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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 22 November 2023

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

Point of Order

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is—

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer.

Members will be aware of the news that broke this morning, as announced by Ineos and PetroChina, that they intend to close the oil refinery at Grangemouth by the spring of 2025. Members will also be aware that that would end Scotland's capability to refine petrol and diesel at scale and increase our reliance on facilities south of the border or, indeed, abroad.

Let us not forget that the Grangemouth plant makes up 4 per cent of the entire Scottish gross domestic product. Thousands of jobs are reliant on the plant, and the entire supply of petrol and diesel—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, could you please get to the bit that engages the standing orders of the Parliament?

Stephen Kerr: I am coming to that very point, Deputy Presiding Officer, because this is a very important issue—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, please resume your seat for a second. I appreciate how important the issue is, but I am trying to ensure that the standing orders of this Parliament are respected. A point of order must trigger a standing order of the Parliament. I implore the member to please indicate further to which standing order the member is making the point of order.

Stephen Kerr: I was just coming to that point. Thousands of people's jobs are reliant on the plant. I am giving context.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, please resume your seat for a second. With all due respect, I understand very well the context. I am asking the member to indicate specifically what his point of order is.

Stephen Kerr: My understanding of points of order is that the member has a number of minutes to explain what they are seeking guidance on—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, could you please indicate what you are seeking guidance on?

Stephen Kerr: I am seeking guidance on the fact that we need a ministerial statement on this matter. I am asking you, as the Presiding Officer, and I am somewhat surprised about how my point of order is being dealt with, if I may say so, because—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, please resume your seat for a second. I will not take any implicit or other criticism of the chair. I understand that the member seems to be seeking a ministerial statement. I am quite happy to address that request. The member will know—

Stephen Kerr: I was coming to that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If I could perhaps finish my comment. The member will appreciate very well the various ways in which matters can be raised in this Parliament. On the issue of a ministerial statement, I imagine that he would perhaps wish to discuss that matter with his party business manager, so that the party business manager can seek to raise the matter with the Parliamentary Bureau.

Stephen Kerr: On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A further point of order, Mr Kerr—[*Interruption.*]

Stephen Kerr: It is all right for you all to sigh, but there are literally thousands of jobs—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, please address the point of order that you now wish to make.

Stephen Kerr: Had I been allowed to make the point of order that I was making—

Members: It was not a point of order.

Stephen Kerr: It was a point of order. I remind members that there are literally thousands of people whose jobs are on the line—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, please resume your seat for a second.

Stephen Kerr: I—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, please resume your seat for a second.

Mr Kerr has indicated that he is seeking a ministerial statement. I have indicated to Mr Kerr how that can be pursued. Mr Kerr wishes to raise a further point of order, which I am happy to hear, but I wish to be assured that it is a point of order that engages the standing orders of the Parliament. Thank you.

Stephen Kerr: My simple point, Deputy Presiding Officer, is that my understanding of the standing orders is that I have a couple of minutes to explain the context for the point of order that I

am raising. You allowed me very little time to make this important point of order. I repeat that, despite all the muttering from the Scottish National Party benches, this is a very important matter for my constituents, thousands of whose jobs and livelihoods are on the line, as is the whole economy of the area. Yet, I am granted a few seconds to make a point of order.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, it is now 14:04:37. What is the next point of—

Stephen Kerr: I have tried—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: What is the next specific matter pertaining to the standing orders of this Parliament that the member, by pursuit of a point of order, wishes to invoke?

Stephen Kerr: My point of order is as I have expressed it. I am making the point that, under the standing orders of this Parliament, a member is entitled to two or three minutes to explain the point of order—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Well, Mr Kerr, I would point out that we are already—

Stephen Kerr: —and I was not allowed that privilege.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We are already at 14:05. *[Interruption.]* We are at 14:05. I think that there has been a good—*[Interruption.]* I think that there has been a good exploration of the issues that the member wishes to raise.

Stephen Kerr: There has not been.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member's point about seeking a ministerial statement has been noted, by everybody in the chamber, I am sure—

Stephen Kerr: But not the why.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: —but, of course, the way in which the member can best pursue that—

Stephen Kerr: Not the why.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I really would not appreciate the member continuing—

Stephen Kerr: Not the why.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, please desist from challenging the authority of the chair of this Parliament. Please have the courtesy to do that.

As I was saying—*[Interruption.]* As I was saying to Mr Kerr, who continues from a sedentary position to challenge the authority of the chair, and who is, in my view, also being extremely rude, the member knows well how a matter can be pursued. That is through his party's business manager. I

suggest that he may wish now to have that conversation.

Portfolio Question Time

Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy

14:06

Living Wage (Support for Rural Businesses)

1. **Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it is supporting businesses in rural areas to become accredited living wage employers. (S6O-02749)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): In the absence of legislative powers to mandate a living wage, which are reserved to Westminster, we fund the living wage Scotland team at the Poverty Alliance to deliver living wage employer accreditations and to promote the benefits of a real living wage to businesses, rural and urban, across Scotland. As a result of that effort, Scotland now has more than 3,400 living wage accredited employers situated across all 32 local authority areas and covering a range of industries and sectors.

Scotland leads the United Kingdom with 91 per cent of employees earning at least the real living wage and, proportionately, it has five times more accredited employers than the rest of the UK.

Emma Harper: Rural and small businesses that I regularly visit across Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders report that they would like to become accredited living wage employers. However, it is often the case that, due to the nature of rural employment, such as seasonal working, small and changing workforces and the costs associated with becoming accredited, it can be difficult for small and medium-sized rural businesses to do so. Will the cabinet secretary provide any further information about the steps that can be taken, such as through enterprise agencies, to support rural businesses to deliver fair work practices such as the real living wage? I remind members that I am a living wage employer.

Neil Gray: I thank Emma Harper not just for her question but for her work in this area. We appreciate the challenges that many employers have faced due to the pandemic, Brexit and the rising cost of doing the business, and that some sectors and regions, particularly in rural areas, continue to face difficulties.

The Scottish Government's fair work action plan commits to supporting employers

"to utilise the resources ... available to embed Fair Work in their organisations."

We have made fair work first guidance available and have developed a fair work employer support tool with our enterprise and skills agencies. I pay tribute to the work of South of Scotland Enterprise and its partners to encourage the uptake of the real living wage in Emma Harper's region.

We will continue to work with partners to join up provision of advice and support for employers through a central fair work resource, making it as simple and efficient as possible to use.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): Does the Scottish Government know how many of Scotland's 1,125 rural estates are accredited living wage employers? Will the cabinet secretary join me in calling on any estates that are not yet accredited to register today?

Neil Gray: Yes, I think that anyone who has the ability to make that choice and move to being a real living wage employer will see the benefits in lower attrition rates and greater productivity in their business. Of course, regardless of the sector, I would encourage employers across Scotland to become real living wage employers.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Can the Scottish Government outline any assessment that it has made of the growing number of business that are accredited living wage employers, of the impact on the horticultural sector and of the future of the Scottish agricultural wages board?

Neil Gray: This area is under active consideration across Government and different portfolios. We recognise that there are challenges in different elements of the economy, and the agricultural sector is one of those. We are looking to do all that we can to provide support to employers, regardless of sector, to ensure that the benefits of being a real living wage employer can be realised.

At the same time, we understand some of the challenges in those areas, and we would be happy to discuss them further with Beatrice Wishart.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Question 2 has not been lodged.

Economic Growth

3. **Paul O'Kane (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to address the reportedly stagnant level of economic growth. (S6O-02751)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): The cost of living crisis continues to impact the ability of households and businesses to spend, which, in turn, affects the wider economy. Despite those extremely challenging economic conditions, the Scottish economy remains resilient.

Our national strategy for economic transformation contains bold and ambitious actions that will deliver fairer, greener prosperity for Scotland, making our economy more sustainable and resilient in the longer term. Similarly, our new deal for business is about creating an environment that supports a wellbeing economy, maximises the opportunities of the green economy and helps businesses to thrive.

Although we remain tied to a failed United Kingdom economic model and do not hold all the financial levers that are needed, we continue to use all the powers that we have to grow a fair, green and growing wellbeing economy that meets the needs and aspirations of the people of Scotland.

Paul O’Kane: The cabinet secretary spoke about resilience. The news from Grangemouth this morning is deeply concerning. It is a huge blow to those communities, as it affects not just the thousands of jobs at the site but also jobs in the supply chain.

There are significant issues in Scotland with stagnant growth, and less well-off areas are growing more slowly than better-off areas. The news will have a significant impact on not only the regional economy but our national economy.

When was the Government made aware of the announcement by Petroineos? What discussions has the Government had about it? Crucially, what action is the Government taking to protect and safeguard jobs, move to a just transition and keep the Parliament informed?

Neil Gray: I will, of course, endeavour to keep Parliament informed of updates on discussions with Petroineos. The decision that has been taken by the company is a commercial one. We were informed last night that it intended to take that decision, and there was no timescale on it. We were given reassurances that Petroineos had fully consulted the workforce before going public.

As Mr O’Kane would expect, I am endeavouring to have further conversations with Petroineos in short order, to understand how this will operate. We have been given assurances that the changes that Petroineos is looking to make at the Grangemouth site are about ensuring a sustainable future for industrial work at the site and ensuring that there is a long-term future for jobs and investment in the area. That is what we would expect, and I am incredibly exercised about ensuring that that can take place.

I will continue to liaise not only with Petroineos but with the UK Government, which has a locus here, and I will update Parliament in due course.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have received requests for supplementaries from four members.

Given the issues that could be raised in relation to this question, I will seek to take all four, but I hope to have brief questions and answers.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): There is no denying the economic impact of Brexit. However, as the ever-increasing damage of leaving the European Union continues to mount, it seems that Labour and the Tories are keeping their heads in the sand.

Can the cabinet secretary provide any update regarding the latest assessment that the Scottish Government has made of the impacts of Brexit on economic growth? Will he join me in calling on Opposition members to wake up to the reality of those impacts and to join us in standing up for Scotland’s place in Europe?

Neil Gray: Yes, I can. I appreciate that question from Colin Beattie.

Brexit has caused economic devastation to Scotland and the UK. The UK’s inflation rate in October 2023 is still higher than the rates in France and Germany. In a recent survey of small and medium-sized businesses in the UK, most respondents said that Brexit had affected them negatively. In March, the Office for Budget Responsibility repeated its expectation that the UK’s gross domestic product will be 4 per cent lower in the long run due to Brexit. It is clear that the costs of Brexit outweigh any costs of UK membership of the European Union.

Joining the European Union as an independent nation would offer Scotland the chance to regain what has been lost because of Brexit.

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): With 4 per cent of Scotland’s GDP dependent on the Grangemouth refinery, does the minister not see that the Government’s rhetoric towards the oil and gas sector—matched by the rhetoric from Keir Starmer’s Labour Party towards that sector—is not helping to support an essential part of the Scottish economy on which hundreds of jobs will depend?

Neil Gray: The decision is a commercial one that has been taken by Petroineos. The age of the site causes a challenge in terms of what is required for the future. My understanding of conversations that have been had, and from the conversations that I have had with Petroineos, is that the decision is about ensuring that there is a long-term future for the site, which includes ensuring that it moves to more sustainable operations.

As I said in response to Mr O’Kane, I will look to engage in further discussions with Petroineos. We will ensure that Mr Fraser and other members are updated on discussions not just with Petroineos but with the United Kingdom Government, which has a locus in the issue as well.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): What is the point of having an economy secretary if he does not know what is happening to one of the major employers in this country more than 24 hours in advance of a decision? Surely he should be integrated into the company and understanding what is going on. If a just transition is to mean anything, we should have had a plan ages ago. Does he have a just transition plan for the plant? What is he going to do about it?

Neil Gray: Yes. Work has been on-going over a long period to engage with Petroineos and the Grangemouth site to ensure that there is a sustainable future for it, in exactly the ways that Mr Rennie describes. That is about ensuring that there can be a sustainable future to provide jobs and that there is continued industrial capacity at Grangemouth. We will continue to engage with Petroineos and the UK Government, which has a locus in the issue, and we will update Parliament in due course.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary advise members which economic levers that are currently reserved to Westminster would help to boost economic growth the most if they were devolved to this Parliament and which of those, if any, the Labour and Conservative parties have committed to devolving and would help to save Grangemouth?

Neil Gray: I appreciate that question from Kenny Gibson. The Scottish Government has consistently argued for the devolution of migration powers to the Scottish Parliament, which would help us to attract working-age people and their families, thereby ensuring that our businesses can access skills and people, and meeting the needs of the parts of Scotland that are most at risk of depopulation. The UK Government has blatantly ignored those calls on more than one occasion, despite the fact that the UK's immigration system is not designed to meet the needs of Scotland and is having a damaging effect on our economy and communities, especially in rural areas.

We also continue to call on the UK Government to devolve employment powers to this Parliament so that we can introduce the real living wage and boost the rights of millions of workers across Scotland. I hope that the Labour Party supports those calls. However, with the full powers of an independent country, we would, of course, do much more.

Scottish National Investment Bank (Wellbeing Economy)

4. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what assurances it has received that the Scottish National Investment Bank is supporting its ambition to create a wellbeing economy, in light of

there not being an advisory board in place. (S6O-02752)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): Now that the Scottish National Investment Bank is fully established, with a growing portfolio of investments, work is under way to establish the advisory group. We receive assurances on the bank's support for a wellbeing economy through the fact that the missions that ministers set for the bank align closely with our wellbeing economy principles; the fact that the bank's robust investment processes ensure that investments align to at least one mission; and the work of the bank to measure the benefits of its investments, information on which was published in the bank's impact report. Senior officials and I also have regular meetings with the bank's senior leadership team.

Douglas Lumsden: The Scottish National Investment Bank has been in operation for three years now and, recently, serious allegations have been made against it. One is that the bank lent £7.5 million to a company that is run by the brother of a bank employee—a company that was loss making and whose accounts were overdue. It has also been reported that there was political pressure to invest £9 million in Circularity Scotland, most of which has now been lost.

I do not know whether those accusations are true, but I know that, if the advisory board was in place, as is required in law, we would have the assurance that things were in order. Does the cabinet secretary accept that it is vital that the advisory board is put in place as soon as possible?

Neil Gray: Yes, I do. We are looking to establish that, as I said in my answer to Mr Lumsden's first question. In addition to bringing about the advisory group, as I also set out in that answer, I have regular meetings with the senior management. I most recently met the chair and chief executive on 2 November. My officials meet regularly to ensure that we have that oversight. The advisory group will be set up as soon as possible, now that the bank is fully operational.

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): In light of recent reports that the Scottish National Investment Bank is investing in firms that are linked to personnel at the bank, what work is the Scottish Government undertaking to improve transparency at the bank, avoid such conflicts of interest, and meet the high standards that are expected of a public entity?

Neil Gray: As I set out to Mr Lumsden, on the bank's support for a wellbeing economy, we receive assurances that its work links to at least one of its missions at our regular meetings with

the bank, at official and ministerial levels. The bank also has to publish an impact report. All its investments are made in a transparent way so that people can see them clearly.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): The failure of the recent United Kingdom Government auction for offshore wind subsidy contracts to attract any new projects has left investors with reduced confidence in UK renewables, according to the recent Ernst & Young renewable energy attractiveness report, with the UK dropping down its international rankings. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on any strategic investment through the Scottish National Investment Bank that will accelerate Scotland's offshore renewables capabilities and help to secure a just transition for our energy sector and a fairer and greener Scotland for everyone?

Douglas Lumsden: What does that have to do with my question?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden, do you wish to make a point of order?

Douglas Lumsden: Yes. On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer.

Do supplementary questions not have to have some relevance to the initial question that was asked? The initial question was about an advisory board for the Scottish National Investment Bank, and Mr Stewart's supplementary question seems to have no relevance to that whatsoever.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Mr Lumsden for his point of order. I listened carefully to Mr Stewart's supplementary question, and he sufficiently brought the issue back to Mr Lumsden's initial question on the assurances that the Scottish Government has received from the Scottish National Investment Bank that it is

"supporting its ambition to create a wellbeing economy".

As I understood it, that was the part of the question that Mr Stewart was getting at, and perhaps that is the part of Mr Stewart's question on which the cabinet secretary could focus his reply.

Neil Gray: I appreciate that direction, Deputy Presiding Officer.

Mr Stewart will appreciate that I cannot give details on active investments that the Scottish National Investment Bank is currently working on. However, the bank has a strong record on investments that contribute to the offshore renewable sector, including the £6.6 million investment in the clean-energy pioneer Verlume, whose technology uses intelligent energy management to deliver a constant output of power from renewable sources, supporting the company's expansion plans. In addition, the

bank's £50 million investment in North Star Renewables is supporting the building of service operations vessels to assist the renewable energy sector and strengthening Scotland's position as a global leader in the offshore wind supply chain. The bank will also be a key delivery partner in relation to the recent £500 million commitment to ScotWind and its supply chain.

Real Living Wage

5. Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the commitment set out in its programme for government 2023-24, whether it will provide more details of how it plans to increase the number of people earning the real living wage. (S6O-02753)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): In line with our programme for government commitment to boost wages, we are providing grant funding to the Poverty Alliance to deliver living wage and living hours accreditation schemes across Scotland. Such schemes promote the business benefits of pay security for both workers and their employers. In July, we introduced a requirement on public sector grant recipients to pay at least the real living wage to all employees and to provide appropriate channels for effective voice.

Although minimum wage rates are reserved to the United Kingdom Government, we will continue to use the levers that are at our disposal to promote payment of the real living wage and enhance fair work in Scotland.

Marie McNair: An effective real living wage policy represents a very welcome attack on poverty pay, and more must be done to assist people on low pay. Does the cabinet secretary agree with me and the Scottish Trades Union Congress that the full devolution of employment powers would allow Scotland to do much more, such as ending zero-hours contracts and fire-and-rehire practices?

Neil Gray: The STUC and the Scottish Government have long shared the view that employment powers should be devolved to Holyrood. We continue to call for that to enable us to create fairer workplaces, enhance workers' rights in Scotland, help to shift the curve on poverty, and deliver a fairer, greener and growing economy in a more prosperous Scotland.

The full devolution of employment powers will allow us to legislate to support workers in precarious employment and ban fire-and-rehire practices. It is important that Scotland can legislate appropriately for its own workforce to ensure adequate protections and security of

employment, and to fully implement policies that will best meet Scotland's distinct needs.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 6 was not lodged.

Fair Work (Unpaid Overtime)

7. Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of its fair work first policy, what its response is to reports that workers in Scotland lost nearly £1.9 million in wages in a year due to working unpaid overtime. (S6O-02755)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): Far be it from me to correct Mr Whitfield, but I think that he meant "billion" as opposed to "million".

We believe that workers should have good work and secure conditions, with a fair wage for a fair day's work. We have called on the United Kingdom Government to devolve employment powers to the Scottish Parliament. However, while employment law remains a reserved matter, we will continue to use our fair work policy to promote fairer work practices across the labour market in Scotland.

Through our fair work policy, we ask employers to pay at least the real living wage and to consider the number and frequency of work hours, which are critical in tackling in-work poverty.

Martin Whitfield: I am grateful for that response—and that assistance.

Through its emanations, the Scottish Government is responsible for the public sector workforce. What does the Government have to say about the estimated £15 million of unpaid overtime hours in that sector, including in relation to teachers, who work well above their 35-hour week? What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that those workers are paid for their work during the cost of living crisis?

Neil Gray: I feel that I must declare an interest as the husband of a hard-working teacher and the son of a recently retired hard-working teacher.

We look to ensure that, in our public sector pay settlements, we do everything that we can to ensure that our hard-working public service workers earn a fair pay and that their contracts include an assurance that they work the hours that are ascribed to them. There are always challenges to that, and we all look to do what we can to ensure that we contribute in our workplace, but that should be recognised in the fair work policies that we bring forward and the contracts and payments that people receive.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Does the cabinet secretary agree that, if Scottish Labour members are serious about protecting the rights of workers and going further to deliver fair work conditions in Scotland, they need to take proper action to press their London bosses to commit to devolving employment law to Holyrood as a priority?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Perhaps the cabinet secretary could focus on those matters that are within his purview.

Neil Gray: With regard to my ability, as the cabinet secretary with responsibility for the wellbeing economy and fair work, to ensure that our commitments are being worked through in policy terms, it would be most helpful if Labour were able to give such a commitment and stand shoulder to shoulder with its Scottish colleagues, because we are in a very similar place; it is the divergence between here and London that is the challenge. Perhaps further conversations can be had around whether, if there is to be a future Labour Government, it would allow us the devolution of employment law in order to deliver on our commitments.

New Deal for Business Group Report

8. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what policy changes it has implemented as a result of issues raised in the "New Deal for Business Group: Report on progress and recommendations". (S6O-02756)

The Cabinet Secretary for Wellbeing Economy, Fair Work and Energy (Neil Gray): I thank Murdo Fraser for his question because it gives me the opportunity to set out that we have extended the deadline for lodging non-domestic rates proposals to 31 August 2023, which gives businesses an extra month to submit their 2023 revaluation proposals, following the introduction of the new two-stage appeals system on 1 April 2023.

We have re-established the regulatory review group, which met for the first time on 26 October 2023 and will provide advice on the pragmatic implementation of regulations. We have started activities to review and update the business and regulatory impact assessment toolkit and guidance, to ensure that it is accessible and purposeful. We are also establishing the new small business unit to work more closely with small businesses and ensure that their voices are heard during policy engagement.

In such short order, that is a good start, and there is more to come.

Murdo Fraser: I welcome all the engagement that the cabinet secretary referred to, which is very

necessary because, last week, a poll of business directors in Scotland showed that fewer than a quarter believe that the Scottish Government understands the business environment in Scotland, and more than two thirds disagree with the statement that the Government understands the business environment.

Business wants action and delivery, not just words. We have just heard from the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the 75 per cent rates relief for businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sector will be extended for a further year. That is the number 1 ask of this Government from businesses in those sectors, so will it follow suit?

