



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Meeting of the Parliament

Wednesday 11 September 2024

Session 6



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

© Parliamentary copyright. Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body

Information on the Scottish Parliament's copyright policy can be found on the website - www.parliament.scot or by contacting Public Information on 0131 348 5000

Wednesday 11 September 2024

CONTENTS

	Col.
PORTFOLIO QUESTION TIME	1
RURAL AFFAIRS, LAND REFORM AND ISLANDS	1
Glen Prosen (Forestry and Land Scotland Purchase).....	1
Animal Welfare	3
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Correspondence).....	5
Deer Management Incentive Scheme Pilots (Rainforest Exclusion).....	6
Galloway National Park	7
Agriculture-supporting Infrastructure (Remote and Island Communities)	9
Procurement (Healthy and Local Food)	11
New Entrants to Farming.....	12
NHS RECOVERY, HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE	13
Alcohol-related Brain Damage Residential Rehabilitation Service (Edinburgh).....	13
Monklands Replacement Project.....	15
Cancer Care (Funding Allocations)	16
Mpox	17
Neonatal Intensive Care Units.....	18
Child and Adult Mental Health Services (Impact of Budget Reductions)	20
NHS Highland (Funding)	22
FREE SCHOOL MEALS (PRIMARY PUPILS)	25
<i>Motion moved—[Liam Kerr].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Jenny Gilruth].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Pam Duncan—Glancy].</i>	
Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con).....	25
The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth)	27
Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab).....	30
Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green)	32
Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD)	34
Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con)	36
George Adam (Paisley) (SNP)	37
Foyso Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab).....	39
Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)	40
Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP).....	41
Ross Greer	42
Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab)	44
Jenny Gilruth.....	46
Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con).....	48
RAIL FARES	51
<i>Motion moved—[Graham Simpson].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Fiona Hyslop].</i>	
<i>Amendment moved—[Alex Rowley].</i>	
Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)	51
The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop)	53
Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)	55
Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green).....	57
Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD)	59
Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con).....	60
Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP).....	63
Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con)	64
Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab)	66
Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)	67
Mark Ruskell	69
Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)	70
Fiona Hyslop.....	72
Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con).....	74

BUSINESS MOTIONS	77
<i>Motions moved—[Jamie Hepburn]—and agreed to.</i>	
PARLIAMENTARY BUREAU MOTIONS	80
<i>Motions moved—[Jamie Hepburn].</i>	
DECISION TIME	81
RETROFITTING AND TENEMENT MAINTENANCE	95
<i>Motion debated—[Graham Simpson].</i>	
Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con)	95
Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP).....	98
Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con).....	100
Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab).....	102
Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)	103
Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green).....	105
Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab).....	107
John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)	109
Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab)	111
The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan).....	112

Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 11 September 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is rural affairs, land reform and islands.

Glen Prosen (Forestry and Land Scotland Purchase)

1. Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what the return has been on any anticipated community, biodiversity and environmental outcomes resulting from the £17.6 million public purchase of Glen Prosen by Forestry and Land Scotland. (S6O-03685)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The acquisition at Glen Prosen links neighbouring parcels of public land and provides opportunities for landscape-scale restoration. Forestry and Land Scotland is working on creating new woodland and montane scrub, restoring peatlands and rivers, improving biodiversity and ensuring resilience to climate change. Preparatory work over the past 20 months has included carrying out ecological surveys to better understand the landscape and guide interventions; extensive public, community and stakeholder consultation; clearing windblow; and beginning deer management and fencing. The land management plan is expected to be produced next year.

Forestry and Land Scotland is pursuing promising opportunities to create new jobs and economic benefits, including proposals for a tree nursery, an education offer, a manufacturing business, a recreation proposition, a field studies centre and plans for residential use.

Liam Kerr: That is certainly one way to look at the matter. Local reports say that, since FLS outbid private bidders a couple of years ago, the top of the glen has, in effect, become depopulated. Families have been turfed out of their homes, which lie abandoned and decaying, and the local school is at risk of closure. Angus already has a problem with rural depopulation and mothballed schools. Meanwhile, the deer population is virtually extinct on unmanaged heather moorland.

What precisely is the Scottish Government doing to turn the situation around? Does the cabinet secretary agree that the experiment should never be repeated in Angus?

Mairi Gougeon: First, we need to set some facts straight in relation to some of the completely baseless claims that Liam Kerr just made. He made an accusation about the houses being in disrepair. The houses, as well as the other built assets that exist in Glen Prosen, are in good condition and are actively maintained. They currently provide homes for two families. An expressions-of-interest exercise engaged the market on ideas for the future development of the wider portfolio of built assets. Discussions are now under way with interested parties about the possibility of a range of future uses that would lead to community benefits. Local communities have also been fully engaged in the land management plan process.

Liam Kerr also levelled an accusation about the employees of the estate, and it is important to set the record straight on that. The seller who previously had Glen Prosen ran it as a sporting estate but wound down the business, which included making the workforce redundant. Termination of the previous employment was undertaken by the seller with no involvement of FLS, and the full-time employees had service occupancy agreements for their homes.

There were five full-time employees and one part-time employee at Glen Prosen prior to the sale, and FLS engaged with them as soon as it was able to do so. Two of the former estate employees moved on before the acquisition was completed, and the part-time role ended when the business activities of the estate were wound up. Upon FLS acquiring the estate, three former estate employees were given tenancies. One has since moved on, another has a part-time contract with FLS on the estate and the last is employed elsewhere but continues as a tenant.

I hope that that clarifies the situation for Mr Kerr.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary set out the strategic value of acquiring Glen Prosen with regard to the outcomes mentioned? Will any specific proposals for the management of the land be subject to a form of consultation?

Mairi Gougeon: I thank Colin Beattie for asking that important question and for allowing me the opportunity to set that out.

The Angus glens project, which includes Glen Prosen, involves a strategic cluster of land in the Cairngorms national park, which offers scope to deliver on the Scottish Government's commitment to nature recovery and climate resilience, as well as to benefit people through the economic,

educational, social and wellbeing opportunities that are being considered. The project is large and will take time to deliver, but it is of crucial importance to tackling the climate and biodiversity crisis that we face.

I assure Colin Beattie and other members that FLS has been actively engaging and consulting on the terms of the draft land management plan with all local stakeholders, especially the local community, neighbouring landowners and land managers. That will continue during the finalisation of the plan for the area, and it will ensure that the potential opportunities that the acquisition will afford are understood and provided for.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): Let us get the facts and figures correct. Expenditure at Glen Prosen has outstripped income by 25 per cent, 18 members of FLS seem to be floating around and consulting on various things, and we still do not have a management plan two and a half years after the purchase. What is the promise for this autumn? Will the plan be delivered, or is it still as far away as it seemed to be in August?

Mairi Gougeon: I do not know whether Edward Mountain listened to my previous responses, in which I outlined when the land management plan would be coming forward. As I have also already outlined in my previous responses, there is no getting around the fact that this is a very large project. FLS wants engagement to take place to ensure that the land management plan is made in consultation with the local communities. That takes time, as do all the various other assessments that have to be undertaken as part of the process. I have said that the plan will come out next year, and there will be engagement as part of that.

Animal Welfare

2. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to support animal welfare. (S6O-03686)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government is fully committed to improving and protecting the welfare of animals in Scotland. We have delivered, or are on course to deliver, several of our programme for government commitments, including consulting on extending licensing legislation to animal care services, consulting on phasing out cages for laying hens and banning the export of livestock for fattening or slaughter.

We are committed to working with our United Kingdom counterparts to deliver welfare improvements whenever it is appropriate to do so. However, we will not hesitate to act independently if it is needed in order to improve animal welfare.

Clare Haughey: The minister will be aware of my long-standing concerns about the safety and treatment of greyhounds that are used in racing. Shawfield stadium in my constituency was the last licensed track in Scotland, but, thankfully, no races have taken place since the pandemic. In my view, and that of the Scottish Animal Welfare Commission, as well as that of numerous other animal welfare organisations, greyhound racing is inherently unsafe, so I believe that a phased ban is required sooner rather than later. Will the minister provide an update on any representations that he has had in recent months with stakeholders regarding greyhound racing?

Jim Fairlie: There have been no meetings to discuss greyhound racing in recent months, but I understand that the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee will report on petition PE1758, which calls for an end to greyhound racing in Scotland, and Mr Ruskell's bill is to be introduced. I will consider both carefully before deciding on how to proceed.

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a farmer.

