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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 14 June 2023

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

Portfolio Question Time

Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time. The first portfolio is wellbeing economy, fair work and energy. Any member who wishes to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

I advise members that we are very pressed for time across the afternoon, so the usual plea for brevity in questions and responses has an extra significance today as I hope to get in as many questions as possible.

Economically Inactive People (NHS Waiting Lists and Long Covid)

1. **Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what proportion of the reportedly rising number of people of working age who are economically inactive are inactive as a result of national health service waiting lists or long Covid. (S6O-02357)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): Scotland's labour market continues to perform well, with unemployment at just 3.1 per cent from January to March 2023. Economic inactivity due to illness is a challenge not just in Scotland but across all these islands, and analysis suggests that most people who are now inactive due to long-term sickness were already out of the labour market for another reason. Nonetheless, economic inactivity due to ill health is a key concern for the Scottish Government, and "Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation" makes a commitment to address Scotland's labour market inactivity challenges.

Jackie Baillie: A recent report from the Resolution Foundation has revealed that a greater proportion of Scottish economic inactivity is attributable to health problems than is the case for the rest of the United Kingdom. We know that long Covid has left many key workers, including public sector workers, carers, nurses, doctors and teachers, debilitated and unable to work. Although

we can debate the absence of clear clinical pathways and long Covid clinics, will the cabinet secretary agree to investigate why so many public sector workers are losing their jobs, with the consequent loss of their expertise, simply because their employers lack understanding about their condition?

Richard Lochhead: The member raises an important issue, and I would not want anyone to lose their job as a result of their employer not understanding their condition.

I should point out that Salus and working health services Scotland provide return-to-work and occupational health services for people who have health conditions or injuries that are impacting on their work, including long Covid, in order to help them to stay in work. I would hope that all employers, in the private sector or the public sector, are taking advantage of those services to help their employees.

The member has asked me to look into a specific issue, which I am willing to do because I am interested in the point that she makes. I will certainly do that.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): When the COVID-19 Recovery Committee took some evidence on long Covid from sufferers of the condition, one of the issues that they identified was the difficulty that sufferers faced in getting back into the workplace, because of the time that it takes them to get a diagnosis and then a treatment path. They tied that to the absence of long Covid clinics in Scotland.

The First Minister, when he was Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, said that he was open to the notion of long Covid clinics in Scotland. Can the minister give any indication of whether there is going to be any progress from the Government on introducing those vital clinics?

Richard Lochhead: Again, the member raises an important issue. He may wish to ask health ministers about progress on the clinics, because it is up to local health boards to determine how to deliver those kinds of services in their localities. As he will be aware, the Scottish Government made available around £10 million for long Covid-related issues, so there is some resource being dedicated to the condition.

Again, I note that the member raises a powerful point. I urge him to raise with health ministers the issue regarding progress on long Covid clinics, as it is an important one.

Infrastructure (Impact on Business)

2. **Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is on what impact poor

infrastructure has on the ability of Scottish businesses to succeed. (S6O-02358)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): Continuing to deliver high-quality public infrastructure is a priority for the Scottish Government, which is why our policy prospectus committed to targeting capital spend on achieving net zero and maintaining high-quality public infrastructure and services across the country.

Our capital budget for 2023-24 is just over £6 billion. The UK Government's planned real-terms cuts in our capital funding over the next five years will significantly impact on our capital plans; however, we will do what we can to maximise the funding that is available to support employment, Scottish businesses and the economy through Scotland's infrastructure investments.

Finlay Carson: A new poll has revealed that nine out of 10 people want a full or partial upgrade of the A75 and A77, with 80 per cent of those citing safety fears as their major concern. Nearly half insist that the lack of investment is not only putting tourists off visiting but putting people off moving to the south-west of Scotland.

That comes on the back of an economic investment assessment that highlighted the £5 billion-worth of positive benefit to the economy if proper transport infrastructure was in place. Does the Scottish National Party accept that rural businesses and rural communities are being disproportionately let down through the dire management of Scottish infrastructure?

Richard Lochhead: The member raises the importance of the A75, which I hope is recognised across the chamber; it certainly is by the Scottish Government. The A75 not only is important to Scotland's economy but provides a critical link between Northern Ireland and the wider markets of the rest of the UK and Europe by connecting the ports to the wider trunk road network.

The member would face the same challenges—if, heaven forbid, his party was ever to be in government—of the financial storms that the Scottish Government has had to cope with in its budgets over the past decade or so, ranging from the banking crisis, the Tory party's austerity agenda, the impact of the pandemic, Brexit, the cost of living and cost of business crises, the war in Ukraine and so on. The Scottish Government has also had to cope with their impacts on infrastructure projects and the speed at which those can be delivered, and on the budgets that can be made available for those very expensive infrastructure projects. A little bit of realism would benefit the member when he approaches these subjects.

The bottom line is that we agree that the A75 requires work and is a very important trunk road for Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Daniel Johnson.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): First I welcome the new tourism minister to his place. Tight labour markets have consequences for infrastructure. I speak to businesses who can identify potential workers, but they cannot travel from where they live to where they need to work. Has the Scottish Government undertaken a critical analysis of key missing transport links and infrastructure that are inhibiting current labour markets?

Richard Lochhead: Of course the Scottish Government has transport plans and policies that take into account the need for people to travel to work and the importance of routes around Scotland to allow that to happen. The member raises an important point, because labour shortages and skill shortages are very important; they are undermining some of the sectors in our economy that have demand for their products and services but cannot meet that demand because they cannot find the labour or the appropriate skills.

In some ways, that is a sign of success because they are doing so well, but to capitalise on that success, we need to make sure that people are available for those particular industries and sectors. That important point has to be taken into account by the Scottish Government in relation to transport plans and wider economic policies. However, Brexit is the issue that is most often cited to me as one of the key causes of why many sectors face labour shortages and of the hurdles that people overseas have to jump over to come and work in Scotland, even when they have an employer who is willing to employ them. A range of issues has to be addressed there.

Levelling Up Funding (Islands)

3. Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding levelling up funding for Scotland's islands. (S6O-02359)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): The Scottish Government engages with the UK Government on a regular basis on the implications of its levelling-up policy for Scotland, especially with regard to its impact on devolution. However, the levelling-up fund is a UK Government scheme that circumvents the Scottish Government. Therefore, Scottish ministers have no say in how it is allocated or what projects are supported.

Shetland is the only island to have received an award thus far in the Highlands and Islands, demonstrating how poorly the fund has provided support for Scotland's islands and rural and remote places.

Beatrice Wishart: The people of Fair Isle, for whom levelling-up support has been allocated for a new ferry, would perhaps disagree with what the minister just said. They are very much looking forward to having their ageing interisland ferry replaced.

Short tunnels to the north isles could be a better long-term solution, so I wonder whether the minister would seek a meeting with his relevant UK counterpart to discuss levelling-up funding with a view to short tunnels between Shetland's islands communities.

Richard Lochhead: The member will be aware that my colleague Neil Gray intends to have much correspondence and many meetings with the UK Government over the future of the levelling-up funds. I will pick up on one point that the member made. My comments were not whatsoever intended to downplay the merits of the Fair Isle award. I was simply making the point that, in the most recent round of funding of a £4.8 billion project, that was the only award for all of the Highlands and Islands.

Apparently, my constituency does not deserve any levelling-up funding, even though, if you look at the economic and social stats, it should qualify for that kind of funding. Many parts of the Highlands would have done so under the European funding, which the levelling-up funding was partly introduced to replicate, but of course the Highlands and Islands were deemed low priority under the UK Government's criteria, whereas when we were in Europe, they were deemed high priority.

The final point that I will make to the member is that the fund mostly—if not wholly—goes through local government in Scotland, so she might wish to speak to her local authority about its discussions with the UK Government about future rounds of the levelling-up fund. However, I will certainly pass on her point to my colleague Neil Gray to ensure that it is incorporated.

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Despite previously benefiting enormously from European Union funding, does the minister share my view that the Western Isles received nothing in either round of the levelling up fund? Does he also share my views that the apparent determination of the UK Government to ignore the devolution settlement is unhelpful and that structural funds should be devolved to the Scottish Government as a priority?

Richard Lochhead: The member makes a good point. Originally, the Scottish Government was led to believe that there would be a consequential of £400 million for it to allocate in tandem with Scottish priorities; then, at the last moment, the UK Government changed its mind and decided to allocate the whole of the fund across the UK according to its own criteria, with the Scottish Government and other devolved Administrations having no meaningful say in the process whatsoever.

Then, there is the idea that the Western Isles should not qualify for the funding—more than £4.8 billion-worth of funding—when I expect that later today members in the chamber will debate the fragility of the Western Isles economy. That fragility is recognised by the Scottish Government and it was recognised by the European Union, but it has not been recognised by the UK Government.

Solar Energy

4. Annabelle Ewing (Cowdenbeath) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its vision for solar energy. (S6O-02360)

The Minister for Energy (Gillian Martin): The Scottish Government published a draft vision for the future of solar energy in Scotland as part of our draft energy strategy and just transition plan. The consultation on the plan has now closed and we are reviewing the many responses and the evidence received. We expect to publish the final solar vision by the end of 2023.

Annabelle Ewing: The minister will be aware of the repeated calls that have been made for the setting of a stretching but achievable target for solar power, because that is seen as a sine qua non to unlocking the huge potential of solar power in Scotland and to secure the just transition that we all wish to see. Is the minister sympathetic to the calls for the setting of a stretching but achievable target?

Gillian Martin: Absolutely—I heard those calls and, as I said, solar was a key part of the energy strategy and just transition draft plan. Through the consultation for that, we invited stakeholders to provide their views on setting a solar deployment ambition and to submit evidence to support them. The consultation is now closed and we are reviewing the responses. By the end of 2023, we are going to provide an updated position on where we see the ambition, and the associated targets will also be set out. To date, 400MW is being generated through solar photovoltaic systems, with 375MW in the pipeline, but I agree that we can do much more.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): We share the minister's ambition for solar, but it is

important that our energy mix and targets are based on evidence and data. At what temperature does the Government's modelling show that a reduction in solar panel output begins, and as temperatures increase as a result of climate change, what source will provide continuous and constant power to compensate?

Gillian Martin: As Liam Kerr knows and as I have said, an energy mix is very important. That is why we invested so much in ScotWind. Wind and solar are compatible, because when the wind blows the sun tends not to shine; the member will know that from living in the north-east. Members will notice some developments happening in that area. For example, I spoke to representatives of the Scottish Power-owned Whitelee wind farm, which is combining solar panels with the capabilities of its wind farm in recognition of that fact. The member is right that we need to look at the energy mix in the round, but wind and solar are eminently compatible.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Given the huge opportunities for solar in our urban and rural communities, will the minister consider at least a 4GW target, given the very positive evidence that the cross-party group on energy efficiency and renewables got on that at last night's meeting? We need support for existing and new homes, buildings and solar farms, given the biodiversity and rural impacts that they could have across the country.

Gillian Martin: I absolutely recognise the level of ambition that there is in the solar sector. Solar Energy Scotland has requested that the Scottish Government set a target of 4GW, with an upper target of 6GW, and of course we are looking at that. Scottish Renewables has also called for a target of 1GW on public sector buildings and I think that we have the potential to put solar on a lot of our public buildings. A lot of local authorities are making that decision right now. My own local authority, Aberdeenshire Council, is providing solar panels for those who live in local authority housing, so there is potential there, working in partnership across local government and the Scottish Government and with our partners in the sector.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 was not lodged.

Connectivity (Support for Island Businesses)

6. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing to tourism and other businesses within island communities to mitigate the impact of any connectivity issues affecting them. (S6O-02362)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): We

understand the critical interdependence between ferries, the tourism sector and businesses across our islands.

Any scheme for additional support for businesses along the lines suggested by the member needs to be carefully considered and would require stark choices to be made about funding priorities, set against efforts to provide resilience in the network. However, the Scottish Government has already given a commitment to look into this further.

Jamie Greene: The Scottish Government has had plenty time to look into this because the ferry fiasco that our islands now face is not a recent event—it has been happening for some years. Hotels, restaurants, shops, cafes, caravan sites and cycle hire businesses—you name it, even our amazing breweries—are all suffering. They are losing money and they are losing customers right now, so I would like to ask the minister what analysis the Scottish Government has done on what this ferry crisis is costing our island communities. Why will the Scottish Government not commit to the immediate launch of a compensation fund so that those businesses can get back on their feet right now?

Richard Lochhead: Of course, Parliament has an opportunity to debate that topic later today. We do not underestimate in any shape or form the impact of the ferry disruptions on the economies of our islands—particularly, as the member says, the impact on tourism and local businesses. That is why the focus up to now has been on building a resilient ferries network to ensure that we can get to the root of the issue facing the islands and sort it out.

However, as I said, the Government is currently exploring other options to see whether we can offer support, where appropriate, and the First Minister commented on that last week in the chamber.

In the meantime, there are many other ways in which the Scottish Government is supporting the islands, with £26 million to support the national islands plan, including £4.1 million this year, rural rates relief, £50 million through the islands growth deals, and the rural delivery plan that we are committed to. Also, through the R100—reaching 100 per cent—programme, we installed 16 new subsea fibre cables, leading to 15 islands, which is crucial for tourism businesses and other businesses. We are doing a lot to help island economies, but we recognise that there are particular pressures just now.

Renewable Energy Projects (Rural Communities)

7. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is ensuring that rural communities, including Dumfries and Galloway, benefit from current and future renewable energy projects. (S6O-02363)

The Minister for Energy (Gillian Martin): Community benefits are a well-established, integral part of renewable energy developments in Scotland, enabling all communities to benefit from our vast natural energy resources. Our community and renewable energy scheme—CARES—provides grants and loans that help communities to benefit from the transition to net zero. CARES also provides impartial support and advice about community benefits and shared ownership schemes.

We have commissioned independent research that will help us to ensure that our policies, advice and funding continue to deliver benefits to communities across Scotland. That research is due to report this summer.

Emma Harper: Many areas across Scotland benefit from renewable energy projects and some of those projects can lead to the regeneration of derelict areas as well as bringing training opportunities in highly skilled and highly paid jobs to the area for local people.

There is the potential for an offshore development near Luce Bay in the Solway Firth, called SW1. However, one of the challenges in attracting investment in the project is in engaging people regarding the potential benefits for Stranraer and Wigtownshire. Can the minister indicate whether the Scottish Government is doing any work to inform communities about how they could benefit from such energy projects?

Gillian Martin: The Scottish Government works closely with partners, including Local Energy Scotland, to increase communities' awareness and understanding of the opportunities that are presented by renewable energy projects, including the potential for shared ownership and community benefits. Our long-standing community and renewable energy scheme provides impartial support and advice as well as funding to communities to help them to make the most of the opportunities and to realise some of the ambitions that they may have. Our good-practice principles clearly set out the need for developers to engage with local communities early and extensively on renewable energy proposals. I have been having positive conversations with various developers about how they can improve their engagement and be inventive with the type of community benefits that they offer, which will have a positive impact on people's lives. Emma Harper will know

that, to date, Dumfries and Galloway has benefited from around £4.6 million in community benefits.

R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme

8. Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the uptake in the Western Isles of R100 Scottish broadband voucher scheme vouchers, worth up to £5,000, for properties for which there is no roll-out of superfast broadband planned. (S6O-02364)

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): The R100 plan involves rolling out superfast broadband to as many properties in the Western Isles as possible. Currently, superfast broadband coverage on the Western Isles stands at 80.5 per cent, up from just 1.3 per cent in 2014. That is largely due to publicly funded investment through Digital Scotland's superfast broadband programme. The R100 Scottish broadband voucher scheme is demand led and, as yet, no vouchers have been claimed in the Western Isles. However, the R100 team is in advanced talks with commercial operators with a view to them becoming registered suppliers for the Western Isles.

Alasdair Allan: A number of my constituents have recently expressed concern that some of the companies that are listed on the R100 website as being active in the Western Isles and, as such, able to utilise the R100 vouchers are declining to undertake the work when approached by interested residents. What more could be done to make it clearer which companies will do the work in the islands so that people can use the vouchers that they are entitled to?

Richard Lochhead: Alasdair Allan is correct that the situation needs to improve, and quickly. I assure him that advanced talks are under way with a number of suppliers with a view to them becoming registered on R100 schemes. I am confident that those talks will, ultimately, yield a positive outcome for the Western Isles. I assure him that I will keep a close eye on the matter and, at any point, I am happy to discuss with the member the specific obstacles that his constituents are facing to taking advantage of the vouchers. As a Government, we are exploring many other options because, as we all know, technology is moving on quickly. As a relatively new minister for the portfolio, I am keen to understand quickly how we can take advantage of those new technologies for our island communities in Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on wellbeing economy, fair work and energy.

There will be a brief pause before we move to the next portfolio, to allow front-bench teams to change position.

Finance and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is finance and parliamentary business. If a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question. There is quite a lot of interest in this portfolio, so I appeal for succinct questions and answers.

Budget 2023-24 (Sport and Leisure Facilities)

1. Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of the 2023-24 budget on the ability of local authorities to keep sport and leisure facilities open to the public. (S6O-02365)

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick):

The Scottish Government places great importance on sport and leisure facilities and believes that everyone should have access to those services. We have increased the resources that are available to local government in 2023-24 by more than £793 million, which is a real-terms increase of £376 million or 3 per cent compared with the 2022-23 budget figures. That does not take away from the challenges that are being faced by all public services in the light of years of austerity, the cost of living crisis and sky-high energy prices. However, it is for local authorities to manage their own budgets and to allocate the total financial resources that are available to them on the basis of local needs and priorities.

Foysoyl Choudhury: The reduction in local government budgets has forced pools and leisure centres to pass on the increases in their running costs to the clubs and customers who use them. We cannot allow swimming pools to become unaffordable and let involvement in and enthusiasm for Scotland's highest-participation sports decline.

Recently, the United Kingdom Government announced a £63 million fund specifically to support swimming pools in England. Does the minister recognise the value of swimming pools, and can he tell us what Barnett consequentialia are to be made available to local authorities as a result of the UK Government's spending?

Joe FitzPatrick: Local sport leisure facilities including swimming pools play a vital part in supporting the physical and mental health of the nation, and we have repeatedly called on the UK Government to use all the powers at its disposal to tackle the cost of living crisis and provide appropriate energy bill relief to leisure facilities,

particularly to indoor water and ice facilities, whose energy costs are absolutely crippling. Therefore, following the UK Government's announcement of the financial package to support swimming pools in England, we are considering what support can be provided to the sport and leisure sector in Scotland and many local authorities to ensure the longer-term sustainability and energy efficiency of those facilities.

Many leisure facilities and local authorities have taken action to reduce energy costs, but the situation is really challenging, so I call on the UK Government to step up and support leisure facilities, particularly indoor water and ice facilities.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): This morning, the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee heard evidence about swimming pools closing right across Scotland. Vibrant, packed community hubs such as Bucksburn in Aberdeen have shut because the Scottish National Party administration slashed the sports budget.

As we heard, there is money from the UK Government to fund swimming pools, so, as some of that needs to be used to get Bucksburn swimming pool back open again, can the minister tell us today when that money will be allocated?

Joe FitzPatrick: The member is again trying to make the Scottish Government take decisions for local authorities.

Douglas Lumsden: No—you've got the money for it.

Joe FitzPatrick: Local authorities are elected on their own democratic merit—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden, I invited you to ask a supplementary question; I did not invite you to then provide the answer. Let the minister be heard.

Joe FitzPatrick: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Local authorities have their own democratic mandate to determine how they dispose of the funding that comes to them. Obviously, any money that comes to the Scottish Government in relation to Barnett consequentialia will be disbursed in the usual way as part of the budgeting process, and I think that that is absolutely appropriate.

I have already said that we are considering whether there is further financial support that the Scottish Government wants to put in place in relation to those facilities.

Swimming pools and ice facilities are two particular areas where the energy costs are absolutely crippling. The UK Government has the powers and can take action to support those facilities now.

Taxation Proposal (Scottish Green Party)

2. **Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it has conducted any modelling on the potential behavioural impact of the Scottish Green Party's proposal to introduce a new increased tax rate for those earning between £75,000 and £125,000. (S6O-02366)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The Scottish Government is aware of the risks and benefits arising from behavioural responses to policy proposals and actively works with stakeholders such as His Majesty's Revenue and Customs to monitor and continually improve the evidence base to help inform policy development.

As is standard practice, any planned changes to Scottish income tax will be announced during the regular annual budget process. Our approach to taxation will continue to be guided by the strategic objectives and principles that are set out in the framework for tax that underpins our fair and proportionate approach.

Annie Wells: Under the Scottish National Party, Scotland is already the highest-taxed part of the UK. Hundreds of thousands of Scottish workers pay more tax for doing the same job as people south of the border. That impacts teachers, police officers and national health service staff. If the SNP plans to increase taxes even more—especially if they listen to the extreme Green Party—it could drive people away. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it would be reckless to increase tax so much that it ends up raising less money to support public services?

Shona Robison: First, based on the latest forecast that was published by the Scottish Fiscal Commission, which is an independent organisation, we calculate that 52 per cent of taxpayers in Scotland will pay less income tax than they would in the rest of the UK.

