opportunities in communities is clearly a major factor. In the last year that we have figures for, there were 14,310 drug-related hospital stays, and approximately half the patients with a drug-related hospital stay came from the most deprived

areas of Scotland. The Labour amendment recognises the need for

“policies that address poverty, deprivation and Scotland's wider health inequalities”

as part of the strategy to address the issues.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): In the context of the factors that are stigmatising for people, as Katy Clark has described, does she agree that one of the most stigmatising is the current misuse of drugs legislation, which is now more than 50 years old and which has been shown to have failed over those 50 years? Indeed, it frequently pushes people back into a cycle of offending and, as she said, impacts the most vulnerable people in communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give Katy Clark most of that time back.

Katy Clark: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

I agree with the convener of the Criminal Justice Committee that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 has failed. However, although that legislation is in place throughout the UK, in Scotland, we have a significantly higher drug deaths rate than the rates in the rest of the nations of the UK. Clearly, that is just one factor, and many other factors drive the very significant problems that we have in Scotland.

The system currently fails those who are seeking support with drug addiction, and the high levels of drug deaths in Scotland clearly highlight that failure. In total, 1,330 people lost their lives to drugs misuse in Scotland in 2021, which was the second highest annual total on record. We have a consistent problem with the worst death rates in Europe, and areas such as the west of Scotland have some of the worst statistics in the country.

In North Ayrshire, 39 deaths were recorded—the highest number in the NHS Ayrshire and Arran area. The minister has already spoken about the facility that has opened recently in Saltcoats. North Ayrshire has the fourth highest level of drug deaths in the country, but, when we look at some of the other economic drivers in North Ayrshire, unfortunately, the area often has some of the worst statistics, such as higher levels of domestic abuse, poor levels of employability and high levels of poverty and deprivation, and many of the other economic drivers highlight the lack of opportunity and hope.

Angela Constance: Given North Ayrshire's additional challenges, does Ms Clark welcome the additional benefits of having a national specialist facility within its borders?

Katy Clark: As the minister knows, it is a national facility, so it will not be people just from North Ayrshire who use it. The facility is for

families, so it will be suitable for people with young children in particular. The minister is perhaps highlighting the need for a range of different types of facility, suitable for the individual's needs. Most important, such facilities must be available when that individual needs and is asking for assistance. The key to success is often that facilities are available when the individual is looking for them.

We understand that it is very common for people who experience problems with drugs also to have significant problems with mental health and alcohol abuse. A recent report from Public Health England highlighted that mental health problems are experienced by a majority—70 per cent—of users who are in community substance abuse treatment. Other research, such as that published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, concluded that pointing to examples of successful harm reduction programmes can reduce the stigma around drug use. Therefore, it is important that discussions are taking place in this Parliament not only about stigma but about what is and should be available.

I do not have a huge amount of time left. I welcome the Government motion. There needs to be a recognition that Scotland has failed and that the high levels of drug deaths are an indicator of that failure. However, I believe that many of the recommendations and action points in the report are part of the pathway that we need to go forward. I look forward to hearing in detail from the minister how the Government will respond to all the recommendations and recommended actions.

16:04

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): Whether it is peers calling you derogatory names and demeaning you, public agencies treating you with contempt or your own thoughts telling you that you are worthless, stigma against people with problematic drug use can be crippling.

I would argue that the UK Government's failed war on drugs has exacerbated that stigma. Instead of criminalising large swathes of the population, we need a public health approach that supports those with addictions and prevents unnecessary deaths. More than that, we need an integrated, person-centred approach to treatment, so I welcome the actions as part of the national mission to expand the services that are available to people, as well as the introduction of same-day treatment.

The motion talks about the importance of being respectful when dealing with people with experience of problem drug use. I absolutely agree with that sentiment. Such a change can go a long way towards eliminating stigma—both societal stigma and self-stigma.

With regard to social stigma, some individuals seem to find it easy to mock people with substance dependence and to resort to name calling. That must change; people must be more aware of the impact of their words to prevent maintaining the scourge of stigma against many of our fellow citizens. At the end of the day, people with an addiction have an illness and they deserve to get treated fairly under a public health approach. We must remember that people with a substance use disorder are our family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues. Drug and alcohol issues are very common here and they can affect anyone.

As well as the social stigma and self-stigma, a huge challenge for many people with experience of drug use and many other illnesses is the belief—which is sometimes backed up by experience—that the Government does not value them or that they are not a full member of society. However, whether or not someone has experience of substance use, everyone in Scotland has rights. A person has every right to live in their community, they have every right to medical care and they have every right to vote and have their say in how the country is run.

In that vein, the national collaborative is an excellent initiative. It will empower people in Scotland who are affected by drugs and alcohol to ensure that their voices and their rights are acted on in policy and practice, and they will serve alongside people who are responsible for delivering services. I wish everyone involved all the best, and I believe that the collaborative's outcomes will be powerful.

From my own experience, I know that families, as well as service workers, are not immune to stigma. Stigma spreads, and sometimes becomes so pervasive that entire communities are characterised by stereotypes and myths. The fact that stigma can get so out of hand demonstrates the fallacy of it. That should make people reflect on their own words and consider whether we want to live in a society in which people get, and deserve, the chance of recovery and to just be the friendly, loving, kind or considerate mum, dad, brother, sister, son, daughter, friend or neighbour they are. For everyone's sake, I think that that is the best approach.