One of the increasing threats to livestock welfare is attacks from dogs. Despite the introduction of harsher penalties in November 2021, livestock worrying continues to be an issue across rural Scotland. What more can the Government do to address that issue? Will there be a commitment to reviewing the Scottish outdoor access code, as Scotland's Rural College has recommended?

Jim Fairlie: I know that the issue has been raised before, but we will have to consider balancing that with allowing people to have a right of responsible access. Mr Eagle rightly points out that livestock worrying is a disaster for livestock farmers in Scotland. The fact that the Scottish Government supported Emma Harper's livestock worrying bill was a crucial step forward. We now have a maximum penalty of a fine of up to £40,000 or jail, so we are taking the issue very seriously.

I and other members of the Government continue to put out the message that we should keep our dogs under control, particularly when they are among livestock, because they should not be there.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The greyhound racing industry's governing body recorded that more than 100 dogs died and more than 4,000 were injured while racing at regulated tracks in England and Wales last year. Does the minister recognise that the nature of that activity, with dogs running against each other at speeds of up to 40mph around sharp bends, leads to a similar rate of collision at any

track, regardless of whether it be in Newcastle or Fife?

Jim Fairlie: I recognise that the member has a long-standing concern about greyhound racing. As I have said, we will wait to see the result of the petition and the member's bill, and we will take our decisions from there.

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Correspondence)

3. **Bob Doris (Glasgow) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what interaction and correspondence it has had, regarding matters related to Scotland's rural economy, with the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, including relevant officials, since their appointment in July. (S6O-03687)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): I have met Steve Reed, the new UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, once so far, when we discussed a range of issues of mutual interest. My officials regularly meet his officials.

I welcome the resetting of the relationship between Scottish and UK Government ministers that has taken place since the general election, and the reinstigation of the interministerial group for environment, food and rural affairs, which will meet for the first time in a year on 16 September. I look forward to continuing to build a more open and, I hope, constructive relationship in the coming months.

Bob Doris: Even this city boy knows that agriculture is a long-term endeavour, with plans sometimes being made years in advance. So far, the new UK Government has not said very much about future funding, which has led to concerns that there is not enough clarity and certainty, and that the new UK Government might be just as bad as the previous UK Government.

Will the cabinet secretary commit to write to the UK Government well ahead of the UK budget to reiterate the calls for clarity and certainty over future funding settlements, which both the industry and the Scottish National Party have said that Scotland's agriculture sector needs?

Mairi Gougeon: Bob Doris raises a hugely important matter. As he will undoubtedly be aware, no commitment to agriculture funding has been made by the UK Government beyond next year. The UK Government must commit to urgent, meaningful engagement on a future multiyear programme funding settlement to provide the certainty and assurance that are needed in order for us to be able to deliver future agriculture policies.

The uncertainty that has been created by the lack of clarity is having a direct impact now. An opportunity has been missed to deliver public good and to take urgent measures to meet the current and future climate change emissions reduction targets for Scotland and the wider UK. I intend to raise the issue with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when we meet at the IMG meeting on Monday.

Deer Management Incentive Scheme Pilots (Rainforest Exclusion)

4. **Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government for what reason rainforests were excluded from the deer management incentive scheme pilots. (S6O-03688)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The purpose of the pilots is to explore incentives for deer management in different local circumstances. The pilots were designed around a number of criteria, including access to data on current cull levels and the potential barriers to increasing deer management. The focus of the pilots is on red deer in Cairngorms national park, roe deer in the central belt and sika deer in south Loch Ness.

We also provide support for projects that help to restore and expand Scotland's rainforests, as part of which funding is available to reduce deer impacts, alongside other activities, including rhododendron control.

Graham Simpson: The minister will know that deer are a natural part of the rainforest ecosystem, but the increasing number of deer and their mobility mean that they are one of the main barriers to rainforest restoration.

Given that the Scottish Government has committed to restoring Scotland's rainforests, I ask the minister to reconsider his current position and to ensure that the deer management incentive scheme will be extended to key rainforest locations.

Jim Fairlie: We will not expand the current pilot scheme, but it is part of a package of looking at how we will manage deer across the whole country. Rainforests are crucial to what we will look at as we go forward.

Although the deer management incentive scheme pilots are looking at a specific set of circumstances, Graham Simpson can be assured that rainforests are very much part of our longer-term thinking.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Does the minister agree that deer management plans should consider biodiversity? What progress is being made towards

reintroducing Scotland's native Eurasian lynx to help to control deer populations naturally, as has successfully happened over the past 50 years in Austria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Switzerland, without any adverse impact on people, pets or livestock?

Jim Fairlie: There are no intentions to allow the introduction of lynx in Scotland.

Galloway National Park

5. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what steps it has taken to ensure that any future Galloway national park will work in the best interests of local communities. (S6O-03689)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): If there is to be a new national park in Galloway, it must be focused on helping to meet the needs of local communities. NatureScot has begun its investigation into the proposal, which will involve extensive public consultation.

We want local people, communities and businesses to have their say on whether Galloway should become Scotland's next national park, as well as on what role a new park could play in supporting economic growth, community development, visitor management and environmental protection.

When we receive NatureScot's report next spring, we will carefully consider its findings before setting out or deciding on any next steps.

Finlay Carson: As it has taken the Government two years to get the nomination for a national park on the table, and almost 10 years for the Galloway National Park Association to make its case, does the cabinet secretary feel that sufficient time has been given to NatureScot to prepare a consultation document, which it will then have only 12 weeks to consult on, not to mention that those 12 weeks will take in Christmas and new year? I am aware that there would be further consultation if the Scottish Government then decides to designate, but that would be only on the finer detail.

Given that the national park designation will have significant impacts that will last generations, does the cabinet secretary agree that the people of Galloway should be given a significantly longer opportunity to make their feelings known, even if that pushes the decision to designate, or not, and any subsequent legislation, into the next parliamentary session?

Mairi Gougeon: I understand the concern that Finlay Carson raises in relation to the issue. That is why I have set out that the period of investigation and reporting that NatureScot is

undertaking is hugely important, and why I encourage everybody who lives in the proposed area to ensure that they have their say.

I believe that the timeframe that has been set out is enough time. As I set out in a response to the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee this morning, although there is a formal consultation time, as of yesterday, NatureScot has published an online resource that sets out where all that information will be available and how people will be able to have their say. I also know that there will be a number of engagement and other events outwith that consultation that communities can attend to ensure that they make their voice known and heard.

I will not commit at this stage to extending a process when I do not know whether that will be needed. I am happy to consider that as we move through the investigation, if it appears that more time may be needed. However, again, I think that it can be delivered within the timeframe, which is why it has been set out as it is. I encourage everyone to take part.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I reiterate that the Galloway national park proposal has caused controversy locally, with my office receiving more than 200 representations of people's views. It is important that communities, small and large, are consulted so that their voices are heard and that any decision that is taken works in the best interests of Galloway's diverse communities.

Will the cabinet secretary provide further assurance that NatureScot will come to all communities in the region and speak to everyone who would like to be heard?

Mairi Gougeon: I say at the outset that I fully agree that every community in Dumfries and Galloway should be able to have their say on the proposal as to whether to establish a national park. As I outlined in my previous answer, yesterday, NatureScot launched a dedicated information website and online engagement hub for local residents and communities to find out more information.

I know that NatureScot is planning further engagement later this month, when it will be issuing a leaflet to all households within and close to the proposed area, explaining what the consultation process will involve as well as explaining how people can take part. Information will be available on NatureScot's website.

Everyone with an interest will be able to make their views known through the consultation paper. There will also be surveys and a series of public meetings, events and drop-in surgeries. There will also be engagement and events with local

businesses and organisations, community councils, young people and equality groups.

I hope that that provides the assurance that Emma Harper and other members who represent the south of Scotland are looking for.

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): Does the cabinet secretary agree that, in many ways, we have a blank sheet of paper here, that there is no single model of a national park, and that local people should take part in the consultation not only to give their view on whether they support it, but to shape the powers, boundary and vision of any proposed Galloway national park?

If the Government decides to go ahead with the proposal, will she give an assurance that any national park will be made in Galloway, for the people of Galloway?

Mairi Gougeon: Yes. I absolutely give that assurance. I thank Colin Smyth for raising that hugely important point.

Our current national parks are very different from each other. Again, the proposal would be starting from a blank sheet of paper in relation to the overall powers that the park would have, such as those over planning. There are issues around what the boundary looks like that could be discussed. Galloway is obviously of a very different nature from our other national park areas, as agriculture is so vital to the area as a whole. It is vital that all that is recognised.