With regard to the money that is raised, we estimate that the income tax policy changes that have been announced for 2023-24 alone will add £590 million to the Scottish budget. That is additional money to spend on public services, some of which we heard calls for earlier on, and it also supports individuals, households and the economy. If the Tories are saying that they want lower personal and business taxation but higher spending on public services, they are suggesting a financial model that exists nowhere in the world. They need to come clean and tell us what their position is. If it is lower tax and higher spending, how does that work?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a number of supplementary questions, which will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The Greens and the SNP first worked together to make progressive changes to income tax in 2018. The Tories claimed then that it would result in a flight south of the border by high-income taxpayers. Is there any evidence that that actually happened? How much money has been raised for our essential public services as a result of those progressive tax changes?

Shona Robison: In December 2021, we published a policy evaluation of the income tax reforms that were implemented in 2018-19, which showed limited evidence of Scottish taxpayers lowering their taxable income in response to increasing tax rates. Our analysis also suggests that the policy raised between £230 million and £245 million that year, compared with the amount that we would have raised if we had implemented the rates and bands that were applicable elsewhere in the UK. In December 2023, the Scottish Fiscal Commission estimated that our income tax policy will raise £1 billion of additional revenue in 2023-24, compared with what we would have raised if we had matched the UK Government rates. Tory policy puts that money at risk.

Finally, Scotland continues to seek consistent, positive, net inward migration from the rest of the UK, and the latest available figures show that that was around 10,000 people, which we welcome.

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): Can the Deputy First Minister tell us how much tax revenue would have been lost from the budgets that pay for the national health service, schools and all the other public services if the Scottish Government had copied the UK Government, as the Tories demanded, and cut tax for the wealthiest?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please answer briefly, cabinet secretary.

Shona Robison: As I said earlier, the modelling that was done by the independent Scottish Fiscal Commission found that, had we done as the Tories asked and matched UK policy in 2023-24, Scotland would be £1 billion worse off. That is £1 billion that would have been stripped from the NHS, schools, social services and councils, to cover things such as swimming pools, in order to provide a tax cut to the better off. That is what the Tories wanted us to do but, thankfully, we did not do that.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Just a year ago, we were told that the resource spending review was absolutely critical to those questions of our public finances but, yesterday, Shona Robison came to the Finance and Public Administration Committee and told us that the plans for returning the size of the public sector to

pre-Covid levels had been scrapped. Has the resource spending review been scrapped in its entirety? Does it form any part of Government policy any more? On 23 June last year, she said that it would “bring to life” her Government’s policy agenda. Has the review been killed off entirely?

Shona Robison: No—but, like any other Government, we have to take account of key elements that change. For example, the negative tax reconciliation—which we now know we will have to deal with next year—was caused by the forecast, due to Covid 19 at that time. We also have to deal with inflation-led pay deals. We did not know that inflation was going to be at the height that it is at, but that has driven pay deals that go well beyond what was budgeted for. We have to deal with all the other inflationary pressures on the budget and we have to make room for spending on social security and health. The RSR remains important but, in the medium-term financial strategy, I set out a plan to deal with all those challenges. What we need to hear from Labour is whether it will back us on those plans.

Budget 2023-24 (Child Poverty)

3. Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what funding has been allocated in the Scottish budget 2023-24 to tackle child poverty. (S6O-02367)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The Scottish budget includes £405 million for our game-changing Scottish child payment and £83.7 million for discretionary housing payments to mitigate the United Kingdom Government’s policies, including the benefit cap.

We continue to invest around £1 billion in the provision of funded early learning and childcare and will make £108 million available for employability support, to enable an increase in services for parents who are out of work or in low-income employment.

Our latest progress report on tackling child poverty, which was published this week, estimates that

“£3 billion was invested across a range of programmes targeted at low income households, with £1.25 billion directly benefitting children.”

Stephanie Callaghan: Last week, a report by End Child Poverty, entitled “Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2021/22”, highlighted that the unacceptable levels of child poverty that remain across the UK are likely to worsen due to the devastating impact of the Tory-driven cost of living crisis.

Although investment within its fixed budget by the Scottish Government, and initiatives such as the Scottish child payment alongside the newly established cash-first approach to tackling food insecurity, are welcome, what fiscal levers would the Scottish Government require to enable it to truly alleviate the pressing issue of child poverty?

Shona Robison: Stephanie Callaghan is quite right to point to the Tory-driven cost of living crisis that underpins the challenge that many families are facing with their household budgets at this time. Analysis published on Tuesday with our child poverty progress report estimates that 90,000 fewer children will live in relative and absolute poverty this year as a result of Scottish Government policies, with poverty levels 9 per cent lower than they would otherwise have been.

We are determined to do everything that we can to provide help to those who need it within the scope of our limited powers and fixed budget. As I have just outlined, that includes mitigating the UK Government’s actions. However, we want to do more than mitigate, and it is only by having the full powers that this country needs, and with the Government having all the levers over the economy, social security and employment, including the minimum wage, to tackle poverty and inequalities, that we can truly do that.

I know that the Tories do not like to hear about poverty, but those are the facts.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Scottish councils have been informed at short notice via the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that the same level of funding provided for tackling holiday hunger programmes will not be offered this summer by this Scottish National Party Government. That simply confirms that it is willing to stretch local government budgets further and further.

Will the cabinet secretary commit to matching last year’s funding, to ensure that tackling child poverty and hunger programmes that local councils across Scotland had already planned can go ahead?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: As briefly as possible, cabinet secretary.

Shona Robison: The member will know, because the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice said so in the chamber yesterday, that our funding package to local authorities includes targeted support for eligible families during the school holidays throughout the school year. We have provided local authorities with £21.75 million to support free school meals for eligible families during the school holidays during this academic year. That is available to families who are eligible for free school meals on the basis of low income, regardless of the age of their children. Councils

have the flexibility to put in place any approach or approaches that meet local needs and circumstances.

Sewage

4. Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to propose a parliamentary debate on sewage. (S6O-02368)

The Minister for Cabinet and Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Any proposals for Government business in Parliament are agreed by the Scottish Cabinet, subject to consideration by the Parliamentary Bureau and, in turn, approval by the Parliament.

Alex Cole-Hamilton: I am very grateful for that reply, but I am not sure that it was an answer. There was a lack of urgency in the minister's response, which characterises the Government's whole approach to the issue. It is an urgent issue—it is urgent to our constituents. Every day, thousands upon thousands of gallons of sewage are purposely dumped in our rivers and our waterways, yet it has been 18 months since we had a meaningful Government statement on the matter, and the only debate held in parliamentary time was a members' business debate in my name. It is about time that the Scottish Government got to grips with the importance of the issue to our constituents. Will the minister think again and schedule a debate on sewage?

George Adam: I am aware of Mr Cole-Hamilton's feelings on the matter, and I continue to try to be helpful to him by suggesting that he take it up with the Government minister, Màiri McAllan. Normally, I would say that Mr Cole-Hamilton should take it to his business manager, but, in his case, that might be quite difficult.

As the member mentioned, the topic was debated in October 2022, and the former Minister for Environment and Land Reform gave a ministerial statement in December 2021.

Revenue Reconciliation 2024-25 (Scottish Fiscal Commission)

5. Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it will take to address the negative revenue reconciliation of £687 million for 2024-25 that is currently forecast by the Scottish Fiscal Commission. (S6O-02369)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The forecast negative reconciliation of £687 million is driven by a large income tax reconciliation of £712 million, which is offset by other social security and devolved tax block grant adjustments.

To be clear, I note that the large variance to the initial forecast is a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic having impacted on forecast income tax receipts and associated block grant adjustments in 2021-22.

As the reconciliation crystallises in 2024-25, that will contribute to an extremely challenging funding outlook next year. Of course, I do not have adequate tools under the current fiscal framework to manage that impact, as it exceeds our borrowing limits by almost £400 million.

As set out in "The Scottish Government's Medium-Term Financial Strategy", I am planning on the basis of maximising resource borrowing to address the negative reconciliation. The upcoming fiscal framework review must address the limited fiscal flexibility and provide the tools that are needed to manage volatility.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will need shorter responses.

Liz Smith: At the Finance and Public Administration Committee yesterday, the cabinet secretary admitted that, as a result of the negative reconciliation, combined with the projected increases in Scottish Government expenditure, especially in relation to social security, the outlook for the Scottish budget is particularly challenging. She also admitted that that would require the Scottish Government to make very difficult decisions. When I asked her about that, she said that the Government is reviewing 500 projects. Given the seriousness of the budget situation and the need for urgent action, when will the cabinet secretary be able to provide Parliament with the information that the Finance and Public Administration Committee is requesting in order that it can pursue its budget scrutiny?

Shona Robison: First of all, I note that the position for 2024-25 is not helped by a real-terms cut to both revenue and capital funding from the United Kingdom Government. If Liz Smith could exert any influence in that regard, that would help.

On the review and targeting of projects, as I set out in some detail yesterday, we are working through a programme that looks at every area of Government and how far each goes towards meeting the core missions that were set out by the First Minister a few weeks ago. That process will lead directly to the budget process for 2024-25.

We will set all that out, engage with the Finance and Public Administration Committee in the normal manner and provide it with as much detail as we can, as it becomes available. However, Liz Smith will understand that that process will take some time to come to its conclusion.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that the

negative reconciliation is yet another clear example of why it is so important that the revised fiscal framework provide the Scottish Government with the budget levers that are commensurate to addressing the volatility that the Scottish budget is exposed to?

Shona Robison: Yes. Our current borrowing powers are limited in scope and, of course, are being eroded by inflation over time. As a result, we must manage a large reconciliation in a single financial year, at a time when our resource borrowing is capped at £300 million. The upcoming fiscal framework review must rectify that and ensure that the Scottish Parliament has sufficient levers to deal with challenges such as those.

Planning System (Retail)

6. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how the planning system can help to create a strong, prosperous and vibrant retail sector, including through business support. (S6O-02370)

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick): The planning system has a vital role to play in supporting the retail sector. National planning framework 4 encourages proposals that improve and enhance the vibrancy of city, town and local centres. That includes taking a town centre first approach to encourage retail in sustainable locations.

We have also introduced changes to permitted development rights and the use classes order to provide more flexibility for different uses, including retail, in city and town centres. Alongside that, we are working with partners to take forward actions in the town centre action plan and our retail strategy for Scotland.

Roz McCall: The structure and nature of Scottish retail has changed over the decades. The prominence of physical retail stores in our towns and shopping centres is gradually declining, and that of social venues such as cafes and eateries is rising. Recently, I visited the Kingsgate shopping centre in Dunfermline, where the management highlighted the significant financial costs that Fife Council has imposed on those who wish to reflect the change by altering their business category from class 1 retail to category 3 hospitality. Will the minister outline what more the Scottish Government can do to lessen those costs for businesses, and how the planning system can better reflect the changing nature of retail?

Joe FitzPatrick: I thank Roz McCall for that really important question.

One of the challenges that we hear from business and from planning authorities across

Scotland is how we will ensure that they have the resource to deal speedily with planning applications. That is partly about ensuring that planning is properly funded. Recently, we increased the fees that planning authorities can charge, which has allowed planning authorities up and down the country to potentially retain or employ new staff.

There is a balance to be struck. However, businesses often say that what is most important to them is that they get a speedy resolution to planning applications.

Fiscal Policy (Impact on Businesses)

7. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the finance secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding any impact that its fiscal policy platform will have on Scottish businesses, including tourism and hospitality businesses. (S6O-02371)

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur): The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and I regularly discuss fiscal policy with our ministerial colleagues. That includes the impacts on a range of sectors, including tourism and hospitality.

We are committed to supporting sustainable and inclusive economic growth and will focus on economic policies and actions that have the greatest potential to grow and strengthen Scotland's economy.

Alexander Stewart: The Scottish tourism sector has faced a catalogue of poorly thought through policies that threaten to seriously undermine the success of tourism and hospitality businesses. The short-term let scheme, the tourist tax and utter failure in respect of our infrastructure, including ferries and the A9, are Scottish National Party thorns in the side of Scottish tourism.

When the sector has asked for time to recover, why has the SNP ignored it and pushed ahead with a string of burdensome priorities that have caused distress and worry for businesses throughout Scotland?

Tom Arthur: We engage very closely with representatives of the tourism sector across a range of issues, including through our work on the new deal for business. We have delivered across a range of infrastructure projects over our time in government, including completion of the M74, the M8, the M80, the Aberdeen western peripheral road and the Queensferry crossing, as well as a range of other activities that are of benefit to the tourism sector and other businesses across Scotland. As we take forward our proposals for a visitor levy, we will continue to engage very closely with business.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP): Last week we debated tourism, and it was very clear then that energy costs, inflation and Brexit labour shortages require action by the London Government. Has the minister had any engagement with the United Kingdom Government on it either taking action or giving Scotland those powers?

Tom Arthur: I agree that the Scottish Government would have much greater freedom to support the tourism sector, which is vital to the Scottish economy, with the full powers of independence. The tourism sector is in need of more support, but we are constrained by the limited fiscal levers that we currently control. That is why we continually urge the UK Government to go further with its reserved tax powers, and why we specifically highlight that a reduced rate of VAT is a consistent ask from stakeholders. We will continue to urge the UK Government to do more to support Scottish businesses.

“Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023”

8. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the recent Accounts Commission report, “Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023”. (S6O-02372)

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick): The Scottish Government welcomes the findings of the “Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023” report. The report rightly points to the pressures on the public finances, but it also confirms that, despite over a decade of United Kingdom Government austerity, local authority revenue funding has increased by 2.6 per cent in real terms between 2013-14 and 2023-24.

Richard Leonard: I thank the minister for that response, but he cannot ignore or wish away the evidence that is contained in the report. In adult social care,

“There are signs that the sector is in crisis, with growing backlogs, declining satisfaction and no clear picture of demand or unmet need”.

In housing, there are growing rent arrears, mounting voids and poorer maintenance performance, and homelessness is spiralling once again. In culture and leisure, there is a “high risk of closures”. In children’s services, the poverty-related attainment gap “remains larger than pre-pandemic” levels. The list goes on.

Does the minister agree that the Government must stop managing decline, stop inflicting cuts on the poorest communities, and must start by introducing a tax on wealth?

Joe FitzPatrick: We look forward to hearing Richard Leonard’s contributions to the budget in the form of proposals. I know that the cabinet secretary will be happy to listen to and engage with Labour if it has serious proposals. That will be a first, as I have been in Parliament for 16 years, and I think that we have been given one serious proposal that would have given extra money to local government. That came from Alex Rowley of the Labour Party but I do not think—*[Interruption.]* I do not think that the Labour group supported it. The Scottish National Party could not support it at that time. *[Interruption.]*

We do not for a second underestimate the challenges that—*[Interruption.]*—local government and other public services are facing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I ask members on the Opposition front benches to stop heckling the minister while he is providing the answer.

Minister, could you conclude?

Joe FitzPatrick: Thanks, Presiding Officer. I could just hear chuntering, so I am not sure what the sedentary point being made was.

Richard Leonard made the good point that we need to address the challenges. That is why we are working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on a new deal for local government. It is co-produced work that I hope all parties in Parliament will sign up to, in order to recognise the democratic mandate that local government has. It is time to allow local government its space as one of the spheres of government in Scotland. This Government is determined to do that: I hope that the Opposition will step up, too.

NHS Waiting Times

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-09462, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on taking action on national health service waiting times. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to please press their request-to-speak button.

14:51

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): There are 779,533 patients on waiting lists in Scotland. That is one in seven Scots, and it is the highest number of people waiting since records began. At the same time, there has been a 73 per cent increase in the number of people going private because they cannot wait any longer. Despite that and the warm words and promises of action, the number of people waiting is increasing. When Humza Yousaf took over as health secretary, 603,000 people were waiting for diagnosis or treatment; now, the figure is 175,000 higher.

This touches every area, from failure to meet cancer waiting times targets, which we know has profound consequences on outcomes; to orthopaedics, where people are suffering in pain, waiting for literally years for treatment; to children waiting in distress for more than a year for an appointment with child and adolescent mental health services. In response, Humza Yousaf set targets for people with the longest waits to be treated. We welcomed the fact that out-patient waits of more than two years were to be eradicated—completely gone—by August 2022, but that has not happened. In-patient waits of more than two years were also to be eradicated by September 2022. That has not happened. Waits of more than 18 months were to be eradicated by December 2022 for out-patients. That also has not happened. One-year waits for out-patients were to be gone completely by March 2023, and—you guessed it, Presiding Officer—that has not happened either. In fact, there are 31,498 patients still waiting.

By every measure that the Scottish National Party Government has set itself, it has failed. In England, with a population 10 times greater than that in Scotland, there are only 599 people waiting more than two years, while here the figure is 7,849, which is 13 times higher. It is clear that the NHS recovery plan that was launched two years ago simply has not worked.

The consequences of that could not be more stark. Over 18,300 patients died while on waiting lists last year, which is a 39 per cent increase on the number of such deaths before the pandemic. Those are people for whom treatment could have

saved or prolonged their lives. While SNP members are fighting like ferrets in a sack, mired by their internal party scandals, Scotland's healthcare system plunges deeper into crisis.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Will Jackie Baillie give way?

Jackie Baillie: No, I do not have time.

All those numbers are, of course, people whose lives are put on hold while they wait, often in pain, to get the medical care that they need. They are people like 82-year-old Robert Stone, who has been waiting more than three years for a knee replacement. His daughter Carol Murray told me:

“He’s now lost all his dignity because of waiting so long. He is sleeping in a bed in ... his living room because he can’t access his bedroom. ... He has become a prisoner in his own home. ... He is now being treated like a dog waiting for scraps.

Where is the fairness in this? Where is the humanity in this? ... I feel like I am slowly watching my father’s demise before my eyes.”

He is one of the shocking 2,207 people who have waited for more than two years for orthopaedic surgery. Humza Yousaf pledged to end such waits by September 2022.

The creation of national treatment centres to get through the backlog and streamline the approach to diagnostics and treatment was a welcome step. It is therefore hugely disappointing that many have been delayed and that there is a funding shortfall and a lack of staffing. It took a freedom of information request from the Scottish Labour Party to get the details out of the SNP Government. We now know that the Government is unlikely to meet its commitment for national treatment centres to deliver an additional 40,000 in-patient and day-case procedures in 2025-26. The response states that

“projections included in the NHS Recovery Plan have dropped significantly”.

Plans for 1,500 additional staff by 2026—a commitment in the NHS recovery plan—are unlikely to be met, with some boards already experiencing staff recruitment challenges. In March, a briefing to the cabinet secretary revealed that there was no revenue funding source for the national treatment centres that are not yet in construction. To top it all, the remaining programme is “not affordable” on the basis of the current capital spending review.

In August 2022, the update on national treatment centres showed that five centres were classed as red, meaning that they were in danger of not being delivered until 2027, such was the limited progress being made.

Will the cabinet secretary publish the revised schedule for national treatment centres? Will he

confirm whether they will all proceed and the timescale for them? Given that the NHS budget is reportedly overspent and that capital projects are being cancelled, we need transparency and we need that information.

Not content with crashing the health service, the SNP is now failing to deliver the modest recovery plan that it promised to implement. Waiting times are increasing. National treatment centres were promised but have not been delivered. Staffing targets are not being met. Ultimately, patients are being let down.

We urgently need a new recovery plan, and we need clinicians to lead that process. Clinicians and Versus Arthritis have been arguing for a recovery plan for orthopaedics—the single largest component of waiting lists—for years, but Humza Yousaf did not listen to them. Will the cabinet secretary commit to such a plan now?

SNP incompetence is threatening the very existence of our NHS. Michael Matheson must act now to support our valiant NHS staff and to undo the deadly legacy of his predecessor—Scotland's worst-ever health minister, Humza Yousaf.

I move,

That the Parliament is deeply concerned that NHS waiting lists continue to increase to record levels, with over 779,000 patients awaiting treatment; regrets that over 18,300 patients died on NHS waiting lists in 2022, whilst the number of people in Scotland paying for private treatment has increased by 73% since before the COVID-19 pandemic; notes that the Scottish Government has failed to meet its revised national targets for tackling long waits for planned care; is concerned about the delay in rolling out the network of National Treatment Centres; recognises that the NHS is facing a workforce crisis, with over 7,000 vacancies unfilled, and agency costs spiralling to £567 million in 2022-23, and calls on the Scottish Ministers to bring forward a revised NHS Recovery Plan, in consultation with key stakeholders, to reduce long waits as a matter of urgency.

14:58

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): Let me start by acknowledging the importance of this topic. I welcome the opportunity to highlight the progress that has been made by our NHS and, equally, the challenges that we continue to face. It is important to state at the outset that we remain focused on ensuring that the health service recovers from the greatest challenge in its history, and I take this opportunity to thank our exceptional health and social care staff, who are at the heart of our services.

However, for many people accessing NHS or social care services, their experience is not what they or I would like it to be. There is work still to be done, and that is encapsulated in the published commitments that the First Minister and I have

made to achieve a series of tangible improvements in the health and social care system by 2026. Those commitments include reducing NHS waiting times year on year and delivering new national treatment centres.

Inevitably, pausing planned treatment during the pandemic has led to a build-up in the number of people waiting. We must recognise that our health service has experienced unprecedented pressures, including pandemic backlogs, staff shortages and the most difficult winter in the NHS's history. I recognise that challenges remain, but I am committed to delivering sustained improvements and year-on-year reductions in waiting times through service redesign and enhanced regional and national working.