The personal cost of stigma is huge. It can reinforce the helplessness that is felt by someone with problematic drug use or increase the guilt that they might feel for what they perceive they have done to family and friends.

As we all know, and as I know personally, the risks of not getting the treatment that is needed include early death. Stigma is damaging and a barrier to treatment. In my view, it plays a big role in the number of drug-related deaths that we see.

I welcome the stigma strategy that has been developed by the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce, which identifies actions that will help to reduce stigma. I also welcome the current work by members of the task force with lived and living experience, who are leading on a stigma charter. I understand that the charter will challenge us all to consider what we can do to create a stigma-free Scotland, which is something that we must do.

Stigma does nothing but hinder people with problematic substance use, their families and friends and, sometimes, whole communities. We should all consider the effects of our language and resolve to treat everyone with dignity and respect. That could be a life-saver.

I look forward to the Scottish Government's publication of the stigma action plan, and I hope that it will be another step on the way towards supporting people to get the help that they want and creating a stigma-free Scotland.

16:09

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): Stigma is dangerous. It fuels misunderstanding of addiction and it can prevent people from seeking and receiving help. It often marginalises people who use drugs and places them at greater risk. Stigma is not only unfair and unjust—stigma kills. It is dangerous, and I agree with the motion that

“tackling stigma is everyone's responsibility”.

The stigmatisation of people who use drugs is difficult to tackle, given its pervasiveness. It is widespread throughout society as well as support services, and messaging from media and politicians often reinforces stereotypes. As the final report of the Drug Deaths Taskforce points out,

“discrimination is even enshrined in UK law, which actively discriminates against people with drug dependency in crucial areas of human rights”.

I was extremely disappointed when, in February, the former UK Government Minister of State for Crime and Policing, in giving evidence during a joint committee meeting on reducing drug deaths, used stigmatising language. When such rhetoric comes from people in positions of power and influence, it is very damaging. Those who are in positions of authority have a responsibility to consider any harm that may be caused by their language. I hope that everyone in this chamber feels the weight of that responsibility.

Stigmatising language sends the message that people who use drugs are somehow less deserving of support or should be regarded as criminals. It creates a narrative of us versus them, and can prevent the public from regarding people who use drugs with empathy and compassion. It

makes scapegoats of people who use drugs and blames them for problems that are often a cause of drug use, not a result.

To challenge that, we need to focus on the root causes of problem drug use and shift the narrative away from drug use as a driver of crime. Time and again in Parliament, the point has been made by me and others that problem drug use is a public health issue, not a criminal justice one, and I hope that we can all agree on that. The task force report states:

“Evidence shows that unacceptable and avoidable stigma and discrimination towards drug use are increased by criminalising people. We have heard that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is outdated and needs to be reformed to support harm-reduction measures and the implementation of a public health approach.”

The war on drugs has failed, and it has increased the stigmatisation and demonisation of people who use drugs, making them less likely to seek treatment. It is endangering lives. The UK must abandon this outdated and dangerous strategy. We need a new compassionate approach that seeks to uphold the rights of people who use drugs and support them into treatment—an approach that affords them their dignity, treats them like human beings and listens to what their needs are.

We also need to recognise the various ways in which stigma isolates people with drug use and prevents them from seeking support. Stigma does not only affect people who use drugs. Friends, families and carers may also have to suffer the trauma of seeing people whom they love and support being marginalised and diminished as being less than any other citizen.

People who work in front-line services will also be impacted by stigma, which is why it is essential that all those who work in addiction services undertake anti-stigma training. I am in favour of that being rolled out more widely, given that people who use drugs may be in contact with multiple services throughout their lives, including housing, mental health and social work services. Tackling stigma in the workforce will, I hope, initiate a culture change so that services are less punitive and inflexible and become more person centred.

There should be an understanding that a one-size-fits-all approach simply will not work for people who use drugs, as it does not take account of individual circumstances. People who use drugs might live chaotic lives, and they should not be punished for that. People who use drugs might also be stigmatised due to factors such as gender, ethnicity, disability, unemployment and homelessness. We need to recognise the multiple ways in which people are affected by stigma and how that reinforces trauma.

Recognising that people who use drugs are human beings, that they are not at fault and nor should they be punished is the very minimum that we can do for them. I completely agree that treating substance dependence as if it were included as part of the protected characteristic of disability would contribute to a fairer and more just society. What good comes of denying people access to adjustments that might make their lives easier and help them to engage with support and treatment services?

Equality Act 2010 regulations state that

“addiction to alcohol, nicotine or any other substance is to be treated as not amounting to an impairment”

unless it is

“the result of administration of medically prescribed drugs or other ... treatment”.

The task force’s report calls for that exemption to be removed, stating that it

“is stigmatising and discriminatory. It prevents people from receiving reasonable adjustments that may assist their engagement with treatment and ongoing recovery.”

I echo that call and urge the Scottish ministers to continue to engage with the UK Government on that matter.