Neil Gray: On the final point that Mr Fraser raised on domestic rates, all of that is in the mix as we assess the impact on Scotland's budget of what we have just heard in the autumn statement. It will take some time for the implications of what has been set out to come through in the wash, and some of the more positive elements might turn out to be more negative in relation to Scotland's budget. We will look carefully at the implications of the autumn statement for our ability to look at non-domestic rates.

On Mr Fraser's previous question about the attitudes of directors and the feeling about the sentiment of the Scottish Government, we continue to work on that. That is the whole reason why we have the new deal for business and why we are engaging in the way that we are. We understand that delivery will be critical. We published an implementation plan earlier this year to go alongside the recommendations of the new deal for business growth, so that we can be held accountable for the work that we have committed to doing.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on wellbeing economy, fair work and energy. We will next turn to the finance and parliamentary business portfolio. I will allow the front-bench teams to change positions should they wish to do so.

Finance and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Again, if any member wishes to ask a supplementary question during finance and parliamentary business portfolio questions, they should press the request-to-speak button during the relevant question or enter RTS in the chat function during the relevant question.

Elective Care Waiting Times (Parliamentary Debate)

1. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it plans to propose a parliamentary debate on

waiting times for elective care for both out-patient and in-patient appointments. (S6O-02757)

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): Currently, there are no plans at this time. As Mr Mountain is aware, 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 Parliament.

Edward Mountain: As the minister will know, this party's business is limited to nine debates per parliamentary year, so there is very stiff competition. Will the minister undertake to raise that specific issue with the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care? Despite the national treatment centre opening earlier this year, waiting times are increasing in the Highlands, and constituents in the Highlands expect those matters to be debated in the Parliament.

George Adam: This is the third time today that I have been asked a question that is outwith my portfolio. I take that as a compliment to my ministerial abilities.

I encourage Edward Mountain to continue to engage with health colleagues. I am happy to pass on his concerns to my health colleagues as well.

Long-term Financial Planning (Effect of Financial Settlements)

2. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what impact United Kingdom Government annual financial settlements have on its ability to undertake long-term financial planning. (S6O-02758)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The United Kingdom Government's financial settlements to Scotland significantly curtail the Scottish Government's ability to undertake long-term planning. In recent years, there has been a significant alteration to assumed UK Government plans as a result of events such as the disastrous mini-budget a little over a year ago. In addition, we must also factor in potential changes to assumed capital programme spending by the UK Government in year to hold against the possibility of negative consequentials that would reduce our spending power in year.

This autumn's statement simply does not go far enough in delivering the funding that we need. That makes the challenges on our budget even more severe. In order to bring as much clarity as it is within our gift to do, we published the medium-term financial strategy, which sets out the challenges to be addressed in our financial position.

Kenneth Gibson: Virtually every organisation that the Scottish Government funds seeks three to five-year financial settlements, yet we have seen chronic financial instability at UK level, with four Chancellors of the Exchequer in four months last year, for example. Has the cabinet secretary been given any indication that the current chancellor is considering longer-term settlements in order to help deliver the certainty, efficiency and effectiveness that longer-term financial planning would bring?

Shona Robison: We have had no such clarity or certainty about longer-term financial planning from the UK Government. We will continue to face significant funding pressures in the year ahead, at a time when costs continue to rise and the need to support people through challenging times remains.

Prior to the autumn statement, I wrote to urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer to provide a funding settlement that will enable us to invest in public services, vital infrastructure and fair public sector pay increases. We have seen no such thing from the autumn statement today. What is emerging is a set of choices that will have a devastating impact on our public services next year.

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): Given the answer that the Deputy First Minister has just given to Mr Gibson, will the Government consider making further representations to the UK Government about the necessity of longer-term financial planning information so that Parliament can provide greater funding assurance to third sector organisations that are interested in providing transformational change in our society but need greater certainty about the funding horizon to enable them to do so?

Shona Robison: I can say to John Swinney that we will continue to do so. Having met a range of organisations during the past few weeks, I can say that, for many organisations, particularly third sector organisations, funding certainty is almost more important than the quantum of the settlement, because it is about being able to keep staff and to plan.

I have to say, however, that what is emerging from the autumn statement today will make every single part of our public sector or third sector organisations' funding extremely difficult. I will be keen to set out to Parliament at the earliest opportunity the full impact and how grave the situation is after what the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced today.

High Streets (Rejuvenation)

3. Kaukab Stewart (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on any plans it has to provide

financial support for high street rejuvenation. (S6O-02759)

The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning (Joe FitzPatrick): The refreshed town centre action plan, which was published last year, is a call to action, both locally and nationally, to support the rejuvenation of our town centres, and it reaffirms our commitment to the town centre first principle.

In 2021, we established the place-based investment programme, which we deliver in partnership with local government to accelerate our ambitions for town centres, place, 20-minute neighbourhoods and community-led regeneration. We have invested £70 million this year to support projects across the country through that programme.

Kaukab Stewart: City centre economies are facing significant challenges, and Glasgow is no different. Currently, a £5.7 million investment in redeveloping Sauchiehall Street, Buchanan Street and Argyle Street is under way, thanks to the city region deal funding. However, there has been a recent decline in the number of hospitality businesses operating in Glasgow. What additional investment similar to the funding that has been announced for Aberdeen's Union Street is being considered by the Scottish Government to boost the hospitality sector and the night-time economy in Glasgow city centre?

Joe FitzPatrick: I am aware of the challenges that some in the hospitality sector are facing, so we have established an industry leadership group with the tourism and hospitality sector to understand its unique needs. Glasgow City Council has benefited from a range of investments. For example, in addition to the investments that were made through the city deal, the council has already received a direct allocation of more than £9 million from the place-based investment programme, and the council has discretion on how it uses that money. We continue to work closely with Glasgow, holding quarterly leadership meetings with the Scottish Cities Alliance.

Last week, the First Minister and Mr Gray and I met all eight city leaders to further reinforce our aims to encourage investment and strengthen the prosperity and wellbeing of our cities.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. Town centres act as vital commercial hubs, places for businesses to locate and places for the provision of employment. Although we must rebalance and rejuvenate town centres, does the minister agree that commercial purpose must remain at the heart of town centres?

Joe FitzPatrick: The member is absolutely right. Across the piece, we are all looking at how town centres can have a new vision for the future, with potentially more people residing in them, increasing footfall and ensuring that they remain vibrant. However, I absolutely agree that a commercial basis for our town centres is crucial. That is at the heart of the town centre action plan.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): A survey from Scotland's Towns Partnership this summer showed that people want to shop locally for ease and for the sake of the planet. However, many retail properties in smaller towns and villages have poor insulation and high energy costs. What more can be done to support the rejuvenation of high streets in small towns and villages to enable more people to shop locally?

Joe FitzPatrick: Many of the small properties that the member is talking about already benefit from substantial support from the Scottish Government, but we need to consider what more we—the Scottish Government and local government colleagues—can do working in partnership to ensure that our town centres remain vibrant and sustainable. Footfall is crucial to that, but the points that the member makes about sustainability, particularly given the incredible increases in energy costs, are an important factor to consider.

National Health Service (Additional Funding Source)

4. Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government from which part of its budget the additional £300 million pledged for the national health service will be allocated. (S6O-02760)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The new funding of £300 million that the First Minister announced in October aims to help to reduce in-patient and day-case waiting lists by an estimated 100,000 patients over three years. That investment is subject to the outcome of the Scottish budget process for 2024-25 and future years, as well as associated approval by the Scottish Parliament.

It is deeply disappointing that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has failed to provide in the autumn statement the funding that devolved Governments need. That makes the challenges for our budget next year even more severe, including those for the NHS.

Sandesh Gulhane: I declare an interest as a practising NHS general practitioner.

That was not an answer, cabinet secretary; it was just a rehashing of a statement. I ask again where the money will be allocated from. Will you

not have to make substantial cuts to services such as mental health provision, from which you have already cut £30 million this year?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind all members that they need to speak through the chair.

Shona Robison: Let us talk about substantial cuts. The Treasury documents that were published today show no noticeable investment in public services, including the NHS, which results in minimal consequential for Scotland's NHS. There will be less than £11 million for the NHS in 2024-25, compared with £367 million in last year's autumn statement.

Those choices of Sandesh Gulhane's Government will have devastating consequences for every part of our public services in Scotland. He should hang his head in shame for coming to the chamber and asking us about funding for the NHS when his chancellor has deprioritised it for all to see. Today of all days, I will take no lectures from the Tories on funding for the NHS.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary confirm that all capital spending plans for the financing of the Scottish Government's programme of national treatment centres will be delivered by the end of the parliamentary session, as committed to in its NHS recovery plan?

Shona Robison: I have said that, when we set out the budget on 19 December, we will set out alongside that the revisions that will need to be made to the infrastructure investment plan. With the capital cuts that are coming from the UK Government, which were announced and confirmed today, there will be a 7 per cent reduction in our capital spending availability. The chancellor announced hardly anything for capital. That cannot have no impact on our capital spending and infrastructure investment, so we will have some challenging decisions to make when we present the choices that we are making and the priorities that we will take forward. I will set those out alongside the budget on 19 December.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): The cabinet secretary will have seen that NHS Fife has already built up a £10.9 million deficit in the first few months of the financial year. The chair of that NHS board is pessimistic about whether costs can be recovered without damaging front-line services. What will the cabinet secretary do to stop the cuts to front-line services that could result from that?

Shona Robison: The Government has always tried to prioritise funding for the NHS. I will not deny or dismiss the pressures that have arisen for our NHS in trying to deal with the Covid backlog, pay pressures and the cost of medicines. All of that heaps pressure on our NHS boards. However,

surely—today of all days—Willie Rennie will join me in condemning the chancellor and the UK Government for giving only £11 million of consequential for the NHS next year. That is all that the NHS will get next year, compared with the £367 million that was announced for the NHS in last year's autumn statement. That shows a hollowing out of funding for NHS England and, as a consequence, NHS Scotland.

I do not know why Willie Rennie is shaking his head. Those are the facts. I have the figures from the Treasury reports—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Cabinet secretary, I will need to move on to the next question.

Shona Robison: Surely he should join us in condemning the chancellor and—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Clare Adamson.

Local Government Finance Support Schemes

5. Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is ensuring that local government finance support schemes are operating effectively. (S6O-02761)

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur): Local authorities are accountable to their local communities and have the financial freedom to operate independently, taking account of local needs. The Scottish Government will continue to work in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to agree a more detailed programme of work, including a fiscal framework and an outcomes and accountability framework, to underpin the Verity house agreement in the coming months. We have also committed to inviting the Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland to be part of that work.

Clare Adamson: I have been helping a number of my constituents regarding the dual housing support scheme, which supports people to go into rehabilitation, and the discretionary housing payment, which mitigates the Tories' bedroom tax. Those are excellent examples of the Scottish Government putting cash into the hands of the most vulnerable at the most difficult of times, in marked contrast to Westminster's austerity.

However, it has become apparent that many constituents and third sector organisations are not aware of those support schemes, which are administered by the local authority. I urge the Scottish Government to work with local authorities to ensure that those initiatives are promoted locally and are passported to the people who are entitled to that vital support.

Tom Arthur: I thank Clare Adamson for her supplementary and for highlighting that Scottish Government investment. We have commissioned Healthcare Improvement Scotland to establish regional improvement hubs, which will bring together groups of alcohol and drug partnerships and other key parts of the local system to design and improve pathways into, through and from rehab. Part of that work is to ensure that local pathways promote routes into residential rehabilitation such as the dual housing support fund.

Local authorities are responsible for promoting the discretionary housing payment scheme in their areas. The Scottish Government has been working with third sector partners to raise awareness of the support that is available to households, particularly with the newly established fuller benefit cap mitigation.

United Kingdom Government Autumn Statement (Engagement)

6. Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what engagement it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding any impact of the autumn statement on Scotland's public finances. (S6O-02762)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): As I outlined to Parliament yesterday, I wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer ahead of the autumn statement to set out the Scottish Government's priorities for action. I also spoke to the new Chief Secretary to the Treasury this morning, when I again emphasised the need for investment in public services and net zero, and the need to support people with the cost of living. The Welsh finance minister and I previously discussed the need for additional investment in devolved Government budgets with the previous Chief Secretary to the Treasury at the most recent meeting of the finance interministerial standing committee.

It is very disappointing that, today, the chancellor has failed to provide the funding that devolved Governments need, which increases the challenges for our budget next year.

Bill Kidd: As we heard earlier, hospitality businesses particularly suffered throughout the pandemic and they have faced rising costs as a result of inflation and increased energy prices. Have any discussions taken place to ensure that specific support is provided for the hospitality sector?

Shona Robison: My ministerial colleagues and I regularly meet representatives of the hospitality industry. The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance chairs the new deal for business

non-domestic rates sub-group, which includes representatives of the hospitality industry.

We responded to business's biggest ask on non-domestic rates and froze the poundage in 2023-24, thereby ensuring that Scotland had the lowest non-domestic rates poundage in the UK for the fifth year in a row. Our rates package is estimated to be worth £749 million. As a result of our providing the most generous small business bonus scheme relief in the UK, around half of properties in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors in Scotland will pay no rates.

Going forward, we will set out our decisions on non-domestic rates in the budget that will be set out on 19 December.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): According to the Office for Budget Responsibility, the outlook for the United Kingdom is pretty subdued, and inflation, as well as interest rates, will be higher for longer. Much has been made already of the impact of Tory decisions on the consequential funding that Scotland will receive, but does the cabinet secretary accept that it is a double whammy, because not only will we receive less, but our costs will remain higher due to Tory incompetence?

Shona Robison: Kate Forbes's summation—she describes it as “a double whammy”—is absolutely on the button. The question for us is how we reconcile a reduction in our budget and a real-terms cut in capital. In fact, the additional capital departmental expenditure limit is a total of £10 million for next year's capital allocation from the UK Government. That puts in context some of the questions that we heard earlier about infrastructure investment priorities.

I look forward to hearing what the Tories' priorities are in the face of the chancellor's decisions today. When each and every one of them comes here asking for more money, I will be reminding them of the chancellor's priorities today—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members!

Shona Robison: —which will have an impact on every single one of their constituencies and the public services in them.

Council Tax Freeze (Impact on Midlothian North and Musselburgh)

7. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of any impact that its council tax freeze policy will have on households in the Midlothian North and Musselburgh constituency. (S6O-02763)

The Minister for Community Wealth and Public Finance (Tom Arthur): The total funding

for local government and the significant associated savings for taxpayers for 2024-25 will form part of the detail of the implementation of the council tax freeze, which will be agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities over the coming weeks.

The freeze will mean that every Scottish household will continue to benefit from cheaper council tax bills. If council tax in England increased by 3 per cent next year, for example, it would see the average band D property in England pay over £700 more on average than a band D property in Scotland, following our freeze.

Colin Beattie: It is very welcome that the Scottish National Party Scottish Government is helping households across Scotland save hundreds of pounds with the council tax freeze, putting money in people's pockets when they need it most.

Meanwhile, apparently, East Lothian's Labour council leader recently threatened to raise council tax by 32 per cent. That would hammer hard-pressed families across my constituency, right in the midst of a cost of living crisis. Will the minister join me in calling on the Labour Party to condemn those tax hike plans and to admit whether it has been planning similar council tax rises across Scotland?

Tom Arthur: We are absolutely committed to constructive engagement with our partners in local government to deliver a council tax freeze that will benefit every part of Scotland. It is for other parties to set out their position—I admit that I struggle to keep up with other parties' positions, as they seem to change on a weekly basis—but we are absolutely committed to working with our local government partners to deliver a council tax freeze that will benefit every single household in Scotland.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): The member is right to question how a council tax freeze will affect households in Midlothian North and Musselburgh, but is it not the case that it will also affect households across Scotland, including my West Scotland region, when it comes to the delivery of public services? Can the minister confirm the expected cost of the council tax freeze and, more crucially, where the money will come from?

Tom Arthur: As I set out in my earlier responses to Mr Beattie, we are committed to constructive engagement with COSLA to deliver a fully funded council tax freeze that will benefit households in the member's constituency and, indeed, households across Scotland.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): Does the minister recognise that a lot of local services are buckling under the financial

pressure? Without getting into the party politics of the matter, is he intending to sit down with local government and look seriously at what can be done to protect services for the most vulnerable people in our communities?

Tom Arthur: I thank Mr Rowley for his question and for the tone of it. We are committed not only to delivering, through partnership and agreement with local government, a fully funded council tax freeze, but to ensuring, through our wider commitments and the Verity house agreement, that we can provide sustainable public services for all people in Scotland, and that we deliver the person-centred services that we all want to see.

Government Bonds (Plans)

8. **Alasdair Allan:** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its plans to issue Government bonds. (S6O-02764)

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Finance (Shona Robison): The First Minister announced on 17 October that, subject to market testing and due diligence, the Scottish Government will go directly to the bond market in our own right for the first time.

The issue of bonds is part of a wide-ranging package of recommendations from an investor panel of senior figures from investment finance. The Scottish Government will issue bonds when the value-for-money case supports it from a fiscal and economic perspective.

It is deeply disappointing that the Chancellor of the Exchequer failed to provide the funding that devolved Governments need in the autumn statement. That makes the challenges for our budget next year even more severe, so it is right that the Scottish Government pursues all of its fiscal and economic levers to boost investment in Scotland, including the issuance of bonds.

The next steps will be set out in the 2024-25 Scottish budget on 19 December.

Alasdair Allan: It is clear that bonds represent an important opportunity to use our powers to invest in infrastructure during a time that, judging by today's autumn statement, will clearly be one of continued Westminster austerity. Can the cabinet secretary say any more about how the bonds could help to raise Scotland's profile and engagement with international investors?

Shona Robison: The investor panel provided its first-stage work to the Scottish Government in September, and it covers a wide range of findings and recommendations on how Scotland can attract mobile capital to support the just transition to net zero.

That piece of work also includes a recommendation that would involve additional costs but could result in Scotland's profile being significantly raised in international capital markets through the use of existing devolved powers to issue debt. That would provide a motivation for regular engagement with investors and an opportunity to market Scotland's investment story, and it would also allow the development of relationships with providers of debt, a track record and a credit rating. However, as I have stressed, the proposal has to meet the value-for-money test, which will be set out by the Scottish Government before we proceed.

The investor panel has produced a valuable piece of work, and I thank it for its efforts and the information that it has provided.

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

Housing

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-11351, in the name of Mark Griffin, on Scotland's housing emergency. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button. I advise members that we have absolutely no time in hand, so I will have to enforce the time limits on speeches pretty robustly.

14:58

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): Before we begin, I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I ceased to be a landlord over the summer.

I am pleased to open the debate for Labour. We are using our business time to call on the Parliament and the Government to face up to the reality that thousands of families across the country face and declare a national housing emergency. I thank the housing sector for its support for the debate and the briefings it has provided. Scottish Land & Estates, Crisis, Homeless Network Scotland and others all recognise the urgency of the housing emergency and desperately want to see—[*Interruption.*—]the minister and the Government act today. Particular thanks are due to Shelter for working across parties to support the debate.

Today was meant to be about challenging the Government to take responsibility and deliver action to deal with the national emergency. As much as the minister might spend all afternoon trying to pin all the responsibility on the economic illiteracy of the Tory Government at Westminster, this emergency has been made in Scotland by his Government, and it is his responsibility to fix it. Sadly, the minister is not prepared to face up to what his Scottish National Party councillor colleagues in Edinburgh and in Argyll and Bute have faced up to.

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): The member rather glided past the question of economic illiteracy in the United Kingdom Government. I do not think that it helps the debate for Mr Griffin to obscure the fact that we are all living with the consequences of some absolutely devastating macroeconomic decisions that were made by the UK Government over many years, but principally in the mini-budget last September. Would Mr Griffin perhaps shine a light for a little bit longer on the economic illiteracy of the UK Government?

Mark Griffin: My colleagues at Westminster have been highlighting that economic illiteracy and will sweep that Government out of office and make

changes for the better for this country. I want to talk about the Scottish Government's responsibility and the action—or inaction—that has led to the housing emergency that it seems the entire country, apart from the Scottish Government, accepts we are in the grip of.

We cannot accept an amendment that denies the emergency, and we cannot accept an amendment that deflects and offers nothing new, because the facts set out that we are in the grip of a housing crisis on a national scale. There are 9,500 children in temporary accommodation—many of them for up to one year—and the number of people who are homeless is the highest on record, with another household made homeless every 16 minutes. By the time that I and the minister have spoken, two more households in this country will have been made homeless. There are 60,000 households at risk of repossession and 200,000 households languishing on waiting lists, and, despite an emergency rent freeze, rents have rocketed by 12 per cent in the past year and are increasing faster in Scotland than anywhere else in the UK.

Earlier today, Anas Sarwar and I met Shelter's helpline team, who are on the front line in supporting people who are being made homeless. Day in and day out they support people with nowhere else to turn, who have been failed by councils that are, ultimately, running out of cash as they deal with the housing emergency. We heard about a person who had been sleeping in an out-of-use caravan in a mechanic's yard. It had no electricity, water or heating, and, when the council found out, the person was told that there was no accommodation available, until a solicitor got involved. A woman with three children was moved from hotel to hotel for months and was forced to share a bedroom with her teenage children, and no adaptations were made for one of the children, who was using a wheelchair.

Most shockingly, we heard of a woman who has been in temporary accommodation for 10 years—she has spent 10 years in temporary accommodation. What is worse is that her six-year-old child has spent their entire life in temporary accommodation. That six-year-old has no concept of what a safe, secure place to call home is. That is an appalling indictment, and the fact that the Government cannot accept that there is a housing emergency when we have people in such circumstances is beyond belief.

