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Wednesday 15 May 2024

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 15 May 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture. I remind members that questions 4 and 8 are grouped together; therefore, I will take any supplementaries on those questions after both have been answered.

UK-EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement

1. Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on what discussions it has had with stakeholders in Scotland affected by Brexit in preparation for any input that it will provide to the review of the United Kingdom-European Union trade and co-operation agreement. (S6O-03420)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I begin by congratulating the Scottish Chamber Orchestra on marking its 50th anniversary. The SCO not only is a jewel in the Scottish cultural firmament but is outstanding in touring and performing throughout Scotland, supporting social inclusion and underlining the role of culture in education, health and wellbeing. I am sure that colleagues across the chamber will join me in congratulating Gavin Reid, SCO performers and conductors past and present and all SCO staff, volunteers, directors, donors and supporters.

In answer to Collette Stevenson's question, the TCA review is due in 2026 but we are not waiting until then to seek changes, not least because recent research has found that Brexit cost the UK economy £69 billion last year.

I hear from stakeholders regularly about Brexit and did so most recently at a meeting of the Scottish advisory forum on Europe in April, which I attended alongside the European Union's ambassador to the UK. The message from Scottish stakeholders was consistent: Brexit has increased costs and uncertainty for our businesses and diminished opportunities for our young people. I have repeatedly pressed the UK Government to address those self-inflicted harms.

Collette Stevenson: Has the cabinet secretary had dialogue with the UK Government regarding population policy following the enforcement of new post-Brexit immigration rule changes, in light of the potential consequences for social care, universities and Scottish society?

Angus Robertson: The simple answer is yes. Scottish ministers have written repeatedly to the UK Government raising serious concerns on immigration changes. For example, we invited the Home Office to work with us to deliver our positively received rural visa pilot proposal, which would seek to address labour market shortages and population challenges in rural and island communities. However, the UK Government rejected the proposal, despite its strong stakeholder support.

Immigration is a cross-cutting policy that has a significant impact on areas of devolved responsibility. Scotland should be able to attract talented and committed people from across the world to work and study here without excessive barriers.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 2 is from Clare Haughey, who joins us remotely.

Scottish Diaspora

2. Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is taking forward work to engage with the Scottish diaspora. (S6O-03421)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Scotland embraces opportunities to strengthen its international relationships by better engaging with our diaspora. We believe that it can benefit us economically and culturally and can improve Scotland's influence and reputation.

In 2023, we published the "Scottish Connections Framework", which sets out our cross-cutting approach to strengthening relationships with Scotland's international groups and developing digital resources to help people join our Scottish connections community.

This year, we aim to establish an external advisory panel and launch the second round of the Scottish connections fund, as we continue building relationships globally through our international offices, Scottish Development International, GlobalScot's trade and investment envoys, and public bodies.

Clare Haughey: The year 2026 will mark the 900th anniversary of the charter of Rutherglen as a royal burgh. A growing programme of community-led events and celebrations is already being planned to celebrate the town's history and to look towards the future. Rutherglen has a strong

local identity, of which its people are very proud, and many residents past and present have a keen interest in sharing their stories and memories. Can the cabinet secretary give further information about support that is available to local groups and organisations to strengthen those connections and reach out to the wider Ruglonian diaspora?

Angus Robertson: Our digital tools for the diaspora are available on the website www.scotland.org to help people and organisations around the world, including in Rutherglen, to join our Scottish connections community. Through our online registration service, anyone can register as a member of Scotland's international community to receive regular communications on news from Scotland or activity that is happening locally. Whether individuals are part of our heritage diaspora, want to connect with Scottish business or education, or want to hear more about our arts and culture, our community directory brings together Scottish organisations and groups into one handy list.

Young Musicians (Impact of Brexit)

3. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of Brexit on young musicians. (S6O-03422)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government recognises that the United Kingdom Government's decision to leave the European Union has had profoundly negative consequences for musicians in Scotland. It is particularly regrettable that younger and less well-established musicians are likely to have been more severely affected. Touring in Europe is now far more difficult, given the need for costly visas and work permits, and the customs restrictions. Stakeholders have indicated that younger musicians who may be at the start of their career might find those barriers harder to overcome due to their being less well established and experienced, with fewer resources.

The loss of access to the creative Europe programme has also had a major impact. The programme played a vital role in facilitating international cultural collaboration, helping young artists to develop cross-border networks, share knowledge and learn from their peers. The Scottish Government continues to call on the UK Government to rejoin creative Europe.

Michelle Thomson: At a recent round table that I hosted with the European Movement, we heard compelling evidence of the impact of Brexit on young musicians. It was testimony from the singer Iona Fyfe that struck me the most. Still relatively early in her career, she anticipates that the loss of free movement into Europe will have a significant

impact. If we do not keep young musicians in the profession who have opportunities to grow and learn and make contacts, we risk much of the social infrastructure and, indeed, the wider arts cluster. I am aware of the very good work that the Scottish Government has done to understand the immediate concerns of musicians generally, but is the Scottish Government collecting data from young musicians specifically over the longer term so that the wider impacts can be felt?

Angus Robertson: Michelle Thomson makes a very good point. We work with and support organisations that support young Scottish musicians. I was recently at the Scottish musical showcase Wide Days, which does tremendous work in helping young musicians at the beginning of their careers to springboard into European markets for the first time.

I also put on the record our appreciation of the announcement by the European Commission that it would welcome a youth mobility arrangement with the United Kingdom, which would obviate many of the problems that we have been discussing. It is extremely disappointing that the UK Government has already rejected that and, in some respects, it is even more disappointing that the Labour Party dismissed it even before the UK Government did.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Shetland young fiddler of the year is an annual competition that is held in April and that demonstrates the talent in the islands. It is a great shame that our young musicians and touring artists are being stifled by Brexit red tape. What constructive engagement has the Scottish Government had with UK counterparts to help to resolve those constraints and discuss any future changes after a UK general election?

Angus Robertson: I would very much hope that, if there were to be a change of Government at the next UK general election, the incoming Government would look very quickly at U-turning on the rejection of the European Commission's proposal for a mobility scheme. That would be very welcome. It would also be very welcome if the Liberal Democrats were to use their voice to speak in support of the European Commission's proposal, which was eminently sensible.

In addition, anything that we can do to change people's minds about schemes such as creative Europe and, for that matter, Erasmus+ would be key. Where parties can work together across the chamber to support youth mobility and to support the creative sector through the likes of creative Europe, we should all embrace that opportunity.

Culture (Funding)

4. **Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the culture secretary has had with the finance secretary regarding future funding for culture, in light of its commitment to invest an additional £100 million in the sector. (S6O-03423)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): We are increasing funding for the culture sector in this financial year by £15.8 million to £196.6 million, which is the first step on the route to investing at least £100 million more annually in culture and the arts by the financial year 2028-29. In 2025-26, we aim to provide an additional £25 million for the culture sector.

I have highlighted to the finance secretary on a number of occasions—and, more recently, to the new First Minister and Deputy First Minister—the importance of additional funding for the culture sector. As is the normal procedure, the Scottish budget for 2025-26 will be published later in the year.

Sarah Boyack: The former First Minister made the pledge seven months ago, so we would have liked to have received more detail today on how organisations can access that critical finance. In Edinburgh, our world-class culture sector is hanging by a thread. The Edinburgh Filmhouse's open the doors campaign has, thankfully, done very well, but the King's theatre urgently needs major investment and, just this week, the Summerhall events venue is set to be put on the market.

Our arts and culture sector is too important for government by press release. It needs urgent support, and people need to know how to access funding. Will the cabinet secretary outline what additional funding will be available, how people will be able to access it and how the Government will not only support but grow Edinburgh's world-class culture sector?

Angus Robertson: Sarah Boyack has identified both the challenge and the opportunity as we ramp up culture spending. Cultural organisations know how to get in touch with Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government, and they do so regularly, including to deal with the financial distress that is experienced by the venues that Sarah Boyack has mentioned and others that are not in the public realm. I assure her that the Scottish Government and arm's-length organisations such as Creative Scotland take such distress extremely seriously, and we are trying to ensure that there are the financial means to deal with that.

I know that Sarah Boyack is committed to the culture sector, and she can meet me at any stage to discuss at greater length any priorities that she

has identified or to give early warning about venues or organisations to ensure that they can get through difficulties, because—I assure her—we are seized of the need to address such issues in Edinburgh and throughout the rest of Scotland.

Culture and the Arts (Funding)

8. **Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the constitution secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding the delivery of its commitment to invest at least £100 million more in culture and the arts by the financial year 2028-29. (S6O-03427)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): As I said a moment ago in response to Ms Boyack's question, we are increasing funding to the culture sector in this financial year by £15.8 million to £196.6 million, which is the first step on the route to investing at least £100 million more annually in culture and the arts by the financial year 2028-29. I think that there is support for that across the chamber.

I will continue to hold discussions with ministerial colleagues about how best to support the culture sector to deliver on our programme for government and culture strategy commitments on engaging across the Government to harness the transformational power of culture.

As I have said repeatedly in the chamber, if any member has views on particular areas that need support and feels that the situation has not been well understood by the Government or funding organisations, I make the offer that I made to Sarah Boyack. I give that undertaking to Liam Kerr, too—perhaps he has an example that he wishes to share now.

Liam Kerr: I am grateful to the cabinet secretary for that answer, but I will press him on it, because I take his offer in the spirit in which it was made.

Certainty is key to allowing Scotland's brilliant culture sector to continue to invest, innovate and deliver on the world stage. With reference to Sarah Boyack's point about the pledged £100 million, how much will be available to sustain the Scottish culture sector right now, and how much of the total allocation will the sector receive in each year up to 2028-29?

Angus Robertson: Liam Kerr understands enough about the budget process to know that £15.8 million has already been identified and committed to in the current budget and that £25 million has been committed to in the next financial year. I see that he is taking notes, so he will probably be able to work out that that leaves about another £60 million. This is an aggregate increase,

so there will be a rise and then the £100 million rise in culture funding will be sustained annually. It is a very considerable increase.

I appreciate that Liam Kerr and other colleagues wish the funding to ramp up as quickly as possible, and it is no secret that I do, too. If he and colleagues across the chamber want to highlight areas that need funding to help the sector to recover, especially from what has happened since Covid, I assure them that such issues are at the forefront of my mind. If he would like to raise with me the cases of particular venues, organisations or parts of the culture and arts sector, my door is open to him and to all other colleagues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have had four requests for supplementary questions. I would like to take them all, but I will need questions and answers to be succinct.

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): I am due to meet with the cabinet secretary shortly, but I want to bring his attention to the closure of Motherwell concert hall in my region, because it is a well-loved facility that has entertained many in Lanarkshire for decades. I want to emphasise the detrimental impact on local economies and the restriction of the growth of talent who rely on smaller venues to get their big break. How will the cabinet secretary work with local councils to save these much-loved music venues, which are of substantial cultural importance and represent a substantial cultural heritage, given the announcement of investment in the sector?

Angus Robertson: I thank Meghan Gallacher for asking that question, which is perhaps a preview of the conversation that we are going to have and that I very much look forward to. These challenges are issues that I discussed with the Music Venue Trust only a few weeks ago, and we are very aware of the fact that a significant number of venues have been suffering distress. It is also the case that, in some parts of the country, local authorities are no longer supporting local venues. Therefore, we will need to work together—parliamentarians, colleagues in local government, the Scottish Government and our arm's-length funding organisations—to maintain the infrastructure of venues right across the country.

I undertake to look at the example that Meghan Gallacher has raised so that I have more information at my fingertips to discuss when we meet shortly. That is a very good example of areas where we can work constructively together.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The cabinet secretary may claim today that the Scottish Government is acting to protect the arts and culture sector, but the situation on the ground tells a different story, with cancelled festivals and cultural organisations calling out for greater

support from the Scottish Government. It is clear that our culture sector is under enormous pressure, so will the cabinet secretary heed Labour's call for a crisis summit on festival funding?

Angus Robertson: As I have said already to Foysoyl Choudhury and other colleagues on the Labour benches, we are engaged in a dialogue with festivals. We are discussing their funding and how they can emerge from the current financial distress in the sector. I regularly—weekly—talk with colleagues in the festival sector. Across the chamber, we are all committed to ensuring that our major cultural events are sustainable. I am sure that he will join me in welcoming the record number of participants in the Edinburgh festival fringe this year.

There is a lot of good news that we should be highlighting. At the same time, we recognise that, where there is financial distress, we need to do everything that we can to ensure that our festivals, venues and cultural organisations are able not only to survive but to thrive in the years to come.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): The culture sector has had to endure the shock of the Brexit fallout, the pandemic, the energy crisis and mismanagement of the economy by the United Kingdom Government. How will this fund ensure vital support for the sector at this critical juncture and ensure that it can respond fully to those pressures?

Angus Robertson: That is exactly what the Scottish Government and Creative Scotland are trying to do. We are trying to ensure that, where there is financial distress, there are interventions in place to enable venues and organisations to continue to trade and to turn around their circumstances. A significant number of interventions have done just that, and I put on record my appreciation of colleagues in the culture directorate of the Scottish Government, in Creative Scotland and in Screen Scotland who have ensured that well-known and loved events will continue into the future.

However, we need to think in the medium and long term instead of dealing only with the immediate crisis. We need to make sure that multiyear funding—which I think everyone supports—is rolled out successfully and that the increase of funding that this Government has committed to and is delivering, in contrast to both the UK Government in England—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary—

Angus Robertson: —and the Labour Government in Wales—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you. I am keen to call Mark Ruskell to ask a supplementary question.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Last week, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee at Westminster urged the UK Government to press ahead with a UK-wide arena ticket levy preceded by an interim voluntary scheme that is led by industry. That approach is essential if we are to prevent grass-roots music venues from closing. They absolutely need that investment. I know that the cabinet secretary has been supportive of a ticket levy in the past. When might a stadium tax be introduced in Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I have discussed that issue in detail with the Music Venue Trust. The member probably met delegates from MVT when they were here last week, when they were also attending the Wide Days music showcase in Edinburgh.

As the member knows, a number of models are being proposed. I raised the issue directly with the UK Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport because, as I think Mark Ruskell understands, not all of that falls within our devolved powers. As I have said to him, I am very interested in learning about deliverable and workable ways in which extra funding can be leveraged into the culture and arts sector.

In summary, it is a work in progress and I very much hope that the UK Government is listening to us and to the Music Venue Trust.

Arts and Culture Sector

5. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it can ensure that the public has confidence in the arts and culture sector. (S6O-03424)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The commitment to invest at least £100 million more annually in culture and the arts by the financial year 2028-29, despite the challenging budget situation, signals our confidence in the Scottish culture sector and is the starting point of a journey of three phases—first to sustain, then to develop, then to innovate.

Through that increased investment, we want to drive up opportunities for participation in creative pursuits, support the production of new works and ensure that Scotland's cultural output has platforms at home and internationally.

Alexander Stewart: The new Deputy First Minister recently said:

"The economic choices we make now, this year, will determine whether Scotland reaps the benefits for decades to come or forever laments the missed opportunities."

However, we are hearing no mention of arts and culture. Will the new Cabinet be one of continuity or will we finally see tangible support for an industry that is worth billions and supports tens of thousands of jobs?

Angus Robertson: Alexander Stewart has been here for the entirety of portfolio questions, so he will have heard me repeatedly underlining the Scottish Government's commitment—it is held across Government, including by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister—to increasing culture funding, while it is being cut by the United Kingdom Government in England and by the Labour Government in Wales. We are absolutely committed to supporting our culture and arts sector.

At the same time—Alexander Stewart is highlighting economic success—we should not omit to mention awareness of some fantastic stories. For example, the screen sector has already reached the stage of providing to the Scottish economy annual gross value added of more than £600 million. By 2030, the figure will be £1 billion. There are some really good news stories about things that are having a major economic impact. We want to support the screen sector and the rest of the culture and arts sector to succeed, so I hope that the member will support us in those endeavours.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): It is vital that the public have confidence in decisions that affect the arts and culture sector. According to the ministerial code, as a representative of the Edinburgh Central constituency the cabinet secretary must recuse himself from decisions that affect the area in order to avoid any conflict of interests. Concerns have been raised about that in recent days.

Given that Edinburgh Central is a hub of cultural activity and the home of the Edinburgh festivals, and given that the cabinet secretary no longer has a deputy culture minister, will he clarify which minister, in the interests of public confidence, will take on responsibility for those decisions and on what grounds, and what opportunity will there be for members to hold that minister to account?

Angus Robertson: Neil Bibby is absolutely right to ask about changes in Government and what they mean for the decision-making process. The good news is that major culture decisions, including decision on our festivals, which are national events, are still the responsibility of the cabinet secretary for culture—namely, me. If there are day-to-day issues or areas in which there might be grounds for recusal, the minister who will have responsibility in those cases is the Deputy First Minister, Kate Forbes.

Creative Scotland (Funding)

6. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to reports that over half of applications to Creative Scotland could be turned down as a result of “standstill funding” from the Scottish Government. (S6O-03425)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government provides significant funding to Creative Scotland each year. Creative Scotland received applications from 281 cultural organisations at stage 2 of their multiyear funding, with a total ask of £87.5 million per year. I expect that the ask will reduce as Creative Scotland undertakes its due diligence and assessment of applications.

Jamie Greene: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response, and I hope that he will join me in congratulating the Wyllieum, the new gallery that has recently opened in Greenock. I invite him, if he has not been down there already, to come and visit. I will happily treat him to a spot of lunch if he does.

There are wider concerns about some of the funding mechanisms that Creative Scotland is in charge of. One industry collective called Culture Counts estimates that more than half the applications might be turned down. The phrase “standstill funding” is a quotation directly from Creative Scotland. It is its belief that funding is not increasing at the rate that it would expect or hope for. Does the cabinet secretary share my concern that it is not just that the size of the pie is worryingly small but that the method by which it has been carved up might leave many people in our culture sector disappointed?

Angus Robertson: Jamie Greene knows that Creative Scotland operates as an arm’s-length organisation. It is not for culture secretaries to instruct how bits of culture funding that are disbursed through Creative Scotland should be disbursed. Creative Scotland regularly gives evidence to the Scottish Parliament, so members of the relevant committees can ask questions about that.

Culture Counts is not just any cultural organisation: it is an umbrella organisation. I listen closely to what it has to say about all such things. It also regularly gives evidence to Scottish Parliament committees and publishes excellent reports that I read very closely.

I agree with Jamie Greene that we have to give the maximum amount of money that we are able to give for disposal by Creative Scotland and to our national performing companies—we were talking earlier about the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. There has been an increase in

Government funding to our national performing companies. We need to ensure that funding is apportioned fairly right across the sector—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, cabinet secretary.

Angus Robertson: —and that is exactly what we will do.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will take a brief supplementary from Rhoda Grant.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): Creative Scotland’s current funding model, which provides three-year funding, has resulted in the Hebridean Celtic festival—which is one of the most important events in my region—facing a catastrophic funding gap post-2024. That, combined with the removal of local authority funding, means that there is no prospect of any public funding until 2028 at the earliest. The cabinet secretary is aware that the loss of the festival would remove millions of pounds from the local economy, which desperately needs it. Will he look at the funding model and review how Creative Scotland provides funding and its processes and policies, to make sure that we do not lose jewels such as the HebCelt festival?

Angus Robertson: It is only fair to acknowledge that, when a new system of funding is introduced, the organisations and venues that receive funding are often delighted. One hears a lot less about that than one hears about venues or organisations that have not been successful in the bidding process.

I agree absolutely with Rhoda Grant that we need to understand how transitional arrangements can best be made to ensure that organisations do not face a cliff edge, as she has identified. That is very much part of my thinking. If she and her colleagues on her party’s front bench have ideas about the optimal mechanism for making sure that that happens—obviously we will learn about multiyear funding in the second phase, later this year—I would be really interested in hearing any specific suggestions.

Normandy Landings (80th Anniversary)

7. **Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what events it has planned to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the Normandy landings on 6 June. (S6O-03426)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government remembers and respects the service and sacrifice of the brave veterans who fought on D-day and in Normandy 80 years ago. As such, we are funding a Scottish national commemorative event in

partnership with the Royal British Legion Scotland. That will consist of a concert at the Usher hall on 6 June, which will pay tribute to the heroism of our D-day veterans. In addition, Legion Scotland and Poppyscotland are working to develop educational materials that aim to raise awareness of D-day across the generations and communities in Scotland.

Liz Smith: I thank the cabinet secretary, and I am sure that we wish all those who participate in the events every success.

The cabinet secretary will know that MSPs recently received information from Historic Royal Palaces on its access fund for schools and how schools can apply for financial assistance for visits. It is a charitable organisation that is working with the Government. Can the cabinet secretary tell us what work is being done between the Scottish Government and charitable organisations to facilitate a greater number of school visits to historical sites such as the D-day Atlantic wall in Sheriffmuir, in my constituency?

Angus Robertson: On the generality of the point that Liz Smith has raised, it is excellent to highlight that there are ways in which school groups can take part in particular events. I did not have advance notice of the question, so Liz Smith will forgive me for not having a detailed answer to it. However, I agree with her in general terms and I undertake to look specifically at the point that she has raised and get back to her. If there is any way in which we can amplify awareness of funds that support schools and pupils to attend such important events, I wish the Scottish Government to be supportive of that.