I absolutely encourage everyone who lives in the proposed area in Galloway to have their say through the events that I mentioned. All that information will be published and circulated to them.

Agriculture-supporting Infrastructure (Remote and Island Communities)

6. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact its recently announced budget reductions will have on investment in infrastructure that supports agriculture in remote and island communities. (S6O-03690)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The rural affairs, land reform and islands—RALRI—portfolio has supported the response to financial pressures by identifying small reductions, but none of those relate to investment in infrastructure that supports agriculture in rural and island communities.

We continue to invest in agricultural communities. Last week, we announced that support payments of more than £243 million will start to be paid to more than 11,500 farming businesses.

We are also driving an ambitious programme of vessel and infrastructure upgrades and replacements in the coming years, including port projects that are near completion, the six major vessels that are currently under construction and the seven small vessels that Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd is progressing through procurement.

Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. I am a partner in a farming business. On back British farming day, I thank farmers across the country, and particularly those from my region of the Highlands and Islands, for all that they do.

It is now more than six years since Orkney's abattoir closed and, despite the efforts of local stakeholders and warm words from the Scottish Government, no solution has yet been found for a new facility. Local abattoirs play an important role in supporting local rural businesses in agriculture, ensuring animal welfare and reducing food miles.

On back British farming day, will the minister advise whether the Scottish Government is playing any role in supporting the establishment of a new abattoir in Orkney?

Jim Fairlie: The loss of small abattoirs across the country has been a huge issue, and I fully accept that I was concerned about the issue long before I came to the Scottish Parliament. I am prepared to meet Jamie Halcro Johnston to discuss the Orkney issue specifically. Funding has gone in from the small producers pilot fund, but I do not want to specify where that will go. However, I absolutely take on board the fact that we have an issue with small abattoirs.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): The minister will be aware that auction marts are beginning to leave islands, forcing island farmers and crofters to take their livestock off island to sell. That means that they accept lower prices, because otherwise they have to take those animals back on island. What can he do to help islands to continue to have their auction marts locally, so that they can sell their animals at the highest price?

Jim Fairlie: Unfortunately, agricultural markets are private businesses that take commercial decisions. However, the rural economy is absolutely founded on livestock markets. The auction houses that I have dealt with know that they have a responsibility to ensure that island communities can continue to trade. I am happy to have a conversation with Rhoda Grant and the auction market in question if there is a specific issue.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): It has been suggested that local abattoirs are an integral part of the infrastructure that supports our farming

community. Orkney has felt keenly the loss of the abattoir in the islands, but there are plans to develop a more bespoke abattoir, and assessments have been made of its viability.

I echo the plea that the minister has already received that he engages with that and ensures that the Scottish Government gives whatever support it can to the delivery of an abattoir that is much needed in the islands that I represent.

Jim Fairlie: I give the assurance that I am more than happy to meet Liam McArthur, and I am absolutely prepared to engage in whatever we can do to support any small abattoir.

Procurement (Healthy and Local Food)

7. Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the rural affairs secretary has had with ministerial colleagues regarding how its procurement powers can encourage the availability of healthy, local food. (S6O-03691)

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): The Scottish Government recognises that public procurement plays a key role in ensuring that everyone has access to healthy, fresh and seasonal food. That understanding is reflected in our draft good food nation plan, which outlines how we seek to maximise the impact that procurement can have through the application of relevant legislation and policy.

Our cross-cutting approach is also supported by the ministerial working group on food, which enables ministers to work collectively to drive cross-portfolio engagement on food-related issues and ensure that food policy is co-ordinated and cohesive.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Many third sector organisations, such as Grow 73 in my region, do great work and support local healthy food provision. They often rely on commissioned grants from the Scottish Government or from local government. I ask the cabinet secretary for her assurance that her Government is using all the powers in its control to support the procurement of good local food, and I ask her to give a guarantee that third sector organisations that provide access to it will get funding decisions in a prompt and efficient way.

Mairi Gougeon: Pam Duncan-Glancy raises a really important point, which we recognised in our draft good food nation plan. There are a number of mechanisms in the plan that I could set out—and I could follow up on them with her—as to how we can encourage local procurement within our existing powers. There are difficulties with procurement, including cross-cutting pieces of legislation to which we must adhere, but we know

that there are places where it is working, and we can make it work within the current framework.

We undertook a consultation on the draft good food nation plan earlier this year. We received a significant response, which I am really encouraged by, and I hope that we can strengthen some of its provisions. I look forward to having a discussion to see what more can be done. If there are specific organisations that Pam Duncan-Glancy would like me to engage with, I am more than happy to do that to see how we can strengthen the plan.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Some 85 per cent of the British public support increasing our self-sufficiency in food production in the United Kingdom. Today is back British farming day, and NFU Scotland is at Westminster, supporting MPs to mark this important day. Will the cabinet secretary support Scottish Conservative calls to hold a back British farming day here in the Scottish Parliament, so that we can celebrate the importance of Scottish farming?

Mairi Gougeon: I would hope that we are supporting our farmers in the job that we do every day. That is hugely important. I know the work that is being undertaken by NFUS, which does sterling work in raising the profile and importance of our industry. I have been heartened by some of the questions that I have received from across the chamber today from members who recognise that the funding that we put into agriculture is hugely important, because of food production. It is such an essential, basic need, which we require in order to survive, and that is why I am proud to support our farmers.

I am, of course, more than happy to enter into discussions with Rachael Hamilton if she has specific celebrations in mind. As ever, I am privileged, in this job, to travel across the country to meet our farmers and crofters and those who are involved in producing our food. I am, of course, happy to celebrate their achievements.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We now come to question 8—time is marching on.

New Entrants to Farming

8. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what support it is providing for new entrants to farming. (S6O-03692)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): The Scottish Government continues to invest in new entrants into farming and crofting. From 2015 to September 2024, around £9.5 million of young farmer and new entrants support funding has been paid under the national reserve. The Scottish Government has helped to identify 134 land opportunities through the farming

opportunities for new entrants group, it has facilitated more than 250 joint ventures through the Scottish Land Matching Service, it has offered a range of consultancy advice to new entrants through the Farm Advisory Service and it has supported the machinery ring pre-apprenticeship programme and the next-generation practical training fund to create opportunities for new entrants and young people.

Murdo Fraser: The minister will be aware of the issue that is having an impact on one of my Fife constituents, who, as a new entrant, was given a 10-year starter farm tenancy from Forestry and Land Scotland and built up a business but, at the end of that 10-year period, found it impossible to find alternative land to farm and now faces having to leave the industry altogether, which is a dismal outcome for everybody involved. What can the minister do to help my constituent and any others who are caught in a similar situation?

Jim Fairlie: I am aware of the individual case that Murdo Fraser has raised. It is not a discussion that I would like to have in the chamber, but I am more than happy to meet him after this question-time session.

The new entrants scheme was paused, because it was not having the desired effect, although some successes came out of that. As has just been released in the programme for government, we are asking our public authorities to consider what land they have so as to create more opportunities for new farmers and new entrants to farming.

Speaking as someone who had an awful job trying to get into farming myself, I am absolutely committed to that. We will ensure that the Scottish Government is doing what it can to get young people into farming.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions on rural affairs, land reform and islands.

NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The next portfolio is national health service recovery, health and social care. Question 1 has been withdrawn.

Alcohol-related Brain Damage Residential Rehabilitation Service (Edinburgh)

2. **Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to Dr Stephen Smith's evaluation of the alcohol-related brain damage residential rehabilitation service in Edinburgh. (S6O-03694)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The Scottish Government is currently reviewing the evaluation of the

Penumbra Milestone alcohol-related brain damage—ARBD—unit that was undertaken by Dr Smith. The report highlights the improvement in cognitive function for people who were assessed in the evaluation period as well as reduced attendance rates at emergency departments. The Scottish Government will review the report's findings and recommendations and will consider them in future policy development.

Sue Webber: This week, we learned that 1,277 people tragically lost their lives to alcohol in 2023—a 15-year high that is, quite frankly, nothing to celebrate. That is 1,277 people who have lived with years of poor health and who have left behind families and friends—the effects are felt by so, so many. We now have 40 per cent fewer people accessing alcohol services than a decade ago and, when people do access those services, they are much older and, as a result, have increasingly complex problems.