My inbox, like those of many others in the chamber, is stuffed full of examples of families, children, and younger and older people who are stuck without somewhere that they can call home. Such stories are repeated across every part of the country, every day of the week. In recent weeks, I have heard from a woman with chronic obstructive

pulmonary disease whose home is making her ill, a young family who have cut spending to the bone but are still a matter of weeks away from losing the roof over their heads, and a teenager who was kicked out of home and who is now couch surfing. Those are all devastating and miserable examples of how desperately people in need of a home in Scotland are living today.

However, rather than dealing with the scale of the problem, the Government is systematically underestimating the country's needs. Councils have been set the task of finding land for a minimum of 200,000 homes over the next decade. Members might think that that number of homes would make a dent in the housing emergency—but only if it was the right number. Last week, Homes for Scotland revealed new data at its conference, which the minister attended, that would terrify any responsible Government into action—but not, it seems, this Government. Homes for Scotland is concerned that local development planning guidance will drastically underestimate real housing need, so it has commissioned a primary research-led report into the true housing need in Scotland in order to support planners. Measuring the number of people in the most extreme circumstances and counting only people who are in overcrowded and concealed households, as well as those who are homeless and in temporary accommodation, ignores the full picture. The Homes for Scotland survey of 14,000 Scottish households found that 28 per cent of Scottish households—700,000—have some form of housing need, which is far higher than the Government's official estimate of 200,000.

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I have some sympathy with the scale of the challenge, as I will say later in the debate. However, real leadership requires sound policies to resolve it. The SNP has built 124,000 social and affordable homes since 2007. What would Labour do?

Mark Griffin: We would build more houses. Labour's record in Government shows that we built an average of 5,000 more houses each year in office than this Government has managed to build. The cause of Scotland's housing crisis is a shortage in supply that has been overseen by the Government's failure to deliver the houses that we need, which has been evidenced by bodies right across the sector. Homes for Scotland, Shelter and a whole range of organisations that specialise in the matter have said that the Government has failed consistently to deliver housing in the numbers that this country needs. Whether members speak to Shelter, Homes for Scotland or housing conveners across the country, they will hear that they have all been told that the minister is in listening mode. However, the response to the

debate shows that the Government has not done a lot of listening and that it is definitely not acting.

People right across the country need and want an immediate emergency response at a scale that we have not seen before. The long-term answer to the problem is simple: it will be ended by increasing the supply and number of houses across all tenures through building more homes. The declarations of a housing emergency by both City of Edinburgh Council and Argyll and Bute Council have said that a lack of supply is the significant problem. Building more homes across all tenures is a key part of the solution.

The SNP Government's inaction is exacerbating the emergency, and it is finding reasons not to act. It refuses to set the all-tenure house building target that Homes for Scotland has called for—a target that could focus Government and industry to co-ordinate action to tackle the crisis.

The minister's amendment talks of work on the task-and-finish group's recommendations, but his officials are in charge and are telling him that the Government cannot commit to an interim target for building social housing.

The Government trumpets housing completions, but the number of social homes has dropped by 24 per cent compared to last year, and its chances of picking up the pace are dire because the number of homes that have been approved has plummeted by 50 per cent.

The Government must double what it is doing now in order to have any chance of building the number of homes that it plans to build. At the same time, the number of empty homes has jumped by 1,500 in the past year but the Government has still not delivered an escalating council tax surcharge. Worse still, since it set its 110,000 target, the Government has seen an exodus of staff from the very team that it has tasked with delivering more homes.

The minister's department has been sounding the alarm for months now. It is an open secret that there is a high risk that affordable housing targets could be missed altogether. Despite mortgage rates rocketing, we are almost two years into a review of the home owners' support fund, and there is still no new support for people who are struggling with their mortgage payments.

Time and again, Government inaction is making this emergency worse. It is strangling the pipeline and failing to deliver the homes that we need—and look at the consequences. Given half a chance to accept that there is a need to take drastic action, the Government is looking the other way. The finance secretary said yesterday that the Government is broke, but the truth is that, with relentless cuts to council budgets, the councils are

trying to tackle this crisis with one hand tied behind their back.

I have heard from constituents who are destitute in their homes because they cannot or will not be rehomed. An amputee who cannot get out of his building and a pensioner with mobility needs on the top floor are told that they are adequately housed, so they are left with little option but to present as homeless.

In East Lothian—the minister's backyard—the council has said that it cannot take any more homes because the revenue demands to run schools and services are too high. City of Edinburgh Council and Argyll and Bute Council have faced up to reality, but every part of this country is facing a housing emergency. Everyone can see it and feel it apart from those in St Andrew's house.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Mr Griffin.

Mark Griffin: It is time for the Government to accept and admit that there is a housing emergency in Scotland and to support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that Scotland is experiencing a housing emergency.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Griffin. I remind those who are looking to participate in the debate but who have not already done so to press their request-to-speak button.

15:11

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I welcome this afternoon's debate on housing. I also thank stakeholders who have engaged with us today, whom I meet on a regular basis.

The Government has three missions—equality, opportunity and community. Housing is the building block for success in all three. To tackle poverty and protect people from harm, we must have secure and affordable homes. For people to share in economic opportunities, they need the stability of a home; for communities to thrive and to realise their full potential, people need a place to live in peace and dignity.

Housing is at the heart of our social, emotional and economic lives. I am committed to giving housing and homelessness the support and attention that it deserves, and I have been doing that since being in post.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I will not at the moment, thanks.

I have met many experts in the sector, and I have spoken to tenants in the private and social rented sectors. I have heard moving personal stories from people with lived experience of homelessness. I have met investors. What people tell me is that Scotland has the right housing targets and the right plan to end homelessness, but they want me to keep those plans moving forward, to maintain momentum with our targets and to create the right environment for investment. I am proud of Scotland's record on housing, but we need and want to do much more.

I will focus on the delivery of affordable homes. Our ambition is for everyone—

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Will the minister give way?

Paul McLennan: I will not at the moment; I have only a limited time.

Our ambition is for everyone to have a safe and affordable home that meets their needs—

Daniel Johnson: Will the minister be taking any interventions?

Paul McLennan: Yes, I will—if I can make progress.

That is why we are making £3.5 billion available in this parliamentary session for the delivery of more affordable and social homes.

Since 2007, we have worked with partners to deliver nearly 124,000 homes, more than 87,000 of which were for social rent. I want to touch on the point that Mark Griffin made. In that period, Scotland has seen 40 per cent—

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Paul McLennan: I will not at the moment, thanks.

Scotland has seen 40 per cent more affordable homes delivered per head of population than in England and more than 70 per cent more than in Wales.

Mark Griffin was asked about policy ideas by Kate Forbes—

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Will the minister give way?

Paul McLennan: I will not at the moment, thanks.

We have delivered more. Let us look at the figures, which I have here. Between 1999 and 2007, 43,500 affordable homes were delivered, which is an average of 5,500 per annum. Between 2007 and 2023, 122,205 houses were delivered, which is an average of 7,630 per annum. That is 40 per cent more per annum, on average, than in

the period 1999-2007. I suggest that Mr Griffin checks his figures, because those are official figures.

Mark Griffin: Will the minister give way?

Paul McLennan: I will.

Mark Griffin: Social homes are clearly crucial. The figures that I gave were for all-tenure house builds. In every single year of a Labour Government, we built, on average, 5,000 more houses. The shortfall, which is set out by Homes for Scotland, has resulted in the housing crisis and the chronic lack of supply that we have today.

Paul McLennan: Government does not build private houses. We help the private sector to do that, but we do not build private houses. The Scottish Government has delivered 40 per cent more affordable homes than the previous Labour Administration did. That is a fact.

Daniel Johnson: Will the minister give way on that point?

Paul McLennan: No, I have to make progress.

Back in 2016, we also brought an end to the UK Government's policy of right to buy, which took more than 500,000 homes out of the social rented sector in Scotland. To my Tory colleagues, I say that we estimate that, since ending the right-to-buy policy, up to 15,500 homes have been protected and will remain available to renters.

Stephen Kerr: Will the minister give way?

Paul McLennan: No, thanks.

Looking forward, we are committed to delivering our target of 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which at least 70 per cent will be available for social rent and 10 per cent will be in our rural and island communities. That is an ambitious target, but we are making progress. Since 23 March 2022, 13,500 homes have been delivered towards the target, of which 10,500 are for social rent, including almost 23,000 council homes.

We are taking concrete action to boost housing supply, but some matters are beyond our control, whether or not we like that. There are inflationary pressures. Developers have been telling me that construction inflation is at 15 to 20 per cent. Our £752 million budget this year includes at least £60 million to support acquisitions.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Paul McLennan: No, I am not going to take—

Stephen Kerr: Will the member give way?

Paul McLennan: No, thanks. That funding will address the high number of households in temporary accommodation.

Our recently published "Rural & Islands Housing Action Plan" supports our commitment to delivering at least 10 per cent of our 110,000 target in rural and island communities. That marks an important step in tackling challenges to delivering more homes in rural and island areas. The plan includes a £25 million rural affordable housing fund for key workers over five years, and a three-year package of support worth almost £1 million that is co-funded with the Nationwide Foundation. That will go to the Communities Housing Trust and South of Scotland Community Housing. This morning, I visited Rural Stirling Housing Association, where I talked about the difference that the action plan is beginning to make already.

Since 2016-17, we have supported the delivery of more than 10,000 affordable homes in rural and island areas.

We also talk about the importance of preventing homelessness. We have a world-leading approach in that regard. We are proud of our record on affordable housing supply, but we must also mitigate the factors that contribute to housing precarity and homelessness.

We see housing as a human right. That is why we are taking a world-leading approach to preventing—

Stephen Kerr: Will the minister give way?

Paul McLennan: I will take an intervention on that point.

Stephen Kerr: The reality is that the minister has just given us a catalogue of complacency. Why are there record levels of homelessness in Scotland? Why on earth can he not see the connection between the rent freeze that this Government has imposed and the rising levels of rent and the rising levels of homelessness?

Paul McLennan: Thankfully, just today, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said that he will end the freeze on the local housing allowance.

The damage that has been done by Stephen Kerr's Government over three years is an estimated £819 million cut to the allowance across the UK. That is coupled with cuts of £181 million to Scotland's capital budget. So, just do not go there.

As I said, there is a declining trend in repeat homelessness and a decrease in homelessness from the private rented sector, and reports of rough sleeping remain lower than pre-pandemic levels.

The housing and homelessness sectors are under great strain. Last year was particularly difficult for the sectors, and that was reflected in our latest homelessness statistics. We know that councils are making huge efforts to deliver

services to people who are experiencing homelessness.

Recovery from the pandemic, the continuing cost of living crisis and more than a decade of austerity from your Government, Mr Kerr—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Through the chair, please, minister.

Paul McLennan: —has put people, businesses, public finances and the third sector under unprecedented pressures. That is why we must focus on the things that matter, such as reducing the backlog in temporary accommodation.

We recognise the challenges that local authorities face. I have been going round the country meeting housing conveners to see how national and local government can work together on solutions. We are acting on the recommendations of the expert temporary accommodation task and finish group, including investing in the national acquisition plan. Funding of £60 million for that was announced in July.

We continue to support local authorities and registered social landlords to make use of their existing stock, to bring empty homes back into use and to increase allocations to homeless households. To support that activity, the Scottish Government has made an additional £2 million available to the 15 local authorities with the most significant temporary accommodation pressures.

In the longer term, we know that the best way to reduce the numbers in temporary accommodation is to support people to stay in their homes and to avoid the trauma of homelessness. We are introducing groundbreaking new homelessness prevention duties in this parliamentary year, which are designed to improve the way that local authorities, registered social landlords and public bodies co-operate to prevent homelessness.

We all know that certain groups are at particular risk of homelessness, including women experiencing domestic abuse. We are piloting a £500,000 initiative called “fund to leave” to help women to leave an abusive relationship.

We have made more than £83 million available for discretionary housing payments this year. The money will be used to fully mitigate the UK Government’s unfair bedroom tax, helping more than 92,000 households in Scotland to stay in their homes.

We have also committed to mitigating the UK Government’s benefit cap as fully as possible within our powers. The cap impacts more than 2,700 families. It will be interesting to see what Labour’s position will be if it takes power in Westminster next year. I would hope that the party would commit to that—hopefully, we will hear Mr Griffin make that commitment later on.

Many of the challenges that Scotland’s housing market faces today are borne of disastrous decisions: the freezing of local housing allowance, which we have talked about, a hard Brexit and a catastrophic mini-budget last year.

This Government has been working hard to secure the uplift of local housing allowance in advance of the UK budget statement today. I am relieved to hear that the chancellor will be scrapping the freeze on local housing allowance—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, minister.

Paul McLennan: In conclusion, the Government recognises the challenges that people such as this young woman face. We know that there is an unmet housing need. People deserve better. We will continue to work in partnership with local authorities, with landlords and with housing developers to ensure that we have the right range and choice of homes to allow our communities to thrive.

I move amendment S6M-11351.2, to leave out from “agrees” to end and insert:

“recognises that Scotland is facing significant pressures with homelessness and temporary accommodation, and therefore agrees that the Scottish Government should build on its track record of delivering 123,985 affordable homes since 2007 by delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032; considers that it should continue to work on the recommendations of the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group and recently published Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan; further considers that it should continue to develop its proposals for a Housing Bill in 2023, with stronger tenants’ rights and powers to prevent homelessness; acknowledges Scottish Government support for local authorities in developing targeted plans to address local housing needs; regrets the disastrous UK Government “mini-budget” of 2022, which has left the housing market struggling against inflationary pressures, as well as the devastating impact of Brexit on construction costs and workforce challenges, and calls on the UK Government to immediately uprate Local Housing Allowance, end the spare room subsidy, more commonly known as the bedroom tax, and reverse the planned real-terms reduction to Scotland’s capital budget.”

15:19

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for bringing the debate to the chamber.

The starting point of the debate is whether one agrees that there is a housing emergency. It appears that the Scottish Government does not think that there is. That is despite overwhelming evidence and two councils having declared such an emergency in their own area, including in the capital, which was backed by SNP councillors. The Government’s amendment is petty, it shows an Administration that is out of touch with reality and we will not support it.

The evidence is compelling. The number of homeless applications increased by 9 per cent in 2022-23. Some 16,200 children have been assessed for, or are threatened with, homelessness. More than 6,000 families have been stuck in temporary accommodation for more than a year. In most council areas, the longest amount of time a child has been stuck in temporary accommodation exceeds a year.

Also, of course, the City of Edinburgh Council this month overwhelmingly declared a housing emergency in the capital; it was the second council to do so, after Argyll and Bute. The City of Edinburgh Council's housing convener said:

"By declaring a housing emergency, we hope to draw widescale attention to an issue that demands urgent and united action. Every single person deserves a warm, safe, and affordable place to call home and we can address this, if we act now."

Shelter Scotland director Alison Watson said of that declaration:

"Scotland is facing a housing emergency, which is at its most acute in the capital."

That in itself should be enough for anyone to back the Labour motion. It is not enough for the Government, though.

Kate Forbes: One of the challenges around housing is how widespread the difficulties are, not least for owners who are struggling to afford their mortgages because a previous Tory leader crashed the economy, leaving people to face rocketing bills. What does he have to say to them?

Graham Simpson: We need an all-tenures solution to the housing crisis and the housing emergency, which the Government denies.

Shelter laid out the statistics in stark terms. A record 9,500 children are trapped in temporary accommodation; that is up 130 per cent since 2014. Forty-five children are becoming homeless every day. A household is becoming homeless every 16 minutes. There is a 10 per cent increase in households becoming homeless compared with last year.

Homelessness is at its worst when we have people sleeping rough on the streets, and that is on the rise again. It is at its worst when people are having to use night shelters. We must commit to ending both.

During the previous parliamentary session, I was on the Local Government and Communities Committee, which carried out an inquiry into homelessness. In October 2017, we visited Finland to look at that country's housing first model. There, they had virtually eliminated rough sleeping. We recommended that the Scottish Government adopt the same approach. For a time,

it looked as though the Government was on board, but now we seem to be slipping backwards.

No one should have to sleep rough and no one should have to use a night shelter, but they do. That is what makes it an emergency. It is disappointing that the Government does not see it that way. It has its head in the sand. We cannot begin to tackle a problem unless we first acknowledge the scale of it. We only have to listen to people such as the Edinburgh students I met this morning, who described the emergency for them in this city.

One of the big issues for many years has been our very low rates of house building. The Government amendment fails to recognise the need for more homes of all tenures or to acknowledge that the delivery of private housing is also pivotal to unlocking affordable housing delivery.

Paul McLennan: Will the member take an intervention?

Graham Simpson: You did not take my intervention, Mr McLennan, so I will not take yours.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Speak through the chair.

We know that the SNP Government failed to meet its 50,000 affordable homes target on time in the previous session of Parliament. We also know that the number of affordable homes approved has reached its lowest level in 10 years, and that social sector new-build starts are 36 per cent down on last year. The social housing sector needs to be a priority. We should not forget the private rented sector, which has seen landlords bailing out and rents rising thanks to Patrick Harvie's ill-judged rent cap policy.

My amendment merely recognises that legislation is on the way, and we simply suggest that it should be used as an opportunity to change things. If anyone opposes the amendment, they will need to say exactly what the housing bill should be for if it is not to fix things. We have seen little in the way of detail so far about the bill, but it must tackle the issues that I have raised, and it must do something to address the chronic undersupply.

Denying the problem will not fix the problem. Is there a housing emergency? You bet there is a housing emergency.

I move amendment S6M-11351.1, to insert at end:

" , and calls on the Scottish Government to tackle the issues that have caused the current crisis in its forthcoming Housing Bill."

15:25

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): SNP members, including Kate Forbes, are right to talk about the Liz Truss budget last year, which had a dramatic impact on household finances and meant that many people simply could not afford their mortgage. Construction costs have gone up, in part because of Brexit but also because of that budget. There is no doubt that demographics have changed. The demand for housing is going up steeply and, to be fair, even though more houses are being built, they are not meeting that demand. That is in part why we are seeing a dramatic impact on the housing situation in Scotland.

We also have the issue of holiday homes and short-term lets, which we have debated frequently, and the issue of second homes, which is putting a bit of pressure on parts of the world such as the east neuk, which I represent. Student demand has changed and, in some parts of the country, more families are being brought over with students from Africa.

All of that amounts to a really difficult situation and huge pressures. In the context of all that, it is unacceptable not to acknowledge that we have a housing emergency. We have a really difficult situation.

John Swinney: Before Mr Rennie leaves the circumstances and context in which we find ourselves, will he say whether he thinks that the prolonged austerity that was ushered in by the Liberal Democrats in 2010 has been a help or a hindrance in tackling the housing challenges that we face?

Willie Rennie: Mr Swinney knows, because he was a particularly astute curator of the finances, that it was important to get the finances under control. However, it is on the record that it was important to get the balance right between spend for the public purse and spend for the private citizen. Some mistakes were of course made during that period but, overall, I do not think that Mr Swinney would deny that, when we arrived in government, we found ourselves in quite cataclysmic circumstances.

However, we are here today and we are dealing with a housing emergency that has been in part—*[Interruption.]* If Mr Swinney wishes to make this a partisan point, which I was seeking not to do, it is important that we recognise the failures of the Scottish Government in this regard, because it has not met the rising demand for housing. In my constituency, there are a couple in their 60s who are sofa surfing. There are numerous disabled families—*[Interruption.]* I see that SNP members are not interested, now that I am talking about the difficulties that people face in their daily lives.

There are disabled people right across my constituency who are crammed into overcrowded housing, with not enough space for their equipment. In those very difficult circumstances, their quality of life has plummeted. We have damp and overcrowded houses, people who are surrounded by antisocial behaviour, and disabled people living upstairs, which is completely unsuitable for their needs. Housing officers in Fife are being increasingly blunt with my office staff and are saying that there are just no homes left.

If that is not a housing emergency, I do not know what is. Of course it is not all the SNP's fault, of course Liz Truss's budget is partly responsible and of course the demographic changes are responsible as well, but that does not negate the fact that we have an emergency. We should acknowledge that, rather than complacently going on thinking that our plans will be enough.

Paul McLennan: I will address the point that Mr Rennie has made. There have been calls today for Scotland to declare a housing emergency but, whatever we decide to call it—I respect the decisions of local authorities that have already declared a housing emergency—the most important thing is the actions that we take. I am keen to stress that we have a programme of action. To put it in context—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Minister, interventions need to be brief.

Paul McLennan: Per head of population, we build 40 per cent more houses than England and 70 per cent more than Labour-controlled Wales.

Willie Rennie: But that is clearly not enough. The people who are desperate for houses do not listen to those statistics; they believe that they do not have a home because they do not have a home. Hearing those statistics will bring them no comfort. It might satisfy the Minister for Housing, but it does not satisfy them. That is why we need to accept that there is a housing emergency.

The Labour motion is good, but it is an Opposition motion. Cammy Day and the City of Edinburgh Council, as well as the leadership of Argyll and Bute Council, deserve huge credit, because a bit of self-criticism is involved in announcing a housing emergency in Edinburgh and in Argyll and Bute, in that they are partly responsible for the situation that we are in.

Would it not be a powerful statement if the minister were to accept that, although he claims that he is doing more, it is clearly not enough and that there is an emergency? That would bring some comfort to my constituents who are desperate for a home. They would get some comfort from the minister acknowledging that more is required to be done for the 4,735 households

including children that are in temporary accommodation and for the 29,600 homeless houses in the system. We have 693,000 people in some kind of housing need. That is an emergency.

I understand that construction costs have gone up, which is making it difficult for house builders to build more homes, but the number of new starts is down by 26 per cent, whereas demand is shooting right up.

We need to do so much more, and we need to accept that there is an emergency. That is what I hope to hear from the minister today, because I think that he wants to sort the problem, but he will not sort it if he denies the reality.

15:31

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests in relation to my former employment.