Even in the face of those challenges, we continue to see progress in the reduction of long waits, following the introduction of the targets last year. We have seen a substantive reduction in new out-patient over-two-year waits since the targets were announced, with 80 per cent of specialties having fewer than 10 over-two-year waits while 20 per cent have none.

Jackie Baillie: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Matheson: Data on our 18-month out-patient target shows that the number of people waiting more than 78 weeks reduced by 48.5 per cent between June last year and March this year, and data on our 12-month out-patient target shows that 41 per cent of specialties had fewer than 10 patients waiting more than 52 weeks. Over-two-year waits for in-patient and day-case treatment have reduced, too, by 27 per cent since the targets were announced.

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

Michael Matheson: I will give way to Jackie Baillie, because she was first.

Jackie Baillie: The cabinet secretary will of course realise that the targets that his predecessor set were to completely eradicate those waiting lists—he did not say, “Reduce them”; he said, “Eradicate them”—and that those targets were set after the pandemic.

Michael Matheson: As I have outlined, we are making steady progress and seeing capacity increase in our NHS in order to continue to reduce those waiting lists.

All that work is further supported by our flagship national treatment centre programme. Four NTCs are opening this year, which will provide significant new and protected capacity for orthopaedics, ophthalmics and diagnostics. The new centres, which include ones in NHS Fife and NHS Highland that opened in March and April, will provide eight

orthopaedic theatres, an in-patient and day-case ward, three endoscopy rooms and two general theatres.

I recognise that orthopaedics is one of our most challenged specialties, which is why last week I met orthopaedic leads and asked them to support the development of a clear and specific plan for orthopaedics, considering capacity and what further improvements can be achieved. I want to see direct action in addressing the issue of orthopaedics, which Jackie Baillie raised.

The work that we are taking forward also includes investing in the recruitment and retention of staff. NHS staff levels are historically high under this Government, with nearly 23 per cent more in post than when we came into government. Only last week, I announced that health boards have exceeded the target of recruiting an additional 750 registered nurses and allied health professionals from overseas, with 800 firm offers in place. We will continue to do what we can to make a long-term investment in healthcare education, too, which is demonstrated by our funding a record number of nursing and midwifery student places this year.

I reiterate my commitment to recovery and reform for a sustainable NHS, and my commitment to focus on what can be done now and in the short term to maximise all capacity and resources to ensure that we see further improvements this year and into next year. As we build on the progress that we have made in the face of our challenges, we will continue to maximise our capacity to achieve year-on-year reductions in the number of people who have waited too long for treatment in NHS Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-09462.2, to leave out from “is deeply” to end and insert,

“recognises the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both the people of Scotland directly, and on the operation of the health service; further recognises that too many people are waiting too long for treatment, and welcomes the reductions in the longest waits recently; notes that health services across the four nations are dealing with the effects of the pandemic on waiting times, and recognises that use of the independent sector by individuals is proportionately lower than that in England or Wales; supports the twin approach of investment and reform of the NHS so that delivery continues to be enhanced, backed by investment founded in progressive taxation; appreciates that the workforce is at the heart of all that the NHS does, and thanks everyone working in the NHS for their dedication, expertise and commitment; believes that the NHS must be kept true to its founding principles of being publicly owned, publicly operated, and free at the point of need, and further believes that the only way to protect the NHS from the threat posed by the UK Government is to realise independence for Scotland.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Sandesh Gulhane to speak to and move amendment S6M-09462.1 for up to four minutes.

15:03

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I am a practising NHS general practitioner.

Our heroic NHS staff have been failed by the SNP's management of Scotland's NHS. The multitude of failures and the neglect have resulted in prolonged suffering and deteriorating health for countless patients. The consequences of dereliction of duty are far reaching and unacceptable. More than 800,000 Scots are on NHS waiting lists; more than 18,000 Scots died last year while waiting for treatment. Cancer waiting times in Scotland are the worst ever.

Let us be clear: that is not down to Covid—the SNP last met its target more than a decade ago. It is a betrayal of trust and a failure to deliver the quality healthcare that patients deserve. It is simply unacceptable.

Equally distressing are the record waiting times in accident and emergency departments. Urgent action is needed to rectify that dire situation, but does the SNP-Green Government act? No, it does not.

The failure to meet waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services has left so many of our young people in jeopardy. Again, that is not due to Covid. The SNP has never met its target for 90 per cent of children and young people to start treatment within 18 weeks of referral.

When Humza Yousaf was promoted to First Minister, 7,700 children were left waiting to start treatment. That is a disgrace. The Deputy First Minister also knows a thing or two about announcements and no delivery. When Shona Robison was health secretary, she promised to end delayed discharge from hospital by the end of 2015. Seven years on, more than 17,000 beds a day are occupied due to delayed discharge.

Moreover, SNP-Green Government cuts to general practitioner budgets, as well as to health and social care spending, demonstrate a shocking lack of foresight and a disregard for the wellbeing of the population—£65 million has been cut from the primary care budget, £38 million from mental health care and £17 million from social care.

Since the SNP promised, in 2017, to increase the number of GPs by 800, GP numbers have actually decreased by 26, yet that pledge was made time and again by Humza Yousaf, who said in the chamber and in the press that the Government was on target.

The SNP has undermined the very foundations of our healthcare system, leaving it teetering on the brink of collapse. We now have an alarming number of vacancies for clinical staff: more than

6,000 nurses are missing and the Scottish Government is spending an exorbitant amount on hiring agency staff.

Take note: over the past decade, the SNP has short-changed our NHS by more than £17 million and not fully passed on the Barnett consequential to our health service. The SNP's management of Scotland's NHS is marred by record failure, and it is clear that the SNP has run out of ideas. We need a fresh approach that incorporates modern, efficient and local solutions in healthcare. In light of those pressing issues, we call on the cabinet secretary for health to present a revised NHS recovery plan—one that includes the fact that Humza Yousaf knew in February that the projections for his flimsy recovery plan had dropped significantly.

Scotland does not need a cabinet secretary who is just a continuity candidate. There is a palpable lack of accountability and a history of failure. We urge the cabinet secretary to deliver a credible plan—a fresh approach that prioritises the wellbeing of our people and ensures that our healthcare system is properly supported.

I move amendment S6M-09462.1, to insert after “2022-23”:

“; notes with concern that long waits are an issue throughout all aspects of the health service, with cancer waiting times at their worst ever level, A&E targets not being met in three years, and the Scottish Government failing to clear the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) backlog”.

15:07

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I am grateful to Jackie Baillie for securing time for this important debate. I would say that I am happy to speak in it, but that would be a lie. I mean, here we are again—it is like beating your head against a brick wall. The facts that are set out in the motion make for grim reading indeed. We keep having to have this debate in Opposition time, because the Government will not get to grips with the crisis that it is presiding over.

A staggering 779,000 people are waiting for treatment, and some 7,000 of them have been waiting for more than two years. There has been a 73 per cent increase in the number of Scots who are paying for private medical treatment. The very worst statistic of all is that more than 18,000 patients died while waiting for treatment last year alone—18,000. Think about that for a second, Presiding Officer, because we are in the foothills of a public inquiry that will ascertain the root causes and decisions that contributed to the deaths of 15,000 Scots during the entirety of the pandemic. How many of those 18,000 people might be alive today were it not for the crisis that is

engulfing our national health service? The stakes simply could not be higher.

I have lost count of the number of times that we have had to debate this issue in Opposition time. Whether they are forced to wait for hours for an ambulance or to be seen at A and E, left abandoned on trolleys or languishing on wards, people are being let down. I fear that we have become accustomed and desensitised to crisis and, indeed, tragedy in our health service.

It is simply not good enough. We may have a new First Minister and a new health secretary, but it is the same old, same old when it comes to ministerial disinterest and mismanagement. Did someone mention continuity? It feels as though that is what we are getting.

I want to be crystal clear from the outset that none of that is the fault of NHS staff. They have worked their socks off. They have worked for long hours, often under the most stressful conditions imaginable, and they deserve our utmost thanks—but they are being let down as well. There are currently more than 7,000 NHS workforce vacancies left unfilled. The chair of the British Medical Association Scotland, Dr Iain Kennedy, has said that doctors and other healthcare workers are “exhausted” and “facing burn-out” under increasing workloads.

Now the Government's failure to negotiate fair pay means that junior doctors are set to strike, making things even more difficult. When he was health secretary, Humza Yousaf repeatedly rejected my party's calls for a staff burnout prevention strategy and a health and social care staff assembly. How helpful might those have proved to be in allowing junior doctors to feel better supported and ensuring a conduit for their views to be heard? Instead, they now feel that they have no recourse other than industrial action. Let us remember that Humza Yousaf, during his leadership campaign, set great store by pointing to Scotland as the only place where NHS strikes were not happening—well, they are happening now.

Under this Government's watch, costs for temporary staff rose to £567 million last year. It would seem that, rather than making the meaningful investment that our health service needs, this Government is relying on short-term fixes to plug the gaps. They are sticking plasters.

The SNP enjoys comparing Scotland with the rest of the UK when it suits it, which is not so with NHS waiting times. Waits in Scotland are twice the length of those south of the border. In England, around 10,000 patients have been waiting longer than 18 months for treatment; in Scotland, 21,000 have. It is no wonder, then, that so many people are turning to private medical treatment. The

Government should be utterly embarrassed by that. Competent management of our health service is, perhaps, the measure of a civilised society. It is what we elect our Government to do, first and foremost. What an indictment it is, then, that people are being forced to pay to get well.

Let me say to the Government and to the health secretary: stop blaming the pandemic. It insults the intelligence and seriously tests the patience of both staff and patients. Instead, the Government must now follow the advice of the Scottish Liberal Democrats and invest in our health service, give staff the fair pay that they deserve, adopt our burnout prevention strategy and set up that staff assembly, so that doctors, nurses and junior trainees can feel heard and understood, rather than ignored and unappreciated.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate and back-bench speeches of up to four minutes.

15:12

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I appreciate that the SNP has other things to be worried about this week, but Scottish Labour remains firmly focused on the priorities of Scottish people. That is why we are debating the issue of increasing waiting lists, which is impacting so many across the country. Labour was required to bring this important debate to the chamber, as the current Government tries to hide from the necessary business of the day. The Government needs to listen, and to act.

One in seven Scots find themselves on waiting lists today. Many of them have been waiting for months, if not years. Many, like the countless constituents who have been contacting me, are waiting with insufferable pain. Tragically, many have died while waiting.

The Scottish Government can point to the pandemic as a global factor that caused unavoidable challenges; predictably, the cabinet secretary did so. Indeed, we do not disagree—we know that the pandemic exacerbated issues with waiting lists. However, the reality is that it is disingenuous and plainly incorrect to suggest that it was not an issue before, and it is disingenuous and plainly wrong to say today that we are making good progress. I had been told to expect better from this cabinet secretary.

Long waiting lists predate the pandemic. They are a result of Governments avoiding difficult decisions; in Scotland, that is in plain sight. They are a result of a Government that is tired, after 16 years, and that has failed services, staff and patients. Why? To push its own agenda. Let me be clear that our NHS workforce is incredible. The service that they continue to strive to provide daily

is of the highest standard, but they are being badly let down and they deserve a lot better.

In relation to debates such as this, we all look at the correspondence that we receive from constituents, who feel helpless. They are in pain, they are suffering and they cannot live the lives that they want to live with their children, friends and families. They feel guilty for being unable to do the things that they used to be able to do, because they are sitting on waiting lists and they have no indication of when their time will come. That is the unfortunate reality of SNP Scotland.

The SNP members at the back of the chamber will not like to hear this, but they know as well as we do that it is a reality; they receive correspondence from constituents, too. Do they scrutinise, or do they accept the excuses? Do they push those on the SNP front benches to do something, or do they clap to drown out the reality?

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Carol Mochan: I will not take an intervention, thank you. Members need to listen to this. They need to live with the decisions that they make in that regard.

Like others, I was shocked and saddened to hear that more than 18,000 people had died on NHS waiting lists last year. If the trend continues, the figure will be more than 20,000 this year. That is tragic.

If that does anything, it should tell the cabinet secretary and the Government that more of the same simply will not do. We need a plan for reducing waiting lists that supports NHS staff by improving recruitment and retention; by opening up national treatment centres urgently, supported by a highly skilled workforce; and by delivering for patients through action, rather than making promises and failing to follow through. It has become clearer to people every day that this Government, while it is no stranger to a strategy, has a poor relationship with delivery. That must change.

The challenges that we face with waiting lists are 16 years in the making, and they have undoubtedly been worsened in recent years by existing problems. Despite that, however, the NHS workforce is lacking a funded and targeted investment plan. This Government is falling short on reducing waiting lists; it is time that it stepped up and provided a service to our NHS staff and patients.

15:16

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I welcome the debate. It is right that we look at the NHS.

However, I sometimes think, when Labour brings these health issues to the chamber, that its members are living very much in a political bubble and not looking at what is happening on the ground. In my constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston, the Labour Party would have removed the accident and emergency department from our local hospital, Monklands, if it had had its way and if it had not been for this Government and the previous Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing and First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, reversing the decision. That is never mentioned, but it would have been an absolutely catastrophic blow—

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Sixteen years ago.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): That was 16 years ago—what is happening now?

Fulton MacGregor: Members are saying “16 years”, but that is—

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Fulton MacGregor: I will not be taking any interventions, because I have only four minutes—Labour should have picked a time when there was longer for debate.

The key issue in the debate is to address NHS waiting lists and the workforce crisis. That is an issue, and it is important that we are discussing such issues, but we have to do so—as the cabinet secretary has said—in the context of the past few years.

Yes, it is true that waiting lists for certain treatments are long; we will all have constituents and personal contacts who have experienced that. However, it is also true that the pandemic brought about the most challenging set of circumstances in the 75-year history of our NHS—

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): Will the member take a brief intervention on that point?

Fulton MacGregor: I cannot—I am sorry.

That applies to the health service not only in Scotland but in Northern Ireland, Wales and England. The Labour motion completely fails to acknowledge that, but it is the reality of the situation. We are not alone in that.

It is true that the Scottish Government decides policy and funding for the NHS, and it is also true that the Scottish Government funds the NHS to a higher level, proportionately, than other Governments across the UK—*[Interruption.]*

It is the Labour Party members, and their friends in the Tory party, who do not like those facts.

The SNP-led Government's £100 billion NHS recovery plan has delivered a significant reduction in the number of two-year out-patient waits. The waiting time targets have already led to a substantial increase in the number of patients seen, with almost 56,000 in-patients or day cases, and more than 311,000 out-patients, seen in the quarter to the end of December 2022. Those are the highest numbers of patients seen since the onset of the Covid pandemic.

With regard to staffing, once again, we must consider the issue in the wider context of the rest of the UK. Since the SNP first entered government, NHS staffing has increased by 22.7 per cent. Recent research from the end of 2022 shows that NHS Scotland has higher staffing per head than NHS England. Scotland has also invested in the future sustainability of the NHS, with NHS agenda for change staff being paid better here than anywhere else in the UK.

There is an issue with bank staff—as MSPs, we all hear that. Perhaps the cabinet secretary can reflect on that in summing up, because a lot of staff are saying that they can get better pay as bank staff.

Finally, the motion touches on the rise in the number of patients having to pay for private care, and it is important to analyse that increase in a wider context. The rise in the number of people paying for private healthcare is, again, not unique to Scotland; it affects health services right across the UK. Wales has similar rates, and self-pay admissions have been at their highest or joint highest levels over the past four years in eight out of nine English regions.

The rise in the number of patients across the UK having to use private healthcare is very concerning to me, and it is probably concerning for others. However, unlike the Tories—and perhaps Labour as well—who might be happy for our NHS to be run by private providers like in England, and Labour, whose private finance initiative policies caused unprecedented damage to our NHS, the Scottish Government continues to support the principle of a public service that is free at the point of use and need.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

Fulton MacGregor: No, I will not.

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

Fulton MacGregor: The Scottish Government supported buy-outs of hospital car parks in Glasgow and Dundee last year and supported the ending of private finance initiative contracts that outsourced a range of hospital support services.

For example, Wishaw hospital in my colleague Clare Adamson's constituency has brought those services back in-house.

The NHS in Scotland faces grave challenges, but the Scottish Government continues to fund and support our NHS with the limited powers that we have. I will leave it there.

15:21

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Fulton MacGregor is trying to defend the indefensible. What can be said in four minutes? Let me start by saying how let down patients, their families and NHS workers feel. We put a lot of trust in the NHS; we trust it with our lives and the lives of our loved ones, but dedicated doctors and nurses feel the frustrations of a system that too often fails patients, and they feel that acutely.

A health board in my constituency is in special measures because of a failure of leadership accountability and culture. The lack of accountability is startling. The board has launched a host of initiatives, but, as elected representatives, we are told that it is too soon to say whether they are working. The special measures will probably last for more than a year. My constituents are fully entitled to question how well the NHS works in their area, and they are entitled to explanations for huge waiting lists and missed targets.

The more waiting lists increase, the more people who have paid their taxes and put their trust in the system are being let down. We all know that it is heartbreaking to listen to their stories. It comes down to a lack of capacity in the system, which is a failure of leadership by the Government. Many people in my constituency struggle even to get an appointment at their local health centre, because general practice lists are full to bursting point.

I am not saying any of that to criticise the brilliant people who work tirelessly in our NHS. For most NHS staff, their work is a vocation. They consistently go above and beyond, because, if they did not, the whole system would collapse. However, they are being asked to do more and more, and, as a result, their mental health suffers.

We have record levels of spending in the NHS despite the fact that the Scottish Government did not pass on £16 billion of Barnett consequential that should have gone into the health service. We also have record levels of vacancies, and there is a crisis in recruitment and retention. There are astonishing levels of vacancies in key roles.

What has gone wrong? In short, there has been a catastrophic failure of workforce planning, and that failure is the failure of SNP Scottish ministers

and their lack of strategic planning. They are in their 17th year in government. There can be no passing of the buck.

We have a problem of toxic workplace cultures in many places, including in NHS Forth Valley, meaning that critically important staff are leaving. Time and again, whistleblowers speak of bullying and intimidation. All that is not happening just because of the pandemic. Nothing makes NHS workers more frustrated or angry than to hear ministers trot out those tired old lines, because this goes a long way back before the pandemic; it goes back to when Andrew Neil said to Nicola Sturgeon in an interview that the NHS in Scotland needed legislation to protect it from the SNP. What we are talking about in this debate is a colossal failure of Government.

The NHS is a complex organisation and bringing about change is akin to turning around a fleet of tankers, but management tick boxing has been prioritised by management over providing the service that patients expect and need. To change the culture, we need leadership, and that starts at the top. Courage is needed to break the failed groupthink that currently exists in too many parts of Scotland's NHS. We need a culture that focuses on delivering the core purpose of the NHS: patient-centred care that is free at the point of need. For that to happen, I fear that we need a new set of Scottish ministers who are open to the change that is needed badly.

15:25

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Across the country, patients and staff are crying out for help to get the treatment that they need or support to do their job; that is what overwhelms my email inbox and office phone line. I get email after email and call after call from people who are in pain, unable to work or unable to go about their daily life because they are on a waiting list with no end in sight. If that is what I get and what Carol Mochan gets, it is what every single MSP will be getting, yet the Government comes to the chamber and dismisses those concerns. Instead, it continues to blame the pandemic for record waiting times, delays to national treatment centres and an NHS workforce crisis.

It is more than two years on from the 2021 election, which is when the people of Cumbernauld and Kilsyth were promised a new treatment centre that we were told would help to clear the waiting lists, but the Government has not even mentioned the treatment centre in its amendment to the motion. In Cumbernauld, it will be June 2028 before the first patients are seen, and even that date is doubtful. The centre will not open in 2026, as was promised on those glossy election leaflets. The treatment centre was meant

to help people who were on gynaecology, urology and ophthalmology waiting lists—waiting lists that the health board said had increased by 83 per cent before Covid. At the end of March this year, of those people who were on waiting lists for those specialisms, more than half of ophthalmology patients had been waiting more than 12 weeks, half of all gynaecology patients had waiting times of six months and a quarter of urology patients will wait more than a year.

Under Humza Yousaf, nothing was done to recover from the pandemic, and now we are left with waiting lists that are the First Minister's legacy; this is his mess, and those are his waiting lists. Freedom of information requests that I have seen show two years that have simply been wasted. Damning internal documents put into doubt the new centre that is meant for Cumbernauld. Report after report has warned that NHS Lanarkshire is concerned about its

“inability to fund and recruit additional workforce”.

The health board is concerned about how it will attract staff to the town, and, worse still,

“due to workforce restrictions, the board may have to increase days of working per week.”

That means asking burnt-out NHS staff, who are already struggling, to increase their working week to cover for SNP Government failures. That is entirely unacceptable, but the First Minister knows that—he knows that he wasted two years while those waiting lists spiralled.