Justice and Home Affairs

HMP Stirling (Noise Disturbance)

1. **Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide a further update on the Scottish Prison Service's work to address reported noise disturbance at HMP Stirling. (S6O-03428)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): As the member will appreciate, that is largely an operational issue for the Scottish Prison Service, but noise complaints continue to be taken very seriously by both me and the SPS. The SPS continues to engage with residents and their elected officials regarding the operational and infrastructural actions that it is taking to reduce the noise coming from parts of the prison. Further substantial measures will require additional investment and time to ensure that they are effective, provide value for money and meet the needs of the women who live at

HMP and YOI Stirling, many of whom are vulnerable.

I know that the member is to meet the SPS shortly at HMP and YOI Stirling to discuss his concerns directly.

Keith Brown: I appreciate that the matter is primarily for the SPS, but, at a public meeting more than six months ago, the SPS gave assurances that action would be taken and very little has happened. My constituents continually report that there has been little improvement to the disruption that they have suffered for nearly a year now. Indeed, they have been asked to be patient and to consider, as the cabinet secretary says, the wellbeing of the inmates, but there appears to be no appreciation of the impact of the situation on my constituents' mental health and wellbeing. Recently, the police have been called and two-year-old children are repeating the profanities that they hear over the fence.

What further action can be taken by the SPS to immediately address the issues that my constituents have raised that will deliver a fast and effective solution to a deeply distressing situation that is impacting so negatively on the local community?

Angela Constance: I take very seriously the issues that Mr Brown raises on behalf of his constituents. I have seen some of the correspondence from his constituents and their personal testimony about the distress and disruption that they are experiencing.

I reassure Mr Brown that the Scottish Prison Service continues to work through this somewhat complex matter. Many of the women who are in the care of the Prison Service have significant needs and require intensive engagement to support them through periods of heightened state and crisis. I am informed that enhanced engagement by prison officers has resulted in a drop in the instances of excessive noise emitting from the prison, which shows that the approach is working, at least to some extent.

The SPS is also working to identify additional options that will further mitigate the noise. I assure the member that I will discuss that again with the chief executive when I next meet her.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The present situation needs to be urgently resolved for residents, staff and prisoners as we enter the 11th month of the disturbances. Residents' children are unable to play in their gardens. Residents are subjected to swearing and abusive behaviour and language and they are suffering from sleep deprivation and stress, which results in residents having no option but to move, at a financial loss. What further pressure can we put on the Scottish Prison Service to end that

misery and suffering and resolve the situation by relocating the prisoners to other parts of the prison estate?

Angela Constance: I assure Mr Stewart—as I assured Mr Brown—that I take his concerns extremely seriously. I hear the representation that Mr Stewart has made in a very considered manner over many months. We know that the noise comes primarily from the enhanced needs unit and the segregation and reintegration unit. There are three key areas of action for the Scottish Prison Service: operational interventions, which I have mentioned; work to improve the physical estate; and monitoring and communication with those who are affected, which is vital.

However, I will again raise the issue with the Scottish Prison Service and will get back to Mr Stewart and Mr Brown.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I think that the cabinet secretary knows that the situation is utterly intolerable for people who live near the prison. The SPS has offered mitigations, but they are not working. The whole community—the community inside the prison and the community outside it—deserves a lot better.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that, as Mr Stewart has already said, the only real option that is left on the table is to move the living quarters within HMP Stirling to a different part of the site? I simply cannot see another way to solve the problem. If there is another way of solving it, we need to hear quickly from the SPS what that is, and we need action.

Angela Constance: I will not repeat what I have already said to other members in this exchange, but I will say to Mr Ruskell that I will discuss with the SPS what further actions can be timeously implemented to give respite to residents. I take on board his remarks and his considered view that the situation needs to be improved, both for those who live in the care of the Prison Service and for the residents.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 2 comes from Willie Coffey, who joins us remotely.

Antisocial Behaviour

2. Willie Coffey (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government how it is tackling antisocial behaviour. (S6O-03429)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): Police Scotland and local authorities have a wide range of powers to tackle antisocial behaviour. We support them in using those powers appropriately and we are investing in prevention and early intervention. Our cashback for communities programme and

violence prevention framework take preventative approaches to antisocial behaviour and violence. The current three-year phase of cashback for communities commits £20 million to early intervention work and positive opportunities for young people in communities across Scotland. Our independent expert working group on antisocial behaviour is examining our strategic approach to antisocial behaviour and is considering how we can improve it. The group will report in late 2024.

Willie Coffey: As the minister knows, antisocial behaviour is a cause for concern in many constituencies. It is a particular concern around our bus stations, where the travelling public and transport staff are often affected by such behaviour. Can any further progress be made to address that? For example, could bus passes be removed from persistent offenders, if that is shown to be a cause, or could dispersal orders—which, I understand, are being used elsewhere in Scotland—be deployed to ensure that our bus stations are safe and welcoming for everyone?

Siobhian Brown: I thank the member for raising the issue. He will be aware that the vast majority of young people who travel by bus behave appropriately. The legislation that underpins the current schemes does not provide a clear mechanism for cards simply to be removed in cases of antisocial behaviour, and free bus travel is just one of several services that are provided through the card.

Transport Scotland is continuing to explore what deterrents and sanctions may be possible and appropriate in such cases. The member should note that the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004 already provides a wide range of measures for dealing with all antisocial behaviour, including dispersal orders, which can be considered by the police, in consultation with the local authority, on an individual or temporary basis.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): One of the unintended consequences of free bus travel for under-22s is the rise in antisocial behaviour, which Mr Coffey identified. Communities from Dumfries to Dunbar have reported groups of youths who abuse the scheme to travel to towns away from their own to engage in vandalism and other ASB activities, often causing extreme distress to drivers and passengers along the route. A resident in Pencaitland recently raised that issue with me and reported that it is

“not just rowdy, but dangerous and threatening behaviour that ranges from arson to vandalism to verbal and physical assaults.”

Given that the next review of free bus travel will not take place until 2025, will the minister now agree to meet fellow ministers, particularly

transport ministers, police, bus companies, trade unions and those communities affected, to address that unacceptable abuse of the scheme pragmatically but urgently?

Siobhian Brown: I make Mr Hoy aware that there has been on-going engagement with Police Scotland and bus companies in recent months involving both the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and me. As I said, Transport Scotland is looking at what to do with the card but not, at the moment, at such a clear mechanism as just taking the card away. We will continue to engage.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 is from James Dornan, who is joining us remotely.

“The Vision for Justice in Scotland” Delivery Plan

3. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made towards implementing its “The Vision for Justice in Scotland” delivery plan. (S6O-03430)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Good progress has been made across the justice sector to meet our vision of

“a just, safe resilient Scotland.”

Our delivery plan provides an overview of work that is being done across the sector to the end of this parliamentary term.

We have launched the violence prevention framework for Scotland, we are rolling out digital evidence-sharing capability following its successful pilot, and we have expanded summary case management for domestic abuse cases into Glasgow.

Progress continues to have tangible effects on the people of Scotland, with statistics showing recorded crime remaining at one of the lowest levels since 1974.

James Dornan: I welcome the substantial improvement in many areas across the justice system.

What further action could the Scottish Government take if it had the full range of policy and operational tools that are needed to keep the people of Scotland safe in order to build on its strong record of reducing crime and keeping people safe from harm?

Angela Constance: Although justice in Scotland is predominantly devolved, the recent “Justice in an independent Scotland” paper sets out opportunities that could be taken with independence. Having the full range of policy and operational tools would provide new choices and new chances for Scotland to take a different approach in areas such as serious organised

crime, firearms and human trafficking. Independence would, for example, allow us to extend our public health approach to violence reduction, in which we focus on prevention, into currently reserved areas, such as drug policy reform and gambling.

Rejoining the European Union would, of course, ensure that Scotland could enjoy the benefits of access to the systems and networks that were lost following Brexit, including access to the European arrest warrant and the Schengen information system.

Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): Every single police officer across the United Kingdom, except in Scotland, has the protection of a body-worn camera as standard. That remains a shameful failing of the Scottish National Party Government. “The Vision for Justice in Scotland” delivery plan sets out a timeline for cameras. Is that on track? When will Scottish officers get the protection that they deserve?

Angela Constance: I am very pleased to say that there will be some good news on that front imminently—within the next week. I would not like to spoil that experience for Mr Findlay at the start of next week.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): The delivery plan refers to the modernisation of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service but not to the state of the fire estate, although a national review of the service has been published. Nearly half of the fire estate has been assessed as being in either bad condition or poor condition. What priority is the Scottish Government giving to the lack of adequate decontamination facilities available to many firefighters, given the serious medical consequences of contact with toxins?

Angela Constance: Ms Clark has raised a crucial point with respect to the fire estate, some of which is somewhat aged and affected by reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete. That was one of the reasons why, despite the new age of austerity in which we are operating, the Scottish Government increased the resource and the capital budget available to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

I know that the minister, along with other partners—in particular, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service—is looking to progress the work around contamination, because the health of our firefighters must be of the utmost importance.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 4 was not lodged.

Police Officer Numbers

5. Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is

to reports that police officer numbers have fallen to their lowest level since the establishment of Police Scotland. (S6O-03432)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Despite the deeply challenging financial circumstances, our budget settlement for 2024-25 for Police Scotland includes an additional £75.7 million to protect front-line policing. As the chief constable confirmed to the Criminal Justice Committee, that investment will enable Police Scotland to bring officer numbers up to around 16,500 to 16,600.

This week, we expect another 120 officers to commence training, in addition to the almost 200 new officers joining in March. Further recruitment intakes are planned across the year.

Scotland continues to have more police officers per capita than England and Wales, with 30 officers per 10,000 of the population, compared with 24 officers per 10,000 of the population in England and Wales.

Colin Smyth: The cuts in police numbers are leaving our officers overwhelmed and overstretched. Many are leaving the service, and mental health absences are soaring. The Scottish Police Federation says that the service is becoming a “reactive service”, and it warns that the lack of community police gathering intelligence will lead to more organised crime.

Has the cut in police numbers on the cabinet secretary’s watch left Police Scotland in crisis? What action will she take to restore confidence with the Scottish Police Federation and officers, which has been broken as a result of the cuts in police numbers?

Angela Constance: I have already outlined to the member that, from the start of this financial year, we have reported additional recruitment. As the year progresses, there will be further recruitment, which will boost front-line police officer numbers.

I assure Mr Smyth that local policing is a central priority. The chief constable has been absolutely crystal clear about that and about ensuring that the service does not become a purely reactive service. That is why she very much welcomed the significant additional investment that the Government is making here and now.

On Mr Smyth’s remarks about the importance of the mental health of serving police officers and how they are at present expected to respond to the mental health needs of the community, I am happy to write to him further about the breadth and depth of work that is going on to ensure that police officers can be more focused on policing and that other partners play their part.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): Our police force is underfunded and overstretched. It has been forced to no longer investigate thousands of crimes. There are not enough officers, and the force does not have enough resources to perform its duties. As a result, the public will be put at greater risk. Does the cabinet secretary accept that fewer officers could mean more victims of crime?

Angela Constance: I dispute that our police service is underfunded, because we have continued to increase investment in Police Scotland year on year since 2016. I have already outlined the significant work in and around recruitment that will progress this year.

It is a sorry state of affairs when people continue to misrepresent the current practice of Police Scotland and serving police officers when the information is available. In the interests of transparency, Police Scotland has rightly said that it will continue to investigate all crimes; it is only when there are no reasonable lines of inquiry that it will quickly provide information to members of the public. That new way of working is assisting in freeing up police officer hours—for example, the north-east pilot has freed up more than 2,600 police officer hours.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): We know that there are impacts on police officers’ mental wellbeing given their difficult role. The impact of attending incidents involving mental health cases is one factor in that. What additional support services can be put in place to support officers in order to help to retain and increase numbers of officers in Police Scotland?

Angela Constance: There is particular support available for police officers, who very often in their day-to-day work have to run towards danger as opposed to running away from it. It is imperative that we support their wellbeing if they have been exposed to traumatic incidents. However, it is also crucial that we support their wellbeing because of the day-to-day stresses of their job. I think that we would all acknowledge that policing is a demanding role that is done on behalf of all of us.

Post Office (Horizon System)

6. Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update ahead of the introduction of the proposed Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill, including in relation to the potential overturning of any wrongful convictions of postmasters in Scotland that were based on evidence from the Post Office’s Horizon computer system. (S6O-03433)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): As the member will

be aware, the Scottish Government has introduced the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill. Although we have always maintained that a United Kingdom-wide approach would be the best way to achieve parity for the sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses across the UK who were convicted on the basis of tainted evidence from the Post Office Horizon system, the UK Government has chosen to exclude Scotland from the scope of its bill. The Scottish bill will therefore seek to ensure that those who are affected by the Horizon scandal can receive justice by having their convictions quashed, and postmasters will have access to compensation via the UK scheme in the same way as their English and Welsh counterparts.

Gillian Mackay: Many of those who were prosecuted using Horizon evidence have already been seeking justice for wrongful prosecution, and all their lives have been monumentally affected by those failures. Given that the UK Government has so far declined to pursue the Post Office or its partner, Fujitsu, in respect of bonuses granted in relation to Horizon, has the Scottish Government considered addressing that corporate wrongdoing through the forthcoming bill or by other means?

Angela Constance: Due to the nature of devolved and reserved matters, it would be somewhat difficult for the Scottish Government to address issues of corporate culpability. The ongoing public inquiry by Wyn Williams is of critical importance. We stand by to play our part, as necessary, on any of those recommendations when they come. In his previous post, my colleague Neil Gray made strenuous representations and expressed the Government's view to Fujitsu on its involvement with respect to the Post Office.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): The UK-wide use of the tainted Horizon computer system evidence was the decision of the Post Office. As such, does the cabinet secretary share my concern that the recent coverage makes it clear that, during the past number of years, those at the top of the Post Office repeatedly obscured and provided misleading information?

Angela Constance: Following on from my reply to Gillian Mackay, I say to Rona Mackay that I have been following with interest the progress of the UK inquiry and I am, of course, concerned about the emerging information about the Post Office investigations and the prosecution of innocent postmasters. We must allow the inquiry to take its course. However, while the inquiry progresses, our focus firmly remains on addressing the grave miscarriages of justice through the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill, which will bring parity of justice for postmasters in Scotland.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Scottish Labour welcomes the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill. Will the cabinet secretary consider that there might be related offences? I am aware of a case in which a sub-postmaster was accused of defrauding £35,000, but, to save his mother from jail, her son pled guilty to taking cash that we now know did not go missing at all, and he was subsequently convicted. Will the cabinet secretary be open minded that that man is as much a victim of the Horizon scandal as his mother was? Will she consider whether there is a way to fix that in the bill?

Angela Constance: We will be open minded as we progress. We need to take considerable care, though—I say that to be up front and in the interest of parity—because we want to ensure that the Scottish bill mirrors the English, Welsh and Northern Irish bills, as far as possible in Scots law, so that we have parity of access to justice and, crucially, to compensation.

Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Meetings with Lord Advocate)

7. Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when the justice secretary last met with the Lord Advocate. (S6O-03434)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I meet law officers, both formally and informally, on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues. I last met the Lord Advocate and Solicitor General formally on 18 April.

Alexander Burnett: For over five years, a constituent of mine who is a victim of domestic abuse has been failed by the Scottish National Party justice system. Across two criminal cases, there have been a total of 24 deferrals because the defendant has failed to turn up, refused to employ legal representation, refused court-appointed solicitors and failed to engage with court-appointed social workers.

I have written numerous times to the procurator fiscal, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service and the Lord Advocate, and eight times to the cabinet secretary. None of them has achieved anything and all are referring me to one another. All this time, my constituent's suffering has been prolonged.

Defendants should be taken into custody if they repeatedly fail to turn up, and courts should have more powers to appoint solicitors. What action will the cabinet secretary take to prevent such stalling tactics?

Angela Constance: I am, indeed, more than aware of Mr Burnett's correspondence on behalf of his constituent. In previous correspondence, I

have referred to the work that we are doing to ensure that additional investment in the courts system can assist in ensuring that our systems are more efficient and effective in holding people to account and getting quicker resolutions. I would be happy to meet Mr Burnett if that would be at all helpful.

As I have said to Mr Burnett previously, I have to be respectful of those independent players in terms of the judiciary, the Lord Advocate and other actors in the system, but I recognise the considerable trauma that his constituent has experienced.

Legal Aid (Stakeholder Engagement)

8. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its engagement with stakeholders in the legal sector regarding the provision of legal aid. (S6O-03435)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): “The Vision for Justice in Scotland: Three Year Delivery Plan” contains an action to reform the legal aid system and to engage with key stakeholders to inform and shape future legislative proposals. Any future proposals will build on the Martyn Evans review recommendations and subsequent public consultation. Officials will engage in a series of stakeholder engagement sessions.

I jointly chair a working group with the Law Society of Scotland and the Faculty of Advocates that has been convened to consider the future of the legal profession in Scotland, and I regularly meet the Law Society and the Faculty of Advocates. I recently met the Scottish Solicitors Bar Association, and provision of legal aid was discussed.

Liam McArthur: Over recent years, there has been a marked drop in the availability of criminal legal aid. Figures published by the Scottish Legal Aid Board show that there are now no private solicitors taking part in either the court or the police station duty solicitor schemes in my Orkney constituency. That is obviously deeply concerning, yet the Law Society recently confirmed that it has withdrawn from talks with the Government, citing “no tangible progress” on reforming legal aid. What steps will the minister take to prevent rural and island areas from becoming, in effect, legal aid deserts?

Siobhian Brown: The legal aid system is a national one and it is flexible enough to allow services to be delivered by solicitors around the country to people all around the country. There are numerous ways in which access to solicitors can be facilitated remotely, and funding is available to allow solicitors to travel to rural and remote parts

of the country to carry out work, meaning that individuals do not have to rely on local provision alone when seeking publicly funded legal assistance.

We will continue to hold discussions with the legal profession on the main areas of concern in relation to legal aid. Both the Law Society and the SSBA are aware that the offer to re-tender for research remains. Through successful engagement with the legal profession, the Scottish Government has delivered significant investment into the legal aid system over recent years. The most recent package of fee reforms and increases was delivered on 29 April last year and took the total additional funding for legal aid to £31 million since April 2021.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on justice and home affairs. There will be a short pause before we move on to the next item of business, to allow front-bench teams to change positions should they so wish.

Teaching

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-13196, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on standing up for teaching. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak button. It will surprise nobody to hear that there is absolutely no time in hand and, therefore, members will have to stick to their speaking-time allowance.

15:00

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I am pleased to bring the debate to the chamber, because, as I have said before, education is a great leveller when it is done well. When teachers are supported, they can support their pupils, and, when pupils are supported, they have the tools to thrive and grow into the incredible people we all want them to be.

We all remember our greatest teachers, and I want to take a minute to remember two of mine. Mrs Stewart taught me English. She made sure that I passed and could go to university, including by supporting my request for additional help to scribe in exams. Mrs Devine was the support for learning teacher who had high aspirations for everyone in her additional support for learning base, including me. She let me do my physio there, and, while I was doing that, she took the time to tell me that people like me could go to university. She encouraged me to go. She talked about what she could do to help to make that happen, which she then did. I want to pay tribute to them and teachers across Scotland who are doing their best every day to support pupils to achieve their best and be their best. To them, I say thank you.

However, I wonder whether the teachers who changed my life would today have the support that they need to do that for the next generation. The truth is that teachers are now expected to do far more work with far less time, money and support from their Government, and I regret that we are now seeing the dire consequences of that. Teachers are leaving the profession early, probationers are less likely to be offered permanent jobs, burnout is at its highest level in years, workloads are soaring and teacher mental health is suffering. In addition, because of the Government's failure to fulfil its promises, teacher non-contact time is still too high and class sizes are still too big. In Glasgow, it is so bad that one teacher has asked whether we are determined to

"burn out the existing staff while making school environments more stressful and stretched".

Another said:

"I cannot, in good faith, recommend teaching as a career any longer. I would leave for another profession if I wasn't sustained by my commitment to the pupils".

I thank those teachers for their commitment to their pupils, but it is unacceptable that good will is the only thing that is now retaining teachers.

Because of the Government's cuts to local authority budgets and its delay on reform and on action on behaviour, current and future teachers have become disillusioned. Just over the weekend, a leading developmental psychologist spoke of the harm that that is causing and what the lack of support for teachers does to them and young people. Adults cannot support children if we do not support them. They cannot pour from an empty cup. Axing teacher jobs and not supporting teachers and school staff has consequences. We know that it will hit our most disadvantaged students the hardest, and there is no doubt that it will set back aims to bridge the attainment gap.

To make matters worse, in Glasgow, the cuts do not stop at teacher numbers—the essential MCR Pathways programme is at risk, too. That programme supports young people and doubles their chances at positive destinations. Cutting it will

"let down our young people",

as one teacher has said. Cutting it would fly in the face of the idea that we can keep the Promise or close the attainment gap, and the Government should be ashamed that its colleagues in the council are even considering it.