Edinburgh's housing shortage has been getting worse for years. On 2 November, as colleagues have acknowledged, the City of Edinburgh Council unanimously declared a housing emergency, recognising that we are in the depths of a housing crisis that touches all aspects of society.

Housing is one of the key issues on which people ask me, as a representative, for help. Families from all backgrounds contact me about the perilous situation in which they find themselves. We urgently need action and investment, because, at the moment, we are not getting them the homes that they urgently need. As of 30 October this year, nearly 5,000 families were being housed in temporary accommodation; that figure is up from 3,500 in March 2020, and it is expected only to rise as our population continues to grow.

As has been acknowledged, despite Edinburgh being our capital, it has the lowest proportion of affordable social rented homes in the country—only 16 per cent compared with the national average of 24 per cent—so it is no surprise that people are struggling to find somewhere safe and affordable to live. A recent council report highlighted that there are, on average, 197 bids for every available house. That means that, time after time, families are refused suitable housing, because there are simply not enough homes available.

The picture in the private rented sector is just as bad. We have lost homes to the short-term let sector, and private sector rents in Edinburgh are the highest in Scotland, with the average rent being in excess of £1,400 a month, or £400 more than the Scottish average. That figure is due only

to rise, despite the rent freeze and the eviction ban.

Stephen Kerr: Will the member take an intervention?

Sarah Boyack: No—I want to crack on.

As well as the financial burden, there have been missed economic opportunities to create jobs in our local communities and supply chains. There is a massive human impact. Warm, safe and affordable accommodation is the bedrock that everybody needs for their lives, and the knock-on impact of not having somewhere safe and affordable to live is massive.

Evidence from Crisis suggests that 45 per cent of people who are homeless suffer from poor mental health. For those who are rough sleeping, the figure rises to eight in 10 people. The fact that people's mental health begins to deteriorate within 72 hours of becoming homeless illustrates why we need everyone to have access to a home.

Moreover, the impact of homelessness on a child can be catastrophic for their academic outcomes as well as for their emotional wellbeing and opportunities in life. An estimated 9,000 children are in temporary accommodation across Edinburgh—that is 9,000 children in Edinburgh alone. Children are being let down, because of the failure to deal with this housing emergency. Just think of being one of those kids' parents and imagine the huge pressure that they are under. We must do better; we must give every one of those children—and their families—the opportunity to learn and develop and have a safe home.

This crisis goes way further than the numbers suggest. Students have already been mentioned in the chamber; the figures do not include the 14 per cent of students in Edinburgh who have experienced homelessness this year at some point during their studies. We now have 100,000 students in Edinburgh, so that 14 per cent represents a significant number of young people forced to sofa surf or commute from further afield, both of which have a detrimental impact on their ability to learn.

If we are going to solve the issue, we need to act urgently. Local authorities need additional support and resources to make the difference that is needed. We need to bring more empty homes back into use.

Paul McLennan: Sarah Boyack knows that I meet the City of Edinburgh Council regularly. A sum of £60 million for the acquisition of properties was announced during the summer, and the council is working on that just now. Does the member acknowledge the partnership work that is also required? Edinburgh has acknowledged that it needs to do more with regard to the 1,500 empty

homes that it has, and we are working closely with it on that and its allocations policy. It is not just about funding.

Sarah Boyack: The challenge is not the willingness of people to work together, whether it be with the voluntary sector, with the councils or even through talking to the minister—it is the finance. Yes, it is good to get a small amount of money to bring some empty homes back into use, but local authorities need more resources to tackle the situation properly. We have now had several round-table meetings in Edinburgh alone, as the minister knows, with MSPs, tenants, students, universities, the council and key stakeholders coming together. We need more than warm words—we need action now.

I have met people in the streets, listened to their personal stories of how they ended up homeless and heard about the massive personal cost to them and their families. It is critical that we prevent homelessness in the first place. Our housing charities do an amazing job, but there are queues around the buildings where people get support. Women have ended up rough sleeping after experiencing domestic violence, and there are families living in rooms that have bed bugs and nowhere to cook food. We have a systemic crisis. This Parliament needs to come together, admit that and act, because the situation does not reflect the equality, opportunity and community that the minister has said that he would like to see.

The City of Edinburgh Council saw that it was facing this crisis and came together, across the parties, to declare a housing emergency. We are going to hear from colleagues who have seen significant pressures on families in constituencies across Scotland. Scotland is facing a housing emergency, so we need to act. We need to take Edinburgh's lead, look at the crisis that we are facing and start to invest, support our councils and our housing providers and bring to an end the situation of thousands of homes lying vacant for far too long—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: We need the Scottish Government to do the heavy lifting because, without leadership, our constituents are being let down. That is not acceptable.

15:38

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Housing plays a fundamental part in all our lives. I have said it before, and I will probably say it again: we must rise to the challenges that the future brings, whether that be recovering from the pandemic, tackling climate change and achieving net zero or supporting our ageing population. As

we know, ensuring that every one of us has a home that meets our needs will be crucial. That means that we need homes that are accessible and affordable, warm and sustainable, with a thriving community and near the services that people rely on.

Affordable housing can help reduce poverty and inequality, because people will spend less of their income on housing costs and the other essentials in life. We have kept poverty levels down in Scotland because rents have been cheaper here. Living in a warm and affordable home also helps with health outcomes, improves educational attainment and allows us to feel more grounded in our communities.

For individuals and families who face homelessness, that is an emergency and a crisis—a reality—for them. We have had a lot of discussion today about action and inaction. Some folk seem more than happy to forgive and forget some actions. Let us look at that in some depth.

Daniel Johnson: Kevin Stewart just described those circumstances as an emergency for those individuals. Why is it so difficult to describe the situation for everyone facing those circumstances as an emergency, too?

Kevin Stewart: For each of those individuals—for all those folks who are currently sofa surfing or homeless—it is a crisis. We need to ensure that we get more houses in place to stop that kind of situation.

Also, a lot of folk are in crisis at the moment, because of the cost of living, which nobody seems to be willing to talk about today. That was brought on by the Truss budget and it means that many folk who never thought that they would face homelessness are now doing so, as they can no longer pay their mortgages because of high interest rates. They canna pay their energy bills and they canna cope with food prices going up. However, many of us here today seem unwilling to talk about that, because it does not fit the agenda.

Willie Rennie: Will the member give way?

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will the member give way?

Kevin Stewart: I will give way to Mr Rennie.

Willie Rennie: I am sure that Kevin Stewart was listening, because I did talk about that. Surely, though, this Parliament should be focusing on what we can do. Of course we can send a message to Westminster, but our priority today should be what we should do. Will the member spend more time on that issue today?

Kevin Stewart: I will spend more time on it. I give credit to Mr Rennie for talking about those issues, but others did not.

Let us look at the action that can be taken. The minister is sitting at the front there, as I have done previously as housing minister, and he will want to do as much as he possibly can. However, the reality is that the minister is bounded by the amount of finance available. Since I have been in this Parliament—that is, since 2011—we have seen constant capital cuts from the UK Government, which restrict the housing minister and other ministers who want to spend on capital projects.

Let us look at what the Government has done and what it plans to do. In the parliamentary session during which I was housing minister—the session from 2016 to 2021—the ambition was to build 50,000 affordable homes during the course of that Parliament. We would have done so, if it had not been for Covid. The target was reached a year later, in March 2022. That target of 50,000 affordable homes was immense. I wanted to go further and faster, as did the Government, but unfortunately the money that should have been available to the Government—to Mr Swinney and the finance secretaries—was not there, because Westminster kept cutting capital budgets. That is the reality.

Even with that, we have still managed to build more affordable homes per head of population since 2007-08 than any other part of the UK. There are 13.9 homes per 10,000 population here in Scotland; the figure is 9.7 in England, 8 in Wales and 13 in Northern Ireland. I am sure that the minister sitting at the front would want to go much further than that—and I would certainly want to see that happen, too—but he is bounded by the finance.

We also need to look at the reality—at the truth—of some of the things that have been said. There was talk of inaction from the Labour benches—and a lack of reality about what they did. Inaction there has been: there was inaction during the Labour-Liberal years with regard to stopping the sale of council homes—which we did to help people—and they also delivered much less affordable housing over every year of the course of their tenure than this Government has done.

They also have the shameful record of managing to build only six council homes in their last years in power.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. You need to conclude, Mr Stewart.

Kevin Stewart: Presiding Officer—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Kevin Stewart: I will conclude.

The “Housing to 2040” vision and principles were shaped through extensive consultation. We need to move on that front. I hope that the minister will get more finance—certainly, that has not come from the chancellor today—because he and I, like everyone in the chamber, want to go further and faster.

15:44

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate about how we address Scotland’s housing emergency. I thank Labour for bringing such an important debate to the chamber. I will support the Labour motion and the amendment in the name of my colleague Graeme Simpson.

Housing is everybody’s business and fixing our problem with the housing system is everyone’s responsibility. As we have heard this afternoon, the evidence that Scotland is facing a housing emergency is absolutely clear. Earlier this year, Argyll and Bute Council, which is in my region, declared its own housing emergency. At recent meetings, several local authority chief executives have been clear that housing supply is one of their biggest challenges, particularly due to the increasing number of homelessness applications that they are having to deal with.

In this day and age, nobody should be at risk of homelessness, but it is still something that thousands of people in Scotland face each year. There are currently 30,000 households in Scotland’s homelessness system, which is the highest level since records began.

Paul McLennan: Will the member take an intervention?

Pam Gosal: I have just started. I might take one later.

There has been a 10 per cent increase in the number of households becoming homeless in the past year alone. As we have heard, almost 10,000 children are in temporary accommodation, which represents an increase of 130 per cent since 2014.

The housing emergency has been developing for a long time. We know that the Scottish Government failed to meet its previous target of building 50,000 affordable homes by 2021. Then, in 2021, the Scottish Government set a target of building 110,000 affordable homes by 2032. So far, however, progress towards that target has been mixed at best. The number of affordable homes to be approved has reached its lowest level for 10 years. In the most recent quarter, social sector home starts fell by 36 per cent compared with the previous year.

Paul McLennan: Will the member give way on that point?

Pam Gosal: I will.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please be brief, minister.

Paul McLennan: Speaking to local authorities and registered social landlords, we hear that the biggest barrier is the cost of borrowing due to high interest rates and construction inflation, which has been at around 15 to 20 per cent. The UK Government must take the blame for the high cost of borrowing, which is delaying our meeting those targets.

Pam Gosal: I thank the minister for that intervention. It is actually a global problem. However, the chief executives that I spoke to last week made it clear that the Scottish Government is failing them. The onus lies with the Scottish Government. It would be good if the minister was to listen to the rest of my speech so that he hears how we can all work together.

The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has said:

“This strain on the supply of new affordable homes is coming at a time when the need for social homes is only becoming more acute”.

The SNP might be holding out hope that the introduction of additional council tax premiums for second homes will increase the availability of homes for local residents, but the evidence on that is not so clear. A survey that was carried out by Propertymark found that most property agents do not believe that the policy will increase availability through the sale of second homes. Propertymark has made it clear that simply delivering more new homes would be a far more effective solution to housing shortages.

On top of that, opportunities have also been missed in the planning system. When the national planning framework 4 was debated earlier this year, the Conservatives were clear that the new planning framework has failed to put Scotland’s housing emergency front and centre in the planning system. Homes for Scotland has highlighted that NPF4 fails to deliver a workable plan for how a consistent pipeline of land for new housing can be provided in the long term. It has also highlighted that NPF4 does not address the shortage of resources in planning departments, which is causing huge delays for planning applications from home builders.

Although there are clearly problems with the supply of housing, our amendment highlights the opportunity that lies in the forthcoming housing bill. As members have set out, there are many problems with Scotland’s housing sector, to which there are several possible solutions. Legislation is

one of those. As a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, I look forward to the introduction of the bill next year. I stand ready to take evidence from key stakeholders and scrutinise the bill constructively. I hope that it will deliver the changes that the housing sector needs. The onus now lies on the SNP Government to ensure that the bill delivers on that potential.

Scotland faces a housing emergency, and this debate is an opportunity for the Scottish Government to accept that. By accepting the motion and our amendment, the SNP could send a clear signal that it is treating the issue with the seriousness that it deserves. However, the onus will still lie on the Scottish Government to act now, and that action needs to include empowering our councils to fulfil their obligations to prevent homelessness.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, Ms Gosal.

Pam Gosal: It also needs to include ensuring that councils have the framework and resources that they need to deliver new homes in every part of Scotland, as well as reversing the current slowdown in the supply of new housing. By taking such steps, the Government will be able to prevent the housing emergency from truly becoming a crisis.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I reinforce the fact that we have no time in hand, so members have up to six minutes. I also encourage front-bench members to stop carrying on discussions while somebody is on their feet speaking.

15:51

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Housing is the most serious issue in my constituency and, arguably, the most serious issue for my generation and those who are younger. I speak for them today.

It is true—and it is widely recognised—that there is a housing crisis in the UK, including in parts of Scotland, among which is my constituency. It is equally true that that crisis was decades in the making. Context matters. The crisis started way before devolution. The right to buy created problems that we are still dealing with today. In a time of plenty and buoyant public finances, the new Labour Government could and should have done more. The austerity agenda of the Liberal Democrat and Conservative coalition Government impacted on the housing challenges that we face in the here and now. It is also true that the public finance challenge that we face at the moment constrains what we can action in this serious situation.

The crisis across the UK is wide reaching and it is about quantity, quality and price. It is a complex monetary and fiscal issue and the responsibility for it rests with us all. In 2007, the SNP Scottish Government rightly committed to a significant affordable house building agenda and investment in our shared national infrastructure. In the context of a recession, an austerity agenda, a Brexit that Scotland did not vote for, a pandemic, a situation of global conflict that impacted the prices of materials and the disastrous Conservative Truss Government that plunged the public finances into turmoil, the SNP Government built around 124,000 new affordable homes, including at the Leith Fort development in my constituency and on-going works in Granton. The Government also ended the right to buy so that we are constantly topping up the quantum of affordable housing in Scotland, which is why our figures are so much higher than those in other parts of the UK, including in Labour-run Wales.

However, it is true that we need more, and that is what we are focusing on in this debate. It is also why it is excellent that, despite the challenge of the financial scenario that we are in, the Scottish Government is committed to and focused on building 110,000 affordable homes, at least 70 per cent of which will be for social rent. In that context, we are in a position in which, although we have had greater success in Scotland, we need to do more. We need to recognise that parts of Scotland face a different challenge. Edinburgh is in a housing emergency, but there is evidence that our record on tackling poverty is better in other parts of Scotland because of the investment that the Scottish Government has made in affordable housing.

I welcome the fact that we are using this time to discuss the collective challenge of what is happening in Scotland but, as Edinburgh Northern and Leith's MSP, I am sure that members would expect me to focus on the emergency that we have in Edinburgh. Specific attention must be paid to areas that have the highest levels of challenge. In Edinburgh, we have one of the lowest proportions of social housing in Scotland, but in recent years we have experienced one of the highest rates of population growth. That is reflected in my casework week after week, and the challenge that it creates is growing ever greater. Figures supplied by Shelter Scotland show that, as of 31 March 2023, there were more than 6,000 live homelessness applications. That represents a 17 per cent increase on the figure on the same date in the previous year. Those are Scottish Government figures.

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I would not disagree with Mr Macpherson's historical analysis, but there is a crisis right across Scotland. Does he agree that, as well as tackling

planning and giving local authorities far greater powers so that they can get the land that they require, we need a skills revolution?

Ben Macpherson: I will come to some of those points, briefly, in a moment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Mr Macpherson, you must still conclude within your allotted time.

Ben Macpherson: Edinburgh has specific challenges that need specific attention. The Government needs to look at the strategic housing investment plan and the affordable housing supply programme with a view to considering how it can target and focus on areas with the greatest need. As has been mentioned, the forthcoming land reform bill gives us an opportunity to think about urban land reform and how we can reduce the price of land for housing so that local authorities can compete with the private sector in trying to get that land, the demand for which is so high.

Housing is a really high priority and it is right that Parliament is focusing on it. In particular, the Government's focus should be on Edinburgh. I welcome the Government's collaboration with me on that.

15:57

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I draw members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I own a sixth share in a family home.

There is a housing crisis in Scotland, and many members have discussed that. However, that crisis is much more pronounced in rural areas. Sadly, the Government does not seem to recognise the scale of the crisis, given its amendment to the motion. That is really concerning, because if it does not recognise the scale of the crisis, how on earth will it rise to the challenge and put things right?

In rural Scotland, a lot of the problem is caused by second homes and holiday lets, which inflate the prices of homes. That is a result of the fact that people who live in such areas do not have access to the same level of finance or the same ability to get a mortgage as the people who come in.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Does Rhoda Grant recognise and welcome the Scottish Government's proposed introduction of the ability for local authorities to charge far more council tax for second homes?

Rhoda Grant: It has long been our policy to make sure that that happens, but we must go further. Because people who can afford to buy a second home have a fair amount of free cash, they will be able to pay that extra council tax, so

we must consider other measures that recognise the fact that they have a lot more money than local people have.

Local people cannot get a mortgage, because they often work in seasonal jobs. They also have unstable jobs. Banks demand a monthly salary—a stable income is what they lend against. People who have three or four different jobs simply cannot provide that to get a mortgage.

We need to take into account the fact that the cost of living in rural areas is much higher. In good times, it was 30 per cent higher, but it will be much more than that now. That means that people in rural areas are less able to compete for homes in their communities.

We also need to look at the cost of building in rural communities, which is hugely different from the cost in other areas. I have often quoted—and I continue to quote—the unit price for a socially rented house in Barra, which was £233,000. The Government grant to housing associations for building in rural areas is less than half of that, at £111,640.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Rhoda Grant: I have already given way and I want to make progress, if I may.

Not only do rural areas not have enough grant from the Government, but they have the higher cost of materials. A house costs 25 per cent more before building it even begins due to the cost of transporting materials on ferries alone.

Housing associations are also bound to put their projects out to tender, and only large companies can afford to tender for them. Those large companies do not employ people in island or rural communities, which also adds to the cost, because they bring in workers from outside. Any economic benefit that could have been given to the rural community disappears, because all the profit from building the unit goes elsewhere. We have to look at how we rural proof our policies, because planning is very much urbanised.

Many people have welcomed the Government's commitment to 10 per cent of affordable homes being built in rural and island areas, but I want to pick that apart a little. Seventeen per cent of people in Scotland live in rural areas, as defined by the Scottish Government. However, the definition includes small, remote towns and accessible rural areas, as well as remote rural areas. The problem with that is that communities such as Barra are competing for that 10 per cent with the leafy suburbs of Edinburgh. That cannot be right, because most of that building will happen in the central belt.

Paul McLennan: That 10 per cent, as discussed in the recent debate, is a minimum. I do

not see competition between rural areas and Edinburgh happening under the rural and islands housing action plan. The figure is for rural housing, and there will not be competition with parts of Edinburgh for funding. I am happy to take that up with the member after the debate.

Rhoda Grant: I am talking about the leafy suburbs surrounding Edinburgh, and I am looking at the Scottish Government's own map and definition. If it is working to a different map, I would very much want to see it but, according to the map that it published, rural areas are competing with country towns and suburbs in the central belt and those around other cities. We need to look at that and ensure that we get housing in our remote rural communities. The cost is so much greater in them that, if rural areas are competing with suburban areas, they will not get any of the housing that they need.

I could speak about many more issues that affect our rural areas. Companies are being encouraged to create their own housing as part of efforts to meet skills shortages, but we in rural communities have moved away from tied housing. I do not want to see a policy that drives us back to tied housing, in which someone's roof over their head is dependent on their job and they are basically almost enslaved to a company because of that.

The whole of Scotland is in a housing crisis, but it is worse for rural communities for the reasons that I have outlined. If the Scottish Government does not deal with that, it will be presiding over a turbo-charged depopulation of our remote rural communities.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I remind members that there is no time in hand and that speeches should be up to six minutes.

16:04

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): It is a fundamental right and an absolute necessity that people in our society should be appropriately housed. Safe and secure housing is essential to ensure that individuals are able to participate fully and effectively in our society with a stable base and that individuals are able to provide a good-quality environment in which children can be brought up.

It is clear that there are significant pressures on the supply of housing in various—perhaps all—parts of Scotland. In my Perthshire North constituency, there are acute challenges in the availability of housing that meets the needs of individuals and families, and I deal with the same types of cases that members have recounted in the debate.

Those pressures are present in most areas of my constituency. There is a need to ensure that suitable and appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of individuals and families is available for all. However, the pressures are perhaps at their most acute in areas where there is buoyant demand for tourist accommodation and where there is an attraction for people to own second homes. The affordability of housing is a real challenge for many people who seek to live and work in those communities, and the competition to obtain appropriate housing is intense.

The implications do not stop there. There are significant consequences for private and public sector employers, who face enormous challenges in recruiting staff simply due to the inability of individuals to afford to live in specific parts of my constituency.

Daniel Johnson: It is interesting that John Swinney says that perhaps all of Scotland faces these issues. He highlighted particular issues in his constituency. Why therefore is there reservation about describing this as an emergency? Would doing so not help to clarify focus and attention?

John Swinney: I will address that point later in my speech.

Over the past eight years, major developments have taken place in different parts of my constituency as a consequence of partnership funding from the Scottish Government and the local authority, such as the 65 homes at the Glebe school site in Scone, the 12 homes in Ardler Road in Meigle, the 20 houses at Linn Road in Stanley, the 20 flats in Birch Avenue in Scone, the 11 new homes in Springbank Road in Alyth and the 10 new homes in Balbeggie. There have also been other developments in which private developers have met their affordable housing targets.

Although those developments are welcome, I recognise that they are not enough. That is why I welcome the good work that is being undertaken by organisations such as Aberfeldy Development Trust, which are taking forward key projects to boost affordable housing supply in communities in which there is intense pressure on the housing stock. Enabling organisations such as Aberfeldy Development Trust to play a part in the effort to improve housing supply is crucial.