When the First Minister gave an update on his NHS recovery plan in October 2022, it scrubbed out the timescales for Cumbernauld's new local centre, and, when the health board did the right thing and said that the opening date should be pushed back to 2028, his Government published its updates with no dates at all. That was a cover-up operation consisting of spin to deceive the people of Cumbernauld. That centre was meant to be worth £40 million in investment and more than £12 million annually, but now it goes without a mention in any Government documents. The First Minister did that knowing full well that, only two months earlier, officials had told him that those election commitments were at risk. They said that

“successful delivery appears to be unachievable”

and that

“the major issues do not appear to be manageable or resolvable”.

That advice was given to the First Minister.

The Government has let down the community of Cumbernauld, and, in today's amendment, it washes its hands of the issue. Instead of talking about investment in the town, the amendment droned on about England and Wales. The SNP

wants to be in power, but it never takes responsibility. Patients and staff are fed up with endless excuses and the Government's constant blaming of someone else for its ineptitude. Only the Labour Party will properly fund our NHS, ensure that it is fighting fit and deliver the treatment centre for Cumbernauld that is so desperately needed.

15:30

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am so disappointed this afternoon. I am disappointed because our health service has challenges—there is no doubt about that—but the Labour Party has brought to the chamber a debate that completely ignores the impact of the coronavirus on our NHS and it is attacking this Government while completely failing to point out the inadequacies of the Westminster Government, including the Trussomics budget that led to what Mark Drakeford described as a sledgehammer being taken to the economy and public service. Both of those things have had an impact on the NHS in Scotland, too.

We have big challenges to face. However, given some of the things that have been said about workforce planning and about people working, I say to Conservative colleagues, including Dr Gulhane, that the pension rules that have made it financially unattractive for retired health service professionals to come back and support the health service are not in the control of this Government. They are in the control of—

Sandesh Gulhane: Will the member take an intervention?

Clare Adamson: No. I will not take any interventions.

Those rules are in the control of Westminster—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members!

Clare Adamson: Westminster could have changed those pension rules. It is quite ready to come forward with section 35 orders on things that we want to do here. How about fixing the pensions situation so that retired doctors and doctors who would be willing to come back to the NHS can do so at financial benefit—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Dr Gulhane, please. We need to listen to the member who has the floor. *[Interruption.]* Excuse me, Dr Gulhane. I said that we need to listen to the member who has the floor. Thank you very much indeed. Ms Adamson, please continue.

Clare Adamson: What about the immigration system? What about the hostile environment that makes it less attractive for people to come here?

Brexit has in itself made people think twice about coming to the United Kingdom. However, I have spoken already in the chamber and I will speak again about the plight of Sudanese health workers who have gone home or who were in Sudan at the time of the conflict and have been unable to bring their families here, or have been unable to come back into the country with an elderly relative and are stuck in Egypt or in Dubai. These are people who work for our health service, who are being denied the opportunity to help their families at a terrible, terrible time of need.

Where are the Tories when it comes to fixing that situation to make it more attractive for people to stay and to be able to come and work here? That is a shocking indictment of what the UK Government is doing in terms of immigration, and we wonder why we cannot recruit people.

Monica Lennon: Will the member give way?

Clare Adamson: I am not going to take any interventions—sorry. [*Interruption.*]

Craig Hoy rose—

Clare Adamson: I have just a very short time for my speech this afternoon. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members! I have already said that we need to listen to the member who has the floor. Thank you.

Clare Adamson: I understand Labour's concerns. I think that we all understand the concerns for our NHS. However, it is simply not possible to ignore what Labour's own ministers have said or the concerns that they have raised, including the Minister for Health and Social Services in the Welsh Government, Eluned Morgan, who recently blamed chronic underfunding by the UK Government for making the management of the Welsh NHS extremely difficult and who called last winter the most difficult time in the history of the NHS. Those concerns are also felt in Scotland. Those have also been the conditions that our health workers have been working in.

I agree that we need to work harder, and Michael Matheson has pointed out how hard he is working to ensure that we still have the best-paid health workers in this country and that we can protect things such as free prescriptions and free eye tests—things that people in Scotland value. However, it would be really nice if the Labour Party, for once, could put a bit of criticism on to the UK Government about its failure to support the NHS here and in Wales.

Stephen Kerr: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can you tell us whether there is a means by which it is possible to amend or correct the official record of this Parliament when a member has knowingly or unknowingly presented things in

a speech that are factually incorrect—for example, in relation to pensions and doctors or perhaps in relation to record levels of immigration to this country over the past two years?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Kerr for his contribution. We are straying into debating points. On the issue of correcting the record, I think that Mr Kerr is well aware of the mechanism that exists to that end.

15:34

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I begin by expressing my heartfelt thanks to everyone who works in our NHS. They have had a mountain to climb since the outbreak of the pandemic. The fact that so many staff members have worked so hard to keep us safe while facing that enormous challenge is incredible. There have also been huge impacts on patients, with too many people waiting too long for treatment due to the backlog in care that has been exacerbated by Covid. It is undeniable that we have to get those waits down. However, it is also essential that people are supported while they wait.

In the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, we have been hearing about waiting well initiatives that are being implemented by health boards, whereby patients are sent letters when there are long waits. In NHS Fife, for example, staff engage in person-centred conversations with patients in all specialties to give them information about the expected waiting time and the reasons behind that and to signpost them to other opportunities. That keeps the lines of communication open and allows patients to keep in touch with the relevant consultants.

In my region, NHS Forth Valley has implemented assessment appointments in order to reduce waiting times. Between July and September 2022, all patients who were on the adult psychological therapies waiting list were offered an assessment appointment with a clinician, which allowed them to be matched to an appropriate intervention without unnecessary waits. That has reduced waits, but it has also allowed the board to undertake more effective service planning to better match the types of demand to capacity. We would all recognise that that has relevance beyond the current time period.

Keeping in contact with patients who are on waiting lists and keeping them informed about how long they can reasonably expect to wait will help to reduce patient anxiety. It is worth noting that boards are implementing new and innovative ways to do that. However, there is still much work to do.

I am very concerned about staff wellbeing, as I know other members will be, given the amount of pressure that people are under. Staff had to shift

from fighting Covid-19 during the worst periods of the pandemic to tackling the huge backlog that built up during the lockdowns. Members have heard many times about the impact that that has had on people. Staff are also being affected by workforce pressures, as vacancies are a key barrier to reducing workloads and waiting times. Recruitment efforts must be prioritised, as must retention. We need to ensure that the NHS has sufficient staff to tackle the backlog, and the promotion of staff wellbeing must play a key part in improving retention.

In the health committee, we have also heard from health boards about how maintaining a focus on wellbeing has aided them in those efforts. During an evidence session, Robin McNaught, who is the director of finance and e-health at the State Hospitals Board for Scotland, spoke about the positive impact of peer support and induction on the recruitment and retention of new staff. He described the focus on the development of a peer support network, both clinical and non-clinical, throughout the board. The board has also delivered training sessions on peer support this year. A number of staff are now trained as peer support workers and they can provide dedicated support to new staff.

At a later committee evidence session, I asked representatives of NHS Fife, NHS Grampian and NHS Lothian whether they had considered setting up similar networks. They confirmed that they have rolled out peer support models across their organisations, as well as wellbeing initiatives such as psychological first aid and speak up ambassadors.

I would be interested to hear from the cabinet secretary in his closing speech how the Government can support all health boards to roll out such peer support schemes where they are not already in place. I would also be grateful for an update on the implementation of safe staffing legislation, as that will also help to reduce the pressure on staff.

We must not underestimate the challenges of working through the backlogs in care. While that work is on-going, we must be keenly aware of the extra pressure and stress that it causes for staff, patients and their loved ones, and we must do everything in our power to alleviate that.

15:39

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I appreciate the opportunity to speak in the debate because it is only the third time that I have been able to contribute to a debate on a health motion. It is, however, disappointing to be repeating myself about the pitiful record of the SNP-Green Government when it comes to Scotland's failing

health service, especially with regard to mental health provision for our children and young people.

Many care-experienced children are likely to suffer from mental health issues, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, anxiety, depression and eating disorders, and it is to that part of the Conservative amendment that I want to draw the attention of Parliament, because it is imperative that we stop looking at those situations in isolation.

Both my daughters have experience of the aforementioned mental health issues. For most of their adolescence, they had to contend with extreme anxiety, which manifested itself in paralysing fear and insomnia, difficulty in maintaining focus, control practices in relation to food, and periods of debilitating depression. They are not alone in their experience.

Time and again, we stand in the chamber and voice our collective backing for the Promise, and we regularly renew our commitment to changing the lives of care-experienced children, but that is impossible if we do not recognise the connection between that and the mental health of our young people.

I want to draw members' attention to the statistics for NHS Forth Valley, which is in my region, especially those for child and adolescent mental health services waiting times. Nearly two thirds of young people in the NHS Forth Valley area who are struggling with their mental health are not being seen within the target time. Figures show that NHS Forth Valley has missed a key child mental health waiting time target. Between January and March 2023, only 42 per cent of patients began treatment within 18 weeks, which is absolutely disgusting when we consider that the target is 90 per cent. Fewer than half of our local young people are being seen within the allocated time frame. Most shocking of all is that half of the referrals for CAMHS in the area were rejected altogether: 110 young people in a single month found themselves without support.

No one but SNP ministers is creating those targets for the Scottish Government. It makes me wonder whether the targets are based on any tangible analyses or are simply plucked out of thin air for a hashtag and a headline. Time and again, we are told of the work that is being done by the SNP-Green Scottish Government to reduce waiting times, but nothing is happening. We hear chants ad nauseam about increased spending per head of population, but what are we actually seeing for that additional spending? Surely 10 per cent extra spending should at least result in a 10 per cent increase in service provision. Of course, while all that goes on, our young people with mental health issues have nothing to show for that

headline-grabbing funding and are left living through mental and emotional hell.

The final area that I wish to highlight concerns the pandemic and the consequences of locking down our young people. Our response to the pandemic has had a massive detrimental effect on our young people and we have barely begun to scratch the surface of the on-going problems that it will cause their generation. Furthermore, we are missing targets now, but the situation is surely going to get worse.

However, the pandemic was a massive magnifying glass for scrutinising every one of our processes: businesses and all levels of government alike were put under a microscope and analysed. The pandemic highlighted where society was working just as much as it highlighted where it was not.

If we only, and blindly, use our current situation as an excuse for recovery delay, we are missing the opportunity to fix what was wrong in the first place and we do a disservice to the people whom we serve—especially in terms of the on-going mental health of Scotland’s children.

15:43

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): The Scottish Government is determined to reduce waiting times across all health specialties. Within the past seven days alone, the health secretary has announced funding for a new national digital dermatology programme, which could reduce demand for out-patient appointments in dermatology—one of the biggest out-patient specialties in Scotland—by up to 50 per cent.

In addition to that, on Monday in Inverness the First Minister opened Scotland’s third national treatment centre. The extra capacity that it has created will help to reduce NHS waiting lists that have built up during the pandemic, and the two further NTCs that are set to open this year will help to further that aim.

Although there is still more to do, since targets were announced last July such actions have resulted in a continued reduction in long waits of over 18 months, as well as a significant reduction in long waits of over two years.

The Labour motion shows us that that party has its head in the sand and demonstrates how little it understands the challenges that are faced by our NHS—not only in Scotland but across all the UK nations. There is no recognition or acknowledgement in it of the biggest challenge that the NHS has faced in its almost 75 years of existence: that is, the Covid-19 pandemic. Scottish Labour might not wish to accept that fact coming

from SNP members, but it should listen to Welsh Labour’s First Minister, who recently said:

“The health services are trying to cope with the impact of the coronavirus, and they are also trying to re-establish everything else that is important in those services.”

Quite evidently, health services across the four nations and, indeed, internationally, are dealing with the effects of the pandemic on waiting times.

I also find it telling that, in its motion, Labour refers to use of private healthcare, which—although Labour would have us believe otherwise—is not unique to Scotland but affects health services across the UK. The rate of people who are self-funding for private in-patient day-case care in England is 19.9 per cent higher than it is in Scotland. In Wales, where Labour has been in charge of the health service for about 25 years, the rate is an eye-watering 120 percent higher than it is in Scotland. Labour’s UK shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, recently said that

“Labour would use the spare capacity in the private sector to get patients seen faster”.

Another area in which some self-reflection from Labour would not go amiss is Brexit, which it now fully supports despite the impact that it is having on recruiting and retaining NHS staff. Although NHS staffing is up to historically high levels under this Scottish Government, we know that workers from overseas have long been an important part of our health and care workforce, and that international recruitment is vital to addressing staffing shortages in the NHS. Since Brexit, the number of new international nurse registrants from inside the European Union has fallen dramatically. Friends and colleagues have returned to their EU home countries, and other people who might have considered a new life here have decided not to come to the UK. That is evidenced in Nursing and Midwifery Council registration data from the past few years, so it is fact, rather than opinion.

As a country, we need to find a way of ensuring that we have an immigration system that is not just humane but meets our social and economic needs.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

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

Clare Haughey: It is clear that Scotland will not find either of those things as part of the Westminster system of Government. The route to both is Scotland becoming an independent country.

Challenges remain, and there are still unacceptable waits in some specialties, but the Scottish Government remains committed to delivering sustained improvement and year-on-

year reductions in waiting times, through maximising capacity across Scotland, enhancing regional and national working, and redesigning care services.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches. I call Craig Hoy to wind up the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives.

15:47

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I would like to say that what the SNP has lacked in its number of contributions today, it made up for in quality, but those were some of the worst and most delusional speeches that I have heard since coming into this Parliament. It is no surprise that only four back-bench SNP members were in the chamber when the cabinet secretary started her speech. I do not know where the others were—perhaps they were down at the florists—but they were clearly not here.

The debate has exposed a shameful record of this Government on the NHS. There are 7,000 unfilled vacancies in our health service. Since the beginning of this parliamentary session, more than 800,000 people have waited more than four hours at our overstretched accident and emergency departments. In my region, more and more patients are not being seen within the four-hour target at A and E rooms in the Borders and Lothian—more than ever before. At the start of this year, as many as three in seven patients waited in accident and emergency rooms in the Borders and Lothian for longer than four hours. That number is, frankly, unacceptable.

In East Lothian, pressure on the NHS has been mounting due to underfunding of community treatment and care services by the Scottish Government, which has led to closure or suspension of some vital services. At the Edington cottage hospital in North Berwick, the minor injuries clinic has closed and in-patient beds have been removed. That is a monument to ministerial inaction.

The arteries of our social care system are clogged to a critical point, which is having an impact across our NHS and in primary care. Daily, those capacity issues are leading to delays in discharging patients from hospital, as Carol Mochan said. In February alone, 51,732 bed days were lost because of patients waiting to be discharged. That is a shocking increase of 4,019 lost bed days on the figure for February last year.

Therefore, post-pandemic the position is getting worse. Delayed discharges have cost our NHS more than £1.2 billion in the past decade of SNP rule, which is contributing to longer waiting times throughout our NHS. As Jackie Baillie said, that is simply not good enough. We are witnessing

severe waiting times across Scotland's health service.

Perhaps in closing the cabinet secretary might answer the question that I would have asked, had he taken my intervention, which was whether he will say sorry to our constituents, some of whom are elderly, frail and living in pain and are having to borrow money from their children or grandchildren for treatment that they deem to be essential but that would not come quickly enough.

We see some of the longest waiting times in the diagnostic arena, where there is an average wait of 63 days for out-patient neurosurgery, 70 days for respiratory medicine and oral surgery, and 98 days for neurology patients.

Targets were set, targets have been missed and all Government credibility is lost. What do we get from the SNP Government? We get a flimsy recovery plan from a flimsy First Minister—a First Minister who is so flimsy that he is not willing to stand up to his predecessor.

We should all be worried about the state that the NHS is in today under the SNP. In concluding today's debate, I echo the calls of my colleagues for better funding and support and for urgent action. We have a Government that has lost control of our NHS and social care system right across Scotland. It is an incompetent SNP Government that is more worried now about search warrants than about waiting times, and it is a Government that has mismanaged the NHS workforce.

This SNP Government is forcing patients, young and old, to live in pain. It is a Government that, ultimately, is now more focused on dividing our country than it is on healing its people.

15:51

Michael Matheson: My apologies that, in the short time that is available to me, I will not be able to respond to many of the points that members have raised.

I am sure that everyone in the chamber would recognise that our NHS has gone through a major challenge over the past few years, and it would be disingenuous to pretend otherwise. For those who do not want to believe me, they have only to look at the published report from Audit Scotland, which recognises the significant challenge that NHS Scotland is facing as a result of the challenges during the pandemic and Brexit. They have only to look at the National Audit Office's report on NHS England, which states that

"activity ... has continued to lag behind the pre-pandemic level and is well below planned trajectory",

and that there are

“significant threats to the recovery”.

In Wales, Audit Wales has said the same thing. It has said that

“Whole system change is overdue”,

and it has talked about the challenges in the system.

Therefore, all parts of the NHS are facing significant challenges, and it will take time to make sure that we are able to address that recovery, which is exactly what our NHS recovery plan is doing. We can see the progress that it is making on waiting lists.

Jackie Baillie: The recovery plan that your Government produced was after the pandemic and after Brexit. Did you not take account of those things? Frankly, the recovery plan is failing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to speak through the chair.

Michael Matheson: The plan took those factors into account, but they are all still impacting our NHS, which is an important point to be recognised. Ms Baillie said that the targets that we set were to “eradicate” the long waits. Actually, the targets were to do that across the majority of specialties, and we are seeing good progress on that.

Then we had the brass neck of Tory members on several occasions talking about standing up for the founding principles of our NHS, when they are rapidly going through the process of privatising the NHS in England as quickly as they can to keep the fat cats and their back benchers happy while they take money from private healthcare companies. Therefore, it is a bit rich listening to anybody from the Conservative Party talk about the founding principles of the NHS, given that it abandoned them many years ago and is rapidly selling it off to its pals in the private sector as quickly as it can. *[Interruption.]*

A number of important points were raised—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Excuse me, cabinet secretary—please resume your seat for a second.

I am being talked at by members who are remaining in a sedentary position. That is not acceptable. If members have something to say, they need to intervene and say it. If not, please let the member who has the floor continue to speak.

Michael Matheson: I want to pick up on a couple of issues that have been raised. Jackie Baillie spoke about orthopaedics. I hope that I will not disappoint her when I tell her that I am ahead of the game on that issue—I have already started work to consider how we can take further action on orthopaedics.

Jackie Baillie also mentioned Ms Murray's father, who is waiting for treatment presently. I do not know the details of that case, but if the member passes those on, I would be more than happy to have that matter looked into as well.

Gillian Mackay raised an important point about the safe staffing legislation. We are making steady progress with that. I had a good meeting with the Royal College of Nursing earlier this week, when we discussed the progress that we are making in the working groups that are taking forward some of the work on the associated guidance for that legislation for next year. I hope that we will continue to make progress with that.

Presiding Officer, I am very conscious of time. In drawing my remarks to a close, I apologise for being unable to respond to many of the points that members have raised in the time that is available to me. I must say to Mr Hoy that some of those are worth more than others.

I will do everything that I can, as the health secretary, to continue to support our NHS staff in the NHS's recovery, and to protect it from those who would seek to undermine it—and particularly from those on the Conservative benches, who have a track record of trying to undermine our NHS through privatisation and choking off its funding where they can.

One thing that the people of Scotland can be sure of is that this SNP Government is completely committed to an NHS in the public sector's hands, delivering for the people of Scotland.

15:56

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): It is a pleasure to close this debate on the Labour motion on NHS waiting times.

The Government seems oblivious to the fact that we are holding it to account for tests that it set itself after Brexit and after the Covid-19 pandemic. We do not dispute that those are hugely challenging events and that they continue to exert an impact, but any credible plan would have accounted for that variability and stress, and it would have taken countermeasures and actions accordingly. We just have not seen a dynamic or invigorating approach from the Government to try to get on top of the issue; nor have we seen the degree of honesty that we should have from any responsible Government.

This is not simply an abstract, technocratic exercise; we all have skin in the game. One in seven Scots—these are our neighbours, our family members and our friends; it could be one of us—are at the mercy of a system that is in serious distress. Therefore, it was essential that the

motion was brought to the chamber for debate today.

I had hoped that members on the Government benches would have treated the motion with that degree of seriousness. However, I have been very disappointed at the tone that has been adopted. We brought the motion in the spirit of collegiality and in the spirit of trying to come together to resolve a common challenge that our country faces and that one of the most precious institutions that our country has ever built faces.

Public Health Scotland data has shown that 31,498 patients are still waiting more than one year for an out-patient appointment. That is completely unacceptable. As we have heard already from colleagues, 18,000 of our fellow citizens have perished waiting on treatment. That is a scandal, and that cannot be treated with the glibness that it has been in the chamber today.

Many members have referred to the structural and systemic issues that our NHS faces. I think that Dr Gulhane mentioned that there is an issue with delayed discharge and that patient flow is critical to achieving efficient systems. That is a fair observation, and it is something that the Government needs to better understand.

Simply maintaining the status quo is not a neutral option, because people are paying the price for that. We have seen the data that shows that 6,895 people face a wait of more than two years for routine surgery. That is two years in agony, two years being disabled and two years being unable to contribute or care for their relatives. That is just not acceptable, and it casts a very dark shadow over our country. It impacts on all sorts of things, including our economic capacity. It introduces lifelong costs and so ends up being a false economy, as people face lifelong disabilities.