Education is key to tackling stigma, and we need to centre the voices of living and lived experience—of those who know the reality of life while using drugs. We need to empower people to speak about their experiences and raise their voices in protest when stigma is perpetrated or services are failing people. However, I reiterate the point in the task force report that

“while peer programmes and advocacy can be an important part of recovery for many, it is not the responsibility of a person with lived or living experience to educate others unless they choose to do so, in which case they should be compensated for their work accordingly.”

As I said, it is the responsibility of all of us to tackle stigma and ensure that people who use drugs are treated with compassion and understanding.

In conclusion, stigma isolates people who use drugs; it shuts them off from avenues of support and prevents them from reaching out; and it is dangerous and costs lives. We must all be part of the joint effort to eradicate stigma and treat people who use drugs with the compassion, respect and dignity that they deserve.

16:16

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): This has been said many times before, but I will keep on saying it until meaningful action is taken: Scotland is experiencing a drug deaths crisis. For many people in communities such as mine in

Springburn, families continue to be devastated by drugs and are left to suffer in grief.

It is true that, in broader society, stigma exists, which might in part explain why some people do not seek the help that they need, and I agree with the Government’s emphasis on the point that stigma creates unnecessary barriers for some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

On Monday, I attended the launch of FAVOR UK’s one-year report, “Blueprint to Save Lives”. I was struck by the staff’s passion, dedication and, frankly, deep frustration over how little progress has been made in supporting some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The launch at Bluevale Community Club marked one year since Douglas Ross and the First Minister met at the same location in Glasgow, attending a meeting alongside charities, experts, and people with lived experience of drug addiction.

Following the First Minister’s admission that her Government had taken its eye off the ball, that meeting was supposed to signal a turning point in combating the drug deaths crisis in Scotland. However, it is abundantly clear from Monday’s launch that front-line experts believe that the SNP Government continues to fall short in supporting people in their road to recovery from drugs.

There has been a very modest reduction in the number of fatalities recorded last year. That, of course, has to be recognised, but let us be crystal clear that progress remains painfully slow. The figures do not lie: Scotland still has by far the worst drug deaths record in Europe with, tragically, 1,330 Scots losing their lives to drugs in 2021. Each person behind those statistics is someone’s mum, dad, son, daughter or friend.

As I touched on, FAVOR UK’s report states that the current treatment system is broken, with almost no progress having been made in reversing the crisis that has engulfed communities across Glasgow and Scotland. Despite the Government’s promise of new funding, significant shortcomings in the current framework include the fact that some of the most vulnerable people have been left in limbo, cast adrift in the system and waiting years for their treatment programmes to begin.

I strongly encourage MSPs from across the chamber to read FAVOR UK’s report, which is available on its website, to get a sense of the significant obstacles that vulnerable people face in accessing the vital treatment that, to be blunt, they need to survive.

As I have said repeatedly, I recognise that there is no silver bullet that will end the drug deaths crisis in Scotland. To that end, I agree with the Government that meaningful action to tackle stigma will be important in encouraging people to seek the treatment that they need. However, that

treatment must be readily available to access in the first place.

Given the hurdles that individuals must jump to get the treatment that they need, I have repeatedly called on the Scottish Government to back Douglas Ross's proposed right to addiction recovery bill. A key strength of that bill is that it has not been developed in a vacuum; it has been developed in conjunction with charities and front-line experts, with many of those individuals having direct lived experience and truly understanding the impact of stigma on seeking treatment. They have contributed to the development of the bill at every stage of the process so far and I sincerely thank them for their input.

The insight and expertise of organisations such as FAVOR UK and SISCO—Sustainable Interventions Supporting Change Outside—is invaluable, because they understand what it takes to guide someone to success in their recovery from substance abuse. It is no wonder that the bill received overwhelming support at the consultation stage.

The right to addiction recovery bill would guarantee access to treatment for everyone who needs it. Front-line experts, and those with lived experience, have been clear that providing reliable pathways to treatment, including rehabilitation services, is crucial in saving lives. The proposed law would provide a statutory right for individuals to access addiction treatment and recovery services, including the community-based residential rehab that experts have stressed is so important.

The bill has the backing of front-line experts and has generated widespread support. I hope that the minister and the SNP Government will back it when it comes to Parliament early in the new year. Following years of presiding over the drug deaths crisis, ministers should understand better than most that a radical solution is required to end that shameful record and ultimately to save lives.

We are done with warm words, and we are done with platitudes and lip service. As those in FAVOR UK say, "You talk, we die." The crisis has been allowed to worsen for far too long. I urge members to back Sue Webber's amendment and to back the right to addiction recovery bill when it comes to Parliament.

16:22

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): The minister is absolutely right to open today's debate by saying that stigma kills. Stigma raises barriers to accessing support and treatment and extinguishes the hope that is necessary to seek that support and treatment. It dehumanises; it others. It makes us all deaf to calls for help and

blind to our neighbours; it closes our minds and hardens our hearts. Stigma means that more and more Scots will die.

Stigma is based on misunderstanding and on the preconception that those who suffer with problem substance use are not victims of circumstance or of grotesque poverty, violent abuse and continued exploitation by unscrupulous dealers in misery.

A culture change is necessary, and nowhere more than in my home city of Dundee. The five-year rolling average death rate for Dundee from 2017 to 2021 was the highest in Scotland, standing at more than 45 deaths per 100,000 of population. This is a rolling crisis, with little progress evident.