Although there are major challenges in the housing supply, I am proud of what the Scottish Government has achieved since it was elected in 2007. Before we came to power—the minister has made this point—our predecessors completed on average 5,431 affordable homes each year. Since this Government came to power, it has completed 7,638 affordable homes on average each year. That is 5,431 each year under the Labour and Lib

Dem Administration and 7,638 each year under the SNP. Those figures are undeniable.

The Labour and Lib Dem record was delivered during a period of burgeoning public finances. There was so much money around that the Government at that time was unable to spend all the money that was available to it and, thankfully, it left £1.6 billion unspent when this Government came to office in 2007.

The record of the SNP Government has been achieved in the aftermath of the financial crash in 2008. All of it has been achieved against a backdrop of austerity, Brexit and the loss of staff, and the costs of borrowing have rocketed due to the Liz Truss-Kwasi Kwarteng mini-budget disaster.

Although there has been criticism of the Government today, a significant amount has been done to tackle the issue.

Various members have said—this is where I come to Mr Johnson's point—that we should declare a housing emergency. I understand that aspiration and the seriousness of the point. My colleague Mr Macpherson made a compelling speech about the importance and severity of the situation that his constituents face. However, I respectfully say to Parliament that it is not enough just to do that. Substantial actions must be set out on how we will address the issue. That was lacking in Mr Griffin's speech—he knows how much I respect his contributions in Parliament.

We cannot just wish away the conditions that we face. Today, construction costs and borrowing costs are higher. The labour market is tight because of the implications of Brexit. If we want to build more houses, we must be prepared to address the reality of the situation that we face. If we want to allocate more money to the task of building more houses, members must be honest enough to say what capital projects will not go ahead. What are we going to stop doing to create the space for more money to be spent on housing?

I spent long enough as the finance minister—nine years on the trot and one year of temporary cover for my dear friend Kate Forbes—listening to members of Parliament spending money twice. Suggestions about spending money twice, three times or four times over are getting particularly acute from Conservative members. If we want to declare a housing emergency, we have to be prepared to put our money where our mouth is. That is a responsibility of every single member.

16:10

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register

of members' interests, which shows that I was a councillor at the start of the session.

I thank Labour for this important debate. I also thank the organisations that have sent briefings for today's debate and all those constituents who have emailed me, asking me to support the motion. The topic affects many people, and the Conservatives will support the motion.

Scotland is, indeed, facing a housing crisis, which is wholly due to the coalition of chaos that is the devolved Government of Greens and the SNP. They have imposed ridiculous measures on what was a thriving sector, which have limited its ability to grow. At the same time, they have cut local government to the bone, preventing investment in affordable housing.

Let us be clear: we are not talking about housing; we are talking about homes—places where people can find safety, security, warmth and comfort. Homes are places where families can make a place for themselves and where communities can be built. When the Government gets that wrong, everything else flows from there. When people have no sense of place and of community, they have no sense of security.

Homelessness is a scourge on our country, and it is a sad indictment of a Government that is so focused on independence that it has lost sight of what the Scottish people want. The Scottish people want a Government that is focused on their priorities, not on constitutional wranglings. They want a Government that addresses the big issues in our society around housing, health, education and economic growth, and they want a Government that invests in our communities.

Paul McLennan: Does the member acknowledge that the biggest drivers of homelessness are poverty and inequality? At the moment, we are spending £83 million per year on the discretionary housing payment. We also mitigate the unfair bedroom tax and the benefit cap. Surely, if those were removed, it would benefit Scotland and we would have more money to spend on the issues that the member was talking about.

Douglas Lumsden: I thank the minister for his pre-scripted intervention. There was no word of national insurance being cut by 2 per cent, and what about the UK Government paying a large proportion of everyone's energy bills last year?

We have seen a catalogue of failures in some of the statistics surrounding the issue. The number of homelessness applications has gone up by 9 per cent during the past year; 16,263 children have been assessed for, or threatened with, homelessness during the past year; there are 6,000 families in temporary accommodation; the number of affordable homes approved is at its

lowest level for 10 years; and the Government's own target of affordable homes has been missed.

Unfortunately, we cannot say that all of that is caused simply by incompetence on behalf of the Green-SNP Government; it is actually wilful policy making that is stifling growth and causing massive rent rises in our rented sector. The crazy rent cap policy—brought in by the Greens in coalition with the SNP—has brought massive rent rises in our cities, in particular, with rent growth in Edinburgh outstripping that in London. Zoopla has said that landlords are left with no choice but to increase rents between tenancies to ensure that they are covering their costs.

The number of homes that were in the rented sector and that are now being sold by landlords is also at its highest level since 2009, with many landlords simply leaving the sector as it is no longer viable for them to continue. That is resulting in a loss of rental accommodation throughout Scotland.

The social rented sector has also been badly affected by the short-sightedness and wilful neglect of the Government, as councils are struggling to balance their budgets in the face of SNP austerity.

When I was co-leader of Aberdeen City Council, I was proud that I worked with Labour to announce the largest social house-building programme in the city for a generation. It consisted of not only 2,000 homes, but 2,000 gold-standard quality homes. I did not want poor-quality homes thrown up quickly; I wanted social homes that matched the standard of the private sector and exceeded it.

We have to be honest: many of our social rented homes are not up to the standard that they should be at. We must build more homes in order to cope with the need and we must replace much of the stock that we have. The Conservatives would give local authorities the ability to build more homes for the people of Scotland. We have pledged to introduce a Scottish housing delivery agency that would be entirely focused on the supply of new homes for our residents.

We would relax planning laws so that more properties in our town centres could be brought into residential use for hard-working families. We would reverse the crazy rent freeze that has had such a detrimental impact on cities such as Edinburgh. It is clear that, although the policy may have been introduced with good intentions, it has made the issue worse.

We need to do more to create homes and communities in our cities, towns and villages across Scotland. We need to invest in housing so that families can find the security that they need to build their lives in a safe and secure setting. We need certainty for house builders that we are a

country that is committed to economic growth, and we need funding for local councils to build more affordable homes in our communities. We need a planning system that has the flexibility to bring disused properties into commercial use, and we need a Government that is focused on the people of Scotland and not on independence. The Government has taken its eye off the ball when it comes to housing in Scotland and it needs to do better for all our communities.

16:16

Kate Forbes (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP): I certainly understand the sentiment behind Labour's motion. Anyone who saw the news coverage after City of Edinburgh Council declared its housing emergency would have been struck by the powerful stories that were told by those who are in temporary accommodation. As Willie Rennie rightly said, for those who are caught in temporary accommodation, are at risk of homelessness or are struggling in other ways to access warm housing, it feels like an emergency.

However, I am going to make the same point as John Swinney. Real leadership is not just about accepting the scale of a challenge or explaining what is taking place; it is about stepping back and figuring out how to best solve the challenge and then getting stuck into delivering some of the solutions.

There is no dispute from me about the scale of the challenge. Rhoda Grant talked about the issues in rural Scotland, of which I am particularly well aware. Time and again, my constituency office reflects on the fact that housing is at the top of our caseload of issues that are of concern to local individuals. However, every Friday and Monday in my constituency, I have a never-ending list of new housing developments to visit in the Highlands—because there is obvious evidence of the Government's funding going into building houses and increasing supply. That is why I asked Mark Griffin about what Labour's solution would be. Based on my years as finance minister and as a local MSP, it feels as though there has never been greater investment in improving the supply of housing of all tenures. So, why is there still a sense, particularly in the Highlands, that individuals find it very challenging to access so-called affordable housing or to get into the housing market? I will come to one solution.

However, I first want to illustrate a little bit more of the problem. Quite clearly, the challenges around accessing housing are inhibiting economic growth, undermining some of our public services and creating greater levels of homelessness in some of our communities. An example of where those challenges are inhibiting economic growth is Fort William, which offers great opportunities for

businesses to grow and develop, such as the sawmill, the smelter and other businesses, as well as the decommissioning services in Kishorn Port. In a place such as Fort William, there is a sense of great prosperity and of being on the cusp of something incredible. Every business tells me that the biggest challenge is not its ambition or the opportunity, but accessing staff, which is linked to housing. For public services on Skye, the challenges of accessing housing for some of our key workers—whether they are nurses, doctors or teachers—are well documented, and they mean that key vacancies cannot be filled.

I spoke to one of our social landlords, who was clear that homelessness policies need to be rural proofed because how we prevent homelessness in urban areas might exacerbate the situation in rural areas. For example, in Aviemore, lots of young workers find themselves having to live in Inverness and travel an hour to get to Aviemore. There might be a plentiful supply of one-bedroom housing, but, as soon as they find a partner or start a family, they are unable to stay.

That is the scale of the issue. I understand it and recognise it, but the solution is not only to continue to improve supply—there is no question about that—but to see greater flexibility around policies. I will quickly mention five areas where I want to see such greater flexibility.

First, if we continue to have an overly fixed or rigid solution to the problem, we will run into the challenge that one size does not fit all. The solution in the middle of Edinburgh, which might be of huge interest to Ben Macpherson, will not work in Elgol, in Skye. Therefore, we have to be clear that policies are flexible.

Secondly, the policy has to be community-led. In Glenelg, at the moment, the community is trying to build new housing. It needs to be community led such that, where the policy does not lend itself to what the community is trying to do, it is the policy and not the community that should change.

Thirdly, we need to listen to those who are out there, delivering. The Communities Housing Trust, for example, is second to none. It is exemplary and brilliant at what it does. It says that, in its humble opinion, the policies and funding are largely already there but it is about using those policies and delivering solutions in each of those areas.

Fourthly, it is about planning. Why does it take between seven and 10 years to get six houses built? That does not add up. It does not make sense. There needs to be some sort of default in—

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Forbes has about two seconds left.

Kate Forbes: There needs to be some sort of default in favour of planning.

Last, and most important, is land reform. We need to see more progress in making land available.

16:22

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): We are living through the worst cost crisis for generations, with high inflation and a squeeze on household budgets. That is why I welcome the opportunity to discuss the housing challenges that Scotland faces.

One of the biggest expenses that people have is housing, which is why the first piece of legislation that was taken through the Parliament by a Green minister provided immediate support to tenants by capping rents. Last year, more than 10,000 homes were completed under the affordable housing supply programme, which is roughly the equivalent of the total housing stock of Orkney or Shetland, and a 12 per cent increase on the year before.

Over the course of this parliamentary session, we will introduce the biggest expansion of tenants' rights since devolution, including better rights and protections and better rent controls. The causes of and solutions to the housing crisis in the Highlands and Islands, which I represent, are complex. A lack of supply, an ageing population, high land values, an imbalance between local wages and house prices, and poor public transport all play a part.

As my colleagues will know, I am a champion of community-led housing—it was good to hear Kate Forbes talking about that just now—and the potential of that model to transform housing, particularly in rural communities. That is why the Greens in government secured stable funding for the rural housing enablers, who empower communities to build the right homes in the right places. That is why we are working to deliver the rural and island housing action plan to ensure access to genuinely affordable homes, and it is also why rural councils have, rightly, welcomed plans to increase council tax for empty and second homes. We must continue to work closely with all councils to develop targeted plans to address local housing needs.

Homelessness in rural areas is not just a lack of a roof over someone's head; it is also the loss of community, of young people of working age and of language and culture. We need more homes, we need to use the homes that we have more effectively and we need to fund services properly in order to treat people with dignity and respect. We need to ensure that we create homes that enable people to become rooted in their

communities and provide the workers and families we need to keep local communities thriving.

In rural areas especially, we lose homes to the holiday and second-home market, as has been discussed already. In Argyll and Bute, and the Western Isles, second homes account for 6 per cent or more of housing; in Orkney, the figure is 5 per cent. There are more than 24,000 second homes in Scotland, and 3,000 of those are in Argyll and Bute alone. That is why the Scottish Government was right to regulate short-term lets; that is why we have introduced stricter planning rules on holiday properties; and that is why we are working with councils to bring empty homes back into use.

We need systemic change to put people and housing first. The social housing and not-for-profit sectors are addressing that challenge in innovative ways. I visited Highland Housing Alliance's incredible retrofitting work on Merchant house. It has transformed a derelict building in the heart of Inverness into affordable energy-efficient homes. Meanwhile, Albyn Housing Association's Bailey Place development has created brand-new highly efficient homes that are close to active travel networks. It has managed to create a real sense of community. I have also seen the pioneering work of Communities Housing Trust, which has worked with community land and development trusts and estates across my region, to build high-quality affordable homes that respond to local needs. From Staffin to Strontian, and from Tìree to Tomintoul, communities are filling the gaps that have been created by decades of underinvestment, which started long before devolution, and using the Scottish Government's schemes, such as the Scottish land fund and the rural and islands housing funds, to deliver them.

What Scotland's housing sector needs is long-term solutions and a cultural change away from housing as an investment to an approach that creates homes for all our people. It is deeds, not words. That is why the Greens in government will strive to ensure that everyone in Scotland has a safe, affordable and warm home, and that our rural communities remain places to dwell, as well as places to visit.

16:27

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): There is no doubt that there is a housing crisis in some parts of Scotland, and housing is, without doubt, the biggest issue that my office deals with. However, as Ben Macpherson said, it is a UK-wide issue, and he eloquently outlined the reality of that situation.

I turn to the motion, which states:

“That the Parliament agrees that Scotland is experiencing a housing emergency.”

That literally sums up the Labour Party’s ambition—it is one line of doomsday nothingness. Where is the ambition? Where is the hope and where is the belief that things can and must get better? Where is the fully costed and detailed plan on how to change what that party sees as a housing crisis? Is any of that too much to ask from a party that sees itself as the change that Scotland needs? I hope that those points will be answered in Labour’s summing up.

Grandstanding pontification with this insipid, lacklustre and, quite simply, insulting nothing of a motion absolutely deserves the derision of the chamber and of the people of this country whose trust Labour in Scotland tells us it has won for the coming election. That is in stark contrast to the SNP Government’s track record, as set out in Paul McLennan’s amendment. On seeing that, the people of Scotland will quickly realise exactly who is looking after their interests.

We know that there are issues to deal with. We know that homelessness is a scourge on our society. We know that we must do more and that we must think creatively to find workable solutions. I am certain that the housing minister has the ability, tenacity and willingness to find those solutions, implement them and help us to help those who need those homes the most.

I have to say that there are things in the Scottish Land & Estates briefing with which I agree, such as the call for a partnership approach, particularly in relation to rural housing. However, there is a distinct lack of acceptance of the culpability of some of those estates in helping to create rural housing shortages. In my constituency and across Scotland, it has been a heartbreaking thing for people who, like me, are desperate to find a rural house to witness the emptying and degradation of literally hundreds of old cottar houses as estates cleared staff and those houses fell to rack and ruin. That is why I very much welcome the £25 million rural affordable housing system that has come from the Scottish Government.

By all means let us have a better, positive relationship with estates, because they will have a role to play, but spare me the holier-than-thou attitude that it is all the Scottish Government’s fault, because it is not. There is a problem, so let us take the collective responsibility to make sure that the solutions are forthcoming. Let us have the ideas, but let us also have the honesty, as John Swinney said, about what we have to do in order to make the housing crisis better.

I would urge caution, however—this is another point on which I agree with Scottish Land & Estates—that the need for speed does not negate

the need for quality or cause a lack of consideration of the potential for unintended consequences.

On a slightly different note, 15 per cent of Scotland’s land is non-LFA—that is, not classified as less favoured area. Non-LFA land means good-quality, grade 1 and 2 arable land—the kind of land that grows our most valuable foodstuffs, such as tatties, wheat, barley, salad, berries, veg and neeps. That is what we grow in those fields, but it is also the easiest ground for builders to build at speed on. In today’s debate, a number of people have asked for easier planning, but we have to ensure that competing demands are reconciled and balanced, so that we maintain a viable and vibrant food-producing industry that can continue to feed our nation.

The same principle applies to planting trees. Yes, the right tree in the right place has enormous value, but we must value and protect our best arable land at all costs. If we do not do that, who are we going to ask to feed us? A presumption of brownfield site development should be considered to protect our arable future, notwithstanding what SLE said are the challenges that those brownfield sites bring.

My final point is about using creative thinking to reimagine what the modern-day requirements are. The abundant empty buildings in city centres, such as the Debenhams building in Perth city centre, could be repurposed and developed to bring people back to the centres that were vacated under Covid and create thriving city centre communities. That, in turn, would lead to a rebirth in businesses, which will grow with the population.

We have numerous other derelict or empty properties throughout my constituency, such as the ex-council buildings or police stations in Crieff, Auchterarder and Kinross. They could all be repurposed, removing the blight of empty properties and helping to increase the number of available homes.

I can see a genuinely positive vision of how our housing and house-building sector can add enormous value to our economy and aid with our skills development and our aim to eradicate homelessness. I can see happening the necessary collaboration that SLE and others are looking for. I see all that ambition and vision in this SNP Government.

What I see in the motion from Labour is a single line of nothing that should tell the people of Scotland all that they need to know—that Labour and the Tories will simply not deliver. The SNP Government will.

16:33

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of interests, which shows that I am a member of Scotland's tenants union, Living Rent, and of Acorn community union.

I speak today in support of the Labour motion—

“That the Parliament agrees that Scotland is experiencing a housing emergency”—

as has been declared by the City of Edinburgh Council, and as I urged Dundee City Council to declare.

There is a housing emergency in Scotland, and tenants are on the front line of it. Despite the rent freeze, Dundee has seen a shocking 17 per cent rise in private rent prices—5 per cent more than the Scottish average—because of loopholes in the legislation. In fact, property investors are describing the city as “Scotland's buy-to-let capital”. Property prices have shot up, driven by the potential to profit from a basic human right.

The picture is mirrored across Scotland, with thousands of people in temporary accommodation and thousands on social housing waiting lists. Properties at or below the local housing allowance rate are scarce, and the private rental sector is capitalising on the overwhelming demand for homes.

This is an emergency, and it has been building for years. Members will remember when I brought the campaign for a rent freeze to the Parliament. They will remember the Scottish Government's fierce opposition to the proposal, and how the Government was forced to U-turn and introduce emergency legislation, thanks to national public pressure from Scotland's tenants.

That legislation should have seen us through to the promised national system of rent controls needed to bring down rents, but more than a year later, as we approach the end of the period of the temporary legislation, loopholes continue to be exploited. Rents continue to rise, and rent control legislation is nowhere in sight. Tenants face persistent issues of mould, cold, damp and disrepair, as well as the constant possibility of being evicted so that their landlord can sell, all while rents continue to rise.

How is this happening? We know that people in joint tenancies have faced unregulated rent increases when a flatmate leaves, as that is often considered to result in a new lease. That loophole is resulting in the de facto eviction of the remaining tenants, who cannot afford increases of hundreds of pounds a month. Also, landlords are dramatically increasing prices for new lets to supposedly future proof against the rent cap, causing the spiralling rises in the market that we

are seeing. That is pushing up prices and forcing overcrowding, worse living conditions and increased commutes, as people have to move further and further away from where their life is.

We need measures that protect people in joint tenancies, those in arrears and those who are being priced out of their communities. Strong long-term rent and eviction controls have the potential to protect people on the lowest incomes, who have the least ability to absorb extra costs and are at the highest risk of homelessness. We need those rent controls now.

We have heard the Government making promises to tenants for years, and we have seen the publication of consultations and strategies and commitments on housing. What we are missing is action. I therefore welcome the commitment from the Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee that the Government will bridge the gap between the end of the emergency legislation and the introduction of longer-term rent control measures. However, we have yet to hear how that will happen. Without that clarity, tenants face a cliff edge at the end of March, at which point there seems to be nothing to prevent landlords from hiking rents even higher.

We need a rapid response to this emergency—one that is watertight, permanent, effective and transformative—but it has to begin by recognising the problem. We are in a housing emergency, and tenants are on the front line. If the Scottish Government refuses today even to acknowledge that, what faith can we possibly place in its ability to address the issue?

I therefore urge all members, whatever their party, to support Labour's motion,

“That the Parliament agrees that Scotland is experiencing a housing emergency.”

16:38

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It is actually refreshing to debate something that is genuinely a priority of the Scottish people, so I commend the Labour front bench members for bringing the debate to the chamber. I wish that the SNP-Green Government were willing to spend more time discussing such matters, rather than some of the nonsense and fiction with which it prefers to waste the Parliament's time.

I believe that the national conversation about housing epitomises what is so wrong with the system in our country. I thought that one of the best speeches that we heard, other than those from my colleagues on this side of the chamber, was from Kate Forbes. There are things about the system that need to be reformed, and quickly. For

as long as I can remember, there has been cross-party consensus on the need to build more and better houses.

The question that we should be asking ourselves is not whether we should be building more houses—we all know and agree on the answer to that question—but why we, as a nation, are unable to build a sufficient number of homes to match demand. The current levels of homelessness in this country are a national disgrace, and the responsibility for the increasing levels of homelessness lies solely at the feet of—

Paul McLennan: Will the member take an intervention?

Stephen Kerr: —the minister who wishes to intervene. I will not give way to him. I stand by what I said to him earlier: homelessness in our country has been made much worse by the SNP-Green Government's staggering lack of insight, addiction to ideology and ill-advised approach to the rental sector. Despite expert warnings, it has pressed on with measures that have brought great distress to many individuals and families.

When it comes to building houses, we must properly investigate where the system is failing. The first problem relates to land. The process of repurposing brownfield land is too slow and too costly, to the extent that it is not economically viable to build on. We must work with those in the industry to make the process more efficient.

We are all aware of neglected buildings in our respective constituencies. Instead of sitting back and allowing the situation to continue, leading to dereliction and local eyesores, we should create a mechanism that allows councils and private companies to repurpose such buildings or knock them down and build anew. Therefore, I am in favour of compulsory sales orders and of bringing to an end the reluctance of councils to use the authority at their disposal to improve dereliction or gap sites.