The same can be said for cuts to the developing the young workforce co-ordinators programme. A teacher said of those cuts that

"attacks on the jobs for DYW co-ordinators is an attack on the life chances of our children".

I agree.

The cuts are not the result of an assessment of what is best for our children. Indeed, any such assessment, if it existed, would prove quite the opposite. The cuts are a consequence of 17 years of failure to properly fund local authorities, and they reflect an abject failure of successive cabinet secretaries, including the current First Minister, to prioritise education.

Teachers have called the cuts short-sighted and have said that pupils who require the most support will be largely abandoned. Parents have said that the cuts will mean that there are no teachers to help with literacy and numeracy, to run parent and child activities or school trips, or to facilitate sporting competitions. There will be no music service, no new resources or subscriptions to learning services and no teachers to provide additional support to the pupils who need it.

On that issue, the Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee's report, published this morning, laid bare how bad things are. It found that access to services outwith the education setting has diminished, that services in schools are now being delivered by school staff without appropriate support and back-up, and that there are issues in recruiting pupil support workers, teachers and other specialist staff that are having an alarming impact on the provision of additional support for pupils. The committee's report says, and I agree, that that is "intolerable".

For nearly 10 years, the Government has said that education has been its number 1 priority, but is the extent of that priority and the Government's ambition for young people in Scotland deep cuts to the core provision of education and the talented people who work within it? We, on the Labour benches, will not sit back and accept that. Our ambitions for Scotland's education system and Scotland's young people go far beyond that. We will not watch the next generation of young people be let down by their Government's failure to stand up for education.

That is why we have secured the debate for the chamber and why we call on the Government to act, to recognise that local authorities need sustainable funding, to publish a plan to address gaps in the teaching and education workforce, to protect staff in schools and, crucially, to prevent teacher job losses. We, on these benches, believe that education can lift the class, glass and step ceiling in the way of opportunity. We cannot do that with more of the same, so we say that it is time to stand up for teachers and stand up for the next generation, because Scotland deserves so much better than this.

I move,

That the Parliament is concerned by reported plans to cut teacher posts in a number of local authorities, including Glasgow City Council, where 172 jobs are at risk in 2024, rising to 450 jobs that are to be cut over the next three years; recognises that teacher numbers have fallen, compared with 2007, and that these cuts will have the greatest impact on pupils in the most deprived communities; notes that the target numbers of student teachers in some subjects have not been met; considers that the increasing precarity of teaching as a profession makes it harder to attract and retain high-quality candidates; understands that local authorities require stability of funding to provide permanent teaching roles and drive up standards in education in Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to intervene to prevent job losses and publish a comprehensive plan to address gaps in the teaching and school staff workforce to inform future recruitment and retention.

15:07

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): I welcome this afternoon's debate during Labour Party business. As the First

Minister set out last week, we are in new, although not uncharted, territory as a Government. Across the parties, we have worked well on a number of different issues in relation to Scottish education in the past year, and I have been indebted to the Opposition for its contributions in relation to improving behaviour in our schools, most recently, and on qualifications reform.

Today, it is in that spirit—[*Interruption.*]*—*that I will listen to challenge from the Opposition and, as the Government amendment sets out, commit to taking the necessary action that is required to drive improvements for Scotland's teachers—improvements that will ultimately lead to improved outcomes for our young people.

Scotland's teachers are the beating heart of our education system, but, on my appointment to this post just over a year ago, I was struck by the challenges that the pay dispute had not resolved. Workload, behaviour and cultural change post-pandemic were contributing to an increasing frustration among the profession, as well as a feeling that they were not valued. I say this to my former profession today: this Government values you. I value you and the compassion that you provide to our young people every day. The extra hours, the extra care and the extra mile that you go for our children make a difference, and we are lucky as a country to have you.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is strange that members of the teaching profession are expected to buy so much stuff for their classrooms to ensure that children have the experiences that they need, unlike almost any other profession in this country?

Jenny Gilruth: I thank Martin Whitfield for his intervention. I do not think that the issues that he is raising are particularly new or nuanced. That has happened over the course of a number of decades in relation to resourcing in schools, but I recognise some of the challenge. I will come on to talk about the resource that this Government is providing. However, if there are suggestions from members on the Labour benches about how we could do things differently, I am all ears.

The policy that I want to talk about is mentioned in the Labour motion and relates to teacher numbers. The Government has a long-standing policy on and financial commitment to protecting teacher numbers and, as education secretary, I will fervently defend that policy. I am absolutely clear that, with fewer teachers, our schools will not be able to respond to the challenges in our classrooms post-pandemic.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention on that point?

Jenny Gilruth: I am happy to do so, although I am conscious of the time.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Is the cabinet secretary therefore concerned that the Government is missing many of its targets to recruit teachers in particularly important secondary school subjects?

Jenny Gilruth: Yes, I am deeply concerned about that point. All of us in the chamber have a responsibility to ensure that we have more people coming into the teaching profession and to talk positively about the difference that they can make in our schools.

I will come on to talk in a moment about some of the ways in which we are supporting that, but I first want to touch on some of the challenges in our schools just now and why the Government has decided to ring fence an additional £145.5 million in this year's budget specifically to protect teacher numbers.

This year, we have changed the approach to funding due to some of the challenge that is highlighted in today's Labour motion. Where we have seen slight dips in recent years, the Government has always maintained a position that we seek to claw back the funding if it is not used for the purpose of maintaining teacher numbers. That is not a position that I wish to be in as education secretary, so, as a result, I chose not to recoup funding that was provided to Scotland's councils this year. I should say that the vast majority of Scotland's schools have maintained or increased their teacher numbers, and to them I say thank you. That additional funding is also helping to protect record numbers of learning support assistants in Scotland's schools, which we know is important, given the increase in the number of children with additional support needs.

I agree with Pam Duncan-Glancy, however, that there are challenges to address in relation to teacher recruitment and retention, particularly in certain geographical areas but also in certain subjects. The Government is taking a number of actions to tackle those issues. For example, the preference waiver scheme, which members will be aware of, allows probationary teachers to receive up to £8,000 on top of their probationer salary. That means a salary of more than £40,000 for the first year in teaching, funded by the Scottish Government, for those who choose to complete their probationary year anywhere in Scotland. Indeed, Scotland's teachers remain the best paid in the UK by a considerable way.

We are also investing in our teaching bursary scheme, providing bursaries of up to £20,000 for career changers who wish to undertake a one-year postgraduate degree in education in hard-to-fill STEM—science, technology, engineering and mathematics—subjects. Of course, the policy of free tuition means that, in Scotland, our trainee teachers do not pay tuition fees, saving students up to £27,750 each for their studies. They are also

funded by the Scottish Government in relation to their first full year of probation.

I am, however, keen to work with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to develop a new education assurance board, recognising that it is local authorities and not the Scottish Government that directly employ our teachers. That has to be underpinned by the values of the Verity house agreement, so that we can collectively consider the issues in more detail.

I am conscious of the different recruitment needs across the country. There are rurality challenges for Highland Council or in Aberdeenshire, for example, and there are other challenges for Glasgow City Council, which the motion mentions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Jenny Gilruth: I am conscious of the time, and there is much more that I would like to say. However, I have an ask of the Opposition today. Minority Government gives Opposition parties a direct opportunity to adapt Government policy, so I will listen to any proposals to that end to improve teacher recruitment and retention.

In that spirit, I move amendment S6M-13196.3, to leave out from “, including” to end and insert:

“; recognises that the Scottish Government is investing in maintaining teaching numbers with an additional £145.5 million designed to support local authorities to do so; thanks those local authorities in 2022-23 that maintained or increased their teacher numbers; acknowledges that the policy of free tuition means that students in Scotland avoid incurring additional debt of up to £27,750; recognises that the Scottish Government further invests in supporting full postgraduate support, and in funding the salaries associated with the first full year of probation; recognises the challenges of rurality and subject area in certain parts of the country; confirms that action needs to be taken to reduce workload that does not support learning and teaching; recognises that the Scottish Government and the Parliament have a responsibility to promote teaching as a highly rewarding career, and agrees that the Scottish Government should engage with parties across the Parliament to hear views on how best to meet these challenges, further to work with COSLA, as underpinned by the principles of the Verity House Agreement, in a joint collaborative effort to improve the employment opportunities for all of Scotland's teachers, for the benefit of Scotland's young people.”

15:13

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): We will vote for the Labour motion because, in a Scotland-wide context in which teacher numbers are down by more than 1,000 since the SNP came to power and the overall pupil roll has risen by more than 13,000, it cannot be right that Glasgow City Council will need to axe 450 teachers over the next three years simply to balance the books. News such as that, along with the huge shortfalls

in the numbers of students who are studying to become teachers in key subjects, explains why the Government seems to be backing out of yet another manifesto commitment—this time, it is the commitment to recruit an extra 3,500 teachers.

It is not only Glasgow where there is an issue. In March, it was reported that the on-going trouble with recruiting secondary subject teachers in Aberdeenshire is reaching crisis point, with a particular shortage of English, science, technical, maths and home economics teachers. There are reports of Falkirk Council trying to plug a gap of £62 million by proposing to cut teaching time by up to two and a half hours a week. Parents have pointed out that that would lead to a pupil who starts primary 1 now losing a whole year of schooling. Orkney, Inverclyde and Clackmannanshire have floated similar plans. Further, around 11,000 teachers and school staff are stuck on temporary contracts, which is leading potential new recruits to ask themselves serious questions about the future.

There is no scenario in which an analysis of such statistics leads to good outcomes for teachers, pupils or parents—indeed, such statistics do not do that, as last year's programme for international student assessment results show that maths, science and reading are at an all-time low. Labour's motion refers to those issues, but the cabinet secretary's self-congratulatory amendment would delete all of that and does not ask the serious questions.

In fact, the Government amendment reveals two concerning fundamentals. First, the Government would rather avoid discussing uncomfortable truths; it would prefer to make an amendment that diverts, distracts and dissembles, because it fears the optics of acknowledging a perfectly reasonable Opposition motion. It is pathetic. I trust that at least Labour, whose press release yesterday called

"on all parties to come together to demand that these job losses are stopped and that children's futures are protected",

will be voting for our amendment rather than opposing it simply because it comes from the Conservatives.

Secondly, the Government amendment reveals a sobering truth—after 17 years and nearly a decade of pretending that education is its number 1 priority, there is no plan. The Government specialises in pumping out pie-in-the-sky targets, often at the time that elections roll round, but it has no idea how to deliver any of them, and some would say that it has no intention of doing so. Rather than projecting five, 10 or 15 years into the future to ask what a thriving Scottish economy and the workforce to service it would look like, and then working back to define the whole environment from early years, through school and

on to further education, higher education and apprenticeships, the Government prefers simply to react to each new piece of bad news with more unevidenced targets.

In seeking to lead from the future rather than to the future, the Scottish Conservatives have such a plan for teachers, and we have a plan for the economy, both of which are referenced in the amendment in my name—and neither of which I can recall the cabinet secretary asking me to discuss and work through, despite saying in her amendment that she wishes to do so.

We must have a sea change in our approach to the economy, to the futures of the people of Scotland, to the education that we provide to them and to how we strategise properly to create the best future for all. At decision time, let us see whether the Government can put aside performative posturing and party politicking and just once do what is right by the people of Scotland.

I move amendment S6M-13196.2, to insert at end:

"; takes on board the recommendations of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party's New Deal for Teachers to support teachers, reduce contact time and properly fund local authorities; believes that enacting these recommendations would help to facilitate the recruitment and retention of teachers, provide the highest standard of education and work to better improve the link between the education system and employers, and calls, in that regard, for the alignment of skills to meet the needs of businesses and employers both for today and into the future, as set out in the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party's Grasping the Thistle economic strategy plan."

15:17

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): The Greens will be supporting the Labour motion. I was very proud that, three years ago, when we entered Government, we came to an agreement with our SNP colleagues to increase the budget for school staffing—for teachers in particular—by £145 million. That was a real sign of progress and commitment. However, it revealed a huge challenge in relation to national commitments, which were in all five of our party manifestos, and the commitment to localism that is enshrined in the Verity house agreement, which I think all five parties support. We ended up in a situation in which £145 million of funding to increase the number of teachers in our schools did not result in an increase in their numbers, at least not nationally, even though that money was spent. I will come back to the tension between national commitments and localism in a minute.

It is fair to say that having more teachers is not the only way to close the attainment gap in our schools, but having fewer teachers clearly will not help; that will take us backwards. The motion

references the unique challenge in Glasgow, which is caused in large part by a £770 million unequal pay bill that was left by the previous Labour administration. However, a challenging national picture needs to be addressed, too. Although the Government amendment has a lot in it that I agree with, it would remove the reference to the situation in Glasgow, so the Greens will not be able to support it.

As much as I welcome the Labour Party's lodging of the motion, I am frustrated that the motion would require more Government spending, because Labour opposed not just the council tax reforms last autumn to give councils more money but the rates resolution to increase tax on the top 5 per cent of earners in Scotland as part of the budget process. If the Labour Party wants more spending, it needs to identify where it would reallocate the money from or to be honest about the need for tax rises.

I get that the Conservatives oppose tax rises, and they have started to bring forward proposed savings. I do not think that I agree with any of their suggestions so far, but it makes for an honest debate when proposals are on the table.

Fundamentally, this is an issue of finance before it is an issue of education, and that is why the proposed Green amendment focused on financial measures. I am proud of the progress that has been made recently. I believe that the devolution of empty property relief alone was worth about £12 million to Glasgow City Council this year. Greater council tax discretion in relation to second and holiday homes has been used immediately by most councils. Parliament will pass the visitor levy later this month. There are commitments to further work, including a cruise ship levy, a public health levy, an infrastructure levy and potentially a power of general competence, which will all empower councils to fund local services.

Those actions collectively all help, but we all know that the big difference will be made only by reforming council tax. Council tax has been outdated since before I was born. I know that I look as if I have had a rough paper round, but I will turn 30 next month. Throughout my entire life, every year, more and more people have moved into the wrong council tax band. Most households in this country pay the wrong rate of taxation, which is absurd. We obviously need revaluation, but we also need an outright replacement, which is why the proposed Green Party amendment said that all parties should contribute to the joint working group on local government financial sources.

The issue is not just about increasing individual tax liability. The public health levy and the carbon emissions land tax are not about individuals but about supermarkets and large landowners. The

Poverty Alliance, Oxfam and others said today, in speaking about child poverty, that Scotland is a wealthy country. Wealth has grown since devolution started in 1999, but it is hugely unequally held. We will achieve our shared goals, whether it is closing the attainment gap, creating a world-class education system or lifting children out of poverty, only if we increase spending in those areas.

The debate is fundamentally about honesty. The block grant is not close to keeping up with inflation or pay demands. We have either to cut public services or to raise revenue. Nobody is proposing to cut teacher numbers, so let us be honest about what we can do to make sure that we keep those posts, preserve those jobs and deliver the world-class education system that our children deserve.

15:21

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Just imagine what the world would have been like if Ross Greer had been in government for the past three years.

Conditions in schools are really challenging, and I think that the education secretary knows that. The report that the Education, Children and Young People Committee published this morning highlights that additional support for learning is now in an intolerable position. Pupils are being forced to fail because of the gap between the rhetoric and the reality. Teachers now have to deal with multiple needs in one class. Sometimes, up to half of the whole class can be identified as having an additional support need. That puts incredible pressure on teachers. That, combined with the behavioural issues that we all know about that lead to violence and low-level disruption, interrupts education.

Then there is absence. Pupils are regularly absent from the classroom and teachers have to spend a lot of time trying to get them to catch up. Newly qualified teachers can spend up to six years on temporary contracts. That all adds up to an intolerable position and it is why we are seeing teachers facing burn-out and considerable mental health problems.

I like the cabinet secretary's approach of reaching out to other parties. I have to remind her, however, that this is not year zero and that the Government has been there for 17 years, so she will forgive us for holding her to account for its performance in that 17 years.

The most recent set of promises in the 2021 election raised expectations among teachers that there would be free school meals, free laptops, lots of extra teachers and a reduction in teacher contact time. Most of that has fallen away, because we are nowhere near getting those 3,500

teachers. In fact, we are going in the opposite direction, partly thanks to the cabinet secretary's colleague in Glasgow City Council, who has obviously not got the memo and is reducing teacher numbers.

This is not just the Opposition being wicked; it is the reality facing local government, because the Government has made significant cuts. On the one hand, it says that we have to increase teacher numbers, but, on the other hand, it has decreased the overall funding that is available for local authorities.

Expectations have been raised, teachers are now feeling really disappointed and, to be frank, they are not listening to the education secretary any more. That is because this is not the first time—we have been here before. Back in 2007, we were promised that class sizes would be 18 or fewer for primary 1, 2 and 3, and 3,000 extra teachers were promised. Both of those promises were quickly dumped when the Government was faced with reality.

However, the most curious thing that I am interested in exploring—I hope that the cabinet secretary will address this in her summing up—is the latest research paper on reducing teacher contact time by 90 minutes. It has not been endorsed by the Government, but it has been produced under the Government's auspices. All of a sudden, the Government has discovered this new wheeze in that, because the pupil roll is falling, first in primary schools and then in secondary schools, we might not need to recruit another 3,500 extra teachers in order to meet the 90-minute reduction in teacher contact time. I am wondering why that has suddenly just been discovered. Surely the Government knew that in 2021, when it made the promise. Why on earth did it make the promise to recruit 3,500 extra teachers in 2021? Surely it did its homework and worked out that the pupil roll was falling.

More important, what does that mean for all those who are being trained through initial teacher education just now? On the 3,500 extra teachers, we are not quite reaching that with secondary schools, but we certainly are with primary schools.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Willie Rennie: Will those people face the dole queue as a result of that failure to plan adequately? I would like to hear from the cabinet secretary how on earth she will reduce teacher contact time by 90 minutes, because we deserve the answers.

15:26

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Last year, I joined members of the Educational Institute of Scotland and Unison on picket lines in their campaign for fair pay. Not a single person wanted to be on strike. Yes, they were angry that pay was falling behind, but the strike was about more than that. It was about the fact that so many pupils with additional support needs are being failed, spiralling teacher workloads and increasing incidents of violence and poor behaviour in classrooms. Just as the Government was too slow in responding to pay demands, it has been too slow in responding to those other challenges.

The fact that one in three youngsters is now identified as having additional support needs in class—compared with fewer than one in 10 a decade ago—has not just happened. For years, we have had a growing number of parents at our surgeries asking why vital learning support for their children has been cut and why their kids are waiting years to get a proper assessment.

Last year, in the absence of any meaningful engagement from the Government, the EIS surveyed its members and warned that the scarcity of support for pupils with additional support needs is compounding the pressure on school staff and damaging the educational experiences of the young people concerned. A year on, little has improved. The Education, Children and Young People Committee's report that was published today lays bare the "intolerable" reality that

"the majority of ASN pupils are not having their needs met", with chronic underresourcing being at the heart of that.

The challenges are linked. Last year's EIS survey revealed that two thirds of teachers believe that having more classroom assistants to provide support for pupils with additional support needs is likely to have the biggest impact on reducing their workload. Better resources and support for our staff in the classroom will also free up teachers and support staff to tackle some of the other underlying causes of the growing crisis of violence and poor behaviour in our classrooms.

This month, Unison revealed the details of its survey of all education support staff in Dumfries and Galloway. There were more than 400 responses from staff at more than 100 schools, nurseries and education centres throughout the region. The responses painted a harrowing picture. Almost all staff had experienced increasing levels of shouting and swearing. One respondent said:

"As part of the job I've regularly been hit, bitten, scratched, nipped, screamed at, had things thrown at me, hair pulled, glasses knocked off. Unfortunately, because we

are learning assistants, it's almost looked at as an accepted part of our job".

It should not be.

Teachers and support staff believe that they are not being listened to and that action is far too slow in coming. Ultimately, much comes down to resources and the impact of the broken relationship between the Scottish Government and our local councils, which have had to bear the brunt of the Government's political choices to cut central funding and provide an underfunded council tax freeze, which was supported by the Greens.

Teachers and support staff accept that their roles can be demanding at the best of times. Demand is part of the job, and they do not shy away from that, but the current level of demand is well in excess of what it should be. Every day, teachers and support staff go above and beyond. It is no wonder that burn-out is at an all-time high. However, they keep going because they care about the future of our young people. They are doing their best under tough circumstances, but we cannot rely on their good will forever. The quality of education for Scotland's young people is at stake.

I had the privilege of being a teacher—it was, I have to say, a wee while ago. We can all remember the teacher or classroom assistant who had a positive impact on us—that one person who let us see our potential. They are our school's greatest assets but, listening to the cabinet secretary, you would be forgiven for wondering whether she had been in government for the past 17 years. The Government needs—

Jenny Gilruth: I was in the classroom.

Colin Smyth: The cabinet secretary was not personally in the Government, but I am sure that she voted for the Government.

The Government needs to start listening and delivering for our teachers, support staff and pupils. It took strike action for ministers to act on pay and, if they fail to address the ticking time bomb of spiralling workloads, growing violence and poor behaviour in our classrooms and the increasing cuts in our teaching numbers, they will find that those same staff are back on the picket line very soon.