Nicola Sturgeon announced a national mission on drugs on 20 January 2021—673 days, or nearly two years, ago. The Dundee drugs commission launched its first report, "Responding to Drug Use with Kindness, Compassion and Hope" in August 2019. That title showed the importance that the commission placed on tackling stigma in our city and, crucially, in our services. The report highlighted the need to tackle stigma and called on the authorities to

"challenge and eliminate stigma towards people who experience problems with drugs, and their families, across Dundee to ensure that everyone is treated in a professional and respectful manner".

However, in its follow-up report more than two years later, the commission recognised the efforts of the third sector in tackling stigma but went on to admonish key public services for their failure to tackle stigma, saying:

"we have seen or heard little evidence to indicate that ... the ... recommendations have been progressed".

The Government has been talking about tackling stigma for over two years. Its Drug Deaths Taskforce published a strategy on 30 July 2020 to address the stigmatisation of people and communities that are affected by drug use. What progress has been made on the delivery of that strategy? How is progress being measured? Two years on, I am afraid that the motion for today's debate could be read as little more than platitudes. The lack of progress can only really be measured in deaths year on year, person by person.

I suggest that an indicator that could be measured is those who are actually accessing services, because the most direct form of stigmatisation is how people feel when they try to access services. Are they welcome? Are they treated as equals?

The central critique of the Dundee drugs commission was that substance misuse services are punitive, that they treat clients as incapable

and lesser, and that they structure policies and treatment plans accordingly. Tackling stigma requires fundamental service reform, but where are we on reform in Dundee? We have no independent chair of the ADP. The previous one resigned months ago, and no one has told us why. Perhaps the minister has asked him and can tell Parliament. The lack of leadership from ADPs was criticised by Audit Scotland in March. The problem is not unique to Dundee, but our local ADP is literally without any of the independent leadership that we were promised.

There has been no response from the ADP, the city council or NHS Tayside to the second report of the Dundee drugs commission. That response should have appeared in the summer, yet here we are with nothing. I remind members of the contents of that report: it said that almost nothing had been done to implement the commission's first report. It had to recommend again that

“all core and funded services should be tasked”

by the drug and alcohol partnership

“with developing a plan for combating stigma and discrimination based on the core values of kindness, compassion, and hope.”

However, we have nothing—no strategy, no delivery plan, not even a response.

Adverts on Dundee bus shelters are not enough to tackle stigma. They are nowhere near enough. The motion for this debate is not enough. Dundee City Council is not doing enough, NHS Tayside is not doing enough and the Scottish Government is not doing enough.

To be frank, it would be of far more use if the minister, in her closing speech, could give us a proper update on those health boards that are, like NHS Tayside, under ministerial direction. What are the names of the single figures of people who are now in place and are responsible for MAT standard delivery, as highlighted in Labour's amendment? Where are the delivery plans? Where are the timescales? When will those individuals be held accountable in front of councillors and MSPs? When, when, when will we see change?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final speaker in the open debate will be Stuart McMillan, who joins us online.

16:27

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests. I am vice-chair of Moving On Inverclyde, which is a local addictions service. I invite the minister once again to go and visit the service. I note that Paul O'Kane visited it earlier this year and was impressed by the work of the

staff, their expertise and the organisation as a whole. That went down very well with all the staff and board members.

Like others, I have raised the issue of stigma in the chamber before. It is undeniably one of the key barriers to helping people who are living with addiction. I welcome the planned stigma action plan and I will read it carefully when it is published. I am sure that I and others will have questions about it, and I trust that it will help with challenging the stigma that people with problem drug use face.

Fundamentally, I believe that a societal change is needed when it comes to the issue of stigma. As the Parliament has heard in debates before, it is vital that stigma is tackled head on so that people can move towards recovery. Problematic substance use is a health condition, but the stigma that is associated with it can have detrimental consequences for the individual, their family and the wider community. For example, people may not acknowledge their problem for fear of being judged and, as a result, they may not want to seek the help and support that they need.

The Drug Death Taskforce, which the minister spoke about, developed a stigma charter that all organisations, including businesses and community groups, can use. It aims to create a Scotland that is free from stigma, in order to support a public health approach to problematic substance use.

I welcome the national mission and the £250 million funding over this parliamentary session. In particular, I welcome the move to a five-year funding cycle for eligible third sector and grassroots organisations, which are at the forefront of saving lives. I, and others from across parties, have highlighted that in previous debates. Partnership working is vital in providing solutions to help those with addictions, and I know that third sector organisations—not only the organisation that I am involved with but other local organisations—are crucial in that service delivery across Scotland, including in Inverclyde. The five-year funding cycle will be hugely important in helping organisations to plan their services and their help with the issue of dealing with stigma.

Every drug death is a tragedy, and I put on record my condolences to families who, sadly, have lost a loved one. During recovery month, in September, I attended a number of local events, the most poignant being the candlelit vigil that was held in Greenock. While that was primarily about providing a space for people to remember those who have lost their lives through problem substance use, attendees heard at first hand some of the real-life stories of those who are in recovery or are still living with drug dependency. I mention that event because one of the key points that were

raised that evening was the issue of dealing with stigma.