The ARBD unit that is run by Penumbra at Milestone house saves lives, yet it is facing the withdrawal of funding. Given that the service reduces NHS Lothian hospital bed days by nearly 2,000 a year, what impact assessment has been carried out on what would happen if the service were to close?

Jenni Minto: I would like to put on record my sympathy and my condolences to all the families who have been impacted in the past year due to alcohol deaths of their loved ones.

As Sue Webber will know, decisions on funding and service provision are made at a local level by NHS Lothian and, although we have no official contact with the health board on this issue, ministers would have to consider the implications of such a move very carefully.

The Scottish Government has set out a clear definition of what counts as residential rehabilitation and has used it consistently. We are working with members of our expert residential rehabilitation development working group to assess whether the ARBD unit meets the definition and we will provide an update to the service manager in due course.

Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): Following a Public Health Scotland report from February this year showing that the Scottish Government is on track to hit its target of 1,000 individuals per year being publicly funded to go to rehab by 2026, can the minister outline the key steps that are being taken to ensure that the target is met?

Jenni Minto: The Scottish Government is taking a number of actions to increase access to residential rehab and meet our targets. That includes providing alcohol and drug partnerships with £5 million per year for residential rehab;

creating a £2 million residential rehab additional placement fund for local areas that have an increased demand for placements; and expanding residential rehab capacity by making £38 million available to eight projects across Scotland to provide 140 more beds by 2025-26.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): Given the recent news that alcohol-related deaths are at a 15-year high and that the number of people who are accessing planned alcohol care and treatment has been declining for a decade, healthcare professionals in my region, South Scotland, tell me that the prevalence of ARBD unplanned presentations at emergency departments is increasing. That is not good for the patients, for the families or for the staff. Does the Government recognise that, and what measures is it taking to ensure that early intervention and support for those patients and families can be achieved right across Scotland?

Jenni Minto: Yes, the Scottish Government absolutely recognises that and we have asked Public Health Scotland to investigate the recent fall in numbers of referrals to alcohol and drug specialist services. We are giving funding to alcohol and drug partnerships for both alcohol and drug treatment services, because those services are integrated. We have made £112 million available to them, which is being used to ensure that they can make the right local decisions. I absolutely recognise that there has been a fall in numbers. We need to look at the reasons behind that, whether that is to do with stigma or a lack of understanding of where those services are.

Monklands Replacement Project

3. Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with NHS Lanarkshire regarding the progress of the Monklands replacement project. (S6O-03695)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): The business case remains under development and NHS Lanarkshire has been invited to provide an update to the Scottish Government's capital investment group later this month.

Fulton MacGregor: Clearly, the financial circumstances are extremely difficult, with an austerity agenda being pursued by the United Kingdom Government. However, that said, I have had contact from many constituents who are worried that there may be further delays to the new hospital, which is badly needed. I know that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Neil Gray, will have had similar representations in his role as a constituency MSP, and I appreciate that that is why he cannot answer the question. To reassure my constituents, will the minister confirm

that the Monklands replacement project remains a top priority for the Scottish Government?

Maree Todd: Yes, I understand the concerns of the member's constituents. As we have made clear, the capital funding position is extremely challenging. All capital projects are under review to ensure that they are affordable and deliverable. The Scottish Government is in on-going discussions with NHS Lanarkshire and the impact of the budget settlement on the proposal to replace Monklands hospital. Further clarity on the health capital programme, including Monklands, will be provided following the 2025-26 Scottish budget and the review of the infrastructure investment plan.

Cancer Care (Funding Allocations)

4. Humza Yousaf (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on funding allocations to ensure the best possible cancer care for patients, particularly in their local communities. (S6O-03696)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The Scottish Government has disbursed cancer service allocations for this year to local health boards, including £4.6 million for systemic anti-cancer therapy and £11.3 million for cancer waiting times, in line with our overall strategic aim that, where possible, diagnostic tests and treatment are situated close to home and travel to specialist care is fully supported.

In addition, we are working in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support to improve the service that we offer patients in local communities through the transforming cancer care programme. It is the first programme of its kind in the United Kingdom and ensures that every patient with cancer in Scotland has access to a specialist key support worker who can assist them in accessing wider local services.

Humza Yousaf: I thank the minister for her comprehensive response. I am sure that she, like me, was pleased to see the results of the Scottish cancer patient experience survey, which was published yesterday and shows that 95 per cent of cancer patients viewed the care that they received positively. However, an area for improvement, and I know that the minister will share my view on this, is that cancer patients often tell us that they want a single point of contact throughout their cancer journey who can provide advice and support. Can the minister outline the support and funding that the Scottish Government is providing to embed single points of contact across Scotland's national health service and, in particular, in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board area, which affects my constituents in Glasgow Pollok?

Jenni Minto: I reiterate the point that Humza Yousaf has made about the positive survey from Macmillan. I agree on the importance and effectiveness of a single point of contact to provide advice and support during a person's cancer journey. In 2024-25, we have continued to invest in our single point of contact programme, including in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, where we have invested more than £250,000 to support people with gynaecological, prostate and lung cancer. We are working with Healthcare Improvement Scotland to review the programme to consider how we best scale the approach across Scotland.

Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): Yesterday, the Scottish cancer patient experience survey for 2024 found that more than one in five cancer patients felt that they should have been seen much sooner for diagnosis. I think that we would all acknowledge that early intervention and treatment is key to beating cancer, but the Scottish Government's continued failure to meet waiting time targets is putting lives at risk. Can the minister tell me what outcomes will be achieved by the additional £11 million that she mentioned? By when will that money improve the missed 31 and 62-day cancer waiting time targets?

Jenni Minto: Jackie Baillie is right to say that we have room for improvement on waiting times for cancer, and we are doing work in that regard. Some £1.2 million of the funding has been directed specifically towards diagnostics, and we continue to focus on improving timely access to cancer services, which is why our programme for government has committed to opening a further rapid cancer diagnostic service, bringing our national total to six.

Mpox

5. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the recent outbreak of mpox in Africa, which was declared by the World Health Organization on 14 August to be a public health emergency of international concern, what plans it has put in place for any potential outbreak of mpox in Scotland. (S6O-03697)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): We are aware of the recent outbreak of mpox in Africa, which has been declared as a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization. Currently, there are no cases of clade I mpox confirmed in the United Kingdom, and the risk to the UK population is considered low.

The Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland are working closely with public health colleagues across the UK, including other UK

ministerial colleagues, as well as national health service boards in Scotland, to monitor the situation and prepare for any cases that we might see.

Audrey Nicoll: Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on how the general population is being informed about the disease and assure the public that transmission rates are, as he said, a low risk to the general population?

Neil Gray: I thank Audrey Nicoll for raising that important issue. Colleagues will have received a letter that I sent to all MSPs on 28 August. I have offered a meeting and a briefing for all Opposition colleagues next week to discuss the issue and to make sure that, from a public information perspective, we, as local leaders, are able to provide reassurance that Public Health Scotland continues to work closely with UK Health Security Agency colleagues to update a range of guidance for health professionals and the general public on mpox, in relation to the existing outbreak of clade IIb mpox, which has been present in the UK since 2022, and investigation and planning for the new strain, clade Ib, which has been spreading in parts of Africa. The guidance includes updates to the Public Health Scotland website and NHS Inform, which provides information to the general public on mpox, including on how it is transmitted, symptoms, who to contact, treatment and dos and don'ts for travellers, as well as updates for the fitfortravel website for travellers to central Africa.

The overall risk to the public is considered low, and, to date, there have been no cases of clade Ib in Scotland.

We are reminding people who have travelled recently to the affected areas to be aware of the signs and symptoms and to contact a health professional if they are concerned.

Neonatal Intensive Care Units

6. Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support specialist neonatal intensive care units across Scotland. (S6O-03698)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The Scottish Government commissioned independent modelling of neonatal intensive care in Scotland, and the report was published on 29 May. We have asked the regional chief executives to progress with development of implementation plans, with the expectation that implementation of the new model is phased over the next one to two years. Additionally, the Scottish Government, with the support of Health Improvement Scotland and Bliss, has consulted families on implementation of the new model. We are sharing the outputs of that consultation with regional chief executives to inform development of pathways and processes for the new model of

care. Jointly with national clinical leads, we are considering Scotland-level actions required.

The Scottish Government continues to provide funding to the boards hosting the neonatal intensive care units to build the capacity required.