15:30

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): I thank my committee colleague Pam Duncan-Glancy for bringing forward today's debate. Her genuine commitment to our education system has always been clear. Another colleague who, I hope we agree, has a genuine commitment to improving our education system is the Cabinet Secretary for

Education and Skills. Positive contributions here and before the committee demonstrate that both of them have a willingness to work co-operatively in search of the best possible outcomes for our teachers and learners alike.

That attitude is reflected in the Government's motion, which accepts concern about the possibility of the loss of teachers and commits to engaging with parties across the Parliament to hear views on how best to meet those challenges. I hope that the other speakers today will take the opportunity to commit their parties to that.

Of course, actions speak louder than words. For today's debate, it is important to recognise and welcome the Scottish Government's additional funding of more than £145 million, which is specifically targeted at maintaining teacher numbers and clearly demonstrates commitment.

It is also important to put on the record a number of points that further demonstrate this Government's commitment to education. In 2021-22, education spend in Scotland was £1,758 per person compared with £1,439 in England and £1,680 in Wales. Scotland's pupil teacher ratio is the lowest in the UK. The overall PTR in Scotland is currently 13.2, which is the lowest that it has been since 2009. That compares with PTRs of 18 in England, 18.4 in Wales and 17.4 in Northern Ireland. Scotland has the most teachers per pupil in the UK, with 7,485 teachers per 100,000 pupils compared with 5,545 in England and 5,038 in Wales. Scotland's teachers are also the best paid in the UK.

Therefore, although I, along with the Government, recognise concerns about possible reductions in teacher numbers—it is very important that we look at that—it is important to balance that concern by highlighting those real achievements.

The learning and working environment is important in attracting and retaining teachers; it must also ensure a welcoming and safe place for learners. Since 2007, the percentage of schools in Scotland that are in good or satisfactory condition has increased from 61 per cent to more than 90 per cent, and the £1.8 billion schools for the future programme has delivered 117 new or refurbished schools across Scotland between 2009 and 2021. Those are, once again, achievements that we should recognise and welcome as part of the debate.

Liam Kerr: I am listening to all the things that the member is trotting out. However, the Education, Children and Young People Committee published a report this morning that raised significant concerns about the school building estate, particularly for ASN pupils. What should the Government do to rectify that?

Bill Kidd: Like the cabinet secretary, I am all ears. Unfortunately, in my case, that is a physical characteristic. Anyway, I am carrying on saying what I am saying.

We must recognise that we are facing financial challenges across the board. The news that, between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, 262,400 emergency food parcels were distributed in Scotland is scandalous. That scandal is the direct result of 14 years of Tory rule, Westminster austerity and indifference to the plight of the people. We must recognise that, in those 14 years—14 years of a Government that we, in Scotland, did not vote for—we have also witnessed savage cuts to public services and that Scotland, as a country held in thrall as a dependency, is dependent on its funding from Westminster. While that lasts, we should all be calling for greater UK Government spending on public services in England in the hope that that will, in turn, raise the level of funding that is received in Scotland to protect the level of services that we have. I hope that colleagues will also commit to that today.

15:34

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): Nicola Sturgeon said:

“If you are not, as First Minister, prepared to put your neck on the line on the education of our young people then what are you prepared to. It really matters.”

It mattered so much that the SNP Government has presided over 17 years of failure in Scottish education.

Despite the efforts of our dedicated teachers, Scotland has fallen down the international rankings in maths, science and reading. The SNP continues to starve local authorities, schools and staff of resources. The number of secondary school pupils with additional support needs has increased significantly. I am sure that we will hear from the SNP that the budget has grown, but it has not grown to the extent that is needed to reflect the rising numbers.

In 2007, primary school pupils with additional support needs accounted for 4.3 per cent of the school roll. In 2023, the figure was 42.9 per cent. Furthermore, almost 93 per cent of pupils with additional support needs spent all their time in mainstream classes.

Here, in Edinburgh, the City of Edinburgh Council recorded that 46 per cent of pupils in its schools had an additional support need, which is significantly higher than the national average of 34 per cent, yet the total number of pupils in Edinburgh who are educated in special schools has remained at around 1.25 per cent for the past five years. That is despite the city’s population

growth and the exponential increase in pupils with additional support needs. As a result, a more complex range of needs are having to be met in the mainstream school sector.

I thank those members who have made reference to the highly critical report by the Education, Children and Young People Committee that was published today, which describes the situation for families and young people with additional support needs as “intolerable”.

I want to reinforce the point that there has been a rise in the wellbeing and nurture element of additional support needs in our schools. Issues such as mild anxiety or other factors do not necessarily have an impact on a young person’s ability to learn, but they have an impact on their capacity to engage constructively in education. Such issues are now more often at the core of the additional need.

The Scottish Conservatives believe that pupils with additional support needs should receive more support but are being let down.

On GIRFEC—getting it right for every child—despite all the rhetoric, we are failing to get it right for so many children. Many need more support and additional learning using innovative approaches. We want to ensure that initial teacher training fully prepares all our teachers to identify and support children with conditions such as dyslexia and autism.

We would like to pay teachers and school assistants to hold extracurricular activities and extra lunch-time classes, which would top up their salaries. We want to see a thriving extracurricular culture in our schools, as that will provide immeasurable benefits to pupils in so many ways, including in attainment, health and wellbeing, and school culture.

However, it is not just the SNP that is letting down our children and the education system in Scotland. Labour’s plans to introduce VAT on fees for independent schools would place a significant burden on the state sector and would disrupt the education of thousands of children. The report by BiGGAR Economics for the Scottish Council of Independent Schools found that 6,000 pupils would have their learning disrupted by being forced out of the sector and that the cost of children joining the state system in Scotland would be more than £50 million. The report highlights that pupils with additional support needs who had to move from the private sector into the state school sector would be most affected by that disruption.

It is time that we prioritised education, it is time that we prioritised our teachers, and it is time that we prioritised all our children and young people.

15:38

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Over the past few months, my inbox has been inundated with emails from constituents who are concerned about the future of education in Glasgow under this Government, anxious about their child's future and angry about the cuts that will have such a deep impact for years to come. It is not just messages from parents that are flooding my inbox—and, I am sure, the inboxes of my colleagues. Teachers are worried that their jobs are becoming more precarious and that their workloads are about to increase when they simply cannot take on any more.

The cuts that have been handed down to local government by the Scottish Government over the past decade have undoubtedly put councils in an invidious position, but it is beyond comprehension that SNP and Green councillors in Glasgow are looking to make savings this financial year by cutting 450 teaching posts over the next three years, as well as by slashing the financial support for the developing the young workforce and MCR Pathways programmes.

I accept that it has been a difficult decision for councillors. Glasgow City Council has had the largest reduction in revenue funding of any Scottish local authority over the past decade—£270 per person. That 11.3 per cent real-terms cut has more than decimated the council's budget. After all, 80 per cent of Glasgow City Council's funding comes from central Government; only 20 per cent of its finances are made up of revenues from council tax and other charges. The situation has been desperate.

The council has done its best to protect education spending in recent years. In 2016, 64 per cent of the overall council funding was spent on education and social work in Glasgow; now, the figure is well over 72 per cent. Clearly, the council has done its best to protect education and social work, but now even those funds have had to be cut. We are well past the fat and well into the bone. Glasgow cannot take those cuts any more.

It is all the more galling that the Scottish Government's budget went up by 2.3 per cent in real terms over the past decade while council budgets have gone down by 2.1 per cent, according to the Scottish Parliament information centre data. Ultimately, that is a choice, and it is one that will impact on the most disadvantaged and the poorest in our communities, hinder people's life chances and deepen inequalities.

The MCR Pathways programme has had an incredible impact on young people across Glasgow, particularly those who require further support or are care experienced. I know that because I have family members who are mentors

in the MCR Pathways programme. It is devastating that young people do not know whether their mentor will still be there for them when they return to school after the summer holidays. That situation has a devastating impact on young lives.

The developing the young workforce programme, which has been so successful in preparing young people for employment, is due to be axed, too. It is staggering.

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): On a point of fact, the Scottish Government has funded in full the developing the young workforce arrangements for Glasgow on the same basis as the rest of the country, with one co-ordinator per two schools. We cannot talk about the programme being axed. It cannot be axed.

Paul Sweeney: I am afraid that that is not the position that the GMB trade union has taken. I went to a meeting with young representatives of educational establishments in Glasgow along with the developing the young workforce co-ordinators, and they are under threat. I suggest that the minister engage with them as a matter of urgency to clarify the position. That would be gratefully received, I am sure.

Ultimately, it is staggering that those things are under threat, given the impact that they will have throughout young people's lives. This is a matter of top priority. After all, the new First Minister said that his goal is to eliminate child poverty. Sadly, that rings rather hollow given that, when he was in charge of education, he was happy to give up on those young people in poverty, dismissing their potential to fit the Scottish Qualifications Authority's bell curve.

Not only has the Government devastated primary and secondary education, but our colleges are in a dire state, too, with rolling strike action. Ministers have been, at best, dismissive or even missing in action. We need to understand the impact that that will have.

Labour will stand up for young people and ensure that they get a world-class education so that they get the best possible start in life. That is a sure investment in a more prosperous and fairer Scotland.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final speaker in the open debate will be Ben Macpherson.

15:43

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Colleagues will appreciate that, as I am an Edinburgh MSP, I will not comment specifically on the situation in Glasgow.

I have heard the concerns that colleagues across the chamber have raised and I acknowledge the concerns that my constituents have expressed to me. However, I acknowledge, too, the reality of the challenge around the public finances and the fact that the Scottish Government is investing in maintaining teacher numbers with an additional £145.5 million that is designed to support local authorities to do so.

As the Scottish Government's amendment notes, several local authorities

"maintained or increased their teacher numbers"

in the financial year 2022-23. For example, the City of Edinburgh Council has increased the number of teachers by 39, although I appreciate the concerns that constituents have expressed to me about how the Labour Party-led City of Edinburgh Council has provided a lot of those positions through the city as temporary contracts rather than permanent ones.

I noted what Sue Webber said in her speech about the city that we both represent. She spoke about pupil teacher ratios, and I have just talked about teacher numbers. The whole debate is in that space. Other colleagues have mentioned the report on additional support needs that the Education, Children and Young People Committee released today. During our evidence taking for that, we heard a lot about the challenges, the subtlety and the importance of considering whether teacher numbers or pupil teacher ratios are the most important aspect to improve learning.

In recent weeks, with the new First Minister—thanks to his leadership from the pole position—we have been thinking about a better political debate, and for our body politic we need to decide what the most important aspect is for improving children's education. Is it more teachers or a better pupil teacher ratio? If we could decide collectively on one of those competing factors and take the party politics out of it, we would be able to debate from the same position.

Sue Webber: Will the member take an intervention?

Ben Macpherson: I will take a brief one.

Sue Webber: It has been a long time since I did maths, but surely if we have more teachers, we will also have a better pupil teacher ratio, so can we not have both?

Ben Macpherson: We can, but a lot of the time it is about the support in the classroom. We also heard that debate around additional support needs. It was about the additional support in the classroom and not necessarily the teacher numbers. Also, there are local authorities where the number of pupils is falling, whereas in Edinburgh, which Sue Webber and I represent,

there is a population increase. We need to take that into consideration.

We also need to think about local government. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities published a report on 22 March 2024 in which it expresses dissatisfaction about the imposition of teacher numbers and learning hours in relation to the Verity house agreement. The Parliament can either agree with local authority discretion or with ring fencing. We cannot have both, and we need to decide on our position.

Lastly, I note that there is a potential solution. The Teach First programme has not been discussed in the Parliament for some time, but it has been highly successful elsewhere in the UK. Perhaps now is the time to look at it again.

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

15:47

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I will start my closing speech by touching on the other element of the Green amendment that was not selected, which was about tackling issues with teacher workload as a way to improve recruitment and retention. I believe—and the Scottish Greens believe—that the principles of curriculum for excellence are strong. The challenges that we have faced with implementation of the curriculum have been about resources, but they have also been about the bureaucracy that has been built up around the curriculum in the years since it was introduced and how that bureaucracy has undermined quality teaching and learning.

The principles of the curriculum rely on the professional autonomy of Scotland's teachers. We have one of the most highly qualified teaching workforces in the world but, over the years, that professional autonomy has been gradually narrowed. I was proud that, a couple of years ago, the Greens and the SNP agreed that we would review the indicators and measures that are associated with the curriculum, with the aim of making teachers' workloads more manageable.

One example of that is Scottish national standardised assessments. It is the Green Party's position—and I believe that it may also be the Liberal Democrats' position—that SNSAs should be scrapped entirely. Other parties have a range of views on which years should and should not include them. The example that I will give is not about SNSAs in and of themselves; it is about all the additional reporting and administrative requirements that have been bolted on to them over the years, primarily by local authorities. I welcome the commitment from the cabinet secretary that the review of indicators and measures will be taken forward, but that specific

example raises exactly the issue that Ben Macpherson was talking about in relation to the autonomy of local authorities in Scotland. Either we believe in national direction in education or we believe that local authorities should have the discretion to make those decisions for themselves.

I have to be honest and say that this is where I hit my limit for localism. Standardised testing is a national policy and it is appropriate to limit it nationally. The Government could set limits on the additional workload that is created around it. The Scottish Government's amendment seems to allude to the fact that such work will take place, so I would welcome a commitment that that will happen. Finances are tight, but there are plenty of policy changes that we could make—free policy changes—which would help with workload and, in turn, would help with recruitment and retention.

There are other options for increasing retention, such as improving teacher career progression. What has happened to the lead teacher model? That was supposed to be an opportunity for teachers to progress their careers without moving out of the classroom into management. In particular, it was designed to boost the number of specialist additional support needs teachers in our classrooms. That model does not appear to have taken off, and I think that we need to revisit it.

I am afraid that the Greens will be opposing the Conservatives' amendment. There are elements of it that we agree with, but it endorses their "Grasping the Thistle" economic plan. I had to remind myself what *The Herald* said about the plan at the time, because the business editor of *The Herald* found himself in the strange position of agreeing with me on a matter of economic policy. Ian McConnell said:

"Not only did Mr Ross fail to deliver anything profound but his speech lacked anything of perceptible substance at all."

I am afraid that that is not an economic strategy that the Greens can endorse.

I agreed with elements of what Sue Webber was saying, but one element that I disagreed with pushed me closer to the Labour Party. Of course, the Greens would absolutely support the fair application of tax to private school fees; it is only just that private enterprises pay the correct level of tax.

Sue Webber: Will the member give way?

Ross Greer: I need to close in the next 10 seconds, I am afraid, Ms Webber.

I am glad that we have had this debate and I am glad that Labour has given us the opportunity to discuss the issues. However, what I wanted to hear this afternoon were colleagues' proposed solutions. It is very easy for us to highlight the

problems; we are all familiar with them, and many of them are long standing—some are even decades old. I have heard very little in the way of proposed solutions this afternoon and I think that school staff—teachers in particular—and young people deserve more from Parliament in the way of actual solutions to these issues.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I would encourage members on the front benches to desist from having conversations across the chamber.

15:51

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to close the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. I thank Pam Duncan-Glancy and Labour for bringing this important issue to the chamber. Again, I find myself highlighting the irrefutable fact that it is an Opposition party ensuring that concerns relating to the Scottish education system are discussed in the chamber.

Since 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Jenny Gilruth, has used Government debating time for education three times, in comparison with 12 debates that have been brought forward in Opposition time. It was not that long ago that Scottish education was the pinnacle against which all policies and, indeed, the Government were to be judged—in the words of the former former First Minister, in one of her "Let me be clear" statements:

"I want to be judged on this. If you are not, as First Minister, prepared to put your neck on the line on the education of our young people then what are you prepared to? It really matters."

Oh, how times have changed.

We have had some excellent contributions; I will highlight only one or two, because that is all that I have time for. It is important to highlight the hot-off-the-press Education, Children and Young People Committee report stating that ASN provision has hit "intolerable" levels in our schools. That was mentioned by Pam Duncan-Glancy, Willie Rennie and Colin Smyth, and it was very eloquently highlighted in her contribution by Sue Webber.

I notice that, in the Labour motion, Pam Duncan-Glancy is asking the Scottish Government for a plan on moving forward and for intervention to prevent job losses. However, as has already been highlighted by my colleague Liam Kerr, there is no plan, and the Government is not coming forward with any plans—neither is Labour, never mind the Government.

With the greatest of respect, I say to Bill Kidd that he has made the best smoke-and-mirrors

contribution I have heard—“Look over here, don’t look over there.” That is simply not how it is in our schools and in our local authorities.

Pam Duncan-Glancy mentioned two very special teachers. For me, it was a teacher called Miss Henderson, who, unfortunately, passed away recently. She was a teacher who knew that educating a child was about more than just imparting knowledge.

Finally, let us look at the Government’s regular protestations. The SNP Government states that it is committed to recruiting an additional 3,500 teachers, as has been mentioned. Indeed, it was the former education secretary, Shirley-Anne Somerville, who said that, over the course of the parliamentary session,

“we will fund the recruitment of an additional 3,500 teachers”.—[*Official Report*, 23 November 2021; c 55.]

The important word there is “additional”. However, the teacher census from March 2024, just over a month ago, has teacher numbers down by more than 1,000 since the SNP came to power.

The SNP also continues to highlight pay rise awards for our hard-working teachers, but that is simply not working. If local authorities had sufficient money to pay increased wages, they would not need to reduce teacher numbers. The SNP is setting more targets that are destined to fail. As is so often the case, it is the future of Scotland that will pay the price.

The cabinet secretary has asked for suggestions. The Scottish Conservatives will come forward with sensible suggestions to make tangible changes. Our new deal for teachers would support teachers and reduce contact times in the classroom. It would also allow teachers to provide the highest standard of education, and it would allow teachers to teach.

We would properly fund local authorities so that they can appropriately recruit and retain teachers. We would tackle violence in our schools. Given that nothing that we do exists in a vacuum, I will mention “Grasping the Thistle”. It is our economic strategic plan to improve the link between the education system and employers, which is desperately needed after the detrimental cuts and reform delays that are currently plaguing our college sector.

The Conservative plans would not only support our teachers, our businesses, our local authorities, our college sector and our young people today and into the future—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Roz McCall: Scottish Conservative plans will take Scotland forward.

15:56

Jenny Gilruth: I thank members for their contributions. I thought that, in her summing up, Roz McCall got to the point of my original contribution, which was about solutions. I had not seen the Conservative amendment in advance, but I would be more than happy to engage with the Conservatives on any of their proposals about the challenges that we face. They are challenges for the whole country and it is important—in reference to Liam Kerr’s point—that we do not play party politics on this.

I will touch on a number of points that members have made in the course of the debate, and I also want to reflect on some of the investment that the Government is currently putting in. I need members to listen to the numbers that we are seeing in Scotland’s schools. We have nearly 1,800 more teachers in Scotland’s schools than we did in 2019. We have the highest level of teachers employed in Scotland since 2009. The Government has baselined £15 million of funding into the local government settlement, and £145.5 million is ring fenced to protect teacher numbers.

The Government also invests in funding our probationary teachers, with £37 million of direct investment in their salaries. We are supporting teacher pay with £242 million. The Government is making a substantial investment in Scotland’s teachers, but Ross Greer is right to talk about the financials, which is where the challenge rests. There is a challenge in relation to local government, which pays for our teachers. I have some sympathy there, but we also need to consider that, this year, the local government settlement was worth £14 billion and, at the same time, the UK Government cut the Scottish Government’s budget in real terms.

If Labour wants more resource, let us be honest about the erosion of the block grant. Will a Labour Government restore the value of the block grant, should Keir Starmer become Prime Minister in the coming months? There is silence from the Labour benches.

A 0.9 per cent cut, compounded by more than a decade of austerity, is harming the outcomes of our young people. Schools are desperately trying to plug that gap. As Bill Kidd alluded, some of the challenge here rests in the cost of living crisis. The Government is funding the most generous programme of free school meals provision across the UK.

Liam Kerr: As Bill Kidd was mentioned and Roz McCall alluded to his smoke-and-mirrors speech, does the cabinet secretary accept that, given that the Government has been in power for 17 years and has yet to make a strategic plan, it is the Government’s failure that is at fault here?

Jenny Gilruth: I do not accept the member's point. The Government invests in supporting our schools directly, through, for example, the Scottish attainment challenge, which is funding an additional 3,000 staff in Scotland's schools, including 1,000 extra teachers.

Willie Rennie said that Scotland's teachers are not listening to me. That was a bit depressing to hear, but I continue to engage with them directly. They seemed to be listening to me this morning when I met them at Queen Margaret University and spoke to a number of religious and moral education teachers about some of their challenges.

In response to Willie Rennie's challenge on class contact, I say that I am resolutely committed to delivering on that commitment. That is what will make a difference for Scotland's teachers in our schools. We, including the Government and local authorities, need to lighten the load. However, the load is not the same in Fife Council as it might be in Glasgow City Council or in Highland Council. We need to understand those local differentials.

Colin Smyth talked about the past 17 years. He and perhaps Mr Kerr might forget that, for most of those 17 years, I was in a classroom. I heard Mr Smyth's keenness for industrial action. That is not a place that I want us to return to, particularly given the record pay deal that was agreed to by this Government in 2022. Scotland's teachers remain the best paid in the UK by some considerable margin.