The second problem relates to planning. We need to change the culture of planning officers. To kick off, there are not enough of them, as was said earlier. Communities and developers need planning officers to become advisers, to support building and to facilitate development, instead of blocking it. We need an end to the farce of an endless planning permission process, which leads to the blight of vacant and derelict sites such as the Banknock distillery in my region. In 2009, a large-scale planning application was approved for nearly four hectares of land, but the site remains on Falkirk's register of vacant and derelict land. That is not good enough. We need to include local people.

Daniel Johnson: The issue is not just the nature of planning. Kate Forbes made an excellent

point about the time that the process takes. Indeed, I think that Michael Gove agrees with that point, too. Does Stephen Kerr agree with it?

Stephen Kerr: Absolutely. It is no wonder that people give up, leave and stop investing, because the whole process is frustratingly expensive and elongated.

I return to the need to engage with local people. Communities know their local areas best. They know the impact that developments will have on roads, schools and health services. Local people should feel empowered to voice their concerns, and developers should work with communities to mitigate them. When we mock people for nimbysism, we should acknowledge that such attitudes exist in part because the system is defective.

Paul McLennan: Will the member take an intervention?

Stephen Kerr: The minister has a brass neck to try to intervene on any speaker in the debate, because I do not think that he took a single intervention himself. He might have taken one, as I have done.

We need to cut red tape. Instead of developers having to navigate regulations that are as long as "War and Peace", there should be concise and clear guidelines.

However, building new housing is not enough. As has been said, it is a national disgrace that many Scots live in inadequate, damp and energy-inefficient spaces. As well as the drive to build houses, we need to be equally committed to improving Scotland's housing stock. That should be a national mission. Housing is not just about bricks and mortar—poor homes can have an impact on health and family life.

Ben Macpherson: Will Stephen Kerr take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr has 20 seconds left.

Stephen Kerr: I am coming to a conclusion. I would have loved to have taken the intervention, but we just do not have enough time to debate issues properly in the chamber.

There is further consensus that we must improve the energy efficiency of our homes. Let us find the money to do that.

We have a national housing crisis. Not only do we not have enough homes, but we have too many inadequate homes. We need to build. We need to improve. Everyone in Scotland must have a home worthy of the name.

16:44

Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): It is always good to begin a contribution to a debate with some positives, and there are plenty to share in this debate. By 2032—only nine years from now—this SNP Administration will have overseen the building of 234,000 social and affordable homes in Scotland. Some 124,000 have been delivered since 2007 and another 110,000 are on the way, 70 per cent of which are earmarked for social rent. In Scotland, since 2007, we have built nearly 14 homes per 10,000 people in the population—a fact that was mentioned by several colleagues. That is a good record, and it outperforms that of any other nation in the UK—especially Wales, where Labour has been in power for so long but has managed to build only around half of that total. In my local authority area, Labour managed to build no council houses whatsoever—zero—during its eight years in power in this Parliament. However, it managed to sell off vital housing stock and, from time to time, to hand back to the UK Government vital cash that it could have invested in housing in Scotland.

The SNP in Government ended the right to buy council houses in 2016, which has saved around 15,000 council houses from being lost to the public social rented pool. Labour, in councils all over Scotland, was happy to sell off vital housing stock, following the Tory mantra of selling anything that could make a quick buck. Between 1979 and 2015, in Scotland, an incredible 494,580 council houses and social housing units were sold off. That is 14,000 houses being lost every year for 35 years. If we are in an emergency situation in some parts of Scotland, it has its origins there, and Labour and the Tories might want to reflect on their role in that before they come here to blame the SNP for their massive sell-off.

There is no doubt that we are facing a number of challenges. Skyrocketing costs brought about by inflation and the problems associated with materials costs, which were made worse by Brexit, are driving up construction costs and making it harder for people to access the various housing markets. However, we are doing what we can to overcome those challenges and support the programme.

I turn to my council in East Ayrshire. I want to share some of its positive achievements and its ambitions for the future. Only this morning, the council's cabinet, which includes Labour councillors, met to discuss a number of housing strategy papers, and the council supported them all, with no exceptions. There was no mention of an emergency at all. There was not a peep from Labour councillors about an emergency in East Ayrshire. That is a curious contrast with the other messages that we are hearing here.

Daniel Johnson: Will the member give way?

Willie Coffey: There is more to follow. I will let the member in if I have time.

Since 2010, East Ayrshire Council, under the SNP, has built 585 council houses. When we include other registered social landlord builds, the total is around 1,000. That is a remarkable achievement and, having seen the quality of the builds, I think that the council and its partners should be commended for that work.

Daniel Johnson: The member has mentioned what councillors are saying in some places. Does he acknowledge that SNP councillors in Edinburgh are saying that there is a housing emergency in the capital city?

Willie Coffey: I absolutely do, but the member may want to have a word with his Labour councillors in East Ayrshire, because they have not got the message. [*Interruption.*] Members can laugh if they like, but those councillors did not mention it.

However, it is not just the numbers that matter. The issue is also about things such as regeneration, wellbeing, climate change and energy efficiency. The council is now building its fourth supported living complex, which includes adapted units with warden support. That has meant that one tenant in particular, who spent 31 years in hospital and residential care, now has a home. There are plenty of other similar examples.

A major development in the north of Kilmarnock has seen 44 new council housing units completed to a high standard, winning a design award in the process. In the south of the town, a development in partnership with the local housing association is nearing completion, with every house being energy efficient and having heat pump technology installed. Another development is the first zero-carbon development to be completed in the area. Those examples from East Ayrshire show what is being done and what can be done to meet our targets and our other obligations.

It is always a pleasure to talk about housing, whether in the Parliament or anywhere else. I was my group's spokesperson on the subject for many years when I was a member of the council in opposition. During that term, we wrestled with the problems of dampness and mould, poor heating systems and zero insulation, which were often overlooked by a Labour Administration that did not act quickly enough to correct those things even when it had the resources to do so.

Looking at where we are now, I am extremely proud of the achievements of my colleagues in local government in East Ayrshire, led by my friend and colleague Councillor Dougie Reid, who has championed that work for so many years.

They have delivered for their communities, they are still doing so, and I hope that they will continue to do so well into the future.

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

16:51

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I am delighted to close on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. I thank Labour for using its debating time to bring the issue to the chamber and I thank Mark Griffin for highlighting at the start of his speech that the emergency is one of the Scottish Government's making.

Scotland has a housing emergency. There is acknowledgement of that fact across the chamber and there is a consensus on it in our briefings from so many organisations. With his customary forensic analysis, my friend and colleague Graham Simpson cut to the chase when he highlighted that no one should have to sleep rough and that no one should have to use a night shelter. The fact that people have to do those things alone makes it an emergency—except, of course, for people who are trying to defend the Scottish Government's position.

We see the usual obfuscation of reality: the publishing of a target without detail on how it will be reached, then a rolling back on the target by people who say, "It's not our fault", as we heard from Kevin Stewart. People say, "There's nothing to see here." However, with all the damning evidence that is stacked up against the Scottish Government's handling of this emergency, to deny that there is an emergency and lay the blame elsewhere just will not cut it.

Kevin Stewart: Will Mr Whittle give way?

Brian Whittle: Not just now.

We cannot begin to tackle a problem unless we first acknowledge its scale, as Mr Simpson reminded us.

Scotland's homelessness deaths numbers are shameful. I would suggest that they are linked in no small part to our drug and alcohol crisis. As the previous First Minister said, she took the eye off the ball. I would suggest that that is what is happening here.

Douglas Lumsden highlighted the chaos that the Greens' policies have brought to the Scottish housing market. The affordable rented stock has plummeted as landlords have left the sector after the Greens' ideological policies have decimated it. Far from preventing rent rises, they have caused massive hikes in rents. I say to Ben Macpherson that many house builders who are looking to build

affordable housing in the build-to-rent space have decided not to proceed.

Ben Macpherson: Does Mr Whittle acknowledge that there is strong interest in cities, such as in the communities that I represent, in undertaking a variety of developments including build-to-rent, and that the Scottish Government is looking to implement its long-term system of rent controls? That certainty is what the market is asking for, and then the buoyancy will continue.

Brian Whittle: I thank Ben Macpherson for that intervention, because it allows me to say that the reality is that the Greens and the SNP do not recognise outcomes if they do not agree with their extreme ideologies. Here is a fact for Mr Macpherson. In 2018, there were six applicants for every rental property in Edinburgh. There are now 24.

Pam Gosal pointed out that the upcoming housing bill has a mechanism to finally give direction to a directionless Government housing strategy. As she articulated, her meetings with chief executives of local councils have highlighted the increase in homelessness applications and the lack of housing stock as the biggest issues that are facing the housing market.

As my friend and colleague Stephen Kerr stated in an impassioned speech, homelessness in Scotland is such a scourge. He rightly asked why the SNP and the Greens continually fail to build enough housing to tackle the crisis. He also pointed out that the woeful planning laws are preventing that progress.

Kevin Stewart: Will Mr Whittle take an intervention?

Brian Whittle: No.

Willie Coffey mentioned climate change, and I would like to talk about that. With a finite budget and the stated twin goals of reducing energy bills and reducing the carbon footprint—which will help to reduce homelessness, especially for those in the most deprived areas according to the Scottish index of multiple deprivation—I suggest that a targeted investment to improve stock is one of the ways forward. The minister should be using funds to improve the energy efficiency of social housing and to build many more energy-efficient social and affordable homes. That would tackle homelessness.

Let us face it—Scotland has some of the least energy-efficient homes in Europe. Furthermore, if the target is also to reduce our carbon output, investment in off-grid rural houses, including in oil-fired heating systems, would have the greatest initial impact. That would also help to tackle the huge shortage of rural housing, which Kate Forbes

highlighted in what I thought was an excellent speech.

Instead of that, we have a housing minister who stands up in the Parliament and says that we are going to retrofit a million homes in Scotland. I asked the Scottish Government in a parliamentary question how many applications have been made for Home Energy Scotland grants and loans this year. The total is 6,000, and the number of offers that have been made is 1,900. I looked through the numbers of applications from each local authority area, including from the poorest places in Scotland, such as Inverclyde, and the total number of applications from there was seven. That is great—we have 999,993 homes to go. I say to the minister that we are well on the way.

A couple of weeks ago, I was at an energy efficiency conference with some colleagues. I will mention some of the asks that came from that. Approvals and pay-outs need to be sped up and backlogs need to be reduced. It is as simple as that. Companies cannot call HES on behalf of customers because of the general data protection regulation, and the backlog is causing salesmen to quit because they cannot wait for four months to be paid their commission. The demand from the sector is there, but the way in which the Government has set up the funding makes commercial viability poor. Poor cash flow for the grants means that those companies cannot grow and recruit, despite the demand. South of the border, the wait is five days.

The Government needs to pay it forward so that builders can make sure that all new builds use renewable technology. The cost cannot be laid solely on the builder and then passed on to the customer. That is not affordable and it contradicts the Government's affordable home strategy. Last week, I asked the Minister for Higher and Further Education whether the Scottish Government had completed a skills mapping exercise prior to setting the targets. Unsurprisingly, he responded that the Government is

"currently engaged with ministerial colleagues across Government to map the skills shortages."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 2023; c 67.]

Let me tell the minister what the scale of the skills shortage in the building industry is. It will be unable to hit the Government targets because it is 22,500 tradespeople short. That makes a mockery of the targets that the Government has set and it epitomises the Scottish Government's approach, which delivers headlines without a route map.

That Scotland has a housing crisis is beyond doubt, despite the continued protestations from the Scottish Government. It is time that that fact was recognised and accepted. Until that happens, how on earth can we possibly begin to tackle what is another Scottish Government crisis? I urge

members to support Graham Simpson's amendment.

16:58

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): I thank all members for taking part in the debate—with a number of notable exceptions. Some members brought to the debate well-reasoned contributions, positive, constructive ideas and an understanding of the causes of the challenges that we face. We should all ask ourselves to reflect on how people who are experiencing significant housing difficulties would view our debate—people who are in temporary accommodation, on housing waiting lists, in homes that are damp or in poor repair and who are struggling to meet housing costs. Mr Griffin and others were right to say that far too many people are still in those situations, and this Government is determined to put that right.

People at the sharp end of those challenges need to hear that determination, but they also need to see action, so I am most grateful to those members whose speeches were focused on solutions. Mr Griffin's speech, unlike his motion, called for a focus on action. Actions build more homes, make existing homes better and keep costs affordable. That is why the Government's amendment focuses squarely on action.

Mark Griffin: I appreciate that the Government wants to set out the action that it plans to take to tackle the crisis. However, I do not understand why it has proposed deleting the entire motion to add its own actions. Why not acknowledge the emergency that exists and then set out the actions that it plans to take to address it? What is the Government's problem with accepting that the emergency exists?

Patrick Harvie: The actions that need to be taken are the only things that will make a difference.

Last October, we took emergency action to support people who rent their homes. The Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 introduced restrictions on rent rises while a tenant remains in the same tenancy and strengthened protection against evictions. It is perfectly clear that the Conservatives would still rather that we ignored the needs of tenants, but the act has continued to provide important additional protection for tenants across the rented sector. Anywhere else in the UK, private tenants have faced the double impact of unfettered rent rises during and between tenancies. Therefore, I was very pleased when the Parliament voted to approve the regulations that extend the provisions for a further and final six months until March.

Brian Whittle: Much as I accept that the policy was introduced with good intentions, does the minister not recognise that the 14 per cent rent increase in Scotland in the past year is greater than the increase in London at the moment?

Patrick Harvie: The member is talking about increases in advertised rents, which are rents for new tenancies. Those have been increasing at comparable levels in other parts of the UK, where tenants also face increases during their tenancies.

The emergency legislation is, by definition, temporary. That is why we have committed to introducing longer-term rent controls in a housing bill that we will bring to Parliament in this parliamentary year. I continue to engage with stakeholders and other colleagues on the shape of that bill. The scale of private rent increases across the UK demonstrates the need for action to tackle rent rises. It is clear from countries across Europe that, where greater regulation of renting and rents is the norm, such regulation can and should go hand in hand with encouraging investment in improving quality and supply.

In addition to our proposals on rent control, we are considering eight policy areas for further rented sector reform, some of which aim to improve the experience of renting and enhance the rights of tenants. That is one of many areas where action is needed in Scotland and in UK policy.

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

Patrick Harvie: I am afraid that I need to make a bit of progress.

We will press ahead with measures to increase housing supply and will work in partnership to maximise the use of current housing stock. We will introduce new homelessness prevention duties this parliamentary year, which will offer stronger protections than those anywhere else in the UK. We will strengthen rights for tenants and offer greater security from eviction. We will bring forward a new housing rights bill.

Daniel Johnson: Will the minister give way?

Patrick Harvie: I need to make a bit of progress to set out the action that we are taking.

The new housing rights bill will incorporate the right to adequate housing into Scots law within the limits of devolved competence.

For a considerable time, we have been pressing the UK Government to end the freeze on local housing allowance. I am relieved that the chancellor has finally given in to that pressure and has scrapped the freeze on LHA. It is an important source of support for low-income households and should never have been frozen in the first place.

The damage done by three years of that freeze is an estimated £819 million cut to the allowance across Great Britain, coupled with cuts of £181 million to Scotland's capital budget. It has also hampered efforts to increase available housing. I sincerely hope that a freeze like that is never considered again, because no one should have to make the choice between paying their rent, feeding their family and heating their home.

I want to be clear that the scale of homelessness and inadequate housing is one of the big challenges that Scotland faces, but it is by no means unique in that respect. For example, statistics show that there has been a 74 per cent rise in temporary accommodation in England over the past 10 years. Acknowledging the wider situation does not by any means absolve us of the need to take action, but we should be clear about that wider context.

In 2023, we are not where we should be, but from listening to some members—some from the Conservative Party and some from the Labour Party—one could be forgiven for thinking that such housing issues exist only in Scotland. Brexit continues to cast a dark shadow over our construction industry and our workforce capacity. *[Interruption.]* I know that some members do not want to hear that.

The pandemic was followed by a cost of living crisis, which was topped by a disastrous experiment with far-right economics in the Truss-Kwarteng mini-budget. That has put a huge strain on our resources. All too often, it is the people with least to fall back on who are hit the hardest. They are the same people who have already been hit by a decade of austerity and brutal welfare cuts—the people who are in temporary housing accommodation or in the poorest housing. That is why we, in Scotland, are determined to do all that we can to turn that tide.

If we offered our package of action to tackle the issues that we are debating—a programme that has included providing 120,000 affordable homes over the past 15 years, getting rid of the right to buy, ending no-fault evictions in the private sector, introducing an emergency rent cap, bringing empty homes back into use and enhancing homelessness rights—to colleagues in England, whether Labour campaigners or housing organisations, or to people elsewhere in the UK, I think that they would bite our hand off.

We will continue to be open to positive, constructive ideas, whether from Labour members or anyone else in the chamber, about how we can continue to make greater progress. People in the most difficult housing situations in Scotland need action and commitment, and that is what this Government is determined to continue to deliver.

17:07

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): There is a housing emergency, but that is not really up for debate. The choice for us this evening is whether we want to acknowledge that crisis or emergency and treat it as such. It is only by acknowledging it in that way that we will treat the situation with the urgency and focus that it deserves.

The tragedy of the debate has been that we had an opportunity. There was no need for the Government to disagree with our motion. The debate could have been an opportunity to have a frank discussion about how we tackle the problems, look at the solutions and come together with a degree of consensus.

I think that there has been quite a strong contrast between the speeches of Government front benchers and those of Government back benchers. We had some thoughtful discussion from SNP back benchers but, unfortunately, we have not had that from the front benchers. In fact, they want to wipe out the word “emergency” from the motion. Apparently, all that we are facing is “significant pressure”, and only among those who are homeless. Tell that to private renters in Edinburgh, to anyone who is looking for a house or to anyone who is facing homelessness. It is not “significant pressure”—it is an emergency.

The other critical problem with what the Government has presented this afternoon is that it fails to acknowledge the fundamental problem. The Government has talked about “initiatives” and “conversations”, but fundamentally we have a problem of housing supply. If we slice and dice that and look at particular categories, we will not acknowledge the full problem. The simple reality is that, on average, the SNP has built 5,000 fewer houses than we did when we were in power. Between 1997 and 2007, 230,000 homes were built.

John Swinney: Will the member give way?

Daniel Johnson: I will come to Mr Swinney in a moment.

Between 2007 and 2022, 260,000 homes were built. In other words, it took the SNP 15 years to build as many houses as we built in 10. That is the simple reality. If we had continued to build houses at the same rate as we were doing when we left power, there would be 104,000 more homes in Scotland than there are today. That is what the simple numbers tell us.

John Swinney: I am grateful to Mr Johnson for giving way. The only slight flaw in the contorted information that he has just given to Parliament is that it ignores factors such as the financial crash in 2008, which led to a haemorrhage of private

building. That had nothing to do with the Scottish Government and everything to do with the financial mismanagement of the last Labour Government in the UK.

Daniel Johnson: There is a serious point. Those are the simple numbers—I did not make any attributions. We have to acknowledge the fundamental point about supply. Unless we do that, we will never make progress.

The simple reality is—Sarah Boyack put it very well—that at the heart of all the numbers is a human experience. She mentioned the fact that 45 per cent of homeless people face severe and significant mental health consequences, which is something on which we should all reflect. It is something that I think about a lot during my surgeries. I hate the fact that, when I am faced with people who are living in cramped accommodation—families of five or six people living in two-bedroom flats—I have to tell them that because of the points on the EdIndex system, they are going to have to wait years. That is inhumane and, until we fix supply, it will continue to be a problem. That is why the Government has to face up to the emergency and face up to the fact that a family is being made homeless every 16 minutes in Scotland.

There have been a number of excellent contributions. Ben Macpherson’s contribution was absolutely spot on: we are not going to address the crisis unless we look at all the issues. There is a global context and a historical context. There was a move away from building social housing through the 1980s and 1990s, and perhaps Ben Macpherson is right that Labour could have done more when we were in power. Only by facing up to such things can we deal with the crisis. What I do not understand, however, is why so many of his colleagues acknowledge that the situation feels like an emergency to so many and yet do not want to recognise it—

Paul Sweeney: I thank my friend for giving way at that point in an excellent speech. One of the great strengths of Labour’s housing policy in Scotland during the 1970s and 1980s was the building of the community housing association movement, which is increasingly experiencing forced directed mergers at the behest of the Scottish Housing Regulator. Does he share my increasing alarm and concern at that trend in Scotland, which has been seen most recently with regard to the Reidvale Housing Association in Dennistoun?

Daniel Johnson: I do indeed. Housing associations have faced being in an absolutely invidious position in recent years, in finding it very difficult to invest in their housing stock. Crucially, fewer housing association dwellings have been

built under the Scottish National Party on average per year than were built under Labour.

I thank Kate Forbes for her thoughtful contribution. She is absolutely right that we need to talk about solutions. I do not disagree with a single one of the solutions that she set out, and I agree particularly on the planning point. Members across the chamber have acknowledged the fact that the reality is that there are financial pressures, but there are also systemic pressures that we could relieve. We have to acknowledge the fact that the number of planners has dropped by a third in recent years. Until we have throughput in the planning system, we will struggle to approve the schemes that we need to approve.

Kate Forbes: In the spirit of consensus, would Daniel Johnson agree that one of the key concerns is that, when a community group is, for example, progressing plans for affordable housing, it often has to jump through the same hoops as major corporate firms would have to jump through, and that we should ensure that it is easier for community groups to get through the process?

Daniel Johnson: I absolutely agree with that. We need to think about throughput in systems and make sure that we reflect the priorities of particular groups, although I acknowledge that the issue is about the broader planning process and strategic infrastructure. Treating all planning applications the same does not make sense, so we need to look at that.