Not only is stigma damaging—as I said a few moments ago—to the individual's mental health and sense of self-worth; it discourages them from coming forward. The Drug Deaths Taskforce stigma strategy identifies actions that will help to reduce stigma. Task force members with lived and living experience are also leading the development of a stigma charter, which will challenge all of us to consider how we can work, together and individually, to create a stigma-free Scotland.

Dealing with stigma is one of the key issues that we as a society face in dealing with problem drug use and how it affects every community in the country. I do not disagree with Labour's amendment when it comes to the fact that stigma disproportionately impacts on the most deprived communities, and I agree that tackling poverty, deprivation and health inequalities is also crucial.

However, I highlight that drug dependency can affect anyone. We know that certain factors, such as adverse childhood experiences, can impact on someone's likelihood of developing problem substance use, but it is not always as clear cut. In recent months, a growing number of people who live with alcohol dependency have presented at Moving On Inverclyde.

I welcome the reported reduction in drug deaths in Inverclyde from 33 to 16. However, that is still 16 too many.

Locally, I have witnessed a growing partnership approach. Much of that came about a few years ago, as the Inverclyde drugs strategy changed. It has become far more inclusive and recognises what the public and third sectors can bring to the table, together, to help to save lives. That can be only positive in dealing with the many economic and social challenges that Inverclyde faces. However, I am concerned that, given the cost of living crisis and the many economic challenges ahead, we may see a return to an increase in deaths. I certainly hope that I am wrong about that.

Finally, when it comes to the Tory amendment, I highlight the proposed bill, which has been spoken of today and in the past. Instead of playing politics on such a vital issue, I suggest that the member who wishes to bring the bill forward goes through the parliamentary process—that they publish the bill so that all MSPs can read it and make up our own minds. The detail of any bill is important. Frankly, to ask for blanket support of something without allowing people to read the details is to take for granted the public and those who need assistance.

Angela Constance has been consistent since she became the minister. The drug deaths crisis

that Scotland faces was not going to be solved overnight. The roll-out of the national mission and its local implementation are vital to saving more lives. Tackling stigma will play an important role in delivering that outcome.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now move to the closing speeches.

16:34

Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): In rising to close for Scottish Labour, I reflect that today's debate has been an important opportunity to discuss a range of issues related to the national drugs mission and the progress that we all want in eradicating stigma around these issues. We know that stigma has an impact on the likelihood of an individual asking for the help they need to start the process of rehabilitation following a period of addiction.

As we have heard from so many colleagues across the chamber, it is crucial that we work to eradicate stigma around drug addiction and drug deaths, as well as shifting attitudes to ensure a more meaningful, open and compassionate discussion as we seek to help prevent more drug deaths and to aid more people on their recovery journey.

In doing that, we must recognise at the outset the tragic loss of so many lives. Let us all remember again that they are not just numbers; they are people who lived in our communities, and they are often family, friends and neighbours. We must start with that at the core of our approach. I was heartened to hear so many colleagues mention that. I thought that Collette Stevenson spoke particularly powerfully in that regard.

We must take a different approach when it comes to stigma. We must take a root-and-branch look at where stigma and wider issues around drugs arise. Our approach must be focused on treating the deep-rooted socioeconomic factors that lead to drug use. It should be a holistic approach that is rooted in public health. The evidence is clear that the most deprived communities are those that are most impacted, and that they have many issues to deal with. We heard from Katy Clark and other colleagues from across the chamber about the sense of endemic poverty and the real structural challenge that exists in so many communities. Most public health experts would say that we must tackle those issues at their very root in order to make the most change. Data from National Records of Scotland has shown that people are 15 times more likely to die of a drug-related incident if they live in one of the most deprived areas, compared with the least deprived areas. Tragically, more than 12,000 people have lost their lives to drugs since 2007,

leaving thousands of parents, children and friends behind, heartbroken.

We have heard contributions on the importance of services to support recovery, and particularly the importance of rehabilitation that is person centred and flexible in order to meet people where they are. As we have also heard, it can often be contradictory to assert commitments to tackling stigma and to help people access support services. In reality, there is a reduction in the support services that are available, due to budgets in health and social care reducing and budgets in local government being cut.

Claire Baker was right to highlight the need for greater investment and for greater pace of change from the Government. It is indeed the Government's responsibility to demonstrate that progress, so that everybody can have confidence in the work of the national mission.

Emma Harper: I really appreciate Paul O'Kane giving me time. We haven't really talked about the role of the media and journalists in tackling stigma. For me, it is about stigmatising images that have been used in print media. Does the member agree that that is something on which we could seek support from journalists?

Paul O'Kane: I thank Emma Harper for that important intervention. That is absolutely crucial. We know that, over many years, the media have got it wrong, and Emma Harper is right to raise that point about the images that are used around drug use, particularly those of syringes, spoons and so on. There is also an issue around the language that is used. Emma Harper spoke earlier about educating people, about the words that we use and about how we refer to people, trying to look at everyone as a human being, seeing and respecting their innate dignity. That is absolutely important, and it is something that we would all want to reflect on and encourage all parts of our society to move forward with.

We have heard contributions today about the importance of the voluntary sector and the organisations that are embedded in communities delivering vital support to help people with addiction. Alex Cole-Hamilton was right to refer to the many campaigners and community organisations that work in this space, including on the provision of safe consumption.