I think that Sue Webber made a number of important points in relation to the Education, Children and Young People Committee's report on additional support needs. She will know that I am looking forward to responding to that report in detail and that I paused the additional support for learning action plan to listen to the concerns of her committee. I know that she is grateful for that pause.

I am keen to make progress. We have not heard much in the way of solutions today. The solutions that I need to try involve working with local authorities, through their requirements on employing teachers, to provide more detail and support for teacher recruitment and retention.

We also need to really improve promotion opportunities for Scotland's teachers. Ross Greer was absolutely right to touch on the role of the lead teacher, which has not been as popular as we would have hoped, to that end.

It is also worth while to point out some of the current workload issues in teaching, which I mentioned in my contribution this morning at Queen Margaret University and which are referenced in the Government's amendment. We need to go back to reducing unnecessary teacher

workload and freeing up teachers to allow them to deliver quality learning and teaching.

There is a lot to be positive about in Scottish education, although you might not have heard it in this afternoon's debate. However, I accept the challenge that is presented in the motion. We cannot fundamentally drive the improvements that we need to see in Scotland's schools with fewer teachers. The Government values our teachers. That is why we invest in the policy of free tuition, fully fund the postgraduate qualification and pay for the first year of probation. However, the Government does not act in a silo. We do not directly employ our teachers, so our local authorities have a key role in driving improvements on retention and recruitment. I look forward to working with them to support Scotland's teachers.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I call Martin Whitfield to wind up the debate.

16:01

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): It is the Opposition that has, again, brought a debate about education to the Parliament. That is important. However, I welcome the cabinet secretary's hand reaching across the chamber to discuss and find solutions—this is the first time that I have said that to her.

I had the privilege of listening to the cabinet secretary speak to some incredible young people only a few hours ago. She rightly raised the fact that, during Covid, when a number of bodies that support our communities and society were forced to step back, it was the education service that stepped up to take care of a number of matters that had previously been dealt with by other services. At that time, additional payments were made.

However, we are now at a stage where the expectations that are placed on our education service are at the level that they were during Covid, but it has lost the financial support for delivery because, as the SNP Government would say, the funding from Westminster has been cut. However, although the funding has been cut, there has been no reduction in the expectation that is placed on our teachers. In the past 17 years, expectations about what the education service, in its widest sense, has to pick up have increased exponentially.

To refer to Bill Kidd's interesting contribution, I agree that actions speak louder than words. For how many years has the chamber been hearing that we need to reduce our teachers' workload? For how many years has the chamber heard about the need to properly support our young people? For how many years has Scotland had promises

of smaller class sizes, and promises about bicycles and computers that have not been delivered?

One of the challenges that is faced by the people of Scotland—especially children and young people who have been in school as part of the Covid generation—is how much more they will have to hear before they see an actual difference. The quality of education of Scotland’s young people is at stake in so many areas, particularly for children from deprived areas.

As is evidenced by the committee report that was published this morning, additional support for learning is being impacted the most. The situation is intolerable—a word that means the opposite of tolerable, and “tolerable” means that something is barely able to be dealt with. For our children with additional support needs, the situation is intolerable.

I could go over a number of the contributions that we have heard today. It is important that people outside Parliament hear the whole debate, because there have been some very powerful contributions, and that will continue to be the case.

I thought that Ross Greer’s first speech was interesting, but he will not be surprised if I do not agree with all of it, including his reference to the equal pay claim. Of course, it was our current First Minister who said, in 2006, that:

“the financial envelope that the Executive”—

now the Scottish Government—

“makes available to local authorities has an essential part to play in resolving the issue”.—[*Official Report*, 9 Nov 2006; c 29150]

Indeed, that quotation goes to the heart of the discussion, as does the “two minutes”—which I heard being chanted behind me—that the getting together to talk lasted.

The question of what the answers are is actually a question that we should never need to ask ourselves, but it is this Scottish Government that has put the question in front of us, through the state of our education. From the experience that children have in the classroom with a teacher, to the experience of an ASN child in terms of adults who used to be there to support them but are not there now, to the building that they are in, to their entire journey through education, it all becomes incredibly questionable.

I will move on to Paul Sweeney’s contribution. He is not the only one whose inbox is flooded with concerns about cuts. Some of the hardest answers that we have to give are to constituents who are concerned about their children. They know that the answer to Scotland’s problems lies in their children discovering, learning, creating wealth, being independent and going away from

Scotland and talking about how great this country can and will be. Yet they are confronted by the fact that they cannot afford shoes and cannot afford coats. Some child in a class is the victim of a situation and there is violence in their schools that is frightening children.

Paul Sweeney went on to say that it is right to talk about it being a choice and he mentioned MCR Pathways. I think that any person who looks at that scheme will see advantage for young people in it, yet—as Paul Sweeney said—they do not know whether their mentors will be there come the new academic year.

I have much more in common with Ross Greer regarding his conclusion. There is a workload that is based on the reporting and bureaucracy that have been driven by national Government requiring that data be pulled from local authorities, which, in turn, the local authorities have pushed down to schools, for them to provide. That raises the question of the actions on chartered teacher status, which previously existed, and which many members will know about. It went because the Government would not fund the salary increase that would have allowed brilliant and experienced teachers to stay in the classroom, working with our young people and supporting their colleagues when they have challenges.

Therefore, perhaps it is not a case of looking back to go forward. Perhaps it is a case of recognising where we are, why we need to change and why the young people of Scotland demand that.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

That concludes the debate on standing up for teaching. It is time to move on to the next item of business. I will allow a moment or two for the front benches to reorganise.

Housing Emergency

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-13197, in the name of Mark Griffin, on Scotland's housing emergency. I would be grateful if members who wish to speak in the debate would press their request-to-speak buttons.

16:09

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which shows that I ceased to be the owner of a private rented property last summer.

Almost exactly six months ago, with the support of Shelter Scotland, I moved a motion for the Parliament to declare a housing emergency in Scotland, and will today move a similar motion in my name—again, supported by Shelter.

Six months ago, I warned of the estimated 700,000 people who are in housing need, the more than 9,000 children who are living in temporary accommodation and the two councils that had declared housing emergencies. At the time, the Government assured us that it would work to ensure that we have

“the right range and choice of homes to allow our communities to thrive.”—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2023; c 36.]

Six months ago, the Government refused to admit that there was a problem. The minister listened to the scale of the challenge, assessed the solutions, then sat by while his Government slashed the affordable housing supply budget by 26 per cent. That decision made a bad situation impossible.

Every 16 minutes, one household becomes homeless. Around 10,000 children are now in temporary accommodation. Three more councils have declared housing emergencies and more are likely to follow. The Scottish Housing Regulator has warned that 10 local authorities are at risk of systemic failure in homelessness services. House building is collapsing, with 24 per cent fewer new houses being built in Scotland this year. Housing associations are building fewer houses than at any point since 1998. West Dunbartonshire Council has told us that it is now highly unlikely to be able to approve any new social housing developments this year. Fife Council has predicted that the number of new social rented house starts there could be reduced by 50 per cent. That is a direct result of Scottish Government cuts.

I welcome the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice's comments in the media today. She is asking Parliament to “unite with one voice” and for work across all spheres of government to tackle

the housing emergency, but the Government has lodged what is, to be frank, a self-congratulatory amendment that blames everyone and everything but the Government. The first step has to be to take responsibility for the facts that there are 10,000 children in temporary accommodation, that not enough homes are being built and that far too many homes are lying empty.

We need to start to come up with solutions; we have come to the chamber repeatedly with those solutions. Some have been adopted, but far more could be adopted. We asked the Government to increase council tax on second homes, to provide more support for people who are struggling with mortgages and to create a national acquisition programme to allow properties to be purchased with tenants in situ in order to prevent homelessness. The Government agreed and started progressing those, although not as quickly as we would have liked, but we have suggested so much more.

The Government should set an all-tenures house building target and reverse years of undersupply. The housing requirements in national planning framework 4 need to be revised and increased urgently. The planning system needs to be reformed and properly resourced, especially given the drain of planning expertise into the renewables sector and away from housing and council planning departments. We have suggested provision of additional national resource to support local authority teams in dealing with applications that are of national significance, which housing applications absolutely are.

Alongside council tax on second homes, council tax on empty homes should be increased, and the funding should be used to build more homes. Councils should have powers of compulsory sale and rental orders in order to force empty homes back into use, thereby removing blight from communities and giving families homes. We should look at the use of discounted homes for sale, with the price being permanently reduced in title deeds to create a positive cycle of affordable home ownership.

We have suggested looking at continental Europe and the innovative €1 houses model to encourage people to take on long-term empty homes and do the work to bring them back to life. We have talked about housing voids and the huge difficulties that councils and housing associations have in getting electricity supply connected to allow the houses to be allocated to families who need them.

We need all of that because Cyrenians and others are telling us that emergency accommodation is at full capacity every single night and that temporary accommodation is usually full by 8.30 in the morning, here in this city.

When charities are saying that there is a housing emergency, when councils are saying that there is a housing emergency, when the private sector is saying that there is a housing emergency and when the public are telling us loud and clear that there is a housing emergency, there is no longer a debate: there is a housing emergency in Scotland.

I am pleased that the Government has finally come to terms with the reality that we are facing. It must now set out a clear plan of action to end the emergency that it helped to create. We are all living with the consequences of the economic illiteracy of our Tory Government. A Labour Government will sweep the Tories out of office and make better choices for this country, but we will need to take stock of the public finances and pick up the mess that we inherit. Now that the SNP has found the political will, within six months, to declare an emergency, it must use every available political and financial tool that it has at its disposal to end it.

I have been absolutely clear that we need to build more houses across all tenures. We have set out a range of policies on making homes affordable and helping those who are facing the mortgage time bomb.

I am glad that the Government has finally admitted that we have a problem. I look forward to seeing a Government action plan and, more crucially, a delivery plan that is developed in conjunction with Shelter and the other organisations that have contributed to the debate today, and that ends the housing emergency and gets kids into warm, safe and secure homes. The people who are at the sharp end of this Government-created crisis do not have any more time to wait.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that Scotland is in a housing emergency.

16:16

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): I welcome this afternoon's debate on housing. Before I get into the substance of my contribution, I will say that Mark Griffin knows that I meet him and Miles Briggs regularly and that I am happy to discuss any of the issues that he has talked about and any ideas that he has. I will touch on that in a little while.

Today's debate offers us the chance to recognise the current housing emergency in Scotland, the reasons behind it and what we can do collectively to tackle it. In John Swinney's first speech as First Minister last week, he remarked that this Parliament

"is not the collaborative place that it has been in the past".—[*Official Report*, 7 May 2024; c 42.]

He is correct and he has committed his Government to working to create more agreement across the chamber. I would like to use today's debate to reach out to colleagues. I already do, and that was touched on in yesterday's debate on the Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill. I intend to put all my energy into working collaboratively with members to deliver more social and affordable homes, to strengthen tenants' rights and to end homelessness. I call on all members to join me on that mission.

I want to touch on some of the Government's achievements, because context is really important. The Government is not afraid to challenge the status quo and to make bold decisions when they are needed. We abolished priority need in 2012. That was an immense milestone that really set Scotland apart. It provided a right to settled housing for homeless households and showed that Scotland was serious about ending homelessness.

In 2016, Scotland ended the right to buy, which was a UK Government policy that resulted in the sale of half a million social homes in Scotland. Half a million homes—let us look at that in context. As a result of that ambitious move, we estimate that up to 15,500 homes have been protected and will remain available to renters now and in the future.

In 2022, we changed local connection rules, giving people more choice in where they settle. We have taken firm action to reduce the use of unsuitable bed and breakfast accommodation and night shelters, and we are discussing that with local authorities as we speak.

We have embraced system change. The shift to rapid rehousing marked a cultural move away from the idea that prospective tenants have to be tenancy ready before being offered a settled home. We continue to fund the transition to rapid rehousing and the expansion of the housing first policy.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I appreciate that the minister wants to defend the Government's record, but has that not led us to the position that we are in today, in which the Government has conceded that there is a housing emergency? What new things is he going to do to reflect the emergency that he has now admitted?

Paul McLennan: Context and where we are is important. Interest rates are the highest they have been for a number of years, and that has impacted on the whole sector. Mark Griffin talked about the all-tenure approach, and I agree with him on that, but the rise in interest rates has impacted right across the sector. We have talked about construction costs, which have been very hard on

the sector. Context is important. I will come on to some of the points that Willie Rennie has raised about what we are going to do next.

As I said, we have embraced system change, and the shift to rapid rehousing marked a cultural move away from the idea that tenants should be tenancy ready. I am proud of Scotland's record on housing and homes, but we want to do much more. Of course we are proud of what we have done.

We want everyone to have a safe and affordable home that meets their needs. This year, we are making available nearly £600 million for the delivery of more affordable social homes.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I am struggling for time—I have only five minutes—but I would be happy to pick up the issue with the member after the debate.

That includes a recent boost of £80 million over two years to facilitate the acquisition of existing properties and to help to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation.

Since 2007, we have worked with partners to deliver more than 128,000 affordable homes, more than 90,500 of which were for social rent. There have been 40 per cent more affordable homes delivered in Scotland per head of population than have been delivered in England and more than 70 per cent more than have been delivered in Wales. However, we need to do more—of course we do, and I will not deny that.

We remain committed to delivering our target of 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, of which 70 per cent will be available for social rent and 10 per cent will be in our rural and island communities. We know that we need more social homes in order to end homelessness. We are taking action to increase housing supply, but some matters are beyond our control.

As I have mentioned, it is not just the Scottish Government that needs to play its part. The UK Government and the incoming UK Government need to play their part. Inflationary pressures, the impacts of Brexit and wider market conditions have contributed to rising construction costs and workforce challenges. We will keep working to mitigate those effects, but the UK Government's policies continue to shape the housing market and are having lasting impacts. I have already discussed with Mark Griffin what we can do about that and how we can work together if the next UK Government is a Labour Government. He knows that I will continue that approach as we move forward.

Local government also needs to play its part. We know that local authorities are working extremely hard to deliver services for people who are experiencing homelessness, and we urge councils to continue working with us. I am meeting all local authorities in two weeks' time to discuss the issues of voids, allocations and empty homes.

We have seen tremendously innovative practice in some councils where temporary homes are flipped to permanent tenancies. Others can learn from that. In certain areas, we are keen for local authorities to increase the pace of activity when it comes to empty homes and vacant council properties.

Although it will not completely solve our supply problems, making the best use of existing stock will help to meet local housing needs.

The Presiding Officer: I must ask you to conclude, minister.

Paul McLennan: We will invite local authorities and associations to revisit their allocations policies and check that they remain fit for purpose during this housing emergency.

I am delighted to have been reappointed as housing minister. I commend the huge and important steps that have been taken in the past 25 years to improve housing policy and end homelessness. I do not want us to go backwards. We are facing major housing challenges, but this afternoon offers a chance to reflect—

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, minister.

Paul McLennan: —take stock of what has been achieved and agree what more can be done to tackle the housing emergency.

I move amendment S6M-13197.3, to insert at end:

“and that the housing emergency is more acutely felt in some parts of the country than others; acknowledges that the current situation is due to a combination of factors including those outwith the Scottish Government's powers, including a decade of UK Government austerity, soaring inflation and an increasing cost of living, labour shortages linked to Brexit, and a freeze to local housing allowance (LHA) rates; calls on the UK Government to reverse the near 9% cut in Scotland's capital funding settlement, commit to ensuring that LHA rates will permanently meet at least the 30th percentile of local rents, and provide adequate support to local authorities impacted by the increase in asylum support cessations; recognises the Scottish Government's record on delivering affordable homes and action taken on rent rises; notes that in 2024-25, despite the UK Government imposing a cut to its capital budget, the Scottish Government will invest nearly £600 million in affordable housing and over £90 million for discretionary housing payments; welcomes the actions in the Housing (Scotland) Bill to tackle rising rent levels and the continued focus on the target of delivering 110,000 high-quality, energy efficient affordable homes, and agrees that the Scottish Government, UK Government and local

authorities must work together to deliver a housing system that meets the needs of the people of Scotland.”

The Presiding Officer: We are very tight for time this afternoon. I call Miles Briggs to speak to and move amendment S6M-13197.2.

16:22

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the Labour Party for bringing this debate to the chamber.

“The Scottish Government’s strategies for housing and homelessness are failing and any attempt to say otherwise is starting to feel like an attempt to gaslight the Scottish public.”

Those are not my words but those of Shelter Scotland’s director.

Last week, the First Minister stated that he wanted to be honest about where the Scottish Government has been going wrong. I welcome the acceptance that ministers are failing to deliver on housing in Scotland and that Scotland is in a housing emergency.

Sadly, however—we have seen this today—the Scottish Government does not seem to be acting with humility or accepting the policy failures on its watch. Instead, we have more deflection and the usual from the SNP’s playbook—that is, blaming everyone else and not taking responsibility.

Paul McLennan: The member is talking about taking responsibility. Does he accept that the 9 per cent cut in the capital budget impacts on what we can do in Scotland?

Miles Briggs: Housing policy in Scotland has been devolved for 25 years, and 17 of those years have been under this SNP Government. The Government’s motion desperately tries to suggest that a housing emergency is due to

“factors ... outwith the Scottish Government’s powers”.

However, there is no mention of the SNP-Green Government’s annual cuts to affordable housing budgets; no mention of the Scottish Government’s failing national planning framework, which is leading to land supply disappearing; no mention of the cuts to local government budgets; no mention that the City of Edinburgh Council, which now has some of the highest homeless rates in the country, has lost out on around £9.3 million in homelessness prevention funding under this Government; no mention of the rent controls policy, which, as ministers were warned, has led to rents soaring and landlords withdrawing properties from the market, housing associations scaling back their property investment portfolios and the complete loss of mid-market rent; and no mention of the fact that, under this SNP Government, 40,000 disabled people are on waiting lists for housing associations and council homes. That is

the SNP and the Green Party’s record in office, and it is time that they accepted it. They have failed Scotland and they need to take responsibility.

Shelter Scotland has stated:

“It is a national scandal.”

I agree. Scotland is in the grip of a devastating housing emergency that damages lives every single day. Across the country, local authority homelessness services face systemic failure. Five councils have declared housing emergencies, and local authorities are routinely failing to even uphold legal housing rights. There is a failure to deliver the social homes that we urgently need, and there has been a significant slowdown in new social housing developments over the past year. The housing emergency is damaging people’s health, wellbeing and education, as well as our economy, and it leaves thousands of our fellow Scots without anywhere to call home.

Scottish Conservatives have repeatedly called for the Scottish Government to declare a national housing emergency, but those calls have fallen on deaf ears until now, so SNP ministers need to play catch-up. As Crisis says in its briefing, declaring a national housing emergency will be of benefit to Scotland only if success is clearly defined and if action targeted at the root causes is taken swiftly by the Scottish Government.

SNP ministers have had to be dragged kicking and screaming into accepting the reality that we face a housing emergency in Scotland. Ministers must now acknowledge where their policies have failed and reach out to charities and across the political divide for new ideas and fresh thinking. Ministers must act. They must urgently outline to the Parliament what will change across all Government portfolios and what fresh leadership will be brought to tackle the housing emergency, like what happened when the Government declared a public health emergency as a result of the drug deaths crisis. Scottish ministers also need to produce an urgent housing emergency plan. That is why, after this debate, I hope that there will be cross-party talks and that the Scottish Government will make an urgent statement on the national housing emergency in the coming weeks.

I move amendment S6M-13197.2, to insert at end:

“; notes that there are a record number of people in Scotland experiencing homelessness with almost 10,000 children stuck in temporary accommodation and 45 children becoming homeless in Scotland every day calls on the Scottish Ministers to bring forward an urgent housing emergency action plan to tackle the issues raised by the Scottish Government’s own expert Homelessness Prevention Task and Finish Group, including actions that will reduce the number of children stuck in temporary accommodation by the end of this parliamentary session;

recognises the need to improve capacity in local government to prevent more local homelessness services falling into systemic failure, and the need to improve delivery for those with specific supported living needs, and calls on the Scottish Ministers to review how national government, local authorities and third sector partners are working together on the shared ambition to end homelessness.”

16:26

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): Circumstances have changed, with 10 local authorities covering nearly half the population either at or close to crisis point. Close to 10,000 children are stuck in the misery of temporary accommodation, with no safe home to grow up in. Declaring a housing emergency must lead to collective action and shared responsibility to tackle the crisis using all the means that are at our disposal.

Local authorities across the country are taking bold steps to respond to the housing emergency. In my region, Argyll and Bute Council is addressing the emergency through a collective commitment with partners, stakeholders, investors and communities to tackle housing shortages. The council has produced a robust housing plan through partnership working and is using all the tools that are available to it. It has doubled council tax on holiday homes and has introduced short-term let zones; it is rolling out housing in the Dunbeg corridor, with 300 houses nearing completion and more to follow; it has two empty homes officers and has used the devolution of empty property relief to incentivise property owners to get properties back in use in under a year; and it is supporting community-led housing on several islands and has enabled the use of rural housing burdens.