Members across the chamber asked what Labour's solutions are. Let me gently remind them that we have made a commitment across the UK to build 1.5 million homes over five years. We will create a national infrastructure commission that will, through partnership, ensure that we lay the bedrock for that. We will ensure that house building and reform of the planning process are at the heart of delivering those plans. We will bring forward similar plans for Scotland.

The simple reality is that nothing that the ministers have brought forward this afternoon really acknowledges that anything needs to be done differently. Their amendment and what they have said point only to what has already been put in place—the plans that are already in effect—and they are saying that everything is fine. However, the numbers tell us that everything is not fine.

Ministers cannot even decide what numbers they want to choose. They disagree when we talk about private sector housing, yet the 130,000 figure that they cite includes private sector housing that they do not want us to talk about. It is a total nonsense and there is total confusion.

The simple reality is that the Government's actions are not enough—the housing crisis points to that. Until supply is fixed, we will continue to

have those problems. [*Interruption.*] I am happy to give way.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Johnson, you are beginning to wind up.

Daniel Johnson: The reality is that we have heard a set of excuses from the Government today, but governing is not about excuses. It is not about dodging problems; it is about acknowledging problems and coming up with an action plan to deal with them, but we have had none of that, and nothing new from the Government.

There have been questions recently about the mooted rebuttal unit that the SNP needs, but it already has it—the Scottish Government's sole purpose seems to be rebuttal. The problem is that it is not very good at it.

We have the chance to get rid of the Tories in the coming months, but, unfortunately, we will have to wait two and a half years until we can get rid of this sorry Government. Until then, I am ashamed to say that Scotland will have to put up with a Government that seeks excuses rather than delivery. That will be felt most when it comes to housing.

Point of Order

17:15

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. I seek your guidance on how parliamentary process can be correctly followed to secure answers on the £11,000 Michael Matheson iPad scandal. On behalf of our constituents, we have tried repeatedly to get answers from the Government and the Parliament but, since last Thursday, we have been frustrated at every turn.

Mr Matheson has referred himself to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, but yesterday the self-same body said that no such process exists. Topical questions have been rejected. Urgent questions have been refused. Debate requests have been dismissed. A request for a further statement received the response that such a statement would be inadmissible, and all the while, the facts keep changing.

The lesson from all great political scandals is that the cover-up is often worse than the crime. It is now abundantly clear that the Scottish National Party is in an industrial cover-up and is closing ranks to avoid the truth getting out.

We have it on record that the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care have all misled the Parliament in recent times, but nothing has happened—no corrections, no apologies and no proper investigations. I cannot understand how that meets the obligations of our standing orders, which ensure that the code of conduct is followed by members, regardless of how senior their position is in Government.

To our constituents watching at home, the Parliament appears to be totally toothless, whether on the iPad scandal or the deleted WhatsApp messages. Words and standards apparently count for nothing for the SNP Government.

The health secretary has been accused by journalists of lying to the Scottish press. Members and the Scottish public deserve to know the truth of that charge, but, sadly, it is increasingly clear that the Scottish ministers are hiding behind the Parliament's rigid rules and inflexible timetabling to evade investigation and interrogation.

In summary, Deputy Presiding Officer, I seek your guidance on how the Parliament can compel the evasive and scandal-hit health secretary to answer key questions on an issue that has rightly enraged our constituents and the entire country.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Thank you, Mr Hoy.

In response to the point that you have raised in relation to the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, it has indicated that self-referral is not possible, but it has also indicated that it is due to meet tomorrow to consider the matter further and it will issue a statement following that meeting.

On the code of conduct, as you will know, that is a matter that is agreed by Parliament, but it is for the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee to consider and report on the adoption, amendment and application of any code of conduct for members. Any revisions to that have to be agreed by Parliament on the basis of recommendations from the committee. Therefore, if you have concerns, you may wish to consider writing to the convener of that committee.

As you will know, the business of the Parliament is agreed at the Parliamentary Bureau. You may wish to consider speaking to your business manager about that. When a business motion is brought before the Parliament, as will be amply demonstrated shortly, there is an opportunity to speak against it.

Business Motion

17:19

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-11374, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme. I call George Adam to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 28 November 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Heat in Buildings Consultation

followed by Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Debate: Female Participation in Sport and Physical Activity

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 29 November 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 Ministerial Statement: Relationships and Behaviour Policy in Schools

followed by Scottish Government Debate: 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 November 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:

Social Justice

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 5 December 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

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 6 December 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 7 December 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
Education and Skills

followed by Reconsideration Stage Proceedings: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 27 November 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]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Stephen Kerr to speak to and move amendment S6M-11374.1. Mr Kerr, you have up to five minutes.

17:20

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Having consulted my party's business manager, I am pleased to bring the amendment to the chamber.

I have been quite shocked that there has been no attempt by the Government to seek to put into the business programme of the Parliament any kind of ministerial statement about the announcement that broke this morning on the end of refining at Grangemouth from the spring of 2025. People who watch these proceedings have been shocked that any attempt to raise the matter in the chamber has not made any progress.

Constituents have been in touch with me. They are worried and concerned about their jobs and livelihoods. When people are faced with uncertainty and fear about their future, it is reasonable for them to look to their Parliament for some sort of assurance that their elected representatives are, at the very least, aware of the issues.

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): I, too, as the constituency MSP for Falkirk East, am shocked by this. I have spent this afternoon in dialogue with Petroineos, I have a meeting tomorrow with the union, and I have submitted an urgent question to address exactly that issue. Perhaps the member would be willing to allow me to carry out my role tomorrow as the constituency MSP.

Stephen Kerr: I would expect nothing less from Michelle Thomson. She has taken the interests of her constituents to heart and has set up those meetings. However, that does not negate the responsibility of the Scottish Government to make a ministerial statement in the chamber and allow members of the Parliament the right to ask questions and seek assurances and answers.

As I have said, people expect their Government to work to secure their best interests, so it is reasonable—and it is certainly reasonable of my constituents and Michelle Thomson's constituents—to look for assurances from the Government, and the issue should be raised in Parliament. That is why I am asking ministers for a statement tomorrow. That is reasonable and proportionate, given the impact on the entire Scottish economy.

Grangemouth is responsible for 4 per cent of Scottish gross domestic product.

Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Stephen Kerr: I am not sure that I will get any time back if I give way. Will I, Deputy Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Not really, Mr Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: I will therefore continue, because some things need to be said about the importance of the issue.

Grangemouth fuels our cars, buses, ambulances, police cars, fire engines, agricultural equipment and emergency generators. Need it be said that fuel is important?

We know that the Scottish National Party and the Greens have shown blatant and open hostility to the oil and gas sector. We need to understand whether that has been a factor in Petroineos's decision to end refining.

In 2016, the Scottish Government and the United Kingdom Government worked together to maintain gas processing at Grangemouth. It is worthy of the Parliament to ask ministers whether that is being explored now. Is there an option for the UK Government and the Scottish Government to work together in the best interests of our constituents? What policy does the Scottish Government have relating to the importance of the domestic production of petrol and diesel? How does the potential removal of large-scale refining from Scotland impact on emergency planning, our resilience and our economy? What will the Scottish Government do for the employees of the plant affected by the proposed change? What support will it make available for the people of Grangemouth?

Those are all questions that members—especially those who represent Grangemouth—have a responsibility to ask. They are questions that it is reasonable for our constituents to hear being asked, with answers from ministers.

One cannot help but wonder whether, if the plant and those jobs were at risk in Glasgow or Edinburgh, the Government would already have scheduled a statement for tomorrow. [Interruption.] Members may disagree with that point, but that is a consideration for people in central Scotland.

I note that the First Minister has seen fit to make a statement about the situation at Grangemouth. I understand that he did that at Bute house in front of journalists. I do not understand why a statement on the crisis cannot be made in the Parliament, with questions to come from elected members. I do not think that that is unreasonable.

I note that Neil Gray, who is the relevant cabinet secretary, has offered to meet some of us in a private Zoom meeting on Friday afternoon. That is good, but let us have an open discussion and a statement in the chamber ahead of any such private meeting.

I am grateful for the Deputy Presiding Officer's indulgence. If our Parliament is not here to discuss such matters of importance to the people of Scotland, what is it here for?

I move amendment S6M-11374.1, to insert after "the following programme of business—":

"Thursday 23 November 2023

11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
1.45 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
1.45 pm	Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions
2.00 pm	Portfolio Questions: Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition
<i>followed by</i>	Ministerial Statement: Grangemouth Oil Refinery
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 1 Debate: Disabled Children and Young People (Transitions to Adulthood) (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time".

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call George Adam to respond on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau. Minister, you have up to five minutes, please.

17:25

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (George Adam): At the heart of the discussion and debate are the families and people who are employed at BP Grangemouth. Those are the people and the community that the Scottish Government and the cabinet secretary take very seriously when we discuss the matter. The cabinet secretary is currently seeking to meet the trade unions.

Let us not forget that the decision is a commercial decision that has been taken by the industry and that it is not a decision or a responsibility of the Scottish Government.

Today, the cabinet secretary has invited his shadow spokespeople and MSPs from the area to a meeting to discuss the matter. The cabinet secretary also answered questions on the important issue earlier today, and he is committed

to updating the Parliament as the situation develops.

On the matter of parliamentary business, Mr Kerr's amendment to business came in at 4.59 pm. It came in after the first division bell had rung.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Mr Kerr had the opportunity to ask questions about Grangemouth this afternoon, as other members did. However, after he made a point of order that was dealt with by the Deputy Presiding Officer, which he was unhappy with, he chose to flounce out of the chamber while others asked questions about Grangemouth. Would the minister like to comment on that?

George Adam: Kevin Stewart makes a very important point. At 2 o'clock, Stephen Kerr made a point of order. The amendment came in at 4.59 pm, after the first division bell had rung.

Stephen Kerr: First, let us first address the issue of what happened at 2 o'clock. I attempted to raise a point of order, which was dealt with by the Deputy Presiding Officer. I did not flounce out of the chamber. [*Laughter.*] I had another important obligation that I left the chamber to fulfil. Members may find that funny, but serving my constituents is something that I take seriously, and I hope that they do, as well.

To address what happened at 4.59 pm, the business manager for the Conservatives has been trying all day, since the announcement was made from Grangemouth, to get a minister to agree to timetable a statement. The fact that the minister has not done so and that we have come to this point reflects very badly on the priorities of the Scottish Government.

George Adam: The Parliament has processes, one of which is parliamentary questions. Mr Kerr needs to have a look at himself and decide how he is going to interact with the Parliament. It is not acceptable on a matter of such importance for the individual to lodge an amendment to the business programme at 4.59 pm. [*Interruption.*] Mr Kerr is not showing the Parliament any respect, which is disgraceful.

I revert to what I said at the beginning. We are not important in this issue; we should be thinking about the families involved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-11374.1, in the name of Stephen Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11374, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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

17:29

Meeting suspended.

17:31

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The question is, that amendment S6M-11374.1, in the name of Stephen Kerr, be agreed to. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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)
 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)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-11374.1, in the

name of Stephen Kerr, is: For 52, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-11374, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 28 November 2023

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Ministerial Statement: Heat in Buildings Consultation

followed by Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Debate: Female Participation in Sport and Physical Activity

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 29 November 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 Ministerial Statement: Relationships and Behaviour Policy in Schools

followed by Scottish Government Debate: 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 November 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Social Justice

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 5 December 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

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 6 December 2023

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 7 December 2023

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Education and Skills

followed by Reconsideration Stage Proceedings: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 27 November 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.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-11375, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Extension and Expiry of Temporary Justice Measures) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.—[*George Adam*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Russell Findlay to speak to the motion, for up to three minutes.

17:34

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The Scottish Government enacted a range of temporary powers in April 2020, at the start of the pandemic. Some of those powers were indeed temporary; however, last year, the Government extended the use of others, including the expansion of fiscal fines. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service issues fiscal fines as an alternative to prosecution. Prior to the pandemic, the maximum was £300, but the emergency Covid law increased that to £500.

Today, the Government is asking members to maintain the £500 limit until this time next year. The Government submitted a policy note to the Criminal Justice Committee, which stated that increasing the maximum fines allowed prosecutors to use them in

“a wider range of cases”.

Those five words—“a wider range of cases”—are the key issue.

I asked the justice secretary exactly what new crimes are being dealt with by way of fiscal fines. She either would not or could not answer. She tried to deflect that there was ideological opposition to fiscal fines, which is not true. I am sure that crime victims have no ideological opposition; I am sure that they would expect to be told when fiscal fines are being issued. I am also sure that the public expect to know when such fines are issued for serious crimes, including acts of violence. People want justice to be done efficiently and effectively, but they also want transparency.

To recap, in 2020, the Government passed an emergency law to widen the use of fiscal fines. It did not tell the public what new crimes they would be used for. The Government relied on the support of all parties, including mine. However, if this SSI is agreed to by members today, this significant

and supposedly temporary measure will be in place for almost five years.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Russell Findlay: Do I have time to take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: A brief one, Mr Findlay.

Pauline McNeill: In addition to what the member has said, Labour has challenged several times whether the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service needs up to 260 days to prepare a case for indictment. If we pass the instrument tonight, that measure—for which there has been no justification—will be extended again to 2025-26.

Russell Findlay: That is another good reason to vote against the SSI, and I note that, in the committee, Labour voted alongside the Conservatives in opposition to it.

This is a shabby and lazy way to legislate. If the Government wants to widen the use of diversion from prosecution, it should be honest and up front about it. It should pass new legislation that explains exactly how fiscal fines would be used. It should not resort to doing so by stealth, using Covid as an excuse.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Angela Constance to respond, for up to three minutes.

17:37

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I attended the Criminal Justice Committee on Wednesday 8 November, and explained the approach taken by the Scottish Government in respect of this instrument. In particular, I noted that the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 includes a range of temporary justice measures that are due to expire at the end of this month. The measures were originally introduced as a direct response to the pandemic. MSPs will be aware of the adverse impact that the pandemic had across many different areas, and the justice system was no different.

Although recovery is well under way, it is not yet complete. The need for some of the measures that were originally introduced has reduced. That is why I was able to advise the committee that certain measures have been expired.

I know that MSPs have rightly shown a keen interest in, for example, the extended time limits. I was pleased to advise committee that more than half—four out of seven—of the extended time limits that were put in place at the outset of the pandemic are being expired. I also confirmed to

committee that I have no plans to make temporary time limits permanent.

I do not want any extended time limits for any longer than is necessary if they are not needed. The instrument is an indication of the progress that is being made in the courts' recovery.

More generally, the Scottish Government has considered carefully the operation of the provisions and engaged with justice agencies and stakeholders. The findings of the Scottish Government review are set out in the statement of reasons that is laid alongside the instrument.

There are three main reasons for maintaining some of the temporary measures. One of those is the clear support from justice agencies for some of the temporary measures to be made more permanent. That is why, earlier this month, I published a public consultation that proposes to make permanent certain temporary measures that will help to improve the justice system and make it more resilient, efficient and effective. They include proposals to make permanent national jurisdiction for callings from custody, an increase in the maximum amount of fiscal fines and virtual attendance at court.

I hope that I clarified to the committee that the increase in the range of fines covers the same range of offences. I had endeavoured to explain to Mr Findlay the difference between the number of cases and the range of offences.

Russell Findlay: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Angela Constance: Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you a little bit of time back.

Russell Findlay: I have to disagree with the cabinet secretary's assertion. The statement from the Government to the committee was that the increase would be for

"a wider range of cases".

That is quite clear. Can the cabinet secretary explain what cases those will be?

Angela Constance: As I have confirmed to Mr Findlay—not once but now twice—the increased fine rate applies to the same offences.

On Mr Findlay's issue about cases, the fiscal fines, by having increased from the £300 to the £500 range, now cover cases in which the Crown Office considers a £300 fine to be insufficient in the circumstances but in which it considers a £500 fine to be appropriate.

Keeping those elements in place, pending consideration of permanent legislation, is a sensible approach to take. The consultation

provides an opportunity to seek wider views on the proposals. Another reason is that the court system is still in recovery from the pandemic.

Given that you are pressing me for time, Presiding Officer, I will just refer members to the statement that I made at the committee.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary. The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-11375, on approval of an SSI. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Heat Networks (Supply Targets) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.—[George Adam]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Douglas Lumsden.

17:41

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): At committee, I raised concerns about the SSI. Those concerns remain, and I would like to raise them again today.

Let me make it clear from the outset that I remain a big fan of heat networks. I am convinced that heat networks will have a huge part to play in decarbonising our buildings, especially in our more densely populated cities, where, for example, having heat pumps in tenement blocks will not be viable. I also speak as a formal council leader, from which role I have experience of heat network installation, so I know how difficult and expensive they are to roll out.

The partial business and regulatory impact assessment sets out a cost of up to £6.2 billion to reach this target by 2035. It also states that that cost excludes any adaptations that may be required within existing buildings, so the final costs will be much higher than the £6.2-billion price tag quoted. When the minister was questioned about that figure at committee, he stated that the Government will be committing only £300 million towards it, so we are left unclear as to where the remaining sums will come from and how achievable that target will be.

The impact assessment also sets out the role that our local authorities will play. I remain concerned that, with our local authorities being underfunded and council tax being frozen, they will not be able to fulfil the function that we require them to take on, especially given that the costs for adaptation of existing buildings are not captured by the assessment, and many of those buildings will be owned by our local authorities.

I also note, from the policy note accompanying the SSI, that the local authorities' local heat and energy strategies will play into the national target, but not all local authorities have completed those strategies. It seems strange to set the target without that information.

We also have no details on where the 7TWh in the policy comes from. I worry that the target that would be set out today, like so many of this devolved Government's targets, is aspirational but, without more detail, simply unachievable. The SNP-Green Government needs to understand that setting targets is one thing, but it is delivery that counts. More details are urgently required.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: For clarity, we are referring to motion S5M-11376, not motion S5M-11375.

I call the minister to respond.

17:44

The Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel and Tenants' Rights (Patrick Harvie): I am grateful for the chance to respond to the points that have been raised on the SSI. It is an order that supports our ambition to grow the number and scale of heat networks in Scotland, which are systems that will supply many of us with clean heating in the years ahead.

The Heat Networks (Scotland) Act 2021 requires us to set a target for 2035, but setting that target is not just a legal requirement; it is helpful in and of itself. It will send a clear signal to the heat network sector that the current Government and future Governments are and will remain committed to its growth. The proposed target of 7TWh is evidence based and was developed using data on potential heat network zones. The proposed target is 1TWh greater than the 2030 target that is already set in the legislation, for which the Parliament voted unanimously.

I was pleased that the committee recommended approval of the SSI, although some concerns were raised, which I have to say I answered repeatedly in the committee, although not to the satisfaction of all its members. Perhaps some members decided that my answers would not be to their satisfaction no matter what I said, but let me run through them again.

The need for a credible plan to meet the targets is precisely why we published our heat networks delivery plan in 2022, setting out a range of actions that we are taking to support the sector. We are under a duty to review how that plan is supporting our targets by March next year. We know that we need to move to create more demand for heat networks, and the upcoming heat

in buildings consultation will make proposals on that.

There was concern about the potential cost of meeting the targets.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I want to make some progress.

Meeting the cost will be achieved through a mix of public and private investment. That point should be well understood by anyone who has looked carefully at the subject.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Will the minister give way on that point?

Patrick Harvie: No, thank you.

The private investment will be driven by creating demand for heat networks. The funding that we have currently allocated to heat networks is to 2026, whereas the target is for nine years later. We know that there is significant interest from private investors in developing such schemes and we have already seen good examples of collaboration, as in Midlothian, where the public and private sectors are working together. Therefore, it is misleading to compare overall cost projections to public budgets.

Based on our best estimate, in 2022, heat networks supplied 1.35TWh of heat. We have committed to keeping the 2035 target and any future targets under review as further evidence emerges—for example, as heat network zones are designated. Setting the 2035 target is just one part of our plan to help grow the sector. We are already taking a range of other concerted actions to allow the heat network sector to flourish. We are resourcing local authorities to develop local heat and energy efficiency strategies, which are identifying opportunities for heat networks across Scotland.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the minister take an intervention?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister is concluding.

Patrick Harvie: For example, Glasgow's LHEES identifies that heat networks there have the potential to supply between 1TWh and 4TWh of the city's heat annually. We have launched the heat network support unit, which is already helping local authorities through the pre-capital stages of heat network development.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, minister.

Patrick Harvie: Collectively, those actions will help us to achieve our proposed target. I ask Parliament to support the SSI.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Again, the question on the motion will be put at decision time.

The next item of business is consideration of three Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move the motions.

George Adam: All moved, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Apologies. I will need to tell you what the motions are first. They are S6M-11377, on approval of an SSI, S6M-11378, on designation of a lead committee, and S6M-11379, on committee meeting times. I invite the minister to move the three motions.