Stuart McMillan mentioned Moving On Inverclyde, which I know is extremely important to him. He has served on its board for many years. I had the pleasure of visiting Moving On Inverclyde in the summer. It is a community-based support service that helps people who have been affected by problematic drug use. Speaking to people over a cup of tea about their lived experience and their journey was hugely powerful for me and, in many

ways, it helped to open my mind to the different experiences that people have. I am sure that Stuart McMillan will continue to work with Moving On Inverclyde for many years, and I hope to work with him in that regard.

It is clear that our third sector needs more support. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations has revealed that third sector and voluntary organisations are facing funding crises when it comes to the support that they can offer, and we need to ensure that they can keep the lights on and the doors open so that they can offer that vital support.

I think that that is true, more broadly, of public services. My colleague Michael Marra spoke powerfully about the need to ensure that people feel respected and valued, that they are met as human beings and that they are not perceived simply on the basis of their frailties or their failures, because they often feel stigmatised in that space. Crucially, we must have public services that are person centred and person focused.

Miles Briggs made an important contribution about housing. The principle of housing first is right, but that cannot be only a headline; there needs to be meaningful support behind that, to ensure that people are not stigmatised where they live. I am sure that we all know from our casework that concerns can be raised about extremely problematic language in that space.

I am conscious of time. If we are all serious about tackling the drug crisis in Scotland, we must take a public health approach. We need a response that meets the need that exists, that mobilises finance and resources quickly to meet the challenges and that acknowledges the scale of the emergency. At its heart, we need a response that puts compassion and humanity at its core.

16:41

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): We often discuss and debate Scotland's terribly sad and shameful record on drug-related deaths. Last year, we lost 1,330 Scots—those lives were cut short and families were torn apart.

Scotland still has the highest drug death rate in Europe. As Sue Webber reminded us, Scotland's rate is 3.7 times higher than the rate for the UK as a whole. It is no exaggeration to say that, under the SNP, drug-related deaths have spiralled out of control. It is clear that the SNP's strategies to help people who are struggling with addiction have failed. We cannot go on like this.

The drug death statistics expose serious inequalities. As Paul O'Kane said, in 2021, people in the most deprived areas were more than 15 times more likely to die from drug misuse. Sadly,

last year, half of the deaths of people who were experiencing homelessness were drug related. Scotland's polydrug habit, which involves street drugs being mixed with alcohol and prescription pills, is causing 92 per cent of all drug deaths.

We agree with the minister that stigma is a problem. Stigma can prevent people from seeking the help and support that they need. Using language that dehumanises people is harmful. I agree with Gillian Mackay, who said that stigma can kill. To remove stigma, we must have a compassionate approach and an effective strategy that provides solutions to what is a health issue.

I am not convinced that having drug consumption rooms located in our communities will help to remove the stigma. In fact, I wonder whether it could do the opposite. That said, I am open to a pilot project, so that we can observe and measure the effectiveness and acceptance of consumption rooms in a Scottish context.

Paul O'Kane: Would Dr Gulhane accept that consumption facilities can take many forms and can be based around the community supports that I mentioned? There is a holistic model whereby people can receive different levels of support and use a safe consumption facility.

Sandesh Gulhane: Yes, but my worry is that drug consumption rooms could increase stigma. However, as I said, I am open to a pilot, so that we can find out how they might work in a Scottish context.

We need to bring the public with us. I believe that we can achieve that if we are also more effective at tackling those who prey on people with addictions. We need more compassion for people who are addicted to drugs and more convictions of those who profit from misery. We must strengthen our response across the drug supply chain and make Scotland a significantly harder place for organised crime groups to operate.

It saddens me that the SNP Government refused to sign up to project Adder, a UK Government scheme to help tackle drug dealing and organised crime. It has already helped with the seizure of 27 million benzodiazepine tablets that were destined for Scotland.

As for health interventions, what are the Scottish Conservatives proposing? We are calling on the SNP Government to listen to front-line experts and back our Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill, which would guarantee treatment for those most in need. The key principle of the bill, which Stuart McMillan will be glad to know is heading through the parliamentary process, is to ensure that everybody who seeks treatment for addiction can access the addiction treatment that they require. There are many options available, including community-based, short and long-term

residential rehabilitation, community-based and residential detoxification, stabilisation services and substitute prescribing services, and the approach will ensure that individuals can access a preferred treatment option, unless it is deemed harmful by a medical professional.

I turn to other points that have been made in the debate. Sue Webber referred to the huge gap between what is said and what is delivered on the ground, and she also highlighted the fact that, because everyone is unique, we need tailored support packages, especially for women with kids.

Claire Baker pointed out that we have a postcode lottery with regard to treatment. Commendably, she has started to help with the situation herself by undertaking Naloxone training.

Alex Cole-Hamilton mentioned the SNP Government's slashing of funding, which has exacerbated the situation with regard to the postcode lottery of treatment, and asked about the sort of drug testing that I believed was considered at Glastonbury this year, while Miles Briggs and Emma Harper talked about how the use of derogatory terms contributes to stigma. Mr Briggs also went to talk about the huge difference that extra support and care would make, in light of Shelter Scotland's comments about the situation pointing towards people being failed by public services and a broken housing system.