Despite that, a constituent told me recently that they would become homeless as no rental properties were available for them in their home of Tiree.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: I am sorry, but I am really short on time and I have a lot to cover.

That constituent’s household includes people with key roles in social care, the local medical practice and the school. They also volunteer as coastguards and firefighters. The community in Tiree can ill afford to lose young islanders in that way, but, in just a few weeks, those people will have no option but to move to the mainland. There are 10 applicants for every social let in Tiree and neighbouring Coll.

There are key issues that councils cannot address alone and that require a national approach. The per-metre build cost is too high. Specifying the use of home-grown Scottish timber and a new microhousing building standard are part of the solution.

Across the country, planning departments see consented sites stalled. There needs to be momentum behind developers, so requiring annual progress reports is part of the solution.

There is a lack of small and medium-sized construction companies. Capacity needs to be built. Part of the solution involves moving to off-site construction, with regional factories for new builds, and incentivising retrofit start-ups.

Empty buildings that could be homes scar our town centres, so more needs to be done to transform them into places to live. Part of the solution involves building on best practice by providing a clear route for local authorities and communities to invest in town centre living, with at-scale support from the Scottish National Investment Bank.

Tens of thousands of empty homes could be brought back into use. Part of the solution involves using all our taxation and enforcement tools to incentivise the reuse of such homes, as well as increasing funding for empty homes officers.

However, even when we take all those actions, we will still face Scotland’s long-term challenges, such as lack of land. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill must provide ways to bring forward appropriate land and buildings for housing. There is a proposed power for estates to be broken up at the point of sale, but we cannot wait for estates to come on the market. What about inheritance? What about urban land reform? We need a secure and appropriate supply of land for housing now.

As we have seen with the low numbers of properties supplied under the affordable housing for key workers schemes—all four of which are in Orkney—bringing empty homes back into use takes time. Creating new homes from scratch is even more expensive and challenging, especially in rural communities, where land and building costs are high and available skilled workers are few and far between.

In February, the then First Minister told the chamber that

“to reform and modernise the compulsory purchase order process is vital”.—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2024; c 23.]

It would be good to hear progress on that issue as well as on the case for compulsory sales orders and compulsory leasing.

At the UK level, we must address VAT thresholds, reverse the near 9 per cent cut in the

Scottish budget and reconsider the freeze on local housing allowance rates. We cannot continue to peddle the fantasy that we can invest in rebuilding the country after nearly two decades of austerity and stagnation—

The Presiding Officer: You must wind up, Ms Burgess.

Ariane Burgess: —without taxing those who are most able to afford it.

16:30

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): When I read the Government's amendment this morning, I thought that we might be getting somewhere. However, I am sorry that the minister's speech was almost exactly the same as the speech that was made last November. Except for the addition of words to accept the housing emergency, nothing else has changed. The minister's contribution was one defence after another, and he then blamed Westminster, which is exactly what he did last year.

When John Swinney and Kate Forbes contributed to last year's debate, they were very clear. John Swinney said:

"I respectfully say to Parliament that it is not enough just to"

declare a housing emergency.

"Substantial actions must be set out on how we will address the issue."

Kate Forbes said that

"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."—[*Official Report*, 22 November 2023; c 54, 57.]

Those two people are now in charge, so I would have thought that we would hear from the minister about what the housing emergency actually means and that we would have a list of new measures—in addition to other measures that he is perfectly entitled to defend—to set out what is different from last November. Why has the Government accepted that there is a housing emergency?

I accept that there are post-recession financial restrictions, which have had an impact for some time; that the Liz Truss budget had a disastrous effect on inflation; and that, of course, Brexit has had an impact, too. However, the Government has a large, multibillion-pound budget and tax-raising powers, so it has choices. Its budget is not limited; it could do something different. However, those are its choices, which it will have to defend today.

One of those choices has been a dramatic cut in the more homes budget. The issue is not just the

direct impact of that cut but the fact that housing associations lever extra private finance as a result of that funding, which will go down, too.

The problem has been building for years and will not be turned around overnight, but we need to start to reverse the damage. The acceptance of a housing emergency must mean something, but I am afraid that, from the minister, it means absolutely nothing.

Some of the rhetoric about and proposed measures for the private rented sector are deterring investment in that sector. We need the Government to change tack on two important measures. First, we need to accept that private landlords are partners, not the problem. They have come to believe that they are the problem and that the Government is out to get them. That needs to change, whatever the reality of the measures.

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: I am afraid that I have only 50 seconds left.

That is the first thing that needs to be recognised. The second one is that we need to be cautious and take an evidence-based approach about any rent control measures that are introduced. There is evidence that they act as a floor rather than a ceiling, so we need to consider them carefully.

Finally—I said that there were two things, but there are three—the mid-market rent properties need to be excluded from any rent control measures, because they are a form of social housing.

I am frustrated at the Government's response. It really needs to wake up and accept its responsibility for 17 years in government. However, so far, I have not been convinced that that is the case.

The Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

16:34

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I have a one-sixth share in a family home.

The lack of housing is the single biggest issue that faces rural Scotland. After 17 years, the Scottish Government now admits that we have a housing emergency, but that cannot be solved by a tick-box exercise. We hear of the £25 million scheme for key workers that has bought only four houses, all of which are in Orkney. Why is that the case? I know that NHS Highland has recruited

staff only for them to withdraw their applications because they have not been able to find a place to live. Why has that fund not been used?

That is especially an issue in Skye. Last weekend, the accident and emergency in Portree was closed during Skye Live, and there were critical health incidents that had tragic consequences. How can it be that patients in Skye cannot march for health services because policing resources are being used in Inverness to police an Orange order march, but Skye Live can go ahead in Skye without adequate ambulance cover and when the local A and E is closed?

The lack of housing is the biggest economic damper that we face. Services cannot be delivered, and depopulation is rife. The shortage of housing is the biggest issue that we hear about from service providers, businesses and individuals. We need there to be a rural burden, especially on homes that are built with public funding. Those homes need to stay in the local housing market.

Can holiday home and second-home accommodation be restricted? Operators of such accommodation now need licences. Can councils set a ceiling—of 10 per cent, say—for a reasonable number of licences to grant? Although the legislation picks up B and Bs in people's own homes and camping pods, they are not the problem. In fact, they boost the local economy, so we need to count them out of that. The big problem relates to family homes. Homes that are suitable for year-round accommodation are being taken out of the local housing market.

There is also a lack of social rented housing. Whatever the Government says, it has not overcome the costs barrier that the lack of economies of scale causes. In a small village, one or two houses will be required. We all know about the homes in Barra that cost a quarter of a million pounds each to build.

The issue is partly to do with urban planning restrictions. We need to have a rural planning system that reflects rural housing standards. There is an insistence on street lights, even though there is nowhere to go after dark. Pavements are considered essential, but there are no pavements to join on to. Rainwater collection systems that have been designed for built-up urban areas are specified in areas where there is a nearby river that collects the rainfall. In addition, the cost of connecting to services such as water, sewerage and telecoms, which are services that people need, is astronomical.

We need to find different ways of doing those things in rural areas, because jobs in renewables are—we hope—coming down the track in those areas, but people cannot currently be housed

there. We need new houses. There is a housing emergency everywhere, but we are feeling it most in rural areas, which are always being left further behind. The Gaelic language is dying because of the dispersal of native Gaelic speakers. People want to remain in their own communities, but they cannot afford to buy a house and there are no social rented houses available.

The Scottish Government has now acknowledged that there is a problem. It needs to spell out what it is going to do, because depopulation is accelerating and we need answers now.

16:39

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): This is one of those times when you stand up and give a completely different speech from the one that you had originally intended to give. However, the point that remains is that, if any individuals or families do not have a roof over their heads, that is an emergency and a crisis, and Governments—whether that is local government, the UK Government or the Scottish Government—should take cognisance of that.

Ariane Burgess made the most important point in the debate so far. It was about collective action and shared responsibility. The UK Government, local government and the Scottish Government have responsibility for getting this absolutely right. I do not agree with some of the speakers who have said that, if the Scottish Government used all the tools at its disposal, that would ensure that we did better, because we have to be realistic—we do not control all the political and financial tools that we need to resolve some of the difficulties.

We heard about the disastrous Liz Truss mini-budget.

Miles Briggs: Will the member take an intervention?

Kevin Stewart: I will gladly give way to Mr Briggs.

Miles Briggs: Where does the member think that the Scottish Government has gone wrong?

Kevin Stewart: I think that the Scottish Government has largely done things right, but there are things that we should have pushed much more for. Let us look at what Rhoda Grant said only minutes ago about the cost of connection to services. Westminster retained power but we should have pushed harder to get the costs reduced.

That Liz Truss budget set us back dramatically.

Rhoda Grant: Will the member take an intervention?

Kevin Stewart: No—I need to carry on.

That led to a huge rise in interest rates and a slashing of capital budgets. Let us look not at what I am saying or what any politician is saying but at the United Kingdom's Competition and Markets Authority, which points the finger at high interest rates and lack of mortgage availability for the stopping of building and for people falling into difficulties. That free-market regulator made it clear that Governments need to fill the gap to get housing on the move again. For the Scottish Government to step in, Westminster needs to increase the UK's capital investment spend, which it controls.

Scotland is not an independent country. Interest rates, monetary policy and capital investment are all controlled by the Westminster system. Scotland needs to end the economic mismanagement by the Westminster parties. We need interest rates to come down and capital investment to go up, and we need to build many more affordable homes. That is what will end the housing emergency.

We also need to look to our local government partners to ensure that they are as up to date as they can be on allocation policy. We need to talk to them more about what additional powers they require to bring homes back into use. Those are key things that we should be doing here and now, but we should not hold back on the fact that we do not have many of the levers of power. We should be pushing Westminster to make massive changes to house many more people in homes that are fit for them.

16:43

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): I wholeheartedly agree with the Scottish Labour motion. There is no getting around the fact that Scotland is in the grip of a housing crisis. There has been a 10 per cent increase in homelessness applications during the past year, and the number of people who have been assessed as homeless has risen by 4 per cent. According to the Office for National Statistics, the average rent in Edinburgh rose by 15.7 per cent between March last year and March this year. That problem has not just come out of nowhere. It is a direct result of the failures of this Government during the past 17 years.

The vandalism by the Scottish National Party on legislation has led to a dramatic lack of affordable housing in Scotland, and we have seen the expected skyrocketing of prices that basic economics tells us happens when there is lack of it. Make no mistake, that is what we are seeing here. The Scottish Government has neglected its duty to increase our housing stock over the past few years, which has led to a lack of affordable homes for people who need them.

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): Will you comment on the 11,500 council houses that are lying empty? There are 1,200 here in Edinburgh, which has a Labour-Tory-controlled council, and 400 in West Lothian, which also has a Labour-Tory-controlled council. The quickest way to get homes for people, especially when the capital budget has been slashed, is surely to bring those 11,500 empty council houses back into use.

Jeremy Balfour: I fully agree that we need to get them back into use. Let us look at history. Who has been in power in Edinburgh for most of the past 20 years? The SNP, which has failed locally as well as nationally.

Unfortunately, it does not seem that the SNP understands the mess that it has made of housing. It admits that it has no idea how many homes will be built in the coming years. It has slashed the housing budget, in a move that the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has described as a

“hammer blow for tackling homelessness and poverty”.

What is more, many of the provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Bill promise to make the problem even worse. We have seen the impact of rent controls over the past year. As I said, the average rent in Edinburgh has increased by more than 15 per cent. Thanks to this Government, Scotland has joined the long line of countries that have tried their hand at price fixing, only to learn the same lesson that every other Administration has learned—if you meddle, it goes wrong.

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): [*Made a request to intervene.*]

Jeremy Balfour: I am sorry, but I do not have time to take an intervention.

However, the SNP plans to expand its rent controls through the bill. Does that not just sum up this Government? In the face of overwhelming evidence, it ploughs ahead with its ideological obsessions only to end up in exactly the same mess that we and others warned that it would make.

To add insult to injury, in its amendment, the SNP throws up its hands and says, “It wasnae me.” The SNP must think that the people of Scotland are fools. Housing has been devolved since the start of this Parliament. For its entire time in Government, housing has been the SNP's responsibility, and it has neglected it. The people of Scotland are not going to accept the rubbish in the SNP amendment that deflects everything—the blame lies at the SNP's doorstep.

There is no solution to the housing crisis that does not include building more homes. The Scottish Government must get its act together—

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, Mr Balfour.

Jeremy Balfour: It must ditch its planned rent controls and promote growth in the sector that is, in essence, holding back our society.

16:48

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Scotland is in a housing emergency, and it is about not just houses but people. It is about the mum who contacted me who was placed by the council in a caravan with her kids because there was not enough temporary homeless accommodation, never mind a permanent home for her family.

It is about the pensioner whom I visited recently who has to sleep in a bed in a small kitchen because she is too frail to climb the stairs to her bedroom. She uses a commode and has not been able to go to her upstairs bathroom for months to properly bathe or shower. She is waiting and waiting to be rehomed.

It is about the young woman whom I spoke to at my surgery who is plagued by antisocial behaviour in the block of flats on her street. She is desperate to hold on to the security of social housing tenancy, but she has been told that it is not even worth applying to be rehomed.

It is about the young worker who asked me for help because he could not take up a job that he had been offered, as there was simply no affordable housing for him and his family in any village within miles of the new opportunity that he was desperate to take.

That is just a fraction—a very tiny number—of the struggles that I have tried to help people with in the past few months alone, but their stories are familiar, because this housing emergency is not new. The Government might only be waking up to it today, but it did not happen overnight. It did not happen because of the pandemic, and it did not just happen during this session of Parliament, but this Parliament needs to decide whether we want to end the housing emergency.

The starting point is the Government declaring a housing emergency, and I am pleased that, albeit at Labour's second time of asking, it is now willing to do so. More importantly, it means the Government setting out what action it will take to deal with it, and we have heard very little on that from the minister. He should begin, but—

Elena Whitham: Will Colin Smyth take an intervention?

Colin Smyth: Yes.

Elena Whitham: In the spirit of consensus, does Colin Smyth agree that, given the reduction of 62 per cent in financial transaction receipts,

which had given us a huge amount of flexibility in ramping up our social housing build, as we can see from the per capita build figures, we have to work collectively to figure out how we can unlock some of the money that we have so that we can invest it in social housing. Working across the chamber, we should be able to do that.

Colin Smyth: I think that the change in financial transactions and capital grants is an issue, but the Government still made a choice to reduce the housing budget by £196 million. That is a 26 per cent cut that is described by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations as

“an absolute hammer blow for tackling homelessness”

and as “devastating” by Shelter and the Chartered Institute of Housing. If the Government does not make it a budget priority to begin to reverse the cut, the commitment that it is still making—including in its amendment today—to delivering 110,000 new homes will remain, in the words of the Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, absolutely “dead in the water”.

We need a more urgent target when it comes to the building of new homes in rural areas. In his amendment, the minister is right in saying that the housing emergency will affect different communities in different areas in different ways. At a time when rural Scotland accounts for 17 per cent of the Scottish population, a target of just 10 per cent of the planned affordable homes by 2032 for rural and island areas simply is not good enough. I still do not know how the Government came to that 10 per cent figure.

Ministers should give local authorities powers to introduce an escalating council tax surcharge on empty homes—a call that is supported in responses to the Government's own consultation on council tax for second and empty homes—so that they can use that money to invest in new properties.

A warm, affordable home is a basic human right that everyone, whoever they are and wherever they live, is entitled to. For far too many of my constituents—and everyone else's constituents—that right is being denied. Until we do not just accept that we have a housing emergency but actually meet it with an emergency response, the lives of far too many families will continue to be held back.

16:52

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I have no issue with calling what we are in a housing emergency, a crisis, a boorach or whatever it is that people want to call it, because I

do not think that it really makes a difference what term we use. What matters is what we do about it.

My experience of not having a home is the reason that I am in politics. I experienced a badly designed process and realised that, although I did not have the money to build houses, the power to ban bad landlords or the knowledge of where in the world people have done housing better and succeeded at it, I knew what could give others a better experience of seeking support to prevent homelessness.

I am proud to look at the SNP Government and see action that aligns with what I know is the right way to approach housing. That includes a recognition that it is not just about building homes but about making sure that the right homes are built in the right places and are accessible to those who really need them. It is about supporting people in insecure tenancies to access financial support, know their rights and be protected from unfair evictions. It is about making the best use of houses that already exist.

From the Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Act 2016 to the ending of the right to buy and the bedroom tax, Scotland has a good story to tell on housing, and that story is not finished yet. However, there are still too many people who are homeless. There are still villages in my region where the heart of the community is barely beating because more than half of the houses available have been bought up for second homes and short-term letting.

We need to address the housing emergency from all angles, accepting that many people and public sector services have a duty to prevent homelessness wherever they can. We need to look at why people who cannot pay their rent cannot do so: it is the cost of living crisis, which was inflicted on Scotland by the same UK Government that has just delivered an almost 9 per cent cut to the Scottish capital budget. It is about delivering a house-building scheme that reacts to the needs of people across the country who are on housing lists, of communities where employers are struggling to fill highly skilled vacancies and of people who cannot keep up with the cost of private rents and mortgages.

I was heartened to see a recognition in the Government amendment that the crisis is being felt by some places more than others. I know that the Government is aware of what Rhoda Grant has described: the higher cost of building materials and contractors in rural or island areas, which could double the cost of building a house or make it impossible.

I was recently in Eigg with the housing minister and we talked for two days about exactly that—the exorbitant cost of building a house in the isles

compared with building a whole development in a city—but also about how critical one house can be for a community. It can be the difference between having a schoolteacher and not, having a healthcare worker and not and having a functioning community and not. It is the same story that Hjaltland Housing Association, Orkney Housing Association and community development trusts up and down the Highlands and Islands will tell you. In its grants and support for rural and island builders, the Scottish Government needs to recognise that. It also needs the money to do that.

I genuinely welcome the contributions from Labour today, and I hope that, in the spirit of consensus, Opposition members, while rightly keeping up the pressure on the Government to deliver change for people in insecure housing or no housing, will join SNP calls on the UK Government to undo that harsh cut to capital funding.

While we are not an independent country and while we cannot borrow money, we are sadly reliant on the UK Government to do the right thing. Therefore, let us speak with one voice, let us recognise what has got us into this situation and what can get us out, and let us all demand that the UK Government do the right thing.

The Presiding Officer: We move to winding-up speeches. I call Patrick Harvie.

16:56

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I welcome the fact that we are now all at the point of recognising the reality of the housing emergency. I regret that a few members seem uncomfortable when consensus breaks out on such an issue. As well as some very constructive and consensual contributions, we have, I am afraid, heard one or two contributions that seemed rather petulant.

A recognition of the causes of the housing emergency is absolutely critical, and it is silly for a few members to say simply that the Scottish Government has led us to where we are at the moment. I will disagree, as I have done in the past, with aspects of Scottish Government policy. I take responsibility for, in some cases, not being able to act as fast as I might have wished on some issues when I was part of the Scottish Government. However, the idea that we would discount the causal factors of the housing emergency that are outwith the Scottish Government's control is absurd. Emma Roddick laid those factors out very clearly a few moments ago: the cost of living crisis, insecure work, extreme rents and UK Government welfare cuts. Those are the factors that lead so many more individuals into housing crisis. Brexit and inflation

are significant structural aspects in relation to the housing system.

In addition to those factors, there are long-standing aspects of our housing system itself that we need to recognise, but the idea that the economic circumstances of the past few years do not create and shape the housing emergency is absurd.

I want to say something about supply because Mark Griffin, Miles Briggs and Kevin Stewart—and, I think, almost everybody else who spoke—said something about supply. The supply of housing is a big part of the picture, but it is not the whole picture, and there have been some simplistic arguments made, not just here but in the wider public debate on supply. The ratio of homes to people has not changed so dramatically in the past few years as to create this housing emergency. The distribution of housing is equally significant. Mark Griffin rightly spoke about empty and second homes, and action is being taken on that. The nature of new supply is also important. It is not just about the number of homes that are built; it is about what they are and where they are.

I hear people talking about the important role of build to rent, but many of the build-to-rent developments that I see being promoted are flats that cost two grand a month at the luxury high end of the market. With some housing developments, I hear the question, “Are we are risking losing investment in housing for sale?” when some of what is being built are homes that cost £250,000 to £300,000. Are those being built for social need or are they being built principally for the interests of investors? We need to ask those structural questions about the nature of our housing market.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the member take an intervention?

Patrick Harvie: I am afraid that I have very little time. Price also needs to be recognised. Rent control is a critical part of our coherent response to the climate emergency—housing emergency. That was a slip of the tongue; I beg your pardon.

I cannot accept that investment in housing must depend on extreme rent rises or that we should simply accept that ever more people will be stuck in the most expensive and least secure tenure. Supply is important, but it is about the nature of that supply.

The Greens will support both amendments. It would be implausible not to mention the context of the housing emergency, as the Government’s amendment does.

We will support the Conservative amendment with some caveats. For example, the homelessness prevention strategy group is leading on the actions that result from the task and

finish group. That is where the leadership of that work should continue, notwithstanding what is in the amendment—there are aspects of the amendment that I would not want to lose.