The member for Coatbridge and Chryston referred to A and E departments, but that was a red herring. This is stuff that took place when I was still at school. The reality is that this Government has been in power for my entire adult life, and it is about time that it took responsibility for its own actions in government. This continuing nonsense about things that took place a generation ago is simply not acceptable. The reality is that these decisions were taken on this Government's watch, and it should have the intellectual and moral honesty to take responsibility for them.

Monica Lennon: What I had wanted to say in my intervention on Mr MacGregor, if he had taken it, was that this is not about the political bubble. This week, I have been speaking to young people in Lanarkshire who have come here from Ukraine seeking sanctuary. They said to me that it is easier

and quicker for them to get healthcare by travelling back to Ukraine than it is to get it in Lanarkshire or elsewhere in central Scotland. That is the reality that we are facing.

What does my colleague say to that? I think that people in Scotland expect us to have very strong responses—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Paul Sweeney, please.

Paul Sweeney: It is absolutely critical. Every member will have received correspondence of that kind, whether it is from new Scots or people who have lived here their entire lives.

One constituent of mine was unable to work until he received a series of tests on his heart. He was out of work for almost a year while he waited on an appointment. When it was chased up for him, it transpired that his referral had never been made. That is shocking.

Ms Mackay, the Green member for Central Scotland, mentioned that waiting well initiatives are taking place. We commend and encourage those, and I thought that the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee heard great evidence on them, but the reality is that they are clearly not working. In every instance that they fail, the cabinet secretary must have a report on his desk so that he can understand the root cause of what went wrong and ensure that resilient measures are put in place to correct it.

We have had many other cases. Another constituent of mine was told in 2020 that she needed knee surgery—

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

Paul Sweeney: —and then was told in 2022 that she might need to wait for another two years for treatment. The orthopaedic recovery plan is to be commended, but that case clearly points to a wider policy failure.

In reality, although we recognise that the Government is facing challenges, we are holding it to account on its own tests, which are set according to the constraints that it has already identified. There is not an excuse. The Government needs to get to grips with the crisis that is engulfing our national health service, or we risk losing it for ever.

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

Caledonian MacBrayne Services (Resilience Fund)

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-09463, in the name of Michael Marra, on a resilience fund for CalMac disruption. I would be grateful if members who wish to speak in the debate were to press their request-to-speak buttons.

16:03

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):

The motion that we have put forward has a simple ask of this Government: to establish a resilience fund for businesses that are affected by the disruption to and withdrawal of ferry services. How Green and Scottish National Party members vote at decision time will be a clear signal of whether they accept responsibility for their catastrophic failure of our island communities and whether they will take a small action to begin to make amends. The failure has been 16 years in the making, but it is destroying livelihoods and communities today.

The figures are damning. From May 2022 to April 2023, the Mallaig-Lochboisdale route suffered 79 diverted sailings, 142 late sailings and 296 cancelled ferries. More than one in four of all scheduled sailings never left the harbour. With news of yet more cancellations this month, the situation is, to quote Alasdair Allan MSP, “abysmal”.

The consequences of those failures are devastating for islanders. Estimates are that local businesses are losing close to £50,000 per day. In an already difficult climate of high energy and fuel costs, coupled with soaring inflation, businesses cannot afford further financial hardship.

Between October 2021 and March 2023, CalMac paid £4.54 million in financial penalties. Where did that go?

The First Minister said last week that the money was

“reinvested back into the resilience of the network.”—
[*Official Report*, 8 June 2023; c 10.]

The Government’s amendment reiterates that claim. However, what is the resilience that it speaks of? Hardly a week goes by without further announcements of delays and cancellations, as the network rusts and breaks and two ferries sit in port under construction in the west of Scotland. The Government’s incompetent approach is not arresting decline or incentivising better performance; it is doing precisely the opposite. CalMac bosses know that the money is being shuffled around in yet another SNP accountancy trick.

In truth, island residents and business owners are the only ones to experience a true financial penalty, as their livelihoods are destroyed. The idea of a resilience fund did not originate from members on the Labour benches; it began in our island communities when residents of South Uist gathered in droves to protest about the withdrawal of yet more ferry services. Scottish Labour has spoken with business owners across the Western Isles and their position could not be clearer. One business owner told us that the impact on her business was “catastrophic” and

“far exceeds the impact from the global pandemic”.

With this Government, it is, I am afraid, a case of out of sight, out of mind. If 185,000 people, or a third of Edinburgh’s population, were protesting outside the Parliament now, the Government would have to listen but, when a third of South Uist’s population turn out to protest, the Government pays no heed whatsoever. It is no wonder that the owner of a catering company in South Uist told us:

“we have lost all faith in the Scottish Government to be able to improve the situation”.

That loss of faith in Government did not happen overnight. It is the result of 16 years of wilful neglect by the SNP Government, which leaves our islands facing an existential threat. That incompetence has consequences. Under the SNP, the vital infrastructure of Scotland’s ferry services is reaching collapse. The litany of policy failures—on infrastructure, connectivity, housing, education, fishing and more—is leading to an exodus from our islands, particularly of young people who see no option for their future in the place that they call home.

The research paper “The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community”, which was published in 2020, issued stark warnings about the future viability of the Gaelic language and culture beyond the next 10 years, in the face of an ageing population in island communities. The paper highlighted that

“The retention of young people and young families willing to contribute to community vitality will be central to any credible strategy of revitalisation.”

How can we expect young people to stay in areas where they will be increasingly isolated and financially penalised?

The very existence of Scotland’s ancient language and culture relies on the economic viability of our island communities, but today it is abundantly clear that the SNP cannot be trusted with the protection of Scotland and of who we are and where we come from. The SNP is eternally distracted, is obsessed with press over policy and dissembling over delivery, and has utterly failed our islanders.

Are SNP and Green members listening? Have they heard the cries of despair from our communities who rely on these services? I see some members in the chamber who represent those communities directly. Will they heed those calls for help? Given the Government's position today, those members must put aside blind loyalty to the amendment that the Government has lodged and loyalty to a failing incompetent leadership and do right by their constituents. Have you heard your constituents' voices and will you act?

I move,

That the Parliament instructs the Scottish Government to establish a resilience fund for businesses adversely affected by Caledonian MacBrayne disruption and withdrawal of services, utilising funds obtained from penalties imposed on Caledonian MacBrayne for breaches of its contract with Transport Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I call Màiri McAllan to speak to and move amendment S6M-09463.2.

16:08

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition (Màiri McAllan): Before beginning, I would like to welcome Fiona Hyslop to her new post. She brings an enormous amount of experience to the role, and I am really pleased to be working with her as team transport.

On the matters at hand, I want to begin with a clear and unequivocal acknowledgement of the importance of the matters that are being debated today. For Scotland's island communities, ferries are not just a mode of transport; they are lifeline services that bring food and vital supplies and that support economic activity. It follows, then, that the issue is not just about the improvement of transport service performance; it is about delivering the confidence that is needed to sustain our island populations and ensure that people and businesses can thrive. Insofar as Michael Mara rehearsed those points, I agree with him.

However, as I said in the chamber recently, following the protests on South Uist, I will not prevaricate about the strain that is currently being felt in the network. On-going technical issues with vessels have resulted in delays to the annual overhaul programme, and the cancellation of sailings has been the result. Regrettably, some communities have been more impacted than others. I absolutely recognise the need to improve CalMac's reliability and rebuild confidence in services.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

Màiri McAllan: I will give way briefly, but I have a lot that I would like to get through.

Paul Sweeney: Does the cabinet secretary accept that other fleets of similar vintages operate with much greater resilience than is shown in the CalMac fleet? Why is there not a proper preventative maintenance system in place to ensure greater resilience in the fleet?

Màiri McAllan: Mr Sweeney's comments come on the back of my full recognition of the need to improve CalMac's reliability and rebuild confidence in the fleet, so that should let him know that, to some extent, I agree that there is work to be done.

I deeply regret that the needs of island communities have not always been met by CalMac services and that CalMac's communications have not always been sufficient or timely. However, I do not want to just regret; I want to have a plan of action for how the Government can do all that we can, all that is practicable and all that is in our gift to bolster the reliability of the network.

As I see it, there are two principal parts to that. First, there is the action that we can take in the here and now to alleviate disruption in what is undeniably a period of pressure. Secondly, the Government should make that period of pressure as short as possible by bolstering and adding to the number of vessels in the fleet. I will use my time today to set out what the Government is doing against both those objectives.

In relation to the here and now, I met the chief executive of CalMac last week. My first question to the CalMac management was how they intended to respond to the protests on South Uist, because, as politicians, we all know that it is essential that there is communication and a presence in communities.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I think that members are interested in how the Government, rather than CalMac, will respond to the demonstrations on South Uist.

Màiri McAllan: I have just started to address the two aspects of the Government's plan and to set out what we will do, in our gift, to address the issue. I am not at all shying away from the actions that the Government needs to take, and I am happy to narrate them now.

On the back of that meeting, I was very pleased that Mr Drummond visited South Uist and met residents. That followed a similar visit from the former transport minister in late May and a visit that the new transport minister made recently in her capacity as a committee member. Indeed, I expect to make similar visits over the summer.

As well as communication, CalMac management and I discussed the route prioritisation matrix that CalMac uses to assess options to maintain lifeline connections when there

is disruption in the network. I asked CalMac to urgently consider that route prioritisation matrix to ensure that it is fit for purpose and capable of taking into account cumulative impacts on fragile island communities. I expect the outcome of that consideration in short order.

This morning, I was pleased to meet the ferries community board, which includes community representatives from our islands and is, in my view, utterly invaluable as a source of lived experience. I strongly believe that CalMac and the Scottish Government should listen carefully to what those people have to say—I certainly intend to do that.

That is the response that we are undertaking in the here and now, but the motion is about compensation.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Màiri McAllan: I am afraid that I do not have time—I am exceptionally short on time.

The contract that we have in place with CalMac allows us to make penalty deductions when performance measures are not met. Through that contract, penalties of between £1 million and £3 million per year have been recovered. Michael Marra questioned where that funding has been directed. He need only look at the MV Alfred, which is currently providing resilience on the Arran route. That cost £9 million, which was funded in part by those deductions. That ferry is providing resilience in the fleet, and I understand that that is exactly what islanders want most of all.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Michael Marra: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Màiri McAllan: I am very conscious of time.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask the cabinet secretary to conclude. We are very tight for time.

Màiri McAllan: I will leave it there. I hope that my colleague the Minister for Small Business, Innovation and Trade will be able to cover any other points.

I move amendment S6M-09463.2, to leave out from “instructs” to end and insert:

“recognises the significant impact that delays and disruption to ferry services have regrettably had on Scotland’s island communities and businesses; acknowledges that some island communities have been particularly badly affected, and also acknowledges the frustration felt by island communities; believes that the Scottish Government must continue to explore all practicable options to support island communities; agrees that the Scottish Government should redouble its efforts to

work with operators and CMAL to improve reliability, resilience and confidence across networks and services, and address concerns that have been raised around CalMac’s route prioritisation matrix to ensure that it is reviewed, with input from communities, and that it considers the economic impact to fragile island communities; notes that all penalty deductions from CalMac made in relation to failures on the network are used to support resilience and help reduce disruption, for example, by helping to partly fund the cost of the charter of MV Alfred, and believes that accelerating the replacement of major vessels in the ferry fleet must be the priority in order to provide the ferry services that island communities need.”

The Presiding Officer: I call Graham Simpson to speak to and move amendment S6M-09463.1.

16:14

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I am afraid that I did not hear any kind of plan there.

I thank Labour for bringing the debate to the chamber; we will support its motion, of course.

In March, I welcomed Kevin Stewart to his new role as transport minister—Presiding Officer, I am getting a bit of an echo when I speak.

The Presiding Officer: I am certainly content with what I can hear; the sound is audible.

Graham Simpson: Okay, I will carry on.

Mr Stewart was just minutes into the job when I asked him an urgent question about what the Government was doing to restore ferry services between Mallaig, Oban and Lochboisdale in South Uist, in light of the announcement that the services were to be withdrawn from 5 April to 13 May. He talked about recognising the challenges that were faced and said that the islands remained open for business. I then asked him whether he would look at a compensation scheme and reduced fares for islanders. He said that he would be speaking to CalMac that day and would “seek mitigations” and “solutions”.

Alasdair Allan had another go on the idea of a business resilience fund and did slightly better: the minister said that he would

“need to consider it further”—[*Official Report*, 30 March 2023; c 60.]

which is not quite a commitment.

Douglas Ross raised exactly the same issue last week because, three months on, things are no better. In fact, they are worse, with sailings of the MV Lord of the Isles between Mallaig and Lochboisdale cancelled until the end of June. As we have heard, locals who have protested in their hundreds have said that CalMac is ushering in “modern day Highland clearances”.

CalMac uses something that is called a matrix to decide which services to run when there are problems, which is quite a lot of the time. John

Daniel Peteranna of the South Uist business ferry impact group, which organised the demonstration, said of the matrix that

“It is as vague and woolly as you can get and that is what they use to make decisions. It is hot air. We think it is commercially better for them to do this ... The matrix should look at the cultural and economic impact but I cannot make any sense of the rubbish that has been written. We need an explanation of what it means ... It is like the Highland Clearances again.”

Robbie Drummond, who is CalMac’s chief executive, has been meeting islanders this week. Mr Drummond had a taste of what they are going through when he reportedly could not get his car on the ferry and travelled a very long way round to get there—if it had been Lorna Slater, she would of course have just chartered a boat. Mr Drummond has promised a review of the matrix; we have heard today that the cabinet secretary will do the same.

The upshot is this: people on the islands are suffering because of mismanagement of our ferries under the SNP. The Government owns Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd, which buys the boats and owns them; it also owns CalMac, which runs the ferries. Sitting above them is Transport Scotland and whoever is minister of the day. The Government even owns the yard that is building two new ferries—eventually. There is no one else to blame; the Government is responsible. Therefore, when people are out of pocket because of it, it should compensate them—it really is that simple.

Right now, island life is being made a misery, so the Government’s amendment is quite shameful; it removes all mention of a compensation scheme. Any islander watching today will be furious; they are being let down and now, they are being ignored. I ask members to support my amendment and reject the Government’s.

I move amendment S6M-09463.1, to insert at end:

“; notes the anger expressed by islanders at repeated disruption, which is impacting on business and day-to-day life; calls on the Scottish Government to establish the fund, which should be permanent, without delay, and welcomes the commitment by CalMac to review its route scoring matrix.”

16:18

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am pleased to note that transport has been restored to Cabinet level; it should never have been removed. I take this opportunity to welcome Fiona Hyslop to her new role as transport minister.

I thank Michael Marra for bringing this important debate and motion to the chamber. Scottish Liberal Democrats will support the motion at decision time, as well as the Conservative Party

amendment. It is the right thing to do to compensate islanders who have been left high and dry as a consequence of their lifeline ferry service failing to meet their needs. The motion calls for resilience funding for compensation, to come from

“penalties imposed on Caledonian MacBrayne for breaches of its contract with Transport Scotland.”

The hundreds of people in South Uist protesting earlier this month about CalMac’s decision to cancel most ferry sailings to Mallaig for the remainder of June will be a lasting image of the frustration at the Scottish Government’s self-inflicted ferry fiasco. The thinking seems to be that the impact can be measured in numbers. The logic seems to be that it is a small community, so there will be small impact. In fact, the opposite is true, because there is a disproportionately large impact on smaller communities: the missed hospital appointments, missed weddings and missed funerals and the loss of income for accommodation providers—when bookings are cancelled because visitors cannot get to the islands—and for retailers who have no stock. It is a threat to the island way of life.

I welcome reports that CalMac will review its route prioritisation matrix, but the cynic in me suggests that it is doing so now only because the islanders’ demonstration hit national headlines. There is much that must be done to repair the damage and loss of trust. As Michael Marra observed, the hundreds of people who protested in South Uist would equate to 180,000 people in Edinburgh. If comparable numbers of cars were parked nose to tail to show disappointment at transport decisions that affected people’s lives in the capital, the Government would not be able to ignore the chaos.

The scale of protests in South Uist shows the strength of feeling about being isolated—even trapped—the sense of injustice on the part of businesses that face losses and the anger that is felt about the fact that the company at the heart of these issues is getting yet more taxpayer cash. There is a sense that the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland do not fully understand the needs of islanders, the critical need for connectivity and the interdependency.

The SNP-Green Government needs to look beyond the central belt. Island communities feel as though they have been abandoned. Depopulation is a serious concern in Scotland’s islands and rural areas. The handling of the ferry fiasco and the lack of accountability on the part of the Government show that the concerns of islanders are distant to ministers. We face the collapse of communities in island areas if ferries are not operating and service is not improved.

The response to the situation has shown that the Government's response to depopulation is lip service at best. What is needed is long-term thinking about the ferry fleet capacity and resilience, a rolling plan for the replacement of old ferries, innovation in the build and other needed functions and a move away from thinking that the impacts on island populations will be small. Islands and those who live on them are very much part of Scotland, geographically, culturally and socially. Islanders are no less important than those who live on mainland Scotland. It is critical that we get transport connectivity right, whether that is ferries, buses or—dare I say it?—tunnels, and everything else will fall into place.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

16:22

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I welcome this important debate and I speak in support of my Labour colleague Michael Marra's motion.

As Michael Marra said, Scotland's islanders are right to be angry, dismayed and frustrated, because they simply do not have the ferry service that they need or deserve. They have been failed and they have been let down. Given that fact and the recent and damaging disruption to island businesses in particular, it is only right that those businesses receive the compensation that they need and deserve.

It is little wonder that we have seen protests recently on South Uist, and we know that the same anger and frustration is felt in other islands across Scotland, including in Arran in my West Scotland region. I have spoken to businesses, particularly food producers, who are in despair. Delays to ferries cost them thousands of pounds a day and could cost jobs in the long term.

Let us not talk around the key issue behind why we are here. The number 1 reason—the main reason by far—why islanders do not have a reliable ferry service is that CalMac does not have a reliable ferry fleet. In addition to being unreliable, it is an ageing fleet: 38 per cent of vessels are more than 30 years old and over the recommended lifespan for a ferry.

That flies in the face of the First Minister's claim last week about the SNP's investment in ferries. Let us look at the outcomes. Over the SNP's time in office, only six ferries have been built—six in 16 years. Compare that with the 10 ferries that were built by the previous Labour-Liberal Democrat Government in half that time—10 in eight years. Even Margaret Thatcher's Government built more new CalMac ferries than this Government has. Its record is shameful.

There is a plenty of blame to go round for the whole ferries fiasco, but the Scottish Government cannot blame anyone else for its abject failure to provide new ferries. It cannot blame CalMac, it certainly cannot blame the Ferguson's workforce and it cannot blame the previous Government for its failure to provide decent ferries for our islands.

Given that this is the Government's fault, the least that it could do now is adequately compensate island businesses whose futures are at real risk. It is time for the Government to take responsibility. I say that because it appears, day in, day out, that the Government is desperate not to take responsibility but to deflect blame elsewhere.

To be clear, CMAL and CalMac are not entirely blameless, but it is not their job, and it is certainly not the job of their workers when dealing with angry passengers, to take the flak for the Government's overall procurement failure. The project Neptune report has been part of the deflection strategy. We need to look at how governance and structures best work and how we best run our ferries, but that cannot, and must not, distract us from the fact that the Government has not built enough ferries.

One clear commitment in relation to project Neptune from the former transport minister was to rule out privatisation. It is hard to see how the current situation could be made worse, but the privatisation of CalMac would do that. That should also be ruled out by the new transport minister.

On taking responsibility, I wish the new transport minister, Fiona Hyslop, and the new transport secretary, Màiri McAllan, well, as I do Kevin Stewart. However, I say to them what I said to Neil Gray last week: the ministerial merry-go-round needs to stop. There was a time when ministers could not get down to Ferguson's quick enough for a photo op; now, ministers cannot wait to get ferries out of their portfolio and to buy themselves time with nice platitudes.

Real responsibility would be a Government minister standing up in the chamber, staking their reputation on fixing this mess and saying that they will not leave until the job is done. Because of the current fiasco, we face a situation in which our ferry network is in crisis and we are having to build ferries in Turkey. We are also—

The Presiding Officer: We are very tight for time, Mr Bibby, so I must ask you to conclude.

Neil Bibby: Okay.

In closing, I say that warm words from the Government mean nothing and do nothing for island communities, unless the Government is willing to put its money where its mouth is and establish—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Bibby.

Neil Bibby: —a proper resilience fund to compensate businesses.

16:27

Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): We all know about, and we have quite rightly rehearsed today, the problems facing the CalMac network. There are not enough ships. The ships that are there are ageing. They are breaking down more often, and those repairs are taking longer. CalMac, which was once very much considered part of the fabric of life in the islands, risks increasingly being seen by islanders as remote and bureaucratic.

Continuing disruption has hit many businesses in my constituency hard, nowhere more so—I should say—than in Uist. Lochboisdale is not typically a place where you will see protests and mass demonstrations. As others have pointed out, the fact that one third of the island's resident population came out to demonstrate against the recent complete withdrawal of the ferry service says much about the pain that is being felt there.