With regard to the specific mention of hepatitis C in our motion, Miles Briggs, who is also our hep C champion, pointed out that Scotland was once a world leader in eradication. However, we seemed to have lost our way.

Perhaps Willie Coffey, given his misjudged comments, needs to listen to the words of his leader, who said that the SNP took its "eye off the ball", and to Michael Marra's passionate description of the lack of action in Dundee.

Willie Coffey: Will the member give way?

Sandesh Gulhane: I think that we have heard all the misjudged comments that we need to hear. Annie Wells rightly reminded us that Scotland is suffering a drugs death crisis. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Do continue, Dr Gulhane.

Sandesh Gulhane: Thank you. She visited FAVOR UK for the launch of its report, and we all share its frustration about the lack of action, the current broken system and the barriers to treatment. FAVOR UK says "You talk—we die."

Here in Scotland—in fact, across the UK—we need to create a system that treats addiction as a chronic health condition. No one should fall through the gaps and miss out on the treatment they need; moreover, there should be no stigma

attached to addition, and I note that the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce's approach would stop people struggling with drug use being turned away from service providers.

As a result, we are calling on the Scottish Government to back the proposed Right to Addiction Recovery (Scotland) Bill, which would enshrine in law a right to treatment, so that all those affected by addiction in Scotland can get the support that they need.

Finally, I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests as a practising NHS doctor.

16:48

Angela Constance: In my opening remarks, I talked about the consequences of leaving stigma unchallenged, and members from all around the chamber have done the same in the debate. We all acknowledge the risks of stigma becoming embedded not just in society but in services, and that tackling it is key to public service reform—by which I mean, reform not just of drug and alcohol services but of the wider public sector response. Of course, one of the actions that will flow from our proposed stigma action plan is to really get underneath the skin of the issue and interrogate policy and practice with regard to what is being delivered on the ground.

Today, I can accept the amendment from the Labour Party. I acknowledge the wider range of harms of drugs beyond those where drug overdose is the cause of death. My officials will, of course, liaise with the National Records of Scotland and Public Health Scotland in and around the linkage of drug-related health data and public health intelligence, and we will report back to colleagues on that.

This is quite difficult terrain, given the impact of stigma. Sometimes, for understandable reasons, people with particular conditions do not acknowledge their drug or alcohol use and, sadly, the problem is established only when it is too late. Of course, I have taken action to start work on introducing the treatment target, and members will be able to see—through the national mission plan, which we have published, and the annual report—how we are measuring, tracking and monitoring progress, with the central aim of getting more people into treatment.

Miles Briggs: I hope that the member has had time to read FAVOR's report. It is an excellent report, and I congratulate FAVOR on it. It asks for a clear definition of residential rehabilitation to be introduced, and for the introduction of a centralised referral pathway and funding system. Is the minister considering that recommendation?

Angela Constance: I read many excellent reports drafted by our diverse third sector community and the drug and alcohol sector.

I politely and kindly say to Mr Briggs that we have a clear definition of residential rehabilitation. Work on that was undertaken before my time as Minister for Drugs Policy, under the leadership of Dr David McCartney, and the work of the residential rehabilitation working group is still going on.

On the point about working towards more national approaches, particularly around what is possible in relation to national and regional procurement frameworks, that is something that we are actively engaged with.

I agree with much of what is in the Conservatives' amendment. I am glad that they have expressed support for the recommendations that were made by the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce, and I hope that that support extends to all of the recommendations, including that our criminal justice system must take a public health approach to drug use, and that we cannot punish people out of addiction, particularly those people with multiple and complex needs.

As I have always said with regard to any member's bill, I will give the proposed right to addiction recovery bill a fair and sympathetic hearing. I have no reason to do otherwise. Of course, as is the case with any bill—a member's bill or a Government bill—the parliamentary process must be gone through.

In the meantime, the consultation on the proposed human rights bill will take place next year. That bill will be introduced during this parliamentary session, and it will give effect in Scots law—as far as possible within devolved competence—to a range of internationally recognised human rights, such as the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and the right to adequate housing and an adequate standard of living. Of course, the national collaborative will set out how the rights that are to be included in the human rights bill can be effectively implemented for people who use drugs, because the solutions very much lie with the lived experience community.

I am pleased that members have acknowledged the Scottish Government investment not only in Harper house but in other endeavours to increase provision for women, such as River Garden Auchincruive in Ayr and the Aberlour Child Care Trust. I am sure that we will all be positive advocates for Harper house and do our bit to raise awareness of that fantastic therapeutic facility, which is part of the commitment of this Government and this Parliament to keep the Promise and keep families together.

Funding is important. It was, of course, the Auditor General for Scotland who said—admittedly, earlier this year—that, as a result of the national mission, there had been an increase of 67 per cent in real terms in allocated funding. We are, of course, all living with the consequences of inflation.

We have ensured that there are residential care pathways in every local area, and we have very much taken a belt-and-braces approach to funding.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: My party and I are very grateful for the investment that the Government is making in residential care pathways and rehabilitation and, in particular, the investment for mothers with small children who are affected by substance use. However, residential care pathways are meaningless unless stabilisation services are adequate to get people into those pathways. Can the minister tell members a little about the investment that she is making there?