It is also astonishing to ignore the role of the UK Government or the political parties that want to spend ever more on public services but will not recognise the need for the progressive taxation that has already put an extra £1.5 billion into the Scottish Government’s budget for public services. They oppose the taxation that raises the money to spend on the services that they want.

17:01

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): When we debated housing in November, the minister was in denial about the existence of a housing emergency. There was an emergency then and it has got worse since. I thank Labour for bringing the debate to the chamber, because it has finally forced the minister to admit reality. However, it would have been helpful if he had thrown away the usual SNP script of blaming someone else and accepted some of the responsibility.

The SNP amendment paints a rosy picture of what it is doing but says that the emergency is all down to the UK Government. Here is the thing: if we did not have 1.5 million people being denied a safe, stable home and living in overcrowded, dangerous, unstable or unaffordable housing; if we did not have 15,600 households in temporary accommodation; if funding for affordable housing supply had not been cut by £196 million; if we did not have a record 9,500 children trapped in temporary accommodation; if 45 children were not becoming homeless every day; if a household was not becoming homeless every 16 minutes; if 16,263 children were not assessed as homeless or threatened with homelessness in 2022-23; if Scotland did not have the highest rent increases of anywhere in the UK; and if five councils—Argyll and Bute, Edinburgh, Fife, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire—had not declared a housing emergency, you can bet your life that that much better picture would be nothing at all to do with Westminster and everything to do with the SNP in what is, after all, a devolved area.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Graham Simpson: No. The minister should be handing Shirley-Anne Somerville the record back and telling her to put something else on, because it is a boring tune and it is not helping.

Last month, the minister ran the gauntlet of property professionals at an event at the University of Strathclyde. To loud applause, property developer Chris Stewart told him:

“You have a market. There is £3bn of investment sitting there. You killed the market.”

He said that there was a

“massive disconnect between what the government is saying and what has happened.”

He added:

“The market was there, the tenant demand was there, along with responsible developers and institutional investors providing a product, and it has just stopped.”

I agree with Mr Stewart, but the guy he should have been directing his fire at was not there. It is not Paul McLennan who has killed the market—it is Patrick Harvie. Now that Mr Harvie is no longer in government, it is up to Mr McLennan to fix the mess. He could start by putting the Housing (Scotland) Bill on hold and getting rid of mad proposals for rent controls.

No doubt, when he was at that conference, the minister would have heard James Blakey, planning director at Moda Living, say that his company had £450 million of investment ready to be signed off but it will not happen because of the bill.

Miles Briggs revealed this week that the Government has no idea how many homes need to be built, but we know that NPF4 is already causing issues, with sites stalling and building rates slowing. Now that the minister admits that there is a housing emergency, he needs to take responsibility, own the problem and act on it.

17:05

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): It is clear that the Scottish Government has recognised for some time that there is a real and genuine challenge in the housing sector. As my colleague Emma Roddick rightly put it, it is very important that we move past debating how we define a problem and move on to the solutions. That is why I am very happy that we do so today and that we all collectively declare that there is a housing emergency. The important point, as members right across the chamber have come to, is what we then do about it.

The aspects that we have laid out in the amendment are about setting the context. That is very important, because none of us, as we debate the solutions, can forget or simply imagine away the financial context that we are in. It is a fact that we have a decrease of 9 per cent in the capital budget that the UK Government gives to the Scottish Government. That is £1.3 billion being taken out of Scottish Government plans, which inevitably brings challenges to all of us as we move forward to see what can be done about it.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If the member will forgive me, I want to make a little bit more progress.

I am keen that we should look at the record, and of course we do that. However, I say to those who have suggested that the amendment is self-congratulating that I deliberately put it together to ensure that it is not. It states the context and the record, but it also states the challenge. I want us all collectively to get together and discuss and agree the fact that the capital budget has gone down, and then collectively demand that the UK Government reverse those cuts.

Miles Briggs: I have listened to the cabinet secretary and the minister. The problem that they have is that they need to look in the mirror. They need to look not just at Westminster but at what has gone wrong in Scotland. Earlier, members talked about the rural housing fund. In one year, the £25 million in that fund has delivered just four homes, which is a total failure. I think that the Government does not understand that it is part of the problem.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will come on to how, collectively, we have responsibility and how we all need to raise our game. I point out that that fund is but one fund that deals with rural housing supply, and that more than 200 homes have been supplied by another fund that we have to assist with rural and island homes.

Willie Rennie challenged the Government on what has changed. What has changed since the previous debate on the issue is that, for example, there has been an £80 million uplift, particularly for acquisitions. That will deal quickly and directly with temporary accommodation and homelessness issues. There is the introduction of the Housing (Scotland) Bill, which introduces the ask and act homelessness duties—I really hope that Graham Simpson does not want the Government to ditch that, because that would be a wasted opportunity. That bill deals with the private rented sector as well.

Members have discussed rent controls, and I appreciate that there are differing views on that among members, including Willie Rennie and Graham Simpson. Just yesterday, Graham Simpson commended the Minister for Housing for how he took forward the Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill. The minister will act in exactly the same way with the Housing (Scotland) Bill when people have different opinions, whether on rent controls or other aspects. Members have seen the way in which the Government takes through legislation and the way

in which the Minister for Housing deals with it—his door is always open. I hope that Graham Simpson agrees that that is, indeed, the case.

It is important that we work together on the issue and that we recognise that there is much that the Scottish Government can do and much that the UK Government has to do. Yes, that includes the reversal of the 9 per cent cut. Local housing allowance rates have one of the biggest impacts on homelessness, and it is the asylum process that caused the housing crisis and emergency in Glasgow.

Councils also have to play their part. We have some councils whose policies are not up to date. How can we learn from the good practice of some to ensure that we are providing a tailored approach that is decided by councils, but after they have looked at all those aspects? How do we tackle the issue of voids, which are too high in some areas? Why is some money being handed back to the Scottish Government and not used by councils yet councils still say that there is an issue?

Of course, if we accept the Tory amendment, we are in danger of spending time doing another action plan. That is genuinely my only issue with the Tory amendment. I would rather focus on implementation delivery, not delivery of another action plan. If Parliament wants that, so be it—we will go forward with it. We have an opportunity for all arms of Government to work together. How do all parties work together? Ariane Burgess talked about collective action and shared responsibility—

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, cabinet secretary.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That is the way that this Government is determined to do it. It is a challenge for everyone across the chamber to rise to.

17:10

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): I will kick off by drawing members' attention to my entry in the register of members' interests with regard to my former work with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations.

I thank Shelter Scotland for its tireless campaign on this issue, and I thank all the homeless charities that work on preventing homelessness and on supporting people to recover from what is a horrific experience that no one should have to go through. I also thank the many constituents who have been in touch to share their experiences of the housing emergency that we are facing in Edinburgh and the Lothians.

Like many others around the room, I am getting a sense of *déjà vu*, because we are back in the

chamber arguing that Scotland is in a housing emergency. What has changed in the past few months is that there is a little pot of money from the Scottish Government but also that there are more local authorities declaring a housing emergency and more worries about systemic failure happening—or at risk of happening—in our councils, so we need to act now.

If we can agree unanimously that we face a housing crisis and that there is an emergency, that will be a start, but we then need to look at the policies that we can work on across the whole of Scotland.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: Let me get started.

Let us think about those 10,000 children who do not have a safe and permanent home and how that impacts on their lives. It will look different in every local authority. There are key issues that need to be addressed. Several members—Rhoda Grant, Colin Smyth and Emma Roddick—talked about the rural challenge in relation to short-term accommodation and the lack of affordable housing, which means that people cannot afford to stay in their rural communities. There is the heartbreaking experience that Colin Smyth mentioned, and I think that we could all quote problems. I have a constituent who wrote to me to say:

“I simply don't have an extra £200 a month in my already tight budget. I'm a single mother already cutting back on everything to provide for bills and food for my seven-year-old son and myself. If I don't pay such a high rent, we will be evicted and end up homeless.”

It is a real problem. We do not have enough affordable social rented housing and the overall shortage of housing is pushing up the cost of private rented properties. We need more new housing and we need it right across the country—

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: Briefly, yes.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: If we are all now agreeing that there is a housing emergency, I take it that that includes the UK Government—both the current one and any incoming Labour Government. Will any incoming Labour Government recognise the housing emergency and its role in that, stop the 9 per cent cut and ensure that there are no freezes to local housing allowances and support for councils on asylum? If not, Labour is not taking responsibility for what it could do.

Sarah Boyack: A Labour Government could not come soon enough. After the economic crisis that we have seen, which was mentioned by Kevin

Stewart and others, the Liz Truss budget is not funny. It felt funny in terms of the lettuce, but it has damaged our economy and led to people's mortgages rocketing. Yes, we need a Labour Government, and we need it urgently. We need action.

Several people mentioned the fact that—

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, I will not. This is a debate. We are each allowed to speak.

Kevin Stewart: Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, I will not.

We have 46,000 empty homes in Scotland—that was mentioned by Ariane Burgess. We need action. We do not need a small-scale approach. We need to work with our local authorities and support them so that they have the staff to pursue compulsory sale orders and to promote urban regeneration. In that way, we can bring empty homes back into use.

However, we must be much more ambitious. When the Housing (Scotland) Bill comes before us, we will work constructively. *[Interruption.]* I am responding to the debate. We need effective rent controls, but the bill will not lead to one new house being built. I hope that the Government will work constructively with members from all parties who have been giving practical solutions today, because we need action now.

I come back to the point that 10,000 children are in temporary accommodation, which is an increase of 138 per cent over the past decade. That is a national scandal. If the First Minister is serious when he says that he wants to tackle child poverty, we need to start with finding affordable housing and funding it across the country.

As we celebrate 25 years of devolution, it is important to remember that housing was baked into the devolution settlement from day 1. I agree with Shirley-Anne Somerville that we need the Scottish Government, the UK Government and every local council to work together.

We have seen 17 years of this SNP Government wasting huge amounts of money, with £196 million being wasted on failed ferry contracts alone. We need an effective Government. Eighty per cent of the people of Scotland agree that we are in a housing emergency, so let us take today as a starting point. In his speech, Mark Griffin gave a raft of potential solutions on which we are happy to work with the Scottish Government. *[Interruption.]*

Sarah Boyack: I am down to my last 30 seconds, I think.

The Presiding Officer: Ms Boyack is in her last minute.

Sarah Boyack: We need new houses being built. We need practical solutions. We need new homes across Scotland. Our constituents deserve nothing less. Emergencies demand responses. We are in an emergency and it is time to respond. It is time to build the new homes, bring back homes into use and tackle poor-quality housing. People deserve that, and they need those homes now.

Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-13230, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill, which is an emergency bill motion. I remind members that, as per rule 11.3.1(h) of standing orders, the question on the motion will be put immediately after the debate. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons.

I call Jamie Hepburn to speak to and move the motion.

17:17

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn): I seek Parliament's agreement to treat the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill as an emergency bill. The bill seeks to ensure parity of justice for sub-postmasters in Scotland who are excluded from the scope of the United Kingdom Post Office (Horizon System) Offences Bill.

Despite the Scottish Government providing the UK Government with the straightforward amendments that would have extended the scope of the bill, and its decision to extend its provisions to Northern Ireland, it chose not to extend the bill's provisions to Scotland. Therefore, it is clear that we need Scottish legislation, and we have introduced that this week.

The bill's proposals mirror those of the UK Government in allowing sub-postmasters with relevant convictions in Scotland, as defined in the bill, to have their convictions quashed the day after royal assent is obtained. Scottish ministers will take reasonable steps to identify those convictions and to notify the person and the court that the conviction has been quashed. A person whose conviction has been quashed will then have access to the UK Government redress scheme.

It is imperative that Scottish sub-postmasters, like others across the rest of the UK who were convicted of offences based on tainted Horizon evidence, have their convictions quashed and are therefore able to seek redress as quickly as possible and in line with those in the rest of the UK. As a result, Scottish legislation needs to be in place as soon as possible after the UK bill is passed—but only after its final form is known, so that we can take account of any amendments that are made. The UK legislation is proceeding through Westminster, but we do not yet have the final timetable for that.

As Parliament is aware, our way of progressing legislation is very different from the Westminster process. Although the UK Government can take forward bills in a matter of months—and sometimes less—our processes normally take a little longer. I am sure that none of us will want that to be the case for this bill, which will ensure that sub-postmasters can seek compensation for the quashing of their conviction in the same timeframe as their counterparts in the rest of the UK. Therefore, I hope that Parliament will agree that this bill must be an emergency bill.

I hope that members will understand that we seek to have a bill that will not do anything to jeopardise equality and parity for victims. Although we are keen for the bill to progress quickly, with stages 1 and 2 being timetabled for next week, on 21 and 23 May, stage 3 cannot be considered in the Scottish Parliament until the UK legislation has been passed, to ensure that MSPs can take account of any amendments that are made to that legislation. However, we commit to timetabling stage 3 as quickly as possible following the passage of the UK bill. Although I hope that that will be before the Parliament breaks for recess, we should remind ourselves that the UK Parliament does not rise until mid-July.

The Scottish Government has introduced our bill swiftly and is now seeking the Parliament's agreement to ensure that it passes at pace, too. I am sure that I speak for all members across the chamber when I say that sub-postmasters in Scotland and, indeed, across the rest of the UK have waited too long for justice and we must ensure that those in Scotland have full and equal access to the UK compensation scheme as soon as possible.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill be treated as an Emergency Bill.

17:20

Alexander Burnett (Aberdeenshire West) (Con): I will keep my remarks brief. The issue with the prosecutions of the Horizon scandal victims has been an emergency for some time. Over the past few weeks, Douglas Ross has tried to bring to the chamber Scotland's most senior law officer, the Lord Advocate, so that she can clarify her comments. After voting against our attempts to make that happen three times, the Scottish Government has finally conceded, and it is right that the Lord Advocate will answer questions in the chamber tomorrow. It is important that the victims of this injustice have a clear, unconditional commitment from the Scottish Government, including from its law officers.

Sub-postmasters have waited too long for justice and have been let down by the Scottish National Party's game playing in manufacturing a grievance with Westminster when everyone knows that Scots law is devolved. The bill acknowledges the nuanced changes that are required in the Scottish legal system. For months, the Scottish Conservatives have been calling on the SNP to step in and get on with introducing legislation to overturn the prosecutions. We therefore welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has finally introduced the bill, and we will support the Government's motion, which will allow the bill to be expedited.

However, we would like the Scottish Government to go further by committing to passing the bill before the summer recess. There is no need to wait to see what other Governments do; Scotland has the powers to resolve the issue now. That is the right course of action, so let us get on with it.

17:22

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Scottish Labour will also support the motion. Emergency bills are unusual in this Parliament. As the minister said in opening this short debate, the way that we process law is different from how it is done in other places, and so it should be, because this is our Parliament. However, at times such as this—a time when it is imperative to consider legislation as soon as possible—the facility to do so should exist, and it does. Therefore, Scottish Labour will support the motion, and I hope that our support for the bill, once we have had a chance to look at it, will follow.

My question relates to rule 9.21 of standing orders, which deals with emergency bills. It states:

“Unless the Parliament decides otherwise on a motion of the Parliamentary Bureau”—

which is what we have before us today—

“Stages 1 to 3 of an Emergency Bill shall be taken on the same day.”

Today's motion explains that stages 1 and 2 will take place on specific days next week—which is, of course, acceptable—but it is silent on stage 3. For completeness, I note that the minister gave an undertaking that the bill will be passed as soon as possible, but I wonder whether we could rectify what is possibly—

Jamie Hepburn: I welcome Mr Whitfield's commitment to backing the motion. I have set out the necessity for this process, and he has recognised the need for us to take forward the bill urgently. We would prefer to be able to complete the process as quickly as possible—indeed, we are still committed to doing so.

I am very happy to pick up the point that Mr Whitfield has made directly with him. We can discuss the matter and, if we identify a necessity for a further motion, we can agree to that at the Parliamentary Bureau meeting next week.

Martin Whitfield: I am very grateful for the minister's undertaking to rectify what might be a textual problem. Given the nature and the rareness of emergency bills in the Parliament, and because of the travesty with the length of time that our post office owners, operators and workers have had to wait, we should put nothing at risk with this one.

I reiterate Scottish Labour's support for the motion.

17:24

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): The Scottish Greens fully support treating the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill as emergency legislation. We consider the scandal that has led us to this point to be a series of appalling miscarriages of justice, poor governance or the failure of trusted institutions on which sub-postmasters, their families and all our communities should have been able to rely. Never again must the lives, reputations and freedom of those working hard and honestly for their communities be sacrificed to defective corporate systems.

We welcomed the apology that was given by the Lord Advocate earlier this year, but an apology is not enough. Those who were convicted of crimes in the scandal must have their convictions quashed, so we support the principles of the legislation that we will discuss next week. However, legislation is not enough. We still need answers about how prosecutions were dealt with in Scotland, including the role of the Post Office and the significance of the evidence that was admitted under the corroboration rule. We need clear and accessible compensation for those who were unjustly accused and reimbursement of sub-postmasters who made payments to rectify Horizon errors out of their own pockets. We need to explore prosecution for those responsible for the fiasco and for the recovery of relevant awards, rewards and bonuses. We must make sure that we learn from what has happened regarding the outsourcing of sensitive systems to profit-driven corporate entities and the safeguards that are necessary in relation to increasingly privatised agencies.

For now, we have the legislation about the quashing of convictions. We must deal with it quickly, so I support today's motion and look forward to our stage 1 and 2 discussions next week.

17:26

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): The Scottish Liberal Democrats support the introduction of the legislation—of course we do—but it has taken far too long. Opposition parties have been asking for the Lord Advocate to come to the chamber to explain the Government's intentions for weeks. With every delay, we increase the anxiety of the Scottish sub-postmasters who are at the heart of the matter.

The Government wasted time on a spat with the UK Government when it should have been doing all that it could to get victims the justice that they deserve, and with good haste. Too much of the process has been defined by confusion as to whether the Government backed blanket exonerations in the first place. For the sake of the victims of the scandal, I am glad that we are finally making some progress towards clarity on that.

This has been one of the most appalling miscarriages of justice in our national story. Lives and livelihoods have been ruined. One Scottish victim spoke recently about how he planned suicide and had to be sectioned due to the trauma that he experienced. He is still on medication for depression as a result. He said that the Government's lack of clarity around whether he would have to go to court individually to have his conviction overturned had made matters worse.

Former Post Office workers across all four nations have tirelessly pursued the justice that they have been denied for so long. We owe it to them to move forward. Members of the public, the press and Government officials were repeatedly lied to in an industrial-scale deception on the part of the Post Office.

Scottish Liberal Democrats are pleased that emergency legislation to clear the victims of the scandal has now been brought to Parliament. We know that around 100 people may have been wrongly convicted by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service in Scotland, based on evidence that was provided by the Post Office.

I am glad to see that the bill will mirror the UK bill, because every step that we take away from that legislation risks delaying justice for Scottish victims. It is vital now that they get the justice and redress that they are entitled to, and as quickly as possible. It is the very least that they deserve.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill motion. There is one question to be put, which is that motion S6M-13230, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill, which is an emergency bill motion, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill be treated as an Emergency Bill.

Business Motions

17:28

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-13218, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill, timetable and procedures for consideration. Any member who wishes to speak to the motion should press their request-to-speak button now. I call Jamie Hepburn to move the motion.

Motion moved,

That, subject to the Parliament's agreement that the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill be treated as an Emergency Bill, the Parliament agrees to consider the Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill as follows—

Stage 1 on Tuesday 21 May 2024; and

Stage 2 on Thursday 23 May 2024.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-13217, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 21 May 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 22 May 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Wellbeing Economy, Net Zero and Energy; Finance, Deputy First Minister Responsibilities and Parliamentary Business

followed by Public Audit Committee Debate: Audit Scotland Report, Adult Mental Health

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 23 May 2024

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: Transport

followed by Committee of the Whole Parliament — Stage 2 Proceedings: Post Office (Horizon System) Offences (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 28 May 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Stage 3 Proceedings: Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.30 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 29 May 2024

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 Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 30 May 2024

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 Scottish Government Business

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 20 May 2024, 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.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-13219, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 1 extension.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1 be extended to 7 June 2024.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

17:30

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-13220, on committee meeting times.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament after Portfolio Questions on Thursday 16 May 2024.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:30

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business.

The first question is, that amendment S6M-13196.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13196, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on standing up for teaching, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:31

Meeting suspended.

17:34

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the division on amendment S6M-13196.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13196, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on standing up for teaching. Members should cast their votes now.

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)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)

MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (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)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 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 Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13196.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, is: For 62, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

The vote is tied. As is usual when the Parliament has not been able to reach a decision, I am obliged to exercise a casting vote. I will not make the decision for the Parliament. The established convention is to vote in favour of the status quo, because the chair is required to act impartially. Therefore, I cast my vote against the amendment, which is therefore not agreed to.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-13196.2, in the name of Liam Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13196, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am sorry, but my app was not working. I would have voted no.

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

Keith Brown (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am not sure whether my vote was registered, but I would have voted yes—sorry, no. I would have voted no. [*Laughter.*]

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote was recorded, Mr Brown.