South Uist has, in fact, regularly suffered more from service disruption than anywhere else on the Clyde and Hebrides network. Over the course of a year, there were 225 cancelled sailings versus 479 that operated. That is an astonishingly high cancellation rate, and it is easily higher than the rate anywhere else on the network. Winter was particularly bad, with only a quarter of scheduled sailings operating between November and March.

Lifeline services should, in the first instance, serve island communities. I carefully preface my next remark by acknowledging that every island in Scotland needs a good ferry service. However, while other islands with smaller populations get two or even four-vessel services, the whole string of islands from Eriskay to Berneray has to share half of a single ferry between North Uist and Skye at the moment.

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I hear what Alasdair Allan says about islands requiring ferries and how they differ in their capacities, but does he agree that one of the most invidious things about this crisis is the fact that islands are sometimes pitted against each other and that we have negativity—almost competition—between islands, which should never happen?

Alasdair Allan: I can identify with what Donald Cameron said, which is why I tried to phrase my remarks carefully. No, we should not be in a position where islands are in competition with each other; of course, when there are not enough ships, they inevitably are. I point to the particular

situation in South Uist and I hope that my remarks are clear about what they have been suffering.

The focus on passenger numbers to the detriment of all other considerations is, I believe, leading those who operate ferry services to drift from their core purpose. That is how we get to a route prioritisation matrix that was devised without any input from communities, and which strips an island of all its ferry services for the whole month of June.

I therefore welcome the cabinet secretary's remarks, in which she is—it would seem—willing to question that matrix. There is no lack of evidence for the economic damage that is being caused. One example that was reported by Business Gateway in Uist detailed a 40 per cent drop in bookings for accommodation providers. Hauliers, who are not supported through compensation from CalMac, have frequently—

Michael Marra: Will the member give way?

Alasdair Allan: I must make progress now.

Hauliers have frequently faced delay and rerouting over hundreds of miles. Time-critical shellfish exports have sometimes not been able to reach European markets timeously.

Even before the latest disruption in Uist, businesses had approached me to say that they were not convinced that they could survive this year as a result of these issues. Of course, the complete withdrawal of the ferry service from South Uist makes the situation even more critical.

The Scottish Government has rightly made ensuring a reliable ferry service a priority. We all want to see the new Islay class vessels, as well as those at Port Glasgow, come into service, but—as I hope that I have illustrated—there are businesses across Uist that cannot afford to wait. What is happening in Uist is in a different league from what is happening in many other places.

The Government's amendment clearly recognises—

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude, Mr Allan. I am afraid that we have no extra time this afternoon.

Alasdair Allan: I conclude there, and I recognise that the Government amendment goes some way—in fact, a great deal of the way—towards acknowledging those problems, which are very real.

16:31

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): I will do something unusual with my four minutes—I will nominate one of my constituents for an award. His letter was dubbed "Letter of the day", but I

nominate Mr John S Milligan from Kilmarnock for the prestigious parliamentary award of letter of the year, because it brilliantly sums up the entire debate. I will read his letter to members. He says:

"I booked my car and caravan on the Ardrossan/Brodick ferry"

about

"two months ago for one of my several annual holiday trips to the Isle of Arran. Regrettably Calmac has cancelled my booking with just over a week before the trip was scheduled to take place. Calmac, trying to be 'helpful', has advised that I can still travel to Arran via Claonaig, which is fine, because whilst it is a four-hour trip from my home, I know the route like the back of my hand since I've had to travel it so often due to last-minute cancellations".

Mr Milligan goes on to say:

"So why did I want to raise my latest holiday ferry booking problem? Quite simply I am utterly fed up with the lottery operated by Calmac which leaves travellers to Scottish islands in the position where they are unable to guarantee whether they can either reach or return from their chosen destination on the dates booked."

He says:

"I might lose out on a holiday which in the overall scheme of things is a relatively minor issue, but perhaps more importantly the long-suffering island communities will also lose out. For example Janie's cafe just outside Brodick will not be serving me or my other seven family members lunch, neither will The Coffee Pot in Whiting Bay, the Lochranza Caravan Site won't be getting our booking, the Stag Pavilion in Lochranza won't serve us dinner, Pirnmill Stores along with numerous others won't receive our custom. All of those businesses which need a reliable ferry service to exist are significantly disadvantaged by the mess that is our so-called island ferry services."

He goes on to say:

"I don't know whether"

to blame

"Calmac or the Scottish Government",

but he says that, while he does not know who is to blame,

"I do know that the current situation cannot continue with its current hit or miss approach."

Mr Milligan finishes by saying:

"This would be an ideal time for our new First Minister to show that, although under the previous regime he was part of ... which was unable to successfully build ships on time, he can successfully deliver projects on time for the people of Scotland."

I hope that the First Minister was listening to me as I read John's letter, because John is right. Businesses on Arran are—as they are elsewhere—at their utter wits' end as a result of the endless uncertainty. Many are unsure whether they will even survive the current crisis.

Last year, I raised in the chamber the Auchrannie resort writing off £400,000 of cash flow to account for ferry disruption, which was on top of

another £300,000 in related costs. That was just one business on one island—we can multiply that by hundreds of businesses on dozens of islands. You do not need to be the finance secretary to do the maths on that—it all adds up.

The problem is that we do not know how much it adds up to. When I asked the Scottish Government just an hour ago whether it had done any work whatsoever to calculate the potential economic cost of the crisis to our island communities—I say this with the greatest respect to Mr Lochhead, whom I have a lot of time for personally—I got complete waffle in response, which we heard repeated, I am afraid, by the cabinet secretary. They do not know the answer because they probably do not want to know the immense cost of the issue.

Our islands need compensation, and they needed it yesterday—no ifs or buts. Get a move on.

16:35

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, particularly on behalf of my constituents on the Clyde islands of Arran and Cumbrae, who, like thousands of others, are regularly impacted by the on-going ferry crisis, which is causing chaos.

As we all know, when a ferry breaks down on a lifeline route, it affects islanders' ability to attend hospital appointments, work, funerals and a wide range of other commitments on the mainland, as well as others' ability to visit the island. The declining resilience of CalMac ferries has an impact on almost every aspect of island life and on the economies of island communities. It has a disproportionate impact on those producing goods with short shelf lives and on those trying to buy or sell such goods, such as food.

Over the festive period, many constituents were in touch with me—and, no doubt, with others in the chamber—about the empty food shelves in shops on Arran due to ferry cancellations. Unfortunately that is becoming a regular occurrence. Constituents on Cumbrae have been in touch about problems with postal services, as well as many other things, as a result of the problems with the ferry service there.

Significant problems have been caused on Arran and Cumbrae by the failure of CalMac to give priority to essential goods such as food.

Màiri McAllan: As the member rightly narrates the concerns of her constituents, I wonder whether she welcomes, in the context of Michael Marra's motion, the fact that the MV Alfred, part funded by CalMac penalty deductions, is now serving her constituents on Arran, who I know have concerns?

Katy Clark: I welcome anything that is done to alleviate the current situation, but, as the cabinet secretary well knows, islanders on Arran continue to have significant problems. However, I was focusing on a very specific issue that has been raised by islanders, who are asking that priority be given to essential goods such as food and to postal services, because there are repeated problems with such essentials when ferries are cancelled. I wrote to the cabinet secretary and her predecessors about the issue, and I suspect that others have done so.

CalMac's socioeconomic report from 2020 showed that its services generated over £227 million in turnover and had a footprint of more than £350 million. A 2020 North Ayrshire Council and Fraser of Allander Institute report estimated that, for each day of ferry operation, there is a contribution of, on average, just under £170,000 to Arran's economy. Of course, that figure will be greater now.

There is absolutely no doubt that functioning lifeline ferry services have a significant impact on the economies of island communities—that cannot be overestimated. Tourism businesses estimate that they lose tens of thousands of pounds every time one of the two ferries serving Arran is diverted to support services elsewhere.

Labour's motion insists that the Scottish Government establish a resilience fund to help businesses that are affected by CalMac cancellations. Islanders are in this situation because of the decisions of politicians, which have meant that we have not procured the vessels needed for many years. I hope that Parliament will support the motion.

16:40

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): First, I remind the chamber that my wife works part time for CalMac. I also welcome Fiona Hyslop to her new role in the Scottish Government and the new responsibility that the cabinet secretary has for transport.

The debate is timely, and I put on record my acknowledgement of the representations to the Scottish Government of the local MSP, Alasdair Allan, on behalf of his constituents. For all constituency MSPs, our first priority is our constituents, and Alasdair Allan has consistently prioritised them throughout this situation. Nobody is in doubt about the significant distress and difficulty that ferry disruption has caused for island communities and their economies. When it is reported that one third of the community has demonstrated to highlight its plight, it is obvious that there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

On the fair question of compensation, the Scottish Government is carefully considering the best option for the resilience of island economies. The compensation fund has not been introduced because money is already deducted from CalMac in penalties and fines and reinvested back into the resilience of the network. The chartering of the MV Alfred from Pentland Ferries, for example, has been part funded by CalMac's performance deductions—the First Minister recently highlighted that during First Minister's question time. The motion from the Opposition talks about funds, but the challenge is where the money would come from, and the penalties are already being reinvested into the system.

CalMac removing a service for one month during the busiest time of the year is certainly not positive for the South Uist economy. Previously, Alasdair Allan wrote to the Scottish Government to express his concerns, those of his constituents and those of local businesses. I accept that CalMac, CMAL and the Scottish Government face a massive challenge with the present situation. Indeed, CMAL is on record as having looked at and considered, over a five-year period, more than 650 ships to bring into the fleet.

In addition, the Scottish Government has bought and deployed an additional vessel—the MV Loch Frisa; chartered the MV Arrow to provide additional resilience and capacity; made significant progress in the construction of vessels 801 and 802; commissioned two new vessels for Islay and two new vessels for the Little Minch routes; progressed investment in key ports and harbours; and confirmed additional revenue funding for the operation of local authority inter-island ferry services. Investment in ports and harbours is hugely important, and the job that CMAL is undertaking is vital in helping to provide the public ferry service network that I am sure we all want to see.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Will the member take an intervention?

Stuart McMillan: No.

The minister's amendment highlights a few areas that are important in the debate. The part that I believe is crucial is:

“address concerns that have been raised around CalMac's route prioritisation matrix to ensure that it is reviewed, with input from communities, and that it considers the economic impact to fragile island communities”.

For one area to regularly be CalMac's go-to location to see a reduced service is, in my opinion, wrong. There will clearly be a wide range of factors involved in that matrix, and a review of those is imperative. The quicker that happens, the better.

I want to see our ferry service improve, and the sooner that additional ferries come into the fleet, the better. That will help with resilience in the service, but the immediate priority must be to help Uist.

16:44

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I welcome my colleague Fiona Hyslop to her new role as Minister for Transport. As a Highlands and Islands MSP, I hear about and feel the profound impact that ferry disruption has on my constituents. It is vital that we centre them in this debate and in all our plans to improve ferry services. Our islands are not museums or amusement parks for tourists; they are living, breathing communities and ferries are their vital arteries. Every ferry cancelled means an appointment missed, a job unfinished or a shop unstocked.

Although the fines that have been paid by CMAL have been used to partly fund the cost of chartering the MV Alfred, the value of the fines is not nearly sufficient to address the challenges that are faced by businesses and communities on our islands. Situations such as the one that is faced by people in South Uist must be prevented from happening again—that must be our focus now.

A short-term resilience fund is not a sustainable solution to the systemic issue that is causing the challenges in our islands.

Michael Marra: Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: I am not going to take an intervention—we are short of time.

At best, a short-term resilience fund would be a temporary and repackaged form of short-term relief that would prioritise the disruption that is caused to business, but not the disruption that is caused to communities. Why should a business be compensated for a cancelled booking when a constituent who has missed a hospital appointment or a long-planned family gathering would not be compensated?

Instead, the Scottish Government's budget must be directed to substantial investment in our future ferry services, which would address the root causes of the challenges that are faced by our island communities. We need legislation and funding that will revitalise our islands in the round. For example, the Western Isles Council is currently engaged in a pilot project in relation to the proposed community wealth building bill, and the Scottish Greens have been calling for funding to support community-led housing and development projects such as those on Mull, Colonsay and Gigha.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: As the member heard earlier, I will not take an intervention because the Presiding Officer has said that we are tight for time.

Rather than simply handing over small amounts of money to affected businesses, as Labour is proposing, we should fundamentally change how economies operate in our island communities so that public and private funds are retained and optimised. It is crucial that we unlock the potential of our island communities and help them to reverse depopulation trends by delivering a resilient ferry network to support Scotland's future as a thriving island nation.

As long as the Scottish Government's finances are constrained by a defective devolution settlement and are routinely worsened by UK Government austerity and Tory economic mismanagement, it is hard to see what viable route there is through which to increase spending on our ferry services and infrastructure. Spending has increased by 180 per cent since last year, which is delivering new vessels and supporting improvement of piers and harbours in order to future proof our ferry services.

I continue to urge that new vessels be low-carbon vessels, like the electric ferries in Sweden and Denmark that run on renewable energy. We also need to decarbonise our existing vessels. Retrofitting electric motors cuts pollution, emissions, noise and running costs. We must also urgently advance a review of fares to ensure that island communities are not further disadvantaged.

As the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers called for yesterday, all parties need to join together constructively to support CalMac, CMAL and our island stakeholders, and get round the table and design a long-term solution.

16:48

Donald Cameron (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I also begin by welcoming Fiona Hyslop to her role as transport minister. She undoubtedly comes into that position with significant experience in Government, which is desperately needed at this time. One of the problems has been that no transport minister has been in place long enough to understand the problems and to commit to solving them. As Neil Bibby said, there has been a "ministerial merry-go-round".

In all the years that I have been a member of the Scottish Parliament, never has the crisis that is engulfing Scotland's ferry network been as great a danger to island life as it is now. We have spoken

many times about island depopulation and the need to address the challenges that cause it, including fixing the unreliable ferry network, but words can do only so much. We need urgent action, but so far the Government has failed on every metric. The number of ferry cancellations has been growing, the number of ferry breakdowns has been growing and we learned earlier this year that CalMac is on track to break its own level of performance fines.

That does not instil any confidence in the Scottish Government's ability to get a grip of this crisis. To Ariane Burgess I say this—she found time to blame the UK Government, but the blame here sits with the Scottish Government, and the Scottish Government alone. For once, I ask her to stand up for the island communities that she represents, because the situation is desperate and is affecting residents, visitors and businesses daily.

In the short time that I have, I will focus my contribution on one island—Mull, which has been so badly affected in recent weeks and months. The sad thing is that I could pick almost any island on the western seaboard and find a community that has been affected by the crisis. However, Mull has seen its ferry services dwindle, following redeployment of the MV Isle of Mull. In its place are two smaller vessels that are unable to cope with demand, especially as the summer season swings into place. The lack of a like-for-like vessel to serve Mull has resulted in 250 fewer car spaces and 7,000 fewer passenger spaces every day. That, coupled with the launch of the disastrous new booking system, has meant that bookings have been cancelled at short notice and passengers have been forced into a free-for-all. That has a direct impact on the people who live and work on Mull.

I spoke to one local business owner, Stephen Blazye, who runs Mull Wildlife Breaks. He told me that he offers customers a bespoke wildlife holiday, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to satisfy clients when their pre-booked tickets are disregarded by CalMac and they have to get any boat that they can be slotted onto. He says that the crisis is resulting in a downturn in bookings and that cancellations are being received at an alarming rate.

Another business, Tobermory Bakery and its tearoom, has reportedly lost between 30 and 40 per cent of its usual takings as a result of coach-tour cancellations. Local groups including Isle of Mull Rugby Football Club have been hit hard. The club organised a rugby tournament to be held about a month ago and spent £12,000 on catering and equipment, only to be told by several clubs that were visiting the island that CalMac had cancelled their bookings. A Mull junior sporting

competitor had in her sport two qualifiers to represent an under-18 Scotland team and she was uncertain about whether she could actually get off the island to attend.

The situation in Mull and across all Scotland's island communities is approaching a precipice. All the groups that I referred to, and many others, need urgent support. Warm words about investment in resilience, as important as that is, simply will not cut it. I have asked this of Humza Yousaf, I have asked it of Kevin Stewart and I have asked it of Màiri McAllan. Now I ask Fiona Hyslop. We need a ferry compensation scheme right now. That is why we will support Labour's motion at decision time.

16:52

Ivan McKee (Glasgow Provan) (SNP): I start by welcoming Fiona Hyslop to her role as transport minister. The importance of ferries to island businesses is crucial to Scotland's tourism sector, so I will focus my remarks on the impact on that sector, following the debate that we had on tourism last week. In that vein, I congratulate Richard Lochhead on tourism being added to his ministerial title, which is hugely important and significant.

The Scottish tourism sector has bounced back strongly post-Covid, particularly in respect of there being more international visitors. We reflected last week on the fact that the sector is a key part of Scotland's economy and has a wide impact that goes beyond the bounds of the sector. However, the supply chain does not work if businesses cannot get to Scotland's islands. Events' detrimental impact on Scotland's islands also affect Scotland's broader tourism sector, as well as the broader international perception of Scotland. That is hugely significant.

I will focus my remarks on the impact on Scotland's local tourism businesses, as well as on businesses in the food and drinks sector, with some examples of the costs that businesses have incurred. It is important to note that this is not just about the immediate impact of various ferries being cancelled at short notice. It is also about the cumulative impact on confidence in the sector; it hurts not only local tourism but the whole sector, because it diminishes Scotland's tourism offer.

Michael Marra: Does the member agree with the disregard that his Green Party colleagues have shown for businesses that employ people on the islands and that urgently need their support?

Ivan McKee: I recognise that tourism plays a vital role in our island economies. Uncertainty is damaging: for example, tour operators have taken decisions to de-list islands from 2024 tour itineraries in order to protect their reputation

because of the uncertainty around ferry connectivity.

It must be mentioned that the problems with the new booking system are adding to the difficulties, as has been highlighted.

There are many examples of the knock-on effects—effects beyond the lost revenues that are hurting businesses. For example, visitors claiming back costs and raising disputes with credit card companies can lead to more work, bureaucracy and additional costs for businesses, and businesses that have bought in high-quality fresh seafood and other produce have had to throw it out when guests have had to cancel at short notice.

Furthermore, there is a loss of potential business, with visitors who were thinking about visiting our islands cancelling their trips or not booking at all and, perhaps, instead travelling outwith Scotland. Of course, we must recognise that businesses do not make as much noise about that as they might, because of their fears about damaging the image of the industry and jeopardising future bookings.

I can cite many examples of businesses that are facing difficulties. A small independent gin company is £15,000 down in revenue for May and June in its distillery. In a family-run boutique bed-and-breakfast one week's losses were more than £9,000. That is all down to a lack of ferries or to ferries being cancelled, with each incident resulting in endless paperwork and phone calls with disgruntled customers. Another accommodation provider's total lost earnings over a six-month period come to £24,500—its last booking inquiry was on 4 April; it has had none since. Again, that is a consequence of uncertainty across the sector.

I welcome the fact that the Government takes the issue seriously and that there are three ministers in the chamber to address it. I have every confidence that they will work together to do what needs to be done across the range of things that need to be dealt with.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that investing in the ferry network is important not only because the network supports island communities, vital though that is, but because it is an investment in Scotland's economy, as it generates returns through building the tourism sector so that it is more productive, through increasing the tax base not only on the islands but across the whole economy, and through enhancing Scotland's overall reputation as a destination.

16:56

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am grateful to Labour for bringing the debate to the chamber. As an islander, I am pleased to be able to speak on an area that is of real concern for island communities across Scotland.

This has been an interesting debate. However, although the impact of the ferries crisis on island communities has been well raised by many across the chamber, islanders will note with disappointment how many Green and SNP MSPs chose to put defending their Government before standing up for islanders and island businesses.

I have warned time and again that the ferries crisis that is engulfing Scotland's west coast risks spreading further. There is a ticking time bomb that relates not only to the existing CalMac fleet but to those boats that provide lifeline links for the northern isles. MV Hamnavoe, MV Hrossey and MV Hjaltland are all 20 years old, and our interisland boats in Orkney are even older—MV Earl Thorfinn, MV Earl Sigurd and MV Varagen are all more than 30 years old. It is quite clear that there is an increasing urgency around the planning for replacement vessels for those interisland ferries, which are all owned and operated by Orkney Islands Council, and that the council will require support in that regard.

The same is true in Shetland but, as ever, the Scottish Government has been slow to engage. Although talks in Shetland are now under way, as they are in Orkney, there is still no commitment to help. However, those are vital links for the community, and I remind the chamber of the words of Shetland Islands Council convener Emma Macdonald. Commenting on the UK Government's grant of £27 million of levelling-up funding for a new ferry for Fair Isle, and new terminals, she said:

"It is no exaggeration to say that this funding from the UK Government has saved Fair Isle as an inhabited island. There would have been no other way for us to sustainably fund such a project."

The UK Government acted where the Scottish Government would not.

It is not just our island communities that are suffering. The Corran Narrows crossing is one of Scotland's busiest, but that vital link has been severed for months, with the route's main vessel's return from refit delayed and its 47-year-old replacement breaking down almost immediately. The service is operated by Highland Council but, with no real encouragement forthcoming from the Scottish Government, that council—now run by the SNP—has chosen to apply to the UK Government for levelling-up funding. Local communities on the Ardnamurchan peninsula who

are desperate for a reliable service will now be hoping that the UK Government steps up where, again, Scottish ministers have not.