Richard Leonard: I thank the minister for her reply, but let us get the facts straight here. The proposal to downgrade the neonatal unit at Wishaw hospital is based on inconsistent, old and inaccurate data, a flawed methodology, and excluded any consultation with parents and families.

This morning, the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considered a petition from those same parents and families. As a result, the committee has agreed to go on a site visit. Why has Scotland's Minister for Public Health and Women's Health never done the same? Will she now visit the Wishaw specialist neonatal intensive care unit, speak to staff and listen to their concerns? Will she review again her decision to downgrade the unit in Wishaw in the light of deliverability, capacity and resilience issues that risk not only the human rights but the human lives of those affected?

Jenni Minto: I am sure that Richard Leonard would like to correct the parliamentary record, because I have visited the Wishaw neonatal unit. I have also visited Ninewells hospital and the Queen Elizabeth university hospital and I have been gathering evidence from people across the health boards and the neonatal and maternity services that Scotland provides.

I am completely focused on ensuring that we make the right decision for the smallest and sickest babies in Scotland. I have read on numerous occasions the expert advice that we have received and I have spoken to the people who were involved in producing it, and that advice shows that reducing to three the number of intensive neonatal care units is the correct decision to support families with the smallest and sickest babies.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): Can the minister speak to the success of the implementation of "The Best Start: A Five-Year Forward Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Care in Scotland", and advise how the Scottish Government will continue to ensure that women and babies receive the highest quality of care according to their needs?

Jenni Minto: The plan set out our vision of a transformation of maternity and neonatal services, and the vast majority of its recommendations have been implemented. Health boards have embedded the plan in local maternity and neonatal care, and that has been supported by national initiatives such as the young patients family fund,

improvements to adverse events investigating and the national bereavement care pathway.

Work continues to establish the new model of neonatal intensive care and to deliver continuity of carer, which is highlighted as a programme for government commitment.

I thank all the people who have been involved in helping to achieve the best start vision, and we will publish a full programme report later this year.

Child and Adult Mental Health Services (Impact of Budget Reductions)

7. Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what impact reductions to mental health budgets will have on child and adult mental health services. (S6O-03699)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): Following the United Kingdom Chancellor of the Exchequer's July statement, the Scottish Government continues to face the most challenging financial situation since devolution.

We have sought to protect mental health funding despite difficult decisions about reductions, which affect the whole Government. Although any reduction is regrettable, we remain committed to taking forward our work across mental health and working closely with key partners. Our collective focus has to be on making as much difference as possible with our funding.

We will continue to pursue our commitment to addressing waiting times backlogs, through our direct engagement with national health service boards, and to drive forward the delivery of our mental health and wellbeing strategy and associated delivery plan, by investing in prevention and early intervention as well as in services.

Meghan Gallacher: Regrettable is one word, but disgraceful is another, because, in some areas of the country, 60 per cent of children and young people are not being seen until between 19 and 35 weeks after their referrals to child and adolescent mental health services. How does the minister intend to tackle CAMHS waiting lists when funding for those services has been disproportionately cut by £18.8 million? Does she feel that those cuts are proportionate?

Maree Todd: To be clear, CAMHS funding has not been cut by £18.8 million. The reduction in mental health portfolios has been achieved largely through programmes being adapted or by taking back money from programmes that have come to an end. In some cases, when it has been possible, work has been reprofiled.

We have a really good news story to tell about CAMHS. I am very proud of the sustained progress that we have made over the past few years. That has been down to enormous effort from staff all over Scotland. However, in the first half of this year, we have seen the best national performance against CAMHS waiting times since the 18-week standard was introduced 10 years ago, in 2014.

In the quarter up to June 2024, 84.1 per cent of CAMHS patients started treatment within 18 weeks of referral, and that proportion was up from 73.8 per cent in the same quarter in the previous year. For the second quarter in a row, eight out of 14 of our territorial boards met the 90 per cent standard, and one in two children and young people who are referred to CAMHS now start treatment within six weeks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. We need to go to supplementary questions.

Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP): Will the minister advise on the Scottish Government's progress towards meeting the child and adolescent mental health services waiting times national standard?

Maree Todd: As I made clear in my previous answer, I am really proud of the progress that we have made. Eight out of the 14 boards met the 90 per cent standard for the second quarter in a row. That is a substantial improvement on where we have been in the past. One in two children and young people who are referred to CAMHS now start treatment within six weeks, compared with within 12 weeks before the pandemic. During the past few years, there has been real and sustained improvement, which was not apparent prior to the pandemic.

However, we are not complacent, despite the progress, and we continue to be absolutely clear that long waits are unacceptable. Performance varies across health boards, and enhanced support is available from the Government to individual health boards that are not on track to meet the standard.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The minister says that she has been trying to protect mental health funding, but I am afraid that the Government does not have a good track record. The health budget for mental health has been frozen or cut in-year for the past two years, with almost £20 million in cuts announced just last week. In the programme for government, the Government said that it would commit to £120 million of funding for mental health. Will that be new money, or is it just a repackaging of existing funding?

Maree Todd: The £120 million commitment was apparent from the budget that we, as a Parliament, collectively passed earlier this year. I have been clear that the savings have been made largely, but not solely, by reprofiling spend. We will slow down the pace of our delivery on commitments by removing some marketing funding and by pulling together the funding, for example, in the mental health enhanced outcomes framework, which brings together a number of previous mental health funding streams. We now offer a single flexible funding stream to NHS boards and integration joint boards, which means that they can use it significantly more flexibly. It is no longer ring fenced, and we have taken a saving back from that. I think that that will work better.

NHS Highland (Funding)

8. Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide any additional funding to NHS Highland, in light of the reported overspend in excess of £50 million by the NHS board in its 2023-24 revenue budget. (S6O-03700)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): We provided increased investment of £0.5 billion for national health service boards in 2024-25, which took funding to more than £14.2 billion. That is an increase of almost 3 per cent in real terms, with NHS Highland seeing £39 million of increased investment for 2024-25.

Notwithstanding that investment, NHS boards, like other public services, are under unprecedented pressure as a result of spiralling United Kingdom inflation—which has eroded our spending power—Brexit and Covid, and we continue to work with them to address the financial challenges this year and beyond.

The Scottish Government recognises the continued financial and operational pressures that the health and social care sector faces and the need to recover, reform and improve services.

Edward Mountain: In short, I think that that means no. As there will be no additional funding and there is no way for NHS Highland to save additional funds by reducing its biggest cost, which is staff costs, will the cabinet secretary reveal which elective surgeries the Government suggests that NHS Highland should cancel to allow it to remain financially solvent?

Neil Gray: Through our finance directorate, we are supporting NHS boards, including NHS Highland, to work through the financial pressures that they are facing and to work to their financial recovery plans. I have a good working relationship with the new chief executive, Fiona Davies, in relation to meeting those financial plans. We will

continue to work to protect front-line NHS provision rather than, as Edward Mountain suggests, seeing it stripped back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I have two requests for supplementary questions. I intend to take both, but I ask that they are both kept brief.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): General practitioners in the Highlands assure me that £6 million could be saved every year if NHS Highland were to return to GPs the service of providing vaccinations. Adopting that approach across Scotland would lead to savings of £100 million. I have been pressing for that to happen for two and a half years. Why will the cabinet secretary not order NHS Highland to make those savings?

Neil Gray: Fergus Ewing and I have engaged previously on that point, including with local GPs in his constituency. He will be aware that the 2018 GP contract was agreed between the Scottish Government and the British Medical Association following a poll of the profession. The transfer of vaccinations was a key element of that contract and allows GPs to focus on what only they can do. That does not mean that GPs should never deliver vaccinations; the contract provides flexibility in rural situations.

I have asked NHS Highland to make full use of all the flexibilities in the GP contract to ensure comprehensive delivery of our vaccination programmes. I understand that the latest NHS Highland vaccination data demonstrates improved rates.

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): It was good to hear the cabinet secretary lay out the increase in funding that NHS Highland received from the Scottish Government this financial year, and that the Government is willing to support it in light of further financial challenges. What level of cut would have been delivered to the health board if we had followed the real-terms cut to health resource spending that was laid out by the then UK Government?

Neil Gray: In 2024-25, NHS Highland's resource budget increased by 3.7 per cent in real terms, compared with last year. In cash terms, its budget increased by £39 million, which is 5.1 per cent, in the same period. Had the Scottish Government followed the then UK Government's spending for the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS Highland would have had a real-terms cut of 0.2 per cent.