For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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)

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)
 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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollak) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13196.2, in the name of Liam Kerr, is: For 29, Against 95, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13196, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, on standing up for teaching, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

The vote is closed.

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

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

For

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 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)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (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)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-13196, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, is: For 62, Against 61, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament is concerned by reported plans to cut teacher posts in a number of local authorities, including Glasgow City Council, where 172 jobs are at risk in 2024, rising to 450 jobs that are to be cut over the next three years; recognises that teacher numbers have fallen, compared with 2007, and that these cuts will have the greatest impact on pupils in the most deprived communities; notes that the target numbers of student teachers in some subjects have not been met; considers that the increasing precarity of teaching as a profession makes it harder to attract and retain high-quality candidates; understands that local authorities require stability of funding to provide permanent teaching roles and drive up standards in education in Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Government to intervene to prevent job losses and publish a comprehensive plan to address gaps in the teaching and school staff workforce to inform future recruitment and retention.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-13197.3, in the name of Paul McLennan, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13197, in the name of Mark Griffin, on Scotland's housing emergency, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 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)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 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)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

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

McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13197.3, in the name of Paul McLennan, is: For 69, Against 33, Abstentions 22.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-13197.2, in the name of Miles Briggs, which seeks to amend motion S6M-13197, in the name of Mark Griffin, on Scotland's housing emergency, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): Apologies, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no, but my app was not working.

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

For

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

Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 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)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 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)
 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)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (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)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-13197.2, in the name of Miles Briggs, is: For 62, Against 61, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-13197, in the name of Mark Griffin, as amended, on Scotland's housing emergency, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 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)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)

Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (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)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (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 Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-13197, in the name of Mark Griffin, as amended, is: For 95, Against 29, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that Scotland is in a housing emergency and that the housing emergency is more acutely felt in some parts of the country than others; acknowledges that the current situation is due to a combination of factors including those outwith the Scottish Government's powers, including a decade of UK Government austerity, soaring inflation and an increasing cost of living, labour shortages linked to Brexit, and a freeze to local housing allowance (LHA) rates; calls on the UK Government to reverse the near 9% cut in Scotland's capital funding settlement, commit to ensuring that LHA rates will permanently meet at least the 30th percentile of local rents, and provide adequate support to local authorities impacted by the increase in asylum support cessations; recognises the Scottish Government's record on delivering affordable homes and action taken on rent rises; notes that in 2024-25, despite the UK Government imposing a cut to its capital budget, the Scottish Government will invest nearly £600 million in affordable housing and over £90 million for discretionary housing payments; welcomes the actions in the Housing (Scotland) Bill to tackle rising rent levels and the continued focus on the target of delivering 110,000 high-quality, energy efficient affordable homes; agrees that the Scottish Government, UK Government and local authorities must work together to deliver a housing system that meets the needs of the people of Scotland; notes that there are a record number of people in Scotland experiencing homelessness with almost 10,000 children stuck in temporary accommodation and 45 children becoming homeless in Scotland every day; calls on the Scottish Ministers to bring forward an urgent housing emergency action plan to tackle the issues raised by the Scottish Government's own expert Homelessness Prevention Task and Finish Group, including actions that will reduce the number of children stuck in temporary accommodation by the end of this parliamentary session; recognises the need to improve capacity in local government to prevent more local homelessness services falling into systemic failure, and the need to improve delivery for those with specific supported living needs, and calls on the Scottish Ministers to review how national government, local authorities and third sector partners are working together on the shared ambition to end homelessness.

The Presiding Officer: The final question is, that motion S6M-13220, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on committee meeting times, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that, under Rule 12.3.3B of Standing Orders, the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee can meet, if necessary, at the same time as a meeting of the Parliament after Portfolio Questions on Thursday 16 May 2024.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

No Falls Week 2024

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The final item of business this evening is a members' business debate on motion S6M-12524, in the name of Clare Adamson, on no falls week 2024.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises that 13 to 17 May 2024 marks No Falls Week; considers that this week is an opportunity to recognise the powerful campaign dedicated to promoting safe working at height, providing an opportunity for organisations in all sectors to focus on working at height safety; notes that the latest figures from the Health and Safety Executive show that 40 people lost their lives due to a fall from height in Great Britain in 2022-23, that falls from height were responsible for 30% of all workplace deaths, and that, it understands, every year thousands of non-fatal falls take place, estimated at as many as 100 every day; understands that the No Falls Foundation has produced a toolkit with resources and guidelines to assist organisations in planning and implementing activities during No Falls Week, and notes the calls encouraging employers not only to contribute to the broader safety narrative, but also to demonstrate their dedication to the wellbeing of their employees.

17:50

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a privilege to open this debate to mark the inaugural no falls week in our national Parliament. I thank my MSP colleagues who supported the motion and those who are speaking this evening. I also thank the campaigners of the No Falls Foundation, the trade unions, safety advocates, Scottish Hazards and all those who are pushing for this vital issue to be addressed. No falls week falls between 13 and 17 May.

I give a special mention to Peter Bennett, chair of the Access Industry Forum and chair of the board of trustees of the No Falls Foundation, for his work. Peter gave a presentation on falls from height at our cross-party group on accident prevention and safety awareness, and it was that presentation that drove home to me the severity of the issue and prompted me to seek to secure this debate.

The No Falls Foundation charity is co-ordinating the first no falls week, and it has produced a toolkit, with resources and guidelines, to assist organisations in planning and implementing activities during the week to promote safe working at height all year round.

The Access Industry Forum represents the 10 leading trade associations and federations involved in working at height. Between them, they train more than 300,000 people every year to work safely at height, and it is estimated that more than 1 million businesses and 10 million workers carry out work involving some form of working at height

every year. That gives a picture of the scale of the issue and emphasises the potential for injury or death that many people are exposed to while they work. When we delve into the figures behind the campaign and, more importantly, the people behind those figures, it becomes clear why the campaign is needed. The latest figures from the Health and Safety Executive show that 40 people lost their lives due to a fall from height in the United Kingdom in 2022-23. Falls from height were responsible for a staggering 30 per cent of all workplace deaths, and thousands of non-fatal falls take place every year—there are estimated to be as many as 100 every day.

There is considerable underreporting of workplace injuries, particularly among self-employed people. Bluntly, the data that we have does not reveal the full picture. Improving outcomes will require collaboration across the UK, as some of the policy areas are reserved. In general, accurate data collection across safety policy remains a crucial problem.

The AIF has renewed its call for a new, simplified system of reporting to accurately reflect the cause of workplace accidents. We hear the same call from an array of safety organisations. Clear and accurate reporting is necessary for informed preventative measures to address the cause of accidents. Data on the circumstances surrounding falls and on the common causes of falls from height is severely limited. We have poor data on whether falls are from existing permanent structures or from temporary equipment and on whether they are from equipment that is not designed for working at height, and we do not know how many of those who were injured or killed were formally trained.

Despite the immense economic and human cost of accidents, the pressure that accidents put on front-line health services and the tragic impact on people and their families, we still have problems with reporting, which makes preventative action even more difficult. Was an accident caused by a lack of training, by negligence or by faulty equipment? We cannot answer those questions without more robust data collection. We have an idea of the economic cost of inaction, but we cannot calculate the cost to those people who have lost a loved one.

Working at height always has inherent dangers. At the cross-party group, we were told of falls of only 2 inches, which had resulted from trips on different levels, leading to serious injury. Every year, hundreds of thousands of incidents are avoidable, as research by safety organisations has long shown. We cannot allow an approach to safety policy that does not respond to the information that we have and does not look to

improve the situation with regard to falls from height in the future.

We must redouble our efforts on data collection, on training and standards, and on working with trade unions and employers to ensure that people who are working at height are adequately equipped. If we have fragmented accident data, we will get fragmented policy action. Simpler and easier reporting would ensure that regulators can focus their intervention on training and prevention.

Collaboration between Government, employers and workers is a must, and trade unions have played a vital role in raising awareness among workers and empowering people to speak up on safety in their workplace. I also commend the work of Scottish Hazards in that regard. The HSE will remain a pivotal stakeholder in this area, and Trading Standards Scotland plays a crucial role in ensuring that suppliers fulfil their duty of care to make products that are safe and fit for purpose.

New technology will also play a role. We have modern construction techniques, innovations in safety and wearable technologies. New wonders such as cobots have significantly reduced or eliminated the risks of working at height. I was delighted to visit New College Lanarkshire's Motherwell campus, in my constituency, to see cobots being used to repair wind turbines. Such work would normally have been undertaken by people abseiling on to the equipment, which is one of the most dangerous jobs that can be done in our renewable energy sector.

We must embrace those innovations. We can also use drones as part of our monitoring of buildings and bridges. As someone who took part in the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee's Forth road bridge inquiry in session 4 of Parliament, I know how important it is to review the safety aspects of the bridges, and that can happen safely and more regularly with the use of drone technology. A fall from height can be life changing. Many people do not return to their job after an incident, and it can have serious consequences for that person and for their family and colleagues.

Once again, I thank every member who is taking part in the debate. In Peter Bennett's sobering presentation to our cross-party group, what stood out to me were not the figures that we know, but the figures that we do not know but should know in order to make work safe for people and ensure that they come home at the end of the day.

17:58

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I thank Clare Adamson for bringing this important debate to the chamber. We definitely need to talk

about how to reduce deaths in industries throughout Scotland.

It is so easily done, however. Perhaps there has been a storm a few days ago and the shed roof has been damaged; there is a roof tile out of place or a bit of painting needs done, just out of reach. I have been there myself and I have seen it done many times: trying to repair or install something at height while balancing on the top rung of a ladder, hanging from the bucket of a telehandler or narrowly balancing on a bit of wood—a two-by-four—while crawling across roofing sheets, each time potentially moments from a catastrophic accident. I admit to being foolish enough to have done that myself a few times, often acting before thinking, because the job needed to be done.

I recall a genuine incident in which I went to get a ladder during a storm to fix a bit of roofing sheet on my sheep shed, which needed a new screw put in. I remember that, as I went to grab the ladder, I was thinking, “What am I doing? It’s 60mph winds outside and I’m about to go on this roof.” I quickly came to my senses and left the sheet making its own music in the wind.

From my experiences in agriculture, I can only imagine what it must be like in industries such as construction. It is a shocking statistic that 30 per cent of workplace deaths are caused by falls from heights. No one is immune—it is easy to imagine that it is about working at the top of the statue of Liberty, painting the Forth road bridge or cleaning windows on the Shanghai tower, but it is just as much about those who are working in shops, hospitals and factories—or, indeed, in any occupation.

I am delighted to welcome no falls week through the work of the No Falls Foundation—a week when we reflect on how we ensure that we are safe at height. It is incumbent on employers to ensure that employees have the correct training and equipment; there is no excuse for employers not ensuring that staff are protected.

To those lone workers like me—the farmers, the small business owners, the digger drivers and the tradesmen who work on their own—I say, “Your life is important.” It is far more important than the cost of the equipment that will keep you safe while working at height, and it is far more important than the roofing sheet banging in the wind, the cable that has come loose, the bird’s nest, the hydraulic hose or the loose tile. I say to those workers that they should select the right personal protective equipment, make use of a good anchor point, use the proper equipment and know how to use it—and they should not skip that local training course. A day spent now might just, one day, save your life.

My thanks go to all those behind the No Falls Foundation. Its website, which I looked at today, is packed with advice, links and safety information—it is worth a look, no matter who you are or where you work.

18:01

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I congratulate Clare Adamson on securing the debate, which is timeous during national no falls week.

I have entitled this speech “Ladder-related myths”, to which I will shortly come. Like the previous speaker, I have observed from my experience the different safety precautions that tradesmen who are working on my house take. For example, every so often, the house—in common with many—requires sprucing up by way of painting, not just doors and so on, but the rones and gutters. I have a two-storey cottage, and there is also the solid-roof conservatory with its doubled-glazed glass roof.

Previously, my regular painter, who is self-employed, dealt with those tasks with only ladders. Like a trapeze artist, he tippy-toed across the wooden spine of the conservatory while I watched anxiously, lest my very own Humpty-Dumpty fell through that glass roof. Maybe he, too, realised retrospectively that it was a bit foolhardy, or at least that he was too old for the ladder routine, so the next time that I called him, he put me on to a colleague, who insisted on scaffolding. I was relieved—it put another thousand pounds on the job, but I would rather that than somebody falling through the roof.

Over the next two weeks, I was entertained as fit young men swung about the scaffolding, and I knew that they, and my glass roof, would—in that order of importance—remain intact. In researching this speech—I did research it—I found a whole list of ladder-related myths. That is a phrase that I never thought that I would use in Parliament, but here are a few of those myths.

The first myth is that the HSE has banned the use of ladders on building sites. That is not the case. Ladders and stepladders can be a sensible and practical option. They can be used for work at height when the use of other work equipment is not justified because of the low risk or short duration: no more than 30 minutes at a time.

Myth 2 is that you need to be formally qualified before using a ladder at work. No, you do not—you need to be competent. That means that you have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to use a ladder properly for the work that you will carry out, or, if you are being trained,

that you work under the supervision of someone who can perform the task competently.

Myth 3 is that you are working at height if you walk up and down a staircase at work—I do not give that much space. No, you are not—work at height does not include walking up and down a permanent staircase in a building.

Myth 4 is that you need to have two feet and one hand on a stepladder at all times when you are carrying out a task. That is not true either. When you need to have both hands free for a brief period to do a job using a stepladder, such as putting a box on a shelf, hanging wallpaper or installing a smoke detector on a ceiling, you need to maintain three points of contact at the working position. That is not just two feet and one hand; it can be two feet and your body.

Myth 5—the last myth—is that the HSE has banned the use of ladders to access scaffolds and that you will be fined if you ignore that ban. That is not true either. Ladders can be used for access as long as they are of the right type, a suitable grade of industrial ladder, in good condition and effectively secured to prevent movement.

There you go—those are five ladder-related myths.

Although I have treated the subject with something of a light touch, it is a very serious business, as my colleague Clare Adamson aptly described. As she indicated, the sensible use of ladders is important not only in the workplace but in people's own homes, when they are using them by themselves.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Grahame. I see that you have found a new specialist subject.

I call Carol Mochan, who is the final speaker in the open debate.

18:05

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Clare Adamson for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I also thank the two speakers before me, both of whose contributions I enjoyed.

On behalf of Scottish Labour, I welcome no falls week 2024 and restate our commitment to promoting safe working at height. I also reaffirm our support for and solidarity with all workers who have been injured in employment, their families, and families who have tragically lost loved ones due to workplace incidents. It is so important that we talk about such matters in the Parliament.

I pay tribute to the No Falls Foundation, which organises no falls week and, as other members have said, promotes this critical work, which forms a base from which campaigns can grow and

deliver results. As the motion states, across Great Britain, in the year 2022-23, 40 people lost their lives due to falls from height. That statistic is absolutely devastating, as all members across the chamber will agree. Falls from height accounted for almost a third of all workplace deaths, which confirms how important it is that we make progress on preventing them.

The workplace environment is different for everyone; some people work in more precarious and challenging conditions than others. Regardless of the workplace environment, though, the safety of workers is absolutely paramount. It has been wonderful that, in the past few weeks, we have discussed these matters so often across the Parliament. At the very least, every worker should expect that their place of work is safe, that precautions are in place and that safety features are explained in all detailed information there. Where that is not the case, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that employers recognise the importance of employees' safety and wellbeing, and that the expected standards are not only met but exceeded.

As a member of the Opposition, that leads me to a key point, which is the need not only to raise issues with the Government but, at times, to challenge it. My colleague Mark Griffin recently proposed an excellent new bill, which was brought to the Parliament just last month. It would have created an industrial injuries council of experts and a new employment injury benefit. It would have been a landmark bill that would have set Scotland apart in recognising the impact of workplace injuries, including falls from height, as well as long Covid, dementia among footballers and cancer among firefighters. That proposal underlines how the Parliament can demonstrate its dedication to the wellbeing of workers across Scotland.

At times, the Opposition's role is to raise—again and again—what the Parliament can do to make a difference. I recognise that everybody is working to ensure that we can make a difference, and I am sure that we can do it by working together. Safety at work is absolutely paramount. I am proud that my party stands with the trade unions and with workers in an effort to reduce incidences of falls and other health and safety matters at work. I hope that Scotland will lead the way on legislating on such issues and that I can play my part in holding the Government to account on them.

I again thank Clare Adamson, who lodged the motion, and the other speakers in the debate.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I invite Tom Arthur to respond to the debate.

18:09

The Minister for Employment and Investment (Tom Arthur): I commend both the No Falls Foundation for inaugurating no falls week and also the range of partners with whom it works. I thank members from across the chamber for their contributions.

I not only thank and commend but pay tribute to Clare Adamson for her tireless work in this area. For many years, Clare has been the convener of the cross-party group on accident prevention and safety awareness. In my inaugural ministerial engagement in Parliament as the Minister for Employment and Investment, it is a particular privilege to have the opportunity to respond to Clare Adamson. I know that another tireless champion of safety in the workplace, our late and dearly missed friend Ron Ewing, would be pleased to see the debate take place. I again put on record my thanks to Clare Adamson for all the work that she undertakes in this area.

I also commend the contributions from across the chamber. The contribution from Tim Eagle was very powerful. He highlighted the key point that it is easy in the moment not to think and to find ourselves in precarious situations that, if we had perhaps taken a few moments of pause to consider, we would not have allowed ourselves to be in. That key point is something that I took from reading the No Falls Foundation website—it is about always challenging ourselves, undertaking training and the importance, as Tim Eagle and other members highlighted, of always having the correct and proper equipment. I commend the work of the No Falls Foundation in this area.

As has been highlighted, the figures are quite striking. Across Britain, 40 lives were lost due to a fall from height in 2022-23, which is 30 per cent of all workplace deaths. That is not happening only in the more obvious settings that we might think of; such tragic incidents occur in shops, offices and other places where the risk might not seem so apparent.

On top of that, every year, thousands of non-fatal falls take place—perhaps as many as 100 every day. That has an economic impact as well. In 2022-23, up to 992,000 working days were lost through non-fatal falls from height, and the estimated total cost was more than £847 million. The number of lives lost and affected by falls from height at work is disturbing enough, but the statistics are made more impactful when we remember that behind them are the lives of individual people, their families, friends and colleagues. I commend the No Falls Foundation for its work to highlight real-life accounts and to provide insight into the consequences in people's lives.

Today, in the chamber, we recognise the work of the No Falls Foundation to prevent accidents in the workplace through increasing awareness and understanding, and to support those whose lives have been affected. I will add my voice in encouraging employers to access the foundation's resources hub and to consider how they might be able to participate this week and what action they can take to promote the wellbeing of their employees.

Christine Grahame: One of the issues is the self-employed. It is different if there is an employer, because an employer has a duty of care, so he or she, or the company, has a liability. The issue is where self-employed people might be trying to cut costs—which I understand—when they take on jobs. Like my man on his ladder, they might think, "Well, I'll just do it, because the scaffolding would put another big bill on it." How do we get through to the self-employed, who might also not be reporting what happens to them?

Tom Arthur: That is an incredibly important point. It is incumbent on us all, working in partnership, to promote best practice. Organisations such as the No Falls Foundation, along with business representative organisations, trade unions, Scottish Hazards and others can all help to create an environment where that information is readily available and to promote best practice, especially for those who are self-employed or operating in small and microbusinesses.

Health and safety at work is important to us all. Good working environments are key to good health, which is important for people accessing and staying in work, and safe workplaces contribute to good mental health. Safe and healthy working conditions are also an internationally recognised human right. However, it is important to point out that health and safety is a reserved matter and is not something that this Parliament or this Government has direct control over.

The health and safety executive is responsible for enforcement across the UK, including in Scotland. However, we have representation on the partnership on health and safety in Scotland, which brings together key players in workplace health and safety in Scotland, and we are taking action through the powers that we have.

Our fair work approach recognises the importance of safe workplaces that support people's health and wellbeing, and it fully supports our commitments to embed equality, inclusion and human rights in everything that we do. I welcome the contribution of the many employers in Scotland that are already implementing fair work practices.

Between 2019 and 2023, fair work first was applied to approximately £4 billion-worth of public

sector funding, contracts and grants. In July last year, we went further and strengthened fair work conditionality in public sector grants. We now require employers that are in receipt of grants to pay at least the real living wage and to provide appropriate channels for effective workers' voice.

Effective voice is one of the critical elements of fair work, providing channels for workers to innovate, raise concerns and be involved in decisions about how their workplace operates. Effective voice can take many forms, but the involvement of workers is key in underpinning safe and healthy workplaces.

It is our long-standing position that a progressive approach to industrial relations, along with stronger protection for workers, is at the heart of a fairer, more successful society. Trade unions can and do make a strong contribution to supporting health and safety and identifying and managing risk.

A crucial element of our support for safe and healthy workplaces is the services that are delivered by Healthy Working Lives, Salus and working health services Scotland. They support and advise employers, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized enterprises that do not have access to in-house occupational health services.

I recognise the importance of the issue and I commend the work of the No Falls Foundation and its partners. It is an example of how critical safe, healthy and fair workplaces are to workers, employers and Scotland's economy as a whole.

Meeting closed at 18:16.

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