In welcoming Fiona Hyslop to her new role as transport minister—I genuinely wish her all the best in that role, because communities across my region cannot afford for her to fail as others have—I ask her to commit to meet communities in Ardnamurchan and, unlike her two predecessors, deliver on that commitment.

The Scottish Government motion is full of platitudes but misses one vital word—sorry. The Scottish ministers have again heralded the £1 million per month deal to charter the MV Alfred from Pentland Ferries, but the motion does not mention that the vessel that will cover the Pentland Firth route while the Alfred is away, the MV Pentalina, suffered a major failure and returned to service only yesterday, after six weeks out, leaving Orkney without our short sea route for all that time. It was not in peak season, so the impact appears to have been minimal, largely because of the efforts of NorthLink Ferries to step in.

As I have mentioned, it is clear that the crisis on the west coast is now impacting other island communities. That crisis only risks getting worse until new vessels come into service in significant numbers. I welcome any acceleration in the replacement of major vessels, but it should not have taken 16 years and the desperate situation—of its own making—that the Scottish Government finds itself in now for the SNP to make that a priority. In the meantime, island communities will continue to suffer and, by refusing to provide compensation, the SNP appears content to abandon local businesses and islanders to their fate, and that is shameful.

17:00

The Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade (Richard Lochhead): I, too, welcome Fiona Hyslop to her new role as transport minister. If anyone is going to work tirelessly to address the very serious issues that have been raised today, it is Fiona Hyslop, working alongside cabinet secretary Màiri McAllan.

This is a very important debate, because it is important that all our island communities see the national Parliament discussing the very real challenges that they face, many of which are as a result of the disruption to ferry services, which is the subject of the debate. Katy Clark, Ivan McKee, Beatrice Wishart and Alasdair Allan have all clearly illustrated the impact that ferry service disruption has on the everyday lives of the people who live and work on the islands.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: Islanders have seen the Parliament debating the issue time and again, but they have not seen ferries or action from the Scottish Government, and that is what they are angry about.

Richard Lochhead: As has been discussed, six new ferries are coming into service in the next few years. That will make a huge difference, and it represents very significant investments, as does the £2.2 billion that the Government has invested in ferry services since 2007.

Today, although we have a variety of different opinions, the Parliament is clearly united in wanting to support our island communities.

Michael Marra: Will the minister take an intervention?

Richard Lochhead: I am running out of time, but I will take one final intervention, given that it is from Michael Marra.

Michael Marra: I appreciate the minister giving way. He mentions the ferries that are being constructed. Does he not recognise that businesses are at risk now? Rather than waiting for six ferries that might be built some time in the future, we are asking for support now for the livelihoods that are supported by those businesses and the wages that go into pockets.

Richard Lochhead: I recognise that and I will come on to that. All the ministers in the Scottish Government, like people across the chamber, very much recognise the strength of feeling on the islands, which was illustrated, for instance, by the very powerful protest on Uist. Other members have given many illustrations of the impact on businesses in different sectors, such as the food and drink industry and tourism. Those are very real examples of the impact that the situation is having on the economy in our islands. It is important that this Government recognises our responsibility and the fact that we are accountable and that we get it right for people who live on the islands. We take that responsibility very seriously.

We are committed to working closely with regional and local partners, including local government, to make sure that we have regional economic empowerment but, to realise that ambition, island businesses and communities need reliable and resilient connectivity, including ferry services and digital connectivity.

Just last Thursday, the First Minister said in the chamber:

“we will look to see what more we can do to support ... businesses”.—[*Official Report*, 8 June 2023; c 12.]

In the same contribution, he also said that nothing is “off the table”.

Therefore, it is important to send out the message today to our island communities that Scottish Government ministers and Parliament are listening. It is a very serious issue that is facing some communities—we are listening and we will act.

Daniel Johnson: Will the minister take an intervention?

Richard Lochhead: Do I have time?

The Presiding Officer: The minister has 40 seconds left.

Richard Lochhead: I am sorry—I cannot take the intervention.

We are investing heavily in our island communities, and I will make some wider references to the priority of supporting our island communities. We have committed £26 million to the national islands plan—£4.1 million this year—and £50 million towards the islands growth deal. We have committed to 16 new subsea cables to 15 islands through the reaching 100 per cent—R100—north contracts, there is the small business bonus scheme and the rural rates relief scheme, and we are committed to a rural development plan. I could go on and on. That investment is extremely important, as are sorting out the ferry services and getting the investment right. We have been speaking to communities about the impact of that.

My final point is that the Tories talk about others not standing up for island communities, when the UK Government announced £4.8 billion for levelling up and not one penny has gone to the Western Isles and virtually not a penny has gone to all the other island communities in Scotland. Moving forward, the Conservative Party could also stand up for island communities. In the meantime, this Government is committed to sorting this issue out and standing by our island communities.

17:05

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I, too, welcome Fiona Hyslop to her new post. I sincerely wish her every success in it, because people's lives really depend on her being successful in sorting out this debacle.

Island businesses do not want compensation; they want ferries. However, without ferries, they need help to survive, and that is why they are asking the Scottish Government to set up a resilience fund. We agree with them. We are not asking the Scottish Government to cut spending elsewhere to do that; we are asking it to pay for it with the very fines that it charges CalMac when ferries are not running. Surely it is natural justice that those who bear the brunt of the cancellations should receive those fines.

Màiri McAllan: On that basis, does Rhoda Grant believe that those penalties should not be reinvested in vessels, such as the MV Alfred, which is currently providing resilience in the network?

Rhoda Grant: The cabinet secretary keeps flagging the MV Alfred as her contribution, but £1 million a month is being spent on renting the MV Alfred—£9 million for nine months. That is a ferry that costs £14 million to buy—it is ridiculous. The Scottish Government bears responsibility for the crisis; it lies squarely at its door. It is not the fault of CalMac or its staff because they do not build ferries—it is the fault of the Scottish Government, which failed to build them. When it did try, it proved to be absolutely incompetent.

As Neil Bibby said, the Government has built six ferries in 16 years. Compare that with the 10 built in the eight years of the Liberal-Labour coalition. Even Margaret Thatcher built more ferries than the SNP and, sadly, those ageing ferries are still being used on those routes. The cabinet secretary and the minister are responsible for the inaction of their Government. They cannot pass the buck.

Of course, some islands are impacted more than others. As Michael Mara said, in South Uist, one in four sailings is disrupted, but not a single island is unscathed. That is creating a huge personal cost to communities. Beatrice Wishart talked about funerals missed, weddings missed and cancer treatment missed. Katy Clark talked about food and essential provisions being impacted in Arran and the Cumbraes. Donald Cameron talked about Mull, and Ivan McKee reeled off a huge number of issues.

There is not an island that is not impacted by all this, but South Uist is a case in point and it stands out. The local economy loses £50,000 a day in low season to lost ferries. It has lost millions in the past couple of months. South Uist was a growing community—young families were being welcomed back. Stòras Uibhist, the community landowner, was developing the area, and Ceòlas, the language and culture centre, was becoming a focal point for the whole community. It was community empowerment in action, yet the community has been marooned by the Scottish Government. A third of the population was out protesting against that, but the best that they can get from the Scottish Government is a review of the matrix.

Jamie Greene: Will the member take an intervention?

Rhoda Grant: Very briefly.

Jamie Greene: I wonder whether islanders on Uist will be as angry and frustrated having listened to today's debate, given that not a single ounce of detail has come from those on the Government

benches on what compensation might be available to them and their businesses. There has not been a single word or commitment from the Government, and those islanders will be as fuming as we are on this side of the chamber.

Rhoda Grant: Yes, I can imagine only that people are getting angrier by the day as they wait for action but see none being taken at all.

Everyone is impacted. A haulier told us that, be it a toothbrush or a new build house, you have to get it on the island and it has to come by ferry.

Alasdair Allan talked about the 40 per cent drop in accommodation bookings. That is almost half an annual income gone. I mentioned Ceòlas. Its summer school has been impacted because bookings are well down. That has a knock-on effect to the local community as well. Furthermore, a hotelier told us:

“People can’t make a living ... they can’t stay here.”

The disruption impacts on staff as well, because they must bear the brunt of community frustration. That is simply not right. They were once proud to serve their islands and that has been taken away from them.

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Ms Grant.

Rhoda Grant: I will, Presiding Officer.

When Government makes a mistake, it compensates people, as it did during Covid when people were losing their businesses. The Government needs to do that now, as the impact of the disruption is worse than Covid. It needs to build ferries, it needs to set up a resilience fund and it needs to do right by our communities.

Urgent Question

17:11

Junior Doctors (Pay Offer)

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the announcement that Scottish junior doctors have voted overwhelmingly to reject the pay offer made by the Scottish Government and plan to take strike action.

The Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care (Michael Matheson): We are disappointed that junior doctors have rejected our cumulative pay uplift of 14.5 per cent over two years and have decided on industrial action, which is in no one’s interest.

We negotiated in good faith, and I addressed concerns from junior doctors. That would have been the biggest investment in junior doctors’ pay for the past 20 years and a step forward in modernising pay bargaining, restoring confidence among junior doctors and ensuring that their contribution to our healthcare system is appropriately recognised.

I have also been very clear with the British Medical Association that the request for a 35 per cent pay increase is unaffordable, with the funding for any increase likely to come from the health budget. However, I continue to engage with BMA Scotland and we will meet tomorrow to discuss how we can move forward.

Sandesh Gulhane: Last week, I met the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, and its members told me that last winter was the worst winter that they have endured. While patients waited for hours to be seen in accident and emergency units, staff were pushed to the brink, with many working long hours on understaffed wards—and that was on top of punishing previous years.

The responses to Scottish Conservatives’ freedom of information requests show that almost 75,000 national health service staff have been absent in the past five years due to anxiety, stress, depression and other mental health-related illnesses. Morale is at rock bottom in the Scottish health service. Given the precarious nature of our services, can the cabinet secretary guarantee that the current offer, and any further and future offers that he makes, will not take funding away from crucial front-line services?

Michael Matheson: Presiding Officer, I must confess that I have heard of leading with your chin in a debate, but the Conservative Party has got some brass neck. On the very day when junior doctors in England are on their third round of

industrial action because of the failure of the Conservative Government in England, to even engage with them meaningfully is quite a stark contrast. I am sure that Dr Gulhane recognises that we recognise how important this issue is, which is why we have been in detailed negotiations with junior doctors over a considerable period and why the BMA viewed the offer that was made to it as being credible enough to put to its members.

I assure the member that I will not disrespect junior doctors as his colleagues in England have. I will engage with them in a serious and meaningful way, and with a sense of humility, to try to address their concerns and issues instead of arrogantly dismissing them as his colleagues at Westminster are doing. He can be assured that I will continue to engage with them in a way that seeks to address their concerns and to find a resolution to the matter, as I believe that it is in everyone's interests—across our NHS and wider society—to ensure that junior doctors are treated with respect and get the support and assistance that they require.

Sandesh Gulhane: What an arrogant answer. *[Interruption.]* Quite frankly, the cabinet secretary did not even bother to answer the question that was put to him.

As an NHS general practitioner who is currently working, I have to categorically tell you—*[Interruption.]*—how difficult things are right now. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members! Let us hear one another.

Sandesh Gulhane: Health is devolved in Scotland. Simply put, this is the Scottish Government's mess to fix. Of course our junior doctors deserve a fair pay offer, but the Scottish National Party Government has consistently neglected other areas of terms and conditions. Poor workforce planning, lack of access to nutritious meals and a culture that does not value front-line staff have all contributed to these strikes.

Can the cabinet secretary guarantee that those issues will be addressed when he next sits down with the junior doctors—which he said will be tomorrow—and can he actually answer my question from the last time?

Michael Matheson: I think that Mr Gulhane has got himself in a bit of a guddle on this issue. *[Interruption.]* I will be quite clear: it is not just me, the cabinet secretary for health, who is saying what we are doing with the BMA. Let me quote from a letter that the BMA issued today—*[Interruption.]*—because it is exceptionally relevant—

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the cabinet secretary.

Michael Matheson: —to the point that the member has made. It is a letter to Rishi Sunak on this particular issue—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Members! Can we please have silence in the chamber when a member is on their feet, putting or responding to a question?

Michael Matheson: The letter says:

“As you will be aware, and with no additional funding, both the Welsh and Scottish Governments have recognised the real terms cuts to doctors' pay, yet your government still refuses to acknowledge pay erosion.”

That is a letter from the BMA recognising that we, as a Government, understand and are concerned about the issues that junior doctors have and pointing out the heartless, empty rhetoric that has come from the United Kingdom Government and the member's colleagues at Westminster. I do not know whether the member is a member of the BMA, but it is very clear that the BMA thinks that the Conservative Party leader—the member's party leader—is not interested in the interests of junior doctors. *[Interruption.]*

I assure the member—I am sure that he and his colleagues will want to hear this—that I will do everything that I can to address their concerns. I will negotiate with junior doctors in a meaningful and genuine way. What I will not do is dismiss them as though I am not interested in their concerns, as his colleagues and his party leader at Westminster have done. He can be assured that we will do the right thing by junior doctors, unlike his colleagues at Westminster.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): As the cabinet secretary has referenced, the BMA today wrote to Rishi Sunak, asking to meet him urgently to find a resolution to the on-going dispute in England.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): How is this relevant?

Clare Haughey: Can the cabinet secretary outline what engagement the Scottish Government has had with the BMA to address these concerns while the UK Government continues to fail to listen to junior doctors?

Michael Matheson: I am going to meet with the BMA again tomorrow to discuss these matters. I have had extensive engagement with the BMA. We have very positive relationships in terms of engaging around this issue, and I want very much to keep it on that footing.

I heard somebody from a sedentary position questioning the issue of the letter from the BMA, asking why it is relevant. It is relevant because it

references the Scottish and Welsh Governments' efforts to resolve the issue, unlike their counterparts at Westminster. Maybe there is some backbone on the Tory benches—[*Interruption.*]—to stand up for junior doctors in Scotland instead of, as ever—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members!

Michael Matheson: —pandering to the Tories' Westminster masters when it comes to dealing with these issues.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary's comments so far, but I gently point out to him that pay erosion began in 2008 and covers the same period for which the Scottish National Party has been in government.

Half of junior doctors are actively considering leaving to work elsewhere. What additional action can the cabinet secretary take to avoid a strike and to avoid losing junior doctors from the national health service completely? Are there any contingency arrangements should his discussions fail?

Michael Matheson: I will deal with the last point first. Contingency arrangements are being put in place and we are engaging with health boards on that. We have been doing that for a number of weeks, to prepare for any potential industrial action, as the member will realise.

On the issue of pay erosion starting in 2008, I gently remind Jackie Baillie that junior doctors pay settlements are agreed through the DDRB—doctors and dentists review body—process, which applies across the United Kingdom. Therefore, Labour Governments in Wales and at the UK level have applied that process during that period, as we have done—we have always been committed to it. We agreed with the BMA's Scottish junior doctors committee's desire to move to a new pay negotiation process, and we committed to establishing such a process. We were prepared to take forward work to ensure that the process was in place by September of this year. I stand by that and will continue to offer it to the junior doctors as we move forward.

Junior doctors have been committed to the DDRB process, as have Jackie Baillie's colleagues in Wales, and there is also a commitment to it in England. It is a well-established approach. Therefore, to try to apportion more blame to the SNP than to anyone else is simply wrong, and it would be misleading to do so. We have always honoured the recommendations from that process. Junior doctors now wish to take a different approach and, so far, the Scottish Government is the only Government in the UK that has committed to doing that. I stand by the commitment that I have given to the BMA, and we will continue to work with it in

the coming weeks on how we can make further progress on the issue.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): I find it very poor that SNP back benchers were jeering and moaning when Dr Gulhane declared his interest as a practising GP. Our primary healthcare workers are all too familiar with that level of contempt from the SNP back benches.

The cabinet secretary's predecessor set great store by the fact that Scotland did not have healthcare strikes, yet, come July, that could be proved wrong and those words could come back to haunt him. It will mean that every ward is a little less safe and every wait in hospital or for treatment is perhaps a little longer. What does the cabinet secretary have to say to those patients who are waiting in pain?

Michael Matheson: I presume that the member is keen for us to try to avoid industrial action. In the disputes that we have had with health unions, we have always engaged with them in a constructive way to seek a resolution to these matters. To date, that approach has allowed Scotland to be the only part of the UK that has been able to avoid industrial action in our NHS. I would have thought that, at the very least, the member would have welcomed that partnership approach in working with trade unions to address the issues of concern that their members have.

We have taken that approach into our engagement with the Scottish junior doctors committee of the BMA, and I continue to be committed to that approach. We will re-engage tomorrow and look to see what further progress we can make. I do not believe that industrial action is in anyone's interest. Ultimately, it will be for junior doctors to decide whether to take industrial action, but I will do everything that I can to avoid that. I will engage with them in a meaningful way through the negotiation process to try to achieve that. If we can achieve it, we will be able to move on and address the issues of concern that junior doctors have.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the urgent question.

Sandesh Gulhane: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In response to the cabinet secretary, I point out that I am, indeed, a member of the BMA.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Gulhane.

Business Motions

17:23

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-09501, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 20 June 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Standards Implementation

followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2021

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Scottish Innovation Strategy

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 21 June 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands; NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

7.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 22 June 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Justice

followed by Ministerial Statement: Education Reform

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Stage 3 Debate: Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.25 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 27 June 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.20 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 28 June 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture; Justice and Home Affairs; Education and Skills

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Charities (Regulation and Administration) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.25 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 29 June 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

1.15 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 19 June 2023, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-09502, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the timetabling of a bill at stage 1.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Regulation of Legal Services (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be completed by 15 December 2023.—[*George Adam*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:24

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of five Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-09503 and S6M-09504, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, motions S6M-09505 and S6M-09524, on designation of a lead committee, and motion S6M-09538, on committee membership.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Forced Marriage etc. (Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Act 2011 (Application to Civil Partnerships and Consequential Provision) Order 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Police Negotiating Board for Scotland (Constitution, Arbitration and Qualifying Cases) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum on the Online Safety Bill.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that Kenneth Gibson be appointed to replace Keith Brown as a member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.—[*George Adam*]

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

Decision Time

17:25

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Michael Matheson is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-09462.2, in the name of Michael Matheson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09462, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on taking action on national health service waiting times, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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

17:25

Meeting suspended.

17:28

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on amendment S6M-09462.2, in the name of Michael Matheson.

The vote is now closed.

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan):

On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect to the system, so my vote did not go through. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McLennan. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)

Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-09462.2, in the name of Michael Matheson, is: For 65, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment has been agreed to. Therefore, the amendment in the name of Sandesh Gulhane falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-09462, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on taking action on NHS waiting times, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

On the first vote, on Michael Matheson's amendment, I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: I confirm that a yes vote was recorded for you, Ms Hamilton, which we are unable to change. However, your comment is on the record.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I apologise; I know that votes cannot be changed, but I had not quite clocked that Sandesh Gulhane's amendment would fall. I thought that we were voting on that amendment, so I recorded a no vote, which should have been a yes vote.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Forbes. As you are aware, we are unable to change your vote after it has been cast, but your comment has been 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)
 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)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)

Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-09462, in the name of Jackie Baillie, on taking action on NHS waiting times, as amended, is: For 63, Against 55, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on both the people of Scotland directly, and on the operation of the health service; further recognises that too many people are waiting too long for treatment, and welcomes the reductions in the longest waits recently; notes that health services across the four nations are dealing with the effects of the pandemic on waiting times, and recognises that use of the independent sector by individuals is proportionately lower than that in England or Wales; supports the twin approach of investment and reform of the NHS so that delivery continues to be enhanced, backed by investment founded in progressive taxation; appreciates that the workforce is at the heart of all that the NHS does, and thanks everyone working in the NHS for their dedication, expertise and commitment; believes that the NHS must be kept true to its founding principles of being publicly owned, publicly operated, and free at the point of need, and further believes that the only way to protect the NHS from the threat posed by the UK Government is to realise independence for Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Màiri McAllan is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Graham Simpson will fall.

The question is, that amendment S6M-09463.2, in the name of Màiri McAllan, which seeks to amend motion S6M-09463, in the name of Michael Marra, on a resilience fund for CalMac disruption, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I can assure you that my point of order relates to this actual vote. My system was not working. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Doris. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not get connected. I would have voted no.

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

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sorry that I could not connect. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr McLennan. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Bibby. We will ensure that that is recorded.

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West)
(Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My machine would not connect. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Burnett. We will ensure that that is recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)

Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-09463.2, in the name of Màiri McAllan, is: For 64, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The amendment has been agreed to. Therefore, the amendment in the name of Graham Simpson falls.