That highlights the importance that the Scottish Government places on increasing the resources that are available to us through more progressive taxation, which is opposed by both Labour and the Tories. Had we followed their advice, our health

boards, including NHS Highland, would have been in a much worse situation.

Free School Meals (Primary Pupils)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-14406, in the name of Liam Kerr, on free school meals for all primary pupils. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons now or as soon as possible. I warn members that there is no time in hand so they will have to stick to their speaking allocations.

I call Liam Kerr to speak to and move the motion. You have up to seven minutes, Mr Kerr.

14:58

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): How times change. Do members remember the then First Minister promising in 2015 to completely close the attainment gap? Now, this Government simply aspires to reduce it. We have had warm words from the current First Minister, who has stated that the eradication of child poverty is

“the single greatest priority for this Government.”

However, last week’s debate highlighted not only that the child poverty rate has remained largely unchanged since 2007, but that the Scottish National Party’s multiple failures have had a detrimental impact.

I bring that up because of another promise. This one was made in the SNP’s 2021 manifesto, which said that

“Over the course of the next parliament”,

it would make sure that

“no child is hungry in the classroom by providing free school breakfasts and lunches to every primary school pupil, all year round”,

yet we heard last week that the provision will be only to primary 6 and 7 pupils whose families are in receipt of the Scottish child payment. Let us be very clear about what that means.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): *[Made a request to intervene.]*

Liam Kerr: I will take Monica Lennon’s intervention later.

Last week, John Swinney confirmed in this Parliament that he was scrapping the SNP’s pledge to introduce universal free school meals for P6 and P7 pupils. A promise was made, and that promise has been broken.

Here is the issue: we know that the Scottish Government has never seriously tried to close the attainment gap. It does not know how to do that; it has not forensically worked out what interventions

would be required to do it. However, everyone knows that our kids need food in order to be ready to learn. As the Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland said yesterday,

“Going to school hungry is not only a barrier to learning and educational achievement but it can severely impact development in childhood and into adulthood”.

The mission of eradicating child poverty will be set back by the Government’s decision, as it has been told by Save the Children, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Child Poverty Action Group.

Monica Lennon: I welcome Liam Kerr’s motion and hope that the whole Parliament will back it today. All primary school pupils in Wales and in London have free school meals because that has been made a political priority. Does Liam Kerr agree that the SNP needs to drop the spin and the excuses in its amendment and put the needs of Scotland’s children first?

Liam Kerr: I absolutely agree with that—it is a good point well made. The amendment is as predictable as it is shameful and, indeed, ignorant.

On 5 September, in this chamber, in a rare moment of self-awareness, John Swinney said:

“We will not be able, in this parliamentary session, to roll out universal eligibility across primary 6 and primary 7 pupils, because our budget has been eroded by ... fiscal mismanagement”. —*[Official Report, 5 September 2024; c12.]*

Hasn’t it just? The Government is sitting on the largest cash-terms block grant in devolution history and, as Monica Lennon says, it makes choices about how it spends that budget. We should never forget that the Scottish Fiscal Commission said just last week that the SNP’s financial woes are largely the result of its own spending incontinence.

Nowhere can I find an official costing for the extension of free school meals. To assist, I have done a very rough calculation. I think that the cost to deliver free school meals for P6 and P7 pupils would be, at worst, around £110 million. In breaking its promise, the Government chooses not to cover that.

What choices has the Government made instead? It chose to spend £400 million on ferries, of course. However, no one will forget the figures that were released in July that show that Nicola Sturgeon’s SNP spent more than £180 million on spin doctors, foreign trips and hospitality. By total coincidence, £110 million of that was spent on press officers, social media and internal communications. Just last week, we also heard about the special advisers that have cost millions. There are then the more than 120 ministerial overseas trips that have been made in the past two years alone to more than 30 different destinations, despite foreign affairs being reserved

to Westminster. Maybe those trips were made to visit the nine Scottish Government overseas offices, which cost £9 million, or to get away from the £16 million in losses and special payments that have been made by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. Perhaps they were made to get away from the £82.95 million in last year's consolidated accounts for losses and special payments.

If it is priorities that we are after, some may have missed that Angus Robertson's budget of £347 million—for the portfolio that covers such things as external affairs and the constitution, which are not actually devolved—was spared the axe in last week's cull by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government. Interestingly for those who worry that £110 million is a lot of money for the Government to find, when Shona Robison was asked why she had not cut that £347 million budget, she said:

"It is a small budget by comparison".

By axing the universal roll-out of free school meals in primary schools, the SNP has shamefully betrayed Scotland's poorest pupils. It has abandoned any pretence that it knows how to eradicate the attainment gap and/or child poverty, and it has played fast and loose with the trust that the people of Scotland invested in it.

When, in September 2020, the Scottish Conservatives first pledged to introduce free school meals for all primary school pupils, we were supported by all parties across Parliament, because some things are just more important than party politics. Two months later, John Swinney, who was then the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, announced that that would be SNP policy. I therefore call on MSPs from all parties to put party politics aside today and send the strongest possible message to the SNP that it cannot—it must not—abandon the young people of Scotland. Let us in this Parliament back the roll-out of free school meals for all primary pupils by voting for the motion in my name.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that free school lunches should be provided for all primary school children, including provision in the school holidays, in this parliamentary session, as promised by the Scottish Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jenny Gilruth to speak to and move amendment S6M-14406.3.

15:04

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Jenny Gilruth): Last night, I met the world schools debating champions at Bute house. Team Scotland was represented by Portobello high school, St Columba's high school from Kilmacollm,

Broxburn academy and Dollar academy. As education secretary, I put on the record my congratulations to them on their success, and I am sure that the Parliament sends them our best wishes, too.

Liam Kerr said that some things are more important than party politics, and I agree. Last night, I told the young people about the topic at hand for today's debate. I explained that it would be a challenging day for the Government, because we do not disagree on the principle of the motion that is in front of us. As the motion recounts, in the 2021 election, the SNP committed to delivering universal free school meals. Today, I want to put on record our recommitment to that delivery because, as a politician, I believe emphatically in the principle of universality and, as a teacher, I know that hungry children cannot learn.

The amendment in my name seeks to provide the necessary financial context to the situation that we find ourselves in. Let us be in no doubt that more children in Scotland today are receiving free school meals thanks to the Scottish Government: every child in primaries 1 to 5, those in special schools, as well as all eligible pupils from primary 6 right up to secondary 6. Free school meal provision in Scotland is saving families on average £400 per child per year. In total, Scottish Government funding is providing free school meals to more than 270,000 children every single year from primaries 1 to 5. We are now focusing our efforts on pupils who are in receipt of the Scottish child payment, which will see an additional 26,000 children benefit. However, I understand the deep disappointment that universal roll-out to primaries 6 and 7 has been delayed and, frankly, I share that disappointment. It is in that spirit that I will listen to and engage with the Opposition today.

Only last week, Parliament heard from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government the full extent of the budgetary challenges that the Scottish Government faces. As Sir Keir Starmer has stated on the issue of free school meals,

"The money is a big factor, I won't shy away from it."

The Prime Minister is right. Of course, it is a painful matter of fact that, under the current devolution settlement, in the absence of any clarity on additional consequential, any emerging in-year costs have to be funded by cuts elsewhere.

Liam Kerr: I share the cabinet secretary's deep disappointment in the Scottish Government's decisions, but can she help us to understand what representations she made to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government to say, "Don't take it out of my budget"?

Jenny Gilruth: I made strong representations to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government. If the member is interested, he can speak to her directly about that.

We are in a Parliament of minorities, and this next question is not really one that is reserved for the First Minister or for me as education secretary. How do we fund the approximate £256 million funding gap that I am presented with in order to deliver universality in this parliamentary session? Right now, the Government simply does not have the resources to deliver that, so I want to hear alternatives for where I should draw the additionality that I need.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Jenny Gilruth: Pam Duncan-Glancy is attempting to make an intervention. I am conscious of time, and I would like to make progress, but I am going to name Pam Duncan-Glancy, because she has reassured me over Twitter that the cavalry is en route. However, I cannot accept a tweet from Ms Duncan-Glancy as confirmation of the extent of the consequential that Scotland will receive from London. Those who hold the purse strings have offered me no such confirmation.

Liam Kerr quoted the Scottish Fiscal Commission. It has noted that there is “significant uncertainty” on the level of funding that we will receive from the UK Government ahead of the UK Government’s budget on 30 October. I would welcome confirmation today from any Labour MSP in the chamber on the totality of consequential that they expect to flow to Scotland from the new UK Labour Government.