Angela Constance: I remain absolutely committed to filling that gap. In our current service provision, we invest around £1 million in existing stabilisation services. Stabilisation services are very distinct from residential rehabilitation. We will come forward with an updated proposition as part of our overall response to the task force.

I was making a point about a belt-and-braces approach to funding. As well as giving continuity to local areas, we are directly funding 200-plus projects throughout Scotland. A wide range of funds is available for our wonderful voluntary sector to tap into. Some of the funding that is attached to the implementation of MAT standards directly supports nearly 100 additional posts in the sector.

Michael Marra: Will the minister take an intervention?

Angela Constance: I am going to move on because I am really short of time. I have to reply to a number of members, including Michael Marra.

As a number of members have acknowledged, we have laid groundwork for safer drug consumption facilities. There would have been an easier way to do all of that, of course, but we are where we are, and we are looking at capturing that within our existing powers.

I say to Claire Baker that families will absolutely be part of the stigma action plan. There is, of course, the investment in action that we are already taking around family-inclusive practice and the whole-family approach.

I would be delighted to engage further with Emma Harper, because she has raised important issues around supporting the workforce within and outwith drug and alcohol services, whether that is

around trauma-informed approaches or stigma modules.

Miles Briggs—and, I think, Michael Marra—spoke about the flexibility of housing policies. It is an important point that policies need to be flexible when it comes to the allocation of accommodation. Through our work on stigma, when people say, “Oh no, we don’t discriminate,” our challenge to them is to say, “Well, demonstrate it—prove that you don’t discriminate against the most marginalised and stigmatised community in Scotland.” The matter is one of equality and equity. Different people need different levels of support. We will say, “Show us your policy and show us your data,” but we will also want to know what the lived and living experience community is saying on the ground about their treatment, how services make people feel, and how they are or are not supporting people into treatment or recovery.

Willie Coffey generated a bit of debate, but he said it well in many ways. This is about hope. I remember very well the visit to Recovery Enterprises Scotland and the time that we had together there. I remember the recovery walk in Kilmarnock, on which I saw for myself some of the projects, including the recovery hub, which has received funding as a result of the national mission endeavour.

The visibility of the recovery community is absolutely essential, because the evidence shows that the best way to reduce stigma is through contact with people with lived and living experience. That has the best long-term effect on reducing stigma.

I genuinely thank all members for their contributions. Although no one aspect of the national mission to save and improve lives should be considered in isolation if we are to secure that all-Government and all-Scotland response to tackling drug deaths, I brought this debate to Parliament to ensure that all members were involved before we finalised the stigma action plan and our response to the Drug Deaths Taskforce. The two documents will be published together to demonstrate exactly how we are turning words into action, because tackling stigma is cross-cutting—that is core—and we are going to get under the skin of the many challenges that we face.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are three questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-06924.1, in the name of Sue Webber, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06924, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: taking concrete action to tackle stigma, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: We will move to a vote. There will be a short suspension to allow members to access digital voting.

17:00

Meeting suspended.

17:03

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We will proceed with the division on amendment S6M-06924.1, in the name of Sue Webber. Members should cast their votes now.

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)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)

Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 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)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

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

Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 28, Against 67, Abstentions 23.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-06924.2, in the name of Claire Baker, which seeks to amend motion S6M-06924, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: taking concrete action to tackle stigma, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-06924, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: taking concrete action to tackle stigma, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is now closed.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to get the app to work. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)

Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 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)
 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)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 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)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 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) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 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)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
 (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 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)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-06924, in the name of Angela Constance, on the national drugs mission: taking concrete action to tackle stigma, as amended, is: For 90, Against 28, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament acknowledges that stigma prevents people from seeking the help and support that they need and that using language that de-humanises people is harmful; recognises that tackling stigma is everyone's responsibility and that the existence of stigma diminishes all communities as it creates unreasonable and unnecessary barriers for people in all aspects of their lives; agrees that problem drug use is a health issue and that people who experience it deserve parity of treatment as with any other long-term, life-affecting health condition; believes that every individual's experience of recovery is unique and should not be stigmatised, and that people with experience of problem drug use and their families should be treated with dignity, respect and equity; recognises that treating substance dependence as if it were included as part of the protected characteristic of disability, would contribute to a more fair and just society; supports strengthening the meaningful involvement of people with experience of problem drug use in their local communities and wider society in the development and implementation of policy; calls on all MSPs to lead by example in challenging the stigma of people who use drugs and their families; welcomes the planned publication by the Scottish Government of a Stigma Action Plan, which should embed these principles and drive action on the stated commitments; recognises that drug deaths and wider drug-

related harms disproportionately impact on the most deprived communities; believes that tackling substance use requires policies that address poverty, deprivation and Scotland's wider health inequalities; agrees that people with an addiction should be able to access the full range of drug treatment and mental health services wherever they live; regrets the delays in fully implementing the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) standards, and agrees that the standards have an essential role to play in tackling the drug deaths crisis and wider drug-related harms; acknowledges that there is a need to know not only the number of people who have tragically lost their lives to a drug overdose, but also due to health conditions caused by long-term problematic drug use, including, for example, cardiovascular disease, end-stage liver disease, HIV or hepatitis C, and believes that such information is essential to inform policy, direct resources and save lives.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time and I close the meeting.

Meeting closed at 17:07.

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