The next question is, that motion S6M-09463, in the name of Michael Marra, on a resilience fund for CalMac disruption, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (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)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (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)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)

Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-09463, in the name of Michael Marra, as amended, is: For 64, Against 53, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the significant impact that delays and disruption to ferry services have regrettably had on Scotland's island communities and businesses; acknowledges that some island communities have been particularly badly affected, and also acknowledges the frustration felt by island communities; believes that the Scottish Government must continue to explore all practicable options to support island communities; agrees that the Scottish Government should redouble its efforts to work with operators and CMAL to improve reliability, resilience and confidence across networks and services, and address concerns that have been raised around CalMac's route prioritisation matrix to ensure that it is reviewed, with input from communities, and that it considers the economic impact to fragile island communities; notes that all penalty deductions from CalMac made in relation to failures on the network are used to support resilience and help reduce disruption, for example, by helping to partly fund the cost of the charter of MV Alfred, and believes that accelerating the replacement of major vessels in the ferry fleet must be the priority in order to provide the ferry services that island communities need.

The Presiding Officer: I propose to ask a single question on five Parliamentary Bureau motions.

As no member has objected, the question is, that motions S6M-09503 and S6M-09504, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments; motions S6M-09505 and S6M-09524, on designation of a lead committee; and motion S6M-09538, on committee membership, all in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Forced Marriage etc. (Protection and Jurisdiction) (Scotland) Act 2011 (Application to Civil Partnerships and Consequential Provision) Order 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Police Negotiating Board for Scotland (Constitution, Arbitration and Qualifying Cases) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Criminal Justice Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the legislative consent memorandum on the Online Safety Bill.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that Kenneth Gibson be appointed to replace Keith Brown as a member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Liver Cancer

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-08629, in the name of Stuart McMillan, on Scotland's liver cancer crisis. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament understands that 90% of liver disease is preventable, but that rising alcohol misuse, obesity and viral hepatitis are reportedly contributing to a liver disease and liver cancer crisis in Scotland; notes reports that liver disease burden is highest in deprived areas, such as those within the Greenock and Inverclyde constituency, which, it understands, had the highest rate of alcohol-specific deaths in 2017-2021, the majority of which were caused by alcohol-related liver disease; highlights what it sees as the importance of prevention and earlier detection of liver cancer, as one of the less survivable cancers, which, it understands, has seen the highest increase in mortality rates of all cancer types in Scotland over the last decade, and commends the work of the British Liver Trust and other charities in promoting the use of intelligent liver function tests and non-invasive liver scans in primary and community care to accelerate earlier detection of liver disease and liver cancer in order to save lives and reduce long-term pressures on the NHS.

17:41

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): First, I remind members—erring on the side of caution—that I am the vice-chair of Moving On Inverclyde, which is a local addiction service.

I am pleased to have brought this important debate to the chamber, and I thank my colleagues on all sides of the chamber in advance for their contributions, as well as those who signed the motion to allow the debate to take place.

The title of the debate, which is "Scotland's liver cancer crisis", might appear drastic to some. Until recently, I did not realise that liver disease and liver cancer were such an acute problem in Scotland. However, figures from the British Liver Trust show that deaths as a result of chronic liver disease in Scotland have increased by 85 per cent in the past three decades and that they surged by almost a fifth—19.3 per cent—during the pandemic, between 2019 and 2021.

Sadly, Scotland has consistently had the highest mortality rate for liver disease in the United Kingdom and one of the highest rates in Europe. Those two facts paint a harrowing picture. When we consider that 90 per cent of liver disease is preventable, the need to tackle the situation becomes even more urgent. The main risk factors for liver disease are alcohol misuse, obesity and viral hepatitis. However, the liver has a remarkable ability to regenerate and repair itself. If diagnosed earlier, liver damage can be reversed, and risks

can be drastically reduced through diet, exercise and drinking in moderation.

Despite that, however, a quarter of liver disease patients die on readmission to hospital, and the rate of death after discharge has not improved in two decades. It is clear, therefore, that we cannot continue with the status quo—we must consider new ways of preventing and treating liver disease.

Policies such as minimum unit pricing are very welcome, and from talks that I have had with the British Liver Trust and others, I know that clinicians in England and Wales want that policy to be replicated UK-wide as a result of its positive impact in Scotland. However, minimum unit pricing alone is not driving down preventable liver disease. As well as looking at other policies to address alcohol-related harm, we must tackle the availability of junk food and encourage people to make healthier choices. That is difficult in a cost of living crisis, and it is all the harder when we consider the health inequalities that make obesity and alcohol misuse more likely in the deprived communities that exist in parts of my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency.

During a recent meeting with the British Liver Trust, I was told that Inverclyde had reported the highest rate of alcohol-specific deaths between 2017 and 2021, the majority of which were caused by alcohol-related liver disease. Marginalised and disadvantaged groups are also most at risk of viral hepatitis, including, for hepatitis C, people who inject drugs and, for hepatitis B, migrant communities from countries where it is endemic. Alarmingly, one in two people with hepatitis C live in the 20 per cent most deprived areas of Scotland. That is why I was so determined to secure a members' business debate on the issue. It is evidently having a major impact on the lives of some people in my constituency.

When people think about cancer, there are certain specific types that typically spring to mind first, most likely because of prominent charities or campaigns that are focused on them. However, it is important that greater attention is given to liver cancer, as it has seen the largest increase in mortality rates of all the cancer types over the past decade. Members may be aware that I have also been raising awareness of bladder cancer—I hosted Fight Bladder Cancer's first Scottish Parliament event in February this year. That, too, is not a type of cancer that people often think of when they hear the word "cancer".

Reducing the rate of liver disease among Scotland's population is not going to happen solely through policies such as minimum unit pricing or taxing unhealthy foods, and we will not prevent more deaths simply by asking people to change their unhealthy habits. Those policies have an important role to play, but we need to improve

patient pathways for the early detection and management of liver disease.

Three quarters of people are diagnosed with cirrhosis when it is too late for effective treatment or intervention, so we must improve detection rates and work to get treatment in place as soon as possible. That is why I support the British Liver Trust's call for new national guidance on liver disease to improve early diagnosis, including through the national roll-out of intelligent liver function testing and fibroscans in primary and community care.

Some colleagues will have had the opportunity to undergo a fibroscan yesterday if they visited the British Liver Trust's love your liver roadshow. Those free scans are quick, easy and painless, and the roadshow unit has private rooms for people to have their scan. The fibroscan checks for signs that the liver has been damaged. I hope to bring the love your liver roadshow to Inverclyde so that people in my constituency can access that technology, which could lead to their learning whether they might have liver damage and being given a letter to take to their general practitioner for further investigation.

I also agree with the charity's call to expand treatment and support for people with alcohol dependency—specifically integrating non-invasive tests for liver fibrosis in alcohol services to target high-risk dependent drinkers. Alcohol recovery services will, understandably, focus, at least in the first instance, on helping people to progress on their recovery journey and to live a life free of addiction. However, it is crucial that those organisations are supported to work in partnership with health services to ensure that people receive the healthcare that they need as a result of their alcohol dependency.

In closing, I hope that today's debate will give us all greater impetus to work towards improving early detection and survival rates for the less survivable cancers, including liver cancer, and I hope that that will be at the heart of the Scottish Government's policy making as we move forward.

17:48

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): I congratulate my colleague Stuart McMillan on bringing this important debate to the chamber.

We know that 90 per cent of liver disease is preventable but, sadly, it is one of the leading causes of premature death in Scotland. In addition, liver cancer has seen the largest increase in mortality rates of all cancer types over the past decade, and it is now the fastest-rising cause of cancer deaths in the UK.

It is vitally important that we focus on the prevention of liver disease and liver cancer, and step up efforts to detect them earlier. For that reason, I welcome the news that NHS Lanarkshire has partnered with the British Liver Trust to launch a series of love your liver roadshows across Lanarkshire this summer.

The love your liver mobile unit will stop at 10 locations in Lanarkshire over the next three months to find people who have been exposed to the hepatitis C virus, which is a silent disease that can lead to severe liver complications if it is left undetected. Visitors to the unit will have the opportunity to gain information about hepatitis C and receive a non-invasive liver scan, and a swab test if they are identified as being at high risk of hepatitis C and liver disease. The roadshow will be in my Rutherglen constituency, at Morrisons in Cambuslang, on Wednesday 26 July. I greatly encourage constituents to attend it.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Would Clare Haughey acknowledge that the love your liver roadshow will be in Coatbridge this Friday? I, too, encourage my constituents to attend it.

Clare Haughey: Thank you.

In the remainder of my speech, I will focus specifically on alcohol misuse and its contributory impact on liver disease. Alcohol harm is on the rise, with a 22 per cent increase in alcohol-specific deaths in the past two years. Nearly one in 15 of all deaths in Scotland is caused by alcohol, mainly due to cancer, stroke and heart disease. An estimated 16 per cent of ambulance call-outs in Scotland are alcohol related, and one person is admitted to hospital as a result of alcohol every 15 minutes.

In 2021, NHS Lanarkshire, which is the health board that covers my Rutherglen constituency, reported the second-highest mortality rate as a result of chronic liver disease of all health boards in Scotland. Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to meet Alcohol Focus Scotland and clinicians who specialise in the harm that is caused by alcohol misuse. One of the main issues that they raised with me was how normalised drinking alcohol is in the UK and how readily available alcohol is to buy. According to the Scottish liquor licensing statistics for 2021-22, there are 710 places from which to buy alcohol in South Lanarkshire, around 460 of which are in pubs and restaurants, with the remainder in shops.

During my discussion with Alcohol Focus Scotland and the clinicians, they spoke of the beneficial effects of minimum unit pricing, without which the impact of alcohol-related harm or liver disease would likely be even greater. The recent Public Health Scotland and University of Glasgow

study "Evaluating the impact of alcohol minimum unit pricing (MUP) on alcohol-attributable deaths and hospital admissions in Scotland" indicates that a 13.4 per cent reduction in deaths and a 4.1 per cent reduction in hospital admissions were wholly attributable to alcohol consumption in the first two and a half years after minimum unit pricing was introduced.

I know that the Scottish Government is currently reviewing the 50p minimum unit pricing rate, with calls from Alcohol Focus Scotland for an increase to the level. As convener of the Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, I look forward to seeing more details of the Government's plans regarding that in due course.

Alcohol-related harm is one of the most pressing public health challenges that we face in Scotland. There were 2,340 alcohol-related hospital admissions in South Lanarkshire in 2021-22. Over the same period, 77 people died in South Lanarkshire from conditions solely caused by alcohol. Every year, alcohol costs South Lanarkshire an estimated £301 per person.

In truth, however, the cost is not just financial. The impact of a loved one being hospitalised or dying due to alcohol can be devastating not just for the person involved but for their friends and family and for the wider community. The Scottish Government has taken action to prevent and reduce that through the introduction of the minimum unit pricing policy, the reduction in the drink-driving limit and the multibuy discount ban. However, we should not be complacent. We should recommit to doing all that we can to tackle the challenges of liver disease and liver cancer in order to save lives.

17:53

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): It is my privilege to take part in today's debate on liver cancer, and I thank Stuart McMillan for bringing this important topic to the chamber. I join him in commending the promotion of intelligent liver function testing and non-invasive liver scans by charities and by primary and community care. Those methods help in early detection of liver cancer and liver disease, which can lessen the existing pressure in our national health service and, most importantly, save lives.

The scale of this public health crisis is all too common in our nation. That is the grim reality concerning the pervasiveness of the problem here in comparison with the rest of the UK and other European countries. That is precisely why I join my colleagues on all sides of the chamber tonight to address a destructive issue that plagues many Scots.

For context, the British Liver Trust mentions the fact that

“Anyone can develop liver disease”.

However, it notes that non-genetic risk factors, which include alcohol, excessive body weight and viral hepatitis, comprise nine out of 10 cases of liver disease. Those factors affect a plethora of groups. Disadvantaged individuals are most at risk of developing viral hepatitis, and that includes residents of areas that lack sufficient patient care pathways.

Liver disease is not only one of the leading causes of premature death; it is also one of the principal risk factors for developing liver cancer. Mortality rates from liver disease itself are very alarming. Men are two times more likely to die from liver disease, and among women there has been a 16 per cent increase in deaths between 2012 and 2020.

Public Health Scotland states that improved lifestyle factors, including a healthy diet, lower alcohol consumption and reducing obesity have

“considerable potential to prevent cancers”.

In addition, it has said that, from 1995 to 2020,

“Of the most common cancers, liver cancer had the biggest increase in mortality rates in the last decade”,

with the rate sitting at 38 per cent. It goes on to note that

“Survival from liver cancer is poor in most cases. The main risk factors for liver cancer are obesity, alcohol and infection with hepatitis B and C viruses.”

The average one-year survival rate for liver cancer in Scotland stands at 40 per cent, which means that liver cancer has a lower survival rate than any other form of cancer. That has had tragic consequences, as the greatest rise in liver cancer among people in parts of the UK has been among Scottish men.

Although liver cancer constituted only 2 per cent of cancers across our nation in 2017, there has been a greater increase in rates in Scotland than in nearly all other parts of the UK. Professor Linda Bauld of the University of Edinburgh has described the number of liver cancer deaths and diagnoses in Scotland as “shocking”. She continued by saying that the rise in liver cancer rates over the past few decades should concern all of us.

Groups including charities that focus on liver disease and liver cancer provide invaluable support and information to enable Scots, through lifestyle changes, to lower their chances of developing liver cancer. I would welcome additional input from those charities in scrutinising legislation and reports such as the Scottish Government’s national cancer plan. From the speeches today, I know that MSPs on all sides of

the chamber will work constructively as we take the issue forward.

17:57

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I, too, thank Stuart McMillan for bringing to the chamber this timely and important debate. To say that we have a liver cancer crisis in Scotland is both patently true and deeply concerning for all of us who have, for decades, been seeing the introduction of various reforms to limit alcohol misuse and obesity that do not go far enough. Progress has been made, but the statistics speak plainly to the damage that has been done, and lives continue to be lost, with all the knock-on effects of that on families across the country.

We know that nine out of 10 cases of liver disease are associated with risk factors that could, with lifestyle change, be preventable; I will come back to our responsibility as legislators on that issue. We need not say any more than simply reiterate the fact that Scotland continues to have the highest mortality rate for liver disease in the UK, and one of the highest rates in Europe. That is not acceptable, and we can never allow it to be seen as such.

To come back to my earlier point about avoidable deaths, I say that I believe that much of the root of the issue is health inequalities. The rate of alcohol-related stays when someone is admitted to hospital is seven times higher in more deprived areas, and the rate of alcohol-specific deaths—as we have heard—is 5.6 times higher. When a person is born in one of the poorest communities in Scotland, they are considerably more likely to suffer serious liver damage over their shorter lifetime than anyone in a better-off community. That is a plain fact, and it cannot be avoided. If we are to address the problem, we need to be aware of that fact and factor it into any remedies that we look to pursue.

Doing so requires us to understand that alcohol is a toxic substance and that when it is drunk to excess it can, and does, cause lasting damage that results in on-going health problems for people and their families. We are not talking solely about people who are suffering from severe misuse issues—it applies across the board, including to what is sometimes seen as casual or social drinking.

I often wonder whether, if we saw the same levels of alcohol-related problems in richer parts of our towns and cities as we do in the poorer areas, a national emergency would already have been declared, but that seems to be the case—as, I am sure, members would agree—with so many things that we talk about with regard to health inequalities.

When excessive drinking and unhealthy eating are mixed with underlying genetic susceptibility to alcohol and obesity-related disease, we have a recipe for serious ill-health that can blight much—in fact, most—of some people’s adult lives, and can carry forward into other generations. That is why—as, I think, we accept across the parties—a public health response is crucial to making sure that we change those things.

We require serious efforts at all levels of government and we need committed and serious discussions across sectors. I respect the fact that some of that consideration should be UK wide, but we have pinpointed things that can happen here in Scotland to tackle accessibility, promotion of alcohol and it being a key part of advertising in areas including sport and in the wider media. Many younger people are exposed to casual and dangerous drinking in that way. If they have not seen it at home, that might be how they are exposed to normalisation of alcohol and alcohol drinking.

Members may have been at a reception earlier in the session at which we saw that members of the Scottish Youth Parliament had done work on that. It was shocking to hear that people as young as eight can recognise cans of beers and lagers. I certainly would be unable to do so, but there is a wide range that children can recognise. That just shows us how exposed they are, time and again.

Another important point is that public consultation and opinion polling indicate that the public support some measures that we could put in place through a public health response.

I am conscious of time, Presiding Officer, so I will not go any further, but I have appreciated hearing members’ contributions and look forward to hearing from the minister.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call the minister, Maree Todd, to respond to the debate, for around seven minutes.

18:01

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): Thank you, Presiding Officer. [*Interruption.*] I apologise. Knocking my microphone was a rookie error.

I thank my colleague Stuart McMillan for bringing the motion to the chamber. We all know how important it is to tackle liver cancer and liver disease. Despite liver cancer being relatively uncommon in the UK, we know that survival is, sadly, poor in most cases, and that in the past decade liver cancer has had the biggest increase in mortality rates, compared with other cancers.

Liver disease has a bigger impact. It affects at least 2 million people in the UK and is often

related to harmful alcohol use, as we have heard, and an unhealthy diet. We must continue to address those.

I thank colleagues for sharing such valuable contributions in the debate. It is great to experience such a united front across all the parties in identifying the need to support the citizens of Scotland to prevent liver cancer and liver disease.

I welcome the love your liver roadshow, which is an absolutely fantastic initiative. Its efforts to get around Scotland are to be commended and I absolutely recommend that anyone who has the opportunity to do so drop in and get a liver health check.

I am grateful to Stuart McMillan for mentioning hepatitis C, which is a particular passion of mine. Scotland is world renowned for its leading approach in tackling hepatitis C. We have committed to, in effect, eliminating the hepatitis C virus by 2024-25, and we have made significant progress, even during the past few years, when we have been struggling with a global pandemic of another disease. The prevalence of chronic HCV infection among people who inject drugs has nearly halved, having gone from 37 per cent down to 19 per cent. There was a reduction of as much as 60 to 70 per cent in the parts of Scotland that had the greatest scale-up of HCV treatment in that population group. By 2021, 80 per cent of individuals who had been diagnosed with chronic HCV infection in Scotland had been initiated on HCV treatment. That is phenomenal progress, and evidence indicates that the vast majority have cleared infection because of that therapy.

The Scottish Government will continue to work collaboratively with health boards, clinicians and public health experts, but it is phenomenal that, in this day and age, we have the opportunity to eliminate such a major cause of liver disease.

I want to pay particular attention to the importance of preventing liver cancer and liver disease. As is recognised in the motion, the risk of liver cancer and liver disease is increased by the impacts of harmful alcohol use and obesity. We are determined to do all that we can to reduce alcohol-related harm, which continues to be one of the most pressing public health challenges that we face in Scotland. We take a whole-population approach to tackling such harm, in line with the World Health Organization’s focus on the affordability, availability and attractiveness of alcohol.

The Government’s “Alcohol Framework 2018: Preventing Harm” contains 20 actions to tackle alcohol-related harm. One of the key actions, as has been mentioned today, has been implementation of minimum unit pricing in May

2018. Since then, we have seen a reduction of 3 per cent in total alcohol sales, with a focus on cheap high-strength alcohol, which is often drunk by people who drink at harmful levels. Recent research by Public Health Scotland found that MUP has saved more than 150 lives a year and has led to 411 fewer hospital admissions.

It is also encouraging—Carol Mochan will be particularly interested in this—that the research has highlighted that the policy is having the greatest effect in Scotland's most deprived areas, which experience higher death rates and levels of harm from alcohol problems. As we consider what more we need to do, it is really important that we remember that that universal untargeted measure has had the biggest impact in the poorest areas, because that is where the problem is greatest.

We also want everyone in Scotland to eat well and have a healthy weight in order to reduce the impacts of a range of diet-related ill-health conditions, including liver disease. We continue to implement the wide-ranging actions that were set out in our 2018 "A Healthier Future—Scotland's Diet & Healthy Weight Delivery Plan" to address the challenge. That includes our commitment to restrict promotions of less-healthy food and to improve availability of healthier options when people are eating out, as outlined in our out-of-home action plan.

Where those preventative measures have not had the anticipated outcome, we know that liver disease can increase the risk of liver cancer. Cancer remains a national priority for the Scottish Government and across NHS Scotland. We have developed an ambitious 10-year cancer strategy, which we will launch imminently. We conducted a public consultation on what its aims and principles should be and there was general agreement on priority areas, including placing an emphasis on the role of prevention and the less-survivable cancers, such as liver cancer. The strategy will take a comprehensive approach to improving patient pathways, from prevention and diagnosis through to treatment and post-treatment care. Its vision and aims will be supported by an initial three-year action plan.

We know that the earlier that cancer is diagnosed, the easier it is to treat. That is why the Scottish Government is committed to raising awareness of all forms of cancer, including liver cancer, through our "Detect cancer early" programme. Work to develop for Scotland a new earlier cancer diagnosis vision that will outline the future of the programme will form part of the new cancer strategy. The programme helps to ensure that people with suspected symptoms of cancer are put on the right pathway at the right time. Our aim is to reduce later-stage disease so that cancer, when it is detected, is much more likely to

be curable. That is all the more important when it comes to the less-survivable cancers, such as liver cancer.

I thank everyone who supports our NHS and patients who have had a liver cancer diagnosis, including the British Liver Trust for its role in raising public awareness and taking its incredible roadshow around Scotland.

Meeting closed at 18:09.

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