As I referenced earlier, we know that the combined capital and revenue costs of universal expansion will total £256 million. My question to Parliament, and particularly to the Labour Party, is simple: where would you find the money? Like its friends in the Conservative Party, the Labour Party has opposed just about every revenue-raising measure that the Government has put in place. Just like the Tories, Labour seek to slash taxes on higher earners, leaving us with less money to invest in our public services.

What is the answer? If members want to commit to the immediate universal expansion in primary schools, which the Scottish Futures Trust’s independent research estimates will cost £256 million, what £256 million of cuts would they make? Would they make cuts elsewhere in our schools, such as to additional support needs provision, the school clothing grant or the Scottish attainment challenge? Would Labour stop funding to the eight new schools that are being built? Would it make cuts elsewhere? Would it make

cuts to the national health service, childcare or the Scottish child payment, or would it do what it has been desperate to do since 2007 and reimpose tuition fees on Scottish students?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, cabinet secretary.

Jenny Gilruth: The reality is that austerity is a political choice. It matters not one iota whether it is red or blue. The result is less money for Scotland, less money for education and less money for our children. In a Parliament of minorities, it is incumbent on the Government to engage with the Opposition on the facts, so I will listen today with the interests of Scotland’s children and young people at the forefront of my mind.

I move amendment S6M-14406.3, to insert at end:

“; notes, however, that the impact of the austerity agenda pursued by the previous Conservative and current Labour UK administrations has reduced the value of Scotland’s budget, meaning that the required combined capital and revenue funding of £256 million is not available to deliver fully during the current parliamentary session; recommits the Scottish Government to full universal delivery for all primary pupils when the budgetary position allows; recognises the progress that has already been made with the delivery of free school meals to all children in P1 to P5, special schools, as well as eligible pupils in P6 to S6; welcomes that the Scottish Government will now make further progress with expansion to P6 and P7 pupils in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment, which will see an additional 26,000 children benefit, and calls on the UK Government to change its fiscal rules to end austerity and allow increased investment in public services to eradicate child poverty.”

15:10

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I am pleased to open on behalf of Scottish Labour in the debate and to speak in support of the motion and the amendment in my name.

I have said this before, but it is worth repeating: education is a great leveller. It can smash the glass, class and step ceilings in the way of opportunity, and any barrier to its full potential and power is a barrier to that opportunity for Scotland’s young people. However, sadly, with its litany of broken promises and incompetence in delivery, one such barrier to opportunity in Scotland is the SNP Scottish Government.

The Government has now promised but not delivered free school meals for every primary school pupil for four years. Although child poverty is stagnant on its watch, people across Scotland will be baffled at the choices that it has made. Experts are, too. The Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland said:

“Any rollback or dilution ... can only be seen as a broken promise”.

The Child Poverty Action Group said that the Government is

“falling behind in ... actions that”

it

“has already committed to and that families so desperately need.”

Children 1st said that it is

“deeply concerned that the drastic cuts to public spending will throw many children and families already in crisis over the edge”.

It is not just lunches; it is breakfasts, too. As the chief executive of Magic Breakfast pointed out last week,

“Despite being the minister who announced it, John Swinney is now the third First Minister in a row to exclude ... universal breakfast provision from their Programme for Government.”

Alone, broken promises to young people on food would be bad enough—but they are not alone. In 2007, the SNP promised to cut class sizes to 18. It abandoned that promise in 2009 and primary classes have not been below 23 while it has been in power.

The SNP manifesto in 2021 promised an increase in the number of teachers and classroom assistants. Teacher numbers have fallen and, in Glasgow alone, against the Parliament's will, 450 might go. The same manifesto promised to reduce contact time for teachers, but a recent Government-commissioned report found that it will not do that, either.

It does not stop there. Pledging to end the digital divide, John Swinney announced in 2021-22 that every child in Scotland would get a digital device. That commitment was dropped this year. Then there are the free bikes. This year, Transport Scotland confirmed that just over 6,000 bikes have gone out to the approximately 250,000 children who are in poverty.

On 11 June, the First Minister said that, where families have free school meal debt, we have written that off, but families are still being pursued and the Government cannot tell us how many families have had their debts written off.

Thousands of Scotland's children and young people who were promised all of that by the Government have now left school. That matters not only because people are sick of being promised stuff that they do not get but because broken promises to young people impact education and stifle opportunity. Because of the SNP's litany of broken promises and incompetence, attainment is down and the gap is up. Fewer young people are in jobs, education or training after leaving school.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will Pam Duncan-Glancy give way?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I am sorry, I do not have time.

Young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are five times more likely to be unemployed. Those are not just numbers: they are young people denied opportunity.

Scotland's once world-renowned education system is on its knees after 17 years of the Government's mismanagement, and the SNP cannot keep blaming someone else. I find the Government's amendment and the speech from the cabinet secretary to be tiresome. People watching are tired of the Government's excuses for not delivering the things that it said that it would deliver. The SNP can point the fingers all it likes, but people in Scotland see the missed opportunities for reducing child poverty and the incompetence and waste that cost us £5 billion and they can hear the experts when they tell the Government that that is because of its own spending decisions.

It is clear that the path to change does not and cannot lie with this incompetent SNP Government. It must fall to Labour members, who are already delivering, to reduce poverty through a new deal for working people, create jobs in GB Energy and improve finances for working people. That is the change that Scotland needs, that is the change that young people deserve and that is the change that we will deliver.

I move amendment S6M-14406.2, to insert at end:

“, and regrets the Scottish National Party administration's repeated broken promises to Scotland's children and young people.”

15:14

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): I should start by thanking the Conservatives, not just for using some of their time this afternoon to debate free school meals, but because the topics of their debates are a defence of green policies from the Bute house agreement era. I am delighted that, having spent so long trying to bring down the Bute house agreement, our Conservative colleagues are now the first to defend the legacy of the Greens in Government.

I will try to be collegiate, but I need to start by making the point that there is more than a whiff of hypocrisy in the Conservatives talking about ways in which we can tackle child poverty. The single biggest driver of child poverty in modern British history is the Conservative Party and the decisions that it has made, whether it be introducing the two-child cap, slashing universal credit or decimating

public services. They cannot pick and choose when they want to lift children out of poverty and when they want to push more children into it without accusations of hypocrisy being flung at them.

On that point of collegiality and consensus, I want to talk about a visit in the previous parliamentary session that Oliver Mundell and I and some other colleagues made to multiple schools in Finland, which has had universal free school meals for some time. It was an experience that we all gained a great deal from. We saw almost every pupil sitting together and staying in school at lunch time for a healthy, warm, free meal. That did a whole range of things. It tackled inequality and helped those families who needed it and who would have struggled with paying for school meals. It improved attainment, because hungry children struggle to learn and behave. It eliminated stigma, because we know that, even with the best will in the world and with the most subtle systems of means testing and entitlement, children can find out who is and is not entitled to a free school meal. Even if they do not find out, those children who are entitled under our current system are worried about people—even members of staff—knowing that their family's situation means that they are entitled. No one misses out under a universal system.

The Finland system also increases social cohesion, because, as we saw, all children eat together, including the children of families who can afford to pay for meals but who otherwise would have probably gone out of school at lunchtime. A very different culture is created as a result of universal provision. Finland is the gold standard. It is all the proof and all the evidence that we need that universal provision works.

It is outrageous that, here in Scotland and across the UK, we have children sitting in school hungry in one of the richest countries in the history of the planet. I am proud that, during the final budget agreement of the previous parliamentary session, just a few weeks before the pandemic brought a lot to a halt, the Scottish Greens managed to secure the Government's agreement to immediately expand universal provision of free school meals to primary 4 and 5 and then move on to primary 6 and 7.

That was part of a wider package that we worked on together with colleagues in the SNP to do things such as cancel school meal debt. The Scottish Greens were the first to uncover the scale of school meal debt in Scotland. We did the research, we campaigned and then, with the support of the cabinet secretary and the then First Minister, Humza Yousaf, we secured funding to cancel that debt.

This afternoon's debate is a bit odd, because we are debating something that we all agree on. The real question is about money. I agree with Liam Kerr that it is a question of priorities, although his priorities and mine are very different. I believe that the Greens have proposals for making the scheme financially affordable. For a start, there are ways of minimising costs using shared catering facilities and timetabling.