George Adam: I was just so eager to be helpful, Presiding Officer.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2023 Amendment Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Finance and Public Administration Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Aggregates Tax and Devolved Taxes Administration (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Finance and Public Administration Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 11.40 am and 12 noon on 7 December 2023.—[*George Adam*]

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

Decision Time

17:48

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): There are six questions to be put as a result of today's business. I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Paul McLennan is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Graham Simpson will fall.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-11351.2, in the name of Paul McLennan, which seeks to amend motion S6M-11351, in the name of Mark Griffin, on Scotland's housing emergency, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)

Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 63, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-11351, in the name of Mark Griffin, on Scotland's housing emergency, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

The vote is closed.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app did not connect, but I would have voted no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Johnson. I will ensure that that is recorded.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I do not think that my app worked. It says that I have not voted, so I do not think that my vote was recorded. I would have voted no.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Stewart. I 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 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)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)

Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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) (Alba)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)

Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-11351, in the name of Mark Griffin, on Scotland’s housing emergency, as amended, is: For 65, Against 50, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises that Scotland is facing significant pressures with homelessness and temporary accommodation, and therefore agrees that the Scottish Government should build on its track record of delivering 123,985 affordable homes since 2007 by delivering 110,000 affordable homes by 2032; considers that it should continue to work on the recommendations of the Temporary Accommodation Task and Finish Group and recently published Rural and Islands Housing Action Plan; further considers that it should continue to develop its proposals for a Housing Bill in 2023, with stronger tenants’ rights and powers to prevent homelessness; acknowledges Scottish Government support for local authorities in developing targeted plans to address local housing needs; regrets the disastrous UK Government “mini-budget” of 2022, which has left the housing market struggling against inflationary pressures, as well as the devastating impact of Brexit on construction costs and workforce challenges, and calls on the UK Government to immediately uprate Local Housing Allowance, end the spare room subsidy, more commonly known as the bedroom tax, and reverse the planned real-terms reduction to Scotland’s capital budget.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-11375, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Deputy 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)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (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) (Alba)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 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)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 64, Against 49, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Act 2022 (Extension and Expiry of Temporary Justice Measures) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-11376, in the name of George Adam, on approval of an SSI, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

The vote is closed.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Bibby. I will make sure 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)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)

Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Cameron, Donald (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 87, Against 3, Abstentions 25.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Heat Networks (Supply Targets) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

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

As no member objects, the question is, that motions S6M-11377, on approval of an SSI, S6M-11378, on designation of a lead committee, and S6M-11379, on committee meeting times, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Budget (Scotland) Act 2023 Amendment Regulations 2023 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Finance and Public Administration Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Aggregates Tax and Devolved Taxes Administration (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Finance and Public Administration Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament between 11.40 am and 12 noon on 7 December 2023.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time. I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so as quickly and quietly as possible.

Calderwood Lodge Primary School (60th Anniversary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-11017, in the name of Jackson Carlaw, on Calderwood Lodge primary school's 60th anniversary celebration. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament congratulates Calderwood Lodge Primary, the only Jewish school in Scotland, on reaching its 60th anniversary year; understands that the school was originally established by the Jewish community in a detached house, Calderwood Lodge, in the Newlands area of Glasgow, with an extension built as the school roll increased, and that it was initially run by the Glasgow Board of Jewish Education and subsequently taken over by Strathclyde Region, then Glasgow City Council, and finally East Renfrewshire Council; acknowledges that, in recognition of this milestone, the school is hosting a 60-year celebration event for current and past pupils, families and members of the wider community, with the day to include festivities and activities for children; understands that, in August 2017, Calderwood Lodge officially relocated from the school's previous site in Newlands to a new building in Newton Mearns to become one half of the first Jewish-Catholic joint campus to be established anywhere in the world, alongside St Clare's Primary; recognises that the joint campus was a £17 million development in East Renfrewshire, with the two primary schools sharing a central amphitheatre, sports pitches and an obstacle course that is located outdoors; notes that the Chief Rabbi, Sir Ephraim Mirvis, will be in attendance at the 60-year celebration event, and believes that Calderwood Lodge is an asset to East Renfrewshire and to Scottish education, that it is viewed with great pride by the Jewish community, and that the Jewish-Catholic joint primary school campus in Newton Mearns is a powerful example of two different faith groups working closely together whilst at the same time maintaining and adhering to their own religious identities.

17:59

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I begin by thanking, through clenched teeth, my colleagues for keeping me up past my bedtime before we have been able to start the debate this evening.

Before I do anything further, I immediately indicate that the debate is very much a joint effort by me and Paul O'Kane. He came to me and suggested that, given everything else that was happening in relation to the international situation, it would be nice for the Parliament to talk about something positive involving the Jewish community in Scotland, which raised their effort and contribution to society above all the division elsewhere.

That is the reason why we are having this debate. I mused to my team today, rather shooting myself in the foot, "Do you know, I hadn't actually realised that Calderwood Lodge was founded only

in the early 60s?" They said, "Well, that's why you're moving a motion congratulating them on their 60th anniversary," which I suppose is a very obvious fact.

However, I said that more because—having commented before in the chamber that, when I was growing up, so many of my neighbours were Jewish—I can remember, as a five-year-old, that some of them went to Calderwood Lodge. Imagine my being told, as a five-year-old boy who was reading Enid Blyton at the time, that my friends were going to a place called Calderwood Lodge! It sounded very exciting, and it was in a place apparently called "New Lands".

One of my friends said that they had met a very important man who was a teddy. I thought, "This is where I want to go." That was Teddy Taylor, who had apparently visited the school. Whether people now—or then, or at any other time—would think that that was a highlight is a matter of conjecture. To me, however, my friends had a teddy, they were in a place called "New Lands", and it was a lodge. It sounded so much more exciting than the school that I was at—Belmont House school—which was notorious for being the childhood home of Margaret, Duchess of Argyll. As members who know their history will understand, her reputation was slightly more racy than anything else.

Calderwood Lodge primary school was founded in the 1960s in Newlands, in Glasgow, and it was the first Jewish school in Scotland. One can imagine how small it must have been, because, at its inception, there was just one year group in one class. It took a number of years, with each year adding to the numbers, before it had a school roll.

The 60th anniversary celebration was delightful. It was much more modern, I would say, than the 50th anniversary celebration—that was a black tie dinner in the constituency, in the now-defunct Newton Mearns synagogue, which has since merged with the one in Giffnock. The 60th celebration was a morning tea party with the families of those who had been at the school. What was so nice was that it was not just the original pupils who were present—it was their children and their grandchildren, who were also going to the school.

There were a lot of activities and things going on to celebrate the occasion. Among those who were there was the former headmistress Dianna Wolfson, who had been a teacher and who spoke at the event. I have to say that it looked to me as though a shiver still went down the spine of some of the former pupils; I do not know how formidable an entity she must have been, but they certainly sat upright, with posture straight, and listened carefully when she was speaking.

Among the former pupils who were there was Gillian Field, who is the daughter of Henry and Ingrid Wuga. Henry Wuga, who will be known to many members, is 99 years old and heading for his centenary—he is the last of the Kindertransport survivors whom we have in the community.

The school has been absolutely central to the lives of so many of my constituents. Paul O'Kane will know more about this, because he was, in his former guise as a councillor in East Renfrewshire Council, responsible for education, and he actually opened the school when it moved to its new campus. The old school in Newlands has now been converted into flats. There are a few remaining—Patrick Harvie might want to know about that, given the housing crisis. The remaining flats are available from £415,000 to £575,000, so I do not know whether they are immediately available for access to everybody. The school buildings there are partly demolished, but the original house lives on.

The important thing, however, is that the school has now moved to the new campus. The tales of the people who were at the old school were much the same as the tales of any of us who have gone to school over the years. They had fancy-dress parties. I do not know whether this is true, but apparently it was suggested, for one such party, that the rabbi should come in fancy dress—rather imaginatively, he came as a rabbi, perhaps not entering fully into the spirit of the occasion. Those tales all featured the same kind of colour and activity.

Moreover, the school did not consist exclusively of Jewish pupils; there were other pupils there, too. In particular, the school was very generous in the support that it provided, and the effort that it went to, for disabled pupils. At a time when other schools might not have given quite the same level of support, it went to extraordinary lengths to make sure that, in a small school, disabled pupils, including severely disabled pupils, had a safe and secure environment.

The 60th anniversary was celebrated, and the Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, was there for the occasion. It really is remarkable. The school was opened in 2017 by the Chief Rabbi and by Bishop John Keenan from Paisley. Is it a unique example in the world? It has two faiths working on a shared campus, with shared collective resources at its centre and other aspects that appeal to each of the different faiths. Much more importantly still, anyone who visits the campus will notice that, because many members of the Muslim population value a faith-based education, there are lots of Muslim pupils there, too, and they will see Jewish children, Catholic children and Muslim children playing together. It reminds me of lyrics from Rodgers and Hammerstein's "South Pacific" that I

quoted in a debate, perhaps a decade ago, on a different issue and which I find extremely apposite:

"You've got to be taught to hate and fear,
You've got to be taught from year to year,
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear,
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a different shade,
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You've got to be carefully taught!"

We are teaching all these young children to live together, to work together and to be educated together. Is it not through education and the example of Calderwood Lodge that Scotland's real hope for community cohesion exists?

Congratulations to Calderwood Lodge. I salute and celebrate its 60th anniversary and wish all those who have been educated there, and all those who will be, every success in the future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Carlaw, especially for that useful insight into fancy-dress party etiquette.

18:06

John Swinney (Perthshire North) (SNP): It is an enormous pleasure to follow Jackson Carlaw and to offer him my congratulations on securing the debate and my thanks for lodging the motion.

While I am on my feet, in such difficult and challenging times in relation to international conflict, I will take the opportunity to commend Jackson Carlaw on the speech that he delivered to the Parliament yesterday. Although I did not agree with all of it, it was a thoughtful, reflective and gracious contribution—typical of Mr Carlaw, frankly—which I think enhanced our debate. I am grateful to have the opportunity to put that on the parliamentary record.

It gives me great pleasure to add my congratulations to Calderwood Lodge primary school on its 60th anniversary—the 60th anniversary of its being the only Jewish school in Scotland. When I listened to Mr Carlaw talk about the roots of the school, I reflected on how it is, in essence, a product of innovation in education and of a recognition 60 years ago that there was space in our education system for creative approaches to be taken by a community to ensure that this educational tradition could be established. We can now look at what has been created as a consequence: the new-build Calderwood Lodge primary school and the joint campus of which it is a part.

I know that members might be a bit sceptical when I say that my five years as education secretary were happy years. They were also challenging years, but there was a lot of joy in that time. I can see part of that joy reflected in some of what Calderwood Lodge is trying to achieve. The school's vision is to

"empower our hearts and minds to develop the knowledge and skills, attitudes and values to be the best we can for our future, our community and our global environment."

At the heart of the school's aims is a desire to develop the school's

"Jewish identity and ethos, while promoting respect for all global cultures and religions."

What on earth could be finer motivations and foundations for the educational attainment of children in our society today in Scotland?

In a sense, the fact that—with the leadership of East Renfrewshire Council, of which Paul O'Kane is a distinguished former education convener—Calderwood Lodge school has developed as a joint campus with St Clare's Roman Catholic primary school embodies the aim that I have just talked about, which is to promote respect for all global cultures and religions. What better way to do that than in a joint campus with a Roman Catholic primary school?

As the father of a son whose primary education took place in a Roman Catholic school in a joint campus, I think that joint campus developments have been an absolutely fabulous innovation in Scottish education. They are places where tradition has been protected and nurtured but where common cause and common space have been created. Again, for our children's educational environment, what more could we hope for than that?

The fact that the school was opened jointly by the Chief Rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, and Bishop John Keenan of Paisley is very special, and it symbolises that coming together.

Another element of that coming together is the contribution of the Scottish Government to the opening of the joint campus. It contributed a modest amount of money—£300,000—for the creation of an interactive hub, which is a shared-faith space at the heart of the campus. Given that the joint campus tries to provide the opportunity for distinct communities to come together, I cannot think of a finer way to do that than by investing in a faith space where we can all bring our traditions together, celebrate one another's traditions, respect them and cherish them. That is surely the foundation of the acknowledgment of the common humanity that all of us want to see, the neglecting of which many of us are distressed about in the current environment.

This is a lovely moment to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the foundation of Calderwood Lodge and to pay tribute to those who had the imagination and the creativity to make it happen, and to the subsequent generations who have been prepared to invest in it and who enabled Paul O’Kane, in his former guise as a councillor, and others to make the choices to ensure that we have fantastic educational facilities for young people.

I commend the motion and all that it aims to achieve for the children and young people of Calderwood Lodge primary school.

18:12

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): I will start by declaring an interest in that, as we have heard, I am a former education convener in East Renfrewshire Council.

I am pleased to be participating in the debate this evening, and I thank Jackson Carlaw for his kind words and for the way in which we have been able to work together to bring the motion to the chamber. I also thank him for his long support of the Jewish community in East Renfrewshire. We have both had a strong relationship with that community over many years, and there is a real cross-party consensus in East Renfrewshire, where we work to support all our diverse communities.

As we have heard, these are undoubtedly dark times for Jewish people around the world. Many of the conversations that I have had with the Jewish community in East Renfrewshire recently have been in grief and in prayer for those who have been murdered in Israel. Often, in those conversations, Jewish people have expressed fear for their safety and security as antisemitism rises. What we heard in yesterday’s debate and have heard in much of the commentary is that we must all stand together against the rising tide of antisemitism that we are seeing in our world.

I am clear that that is not how Jewish people want to be defined or seen. Indeed, when I, along with Jackson Carlaw, joined the community in celebrating 60 years of Scotland’s only Jewish school, Calderwood Lodge, I heard a variety of voices speaking in joyful celebration and in hope—celebration of what the community has achieved over 60 years and hope for what it will go on to achieve in the future here in Scotland. That hope and joy were exemplified in the smiling faces and angelic voices of the children of the school, who shared traditional Hebrew songs with us as we tucked into a great brunch that morning in Calderwood Lodge.

The community is rightly proud of what many describe as the jewel in the crown of the Jewish story in Scotland. That story is long and varied,

just as the school’s story is long and varied—we have heard much of that articulated by Jackson Carlaw this evening.

It was my honour to serve on East Renfrewshire Council for 10 years, including five years as vice-convenor of education and four years as convenor. I am grateful to John Swinney for his comments on that. Although he and I often disagreed on elements of policy when I was convenor, there was a real sense that, on issues such as improving school facilities and making sure that we pushed forward in bringing communities together, we were very much working with one purpose. I know that, over his time as education secretary, many of the schools in East Renfrewshire greatly valued the time that he gave to visit schools and speak with staff, pupils and parents. His visits were always well regarded, so I am grateful to him for that.

I will focus my remaining time on the rebuilding of the school on its current site in Newton Mearns. It had long been the council’s ambition to relocate the school and provide new and modern facilities. I am proud that we chose to do that by investing £17 million in what we believe to be the world’s first Jewish-Roman Catholic shared campus. It was a courageous and bold plan in many ways, but it enjoyed the support of parents from both faith communities, the leaders of those faith communities, staff and the wider community in East Renfrewshire.

It was not always plain sailing; trust had to be built. I recall many late meetings of parent councils and community groups to iron out some of the issues and concerns and find common ground. Common ground was the key—respecting one another’s faith and traditions and deciding to share where we could on encounter, experience and humanity.

I remember that, when the architects presented the plans for the building, they spoke about there being a central heart, and it was the facility that John Swinney referred to. It would be a place where children could come together—the busyness of school life would pause for a while and there would be time together to share meals and for dancing, drama, social occasions and faith experiences.

There was a real sense that, for both schools, having a heart in the school was nothing new. For them, it was not just about the heart as the centre of the building; it was about so much more. For 60 years, Calderwood Lodge has been a beating heart—a place of learning and love where Jewish children have learned alongside Muslim children and children of other faiths and no faith, and where lives have been shaped and minds have been inspired. It stands as a beacon of hope, perseverance, tolerance and respect. As the

motion rightly states, it is an asset to East Renfrewshire and to Scotland. It rightly commands the pride of the Jewish community and the local authority.

In concluding, may I suggest that Calderwood Lodge also commands this Parliament's pride and respect? Let us, with one voice, say, to the community of Calderwood Lodge, mazel tov, and to all pupils, teachers and the community, past and present, chazak v'ematz.

18:18

Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con): I am delighted to speak in the chamber to honour Calderwood Lodge primary school, which is now in its 60th year of providing Jewish faith-based education. For me, growing up in Golders Green, Jewish schools were the norm, although I went to the state Garden Suburb junior school.

My colleague Jackson Carlaw and others have spoken eloquently about the school's history, from its early days in Newlands, in Glasgow, to the more recent move to Newton Mearns, where it shares a campus with St Clare's primary school. This is the first Jewish-Catholic campus in the world. Having kids of Jewish, Catholic and Muslim faiths playing together and learning together is wonderful and is growing multiculturalism.

Although the school's direct impact extends primarily to the Jewish community, Calderwood Lodge primary school contributes to a broader education and cultural landscape in East Renfrewshire, showcasing the importance of diversity in the region. The school fosters a sense of pride and identity in the pupils' heritage within a strong Jewish ethos, while also promoting respect for all global cultures and religions.

By existing alongside other schools, Calderwood Lodge contributes to interfaith understanding and collaboration, promoting a diverse and inclusive environment. It is no surprise that that is important to the ethos of Calderwood Lodge primary school, and to see that we need only look at the contribution of Scotland's Jewish community as a whole to the cultural, social and economic fabric of our country, particularly in Glasgow and East Renfrewshire.

Scotland's Jewish community is heavily engaged in philanthropic education and community initiatives, fostering diversity, understanding and appreciation among different communities, promoting tolerance, and enriching Scotland's social tapestry.

Jewish entrepreneurs and professionals contribute to the economic landscape, create business, generate employment and participate in academia, innovation and development.

Our Jewish friends are at the forefront of promoting interfaith dialogue, helping to build bridges between different religions and cultural groups, and actively encouraging mutual respect and understanding.

The history of the Jewish community in Scotland is rich and varied, and it dates back to the late medieval period. Do not worry—I will not go all the way back there. Rather, we will fast forward to the early 20th century, when there was a well-established Jewish community in Glasgow. During world war two, Scotland provided a safe haven for Jewish refugees who were escaping Nazi persecution. Many Jewish refugees integrated into Scottish society and contributed in various fields.

In the post-war period, our Jewish community continued to grow, and synagogues, schools and community organisations were established. Notable contributions were made in business, science and the arts.

Today, the Jewish community in Scotland is diverse, and members of it contribute across various aspects of Scottish life. Our synagogues, community centres and educational institutions play crucial roles in preserving Jewish identity and fostering connections with the broader community.

Calderwood Lodge primary school continues that much-valued tradition. Family and community are at the core of the school experience, underpinned by the study of Hebrew and Jewish values. Children are guided to develop the necessary skills to make positive contributions to Scotland and the world at large, now and in the future.

I congratulate Calderwood Lodge primary school on its 60th anniversary.

18:21

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): The challenge in responding on behalf of the Government in such debates is that everyone who has gone before—not least the person who lodged the motion—has covered pretty much everything. Therefore, please accept my apologies if the next few minutes offer little fresh insight.

Seeking to match the eloquence, humour and delivery of Jackson Carlaw on most topics is, of course, a task beyond most of us—certainly me, and certainly tonight. I enjoyed his contribution, and I thank him for securing this debate.

I also thank the other contributors, particularly Paul O'Kane. Collectively, they have shone a light on the history and achievements of Calderwood Lodge primary school, and, in so doing, they have reminded all of us in passing about what members' business debates were designed to be

about: parking the politics and, as MSPs, marking significant landmarks for organisations in our constituencies and beyond, as well as highlighting the good about the communities that we are privileged to represent.

Lovely, thought-provoking points have been made that highlight the special nature of Calderwood Lodge primary school. As other members have done, I congratulate the school on the achievement of reaching its 60th anniversary.

I will pick up some points that have been made.

Jackson Carlaw noted the particular nature of the school. Generations of the same households have gone to it. That is quite unique in education these days, with families moving around the country.

John Swinney highlighted the aims and vision of the school. He was right to note their worthiness.

Paul O’Kane took us back to the establishment of the current facility, six years ago, and talked about the trust-building exercise that had to be embarked on. I do not doubt how challenging that must have been at the time, but I am sure that he is thinking how worth while it was to take on that challenge.

Denominational schools have played a key role in the Scottish education system for over 100 years. They provide our faith communities with an opportunity to bear to witness to their faith through the education of their children.

Many other denominational schools have a diverse intake that reflects the range of faiths in the communities. Parents of other faiths and no faith often choose a denominational school for their children’s education. Jackson Carlaw talked about the Muslim cohort at Calderwood Lodge primary school, which I suspect is quite unique. That demonstrates community cohesion.

Members have mentioned the joint campus, which brought together Calderwood Lodge and St Clare’s primary schools on the same site and was the first of its kind in Scotland. As John Swinney reminded us, in 2017, the Scottish Government was pleased to provide the modest sum of £300,000 towards the project to create a shared faith space at the heart of the campus to encourage new ways of learning, teaching and socialising, as well as interfaith interaction, while fostering respect, collaboration and understanding.

Diversity and equality are at the heart of the policies that underpin education in Scotland, and we must be vigilant in challenging any discriminatory and abusive behaviour in our schools, in any form. Where it occurs, it must be challenged through educating our children about all faiths and belief systems and none, and ensuring that they learn about tolerance, respect,

equality, good citizenship and healthy relationships. From what we have heard tonight, it is clear that Calderwood Lodge lights the way for us in that regard.

The Government’s anti-racism in education programme provides oversight of a number of areas of work that are embedding anti-racism in education, including education leadership and professional learning; increasing diversity in the teaching profession; decolonising the curriculum; and tackling racist incidents in schools.

The Scottish Government absolutely values and appreciates our relationship with Scotland’s Jewish communities, and we welcome their contribution and input to our nation’s civic life. We acknowledge the cultural and religious identity of those communities, and we will continue to work together to tackle prejudice and support one another in building the society that we want to be—a safer, stronger and fairer Scotland.

Events in Israel and Palestine, as awful as they are, do not justify expressions of racial or religious hatred of any kind. Although we are not seeing the same rise in reported hate crime as has been seen elsewhere in these islands, we should not be complacent in that regard. Just this week, the Minister for Victims and Community Safety launched the hate crime strategy delivery plan at the tackling hate crime and building cohesive communities conference. However, we should not need strategies or delivery plans here, because this is about tolerance, respect and decency—the hallmarks that should underpin any society, especially our society.

We greatly value Calderwood Lodge primary’s contribution to the Jewish community in East Renfrewshire. The school is rightly a source of pride not only to that community but to others, including the wider community in that locality. Once again, I congratulate Calderwood Lodge on reaching the milestone of its 60th anniversary year. I also congratulate Jackson Carlaw on securing this platform to highlight that achievement and on his excellent speech.

Meeting closed at 18:27.

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