The problem that I have with the Government's amendment is that it presents, quite rightly, the scale of austerity delivered by the Conservative Party—and not reversed by the Labour Party—as a challenge. However, it then makes out that that challenge makes austerity inevitable. It is not inevitable. There are a range of ways in which the Scottish Government can save money in-year in this financial year. On the capital side, we would freeze spending on trunk roads and motorway expansion. On the revenue side, we would scale back on tax breaks for shooting estates, for example. It is a question of political choice. I want to hear more about the choices that all colleagues would make this afternoon if we genuinely had a consensus on the priority of delivering the policy.

15:19

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): Marcus Rashford made a big impact on this whole debate in 2020 and before that. He has left a lasting legacy that has been credited, quite rightly, across the United Kingdom. At that point, the SNP was a victim of its own spin and approach to politics. It is now still a victim as a result.

At the time, John Swinney sought to exploit that campaign and to draw a difference between the Conservative Government at Westminster and the Scottish Government. He said that hunger "doesn't take a holiday" and that every child, every minute and every school day are incredibly important for learning. He committed the SNP to delivering that promise by August 2022—two years ago—but it is clear that the SNP did not have a costed plan. It was evident from almost the point that the SNP agreed that commitment and put it in its manifesto that it was retreating from it.

Initially, the SNP blamed local authorities for being unable to deliver the commitment in 2022, then it blamed the Westminster Government, and now it is blaming the Labour Government, even though it has been in power for only a few weeks, as opposed to the 17 years for which the SNP has been in government. The SNP hunted around almost from the very beginning for an explanation and an excuse for its failure to deliver the solemn promise that it put in its manifesto in 2021.

It was clear at that point that the SNP refused to accept that there was a looming financial crisis at

the heart of the Scottish Government, which successive finance committees and the Scottish Fiscal Commission have been telling us about for years, and it made endless promises, jumping on the headlines that had been created—quite rightly—by Marcus Rashford, but doing so without having a costed plan. I have no problem with the Government meeting the needs and desires of the electorate, but it must be honest and straightforward from the very beginning, rather than using such promises as election gimmicks.

Today, the education secretary has challenged us to say where we would find the money. If she had been at last week's meeting of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, she would know the answer to that, because Graeme Dey knows exactly where all the money is. Apparently, he has worked it all out. He made an agreement with the college unions across the country, and he told us that he did not have a clue where the finance was going to come from. I suspect that he knows everything about the finances of the Scottish Government and that he has the money tucked up his sleeve. Therefore, all that the education secretary needs to do is to reach over to Graeme Dey, who will have the answer to everything.

We will take no lectures from the SNP about the need to say where we would find the money, because it plays that trick against the Opposition every single time. The Government knows the finances back to front. If it did not, why did the SNP make that promise in 2021? Surely it would have had a costed plan that was worked out over the years. Surely it would have known that the Conservatives were going to have austerity for years and that the successive Labour Government was going to be dreadful. Surely it had worked all that out before it made that promise. However, we know that it had not, because it has played fast and loose with Scotland's public finances by making endless promises that it simply cannot keep.

Today, the education secretary faces a challenge, because it is clear from what my colleague Ross Greer said, and from what Conservative and Labour members and I have said, that all of us will vote against the Government's amendment, so she will lose. She must decide how she will respond to the will of Parliament, because the will of Parliament is incredibly important, as we have heard from her bosses—previous First Ministers—over many years. We would expect the Government to make a statement on how it will meet that promise—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Willie Rennie: It is not only our promise; it is the Government's promise, and it is for the

Government to deliver it. We deserve an answer from the Government today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate.

15:23

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I declare an interest in that my eldest daughter is a teacher. She is head of guidance as well as being a physical education teacher.

When I came into Parliament, I led with the statement that I thought that education was the solution to our health and welfare problems, and I believe that even more now. In fact, as I have said in the chamber many times, I think that education should be the cornerstone of every portfolio. However, the biggest disappointment that I have experienced in this Parliament has been the Scottish Government's failure to drive the changes in education and health that it could have made, given that those portfolios are entirely within the Scottish Government's control. It could have been bold, taken its own path and delivered solutions to some of the country's biggest issues, but it has seemed content to stumble along behind the crumbling excuse, "It's not our fault."

The Government's usual fallback position is, "We need more money," but here is the thing. If you invest in education, you are investing in health, justice, welfare and the economy—the economy that is required to pay for all the services that we need.

We need to define the issues we are trying to address. In education, those are poor physical and mental health, declining behavioural standards, declining attendance and the attainment gap, as well as hunger and malnutrition. Today, we are talking about free school meals for all primary school children. If we are tackling malnutrition and hunger for children coming into school, why are we not talking about free school breakfasts? Logic tells me that that is the meal that we should be targeting, although I am not against also having free school lunches for those children from the most deprived areas.

If we want the uptake of free school meals to improve and the queues outside the chip shop to go down, we need to offer pupils more reasons to be in school. I have put forward the idea of offering some kind of activity prior to the start of the school day that happens to have breakfast included and of offering extracurricular activities at lunchtime to keep children in school and active. Those initiatives would tackle all the issues that I previously highlighted and the costs associated with them.

The Scottish Government's approach is one of crisis management rather than tackling the long-term needs of our educational environment. It has been funding increases in salary by cutting support staff and reneging on a manifesto promise of free school meals.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Brian Whittle: I am afraid that I do not have time.

Ploughing that furrow simply digs a deeper and deeper hole for our educators, heaping ever more responsibility on to our already stretched teachers.

It is increasingly obvious that, in SNP Scotland, if a pupil is not academically inclined, school offers less and less for them. Sport, art, music and drama are all in decline despite all the mental and physical health benefits that they deliver. Now, the SNP wants to cut back on school meal provision. It is a false economy. It will disincentivise pupils further, leading to more absenteeism, unhealthier pupils, poorer behaviour and a widening attainment gap.

The biggest inequality is the inequality of opportunity, and this decision by the SNP Government is just another element of that inequality. Instead of its delivering the rounded education that we desire, we see short-termism that will just hand on the problems to the next Government.

At some point, we need to halt the continuous decline in our public sector and recognise that, by getting education right, we can start tackling all the other crises that the SNP has presided over. Education used to be the SNP's number 1 priority. Unfortunately, when it failed to deliver on that pledge, it just moved on to another of its priorities, leaving our education system much worse off than when it inherited it.

The Opposition parties might not agree with some of the solutions that I have put forward, and that is perfectly acceptable—as long as they come up with their own solutions. However, as we know, the SNP's solution is inevitably yet another consultation that leads to yet more inaction. It will not do. Cutting school meals is yet another symptom of a Scottish Government without a clue.

15:27

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I find myself back on the back benches, freed from the shackles of Government, able to say what I really mean and what I really want to say. However, you are all gonnae be extremely disappointed, because sometimes I find Opposition business extremely tedious. Here we have the classic attempt by them to get that "gotcha" moment, talk

down the Government and offer no ideas about delivery or what they would do.

The Presiding Officer will remember that we used to discuss the big ideas here, during all parts of this chamber's business. We used to talk about them all the time—but no longer. It now seems to be about a very simple "gotcha" and trying to get the next headline from the Opposition parties.

Liam Kerr said that we should "put party politics aside". I would quite gladly do that. If people genuinely want to work with me and others in the SNP to make a difference to young people's lives, I would say, "Let's go for it." However, he made the most partisan political speech that I have heard for some time.

Free school meals are there to support many families who are struggling. I am happy to work with the Government and others to achieve all our ambitions on school meals. This is more than just an academic discussion for me, given my background. My family are from Feegie—which, for the *Official Report*, is Ferguslie Park, in Paisley. It is an area that has had its challenges with poverty over the years, and that is what this is all about. I am here to represent the people of Paisley and the people I grew up with.

Like other parts of Scotland, Ferguslie Park, in Paisley, has had to deal with those challenges with little support from successive UK Governments. The Scottish Government has invested to support those families as much as it can. A perfect example of that is the £400 million-worth of measures such as the Scottish child payment that have brought 100,000 children out of poverty.

The Scottish Government has had to focus on those things while dealing with the constraints of the Westminster settlement. The problem is that the Scottish Government cannot keep propping up continually failing UK Governments. As I have stated, our on-going challenge in Scotland is that we have been continually hampered by successive UK Governments. I am sure that, with the full powers of independence, we could change all of our children's futures for the better and move away from 14 years of Westminster failure on top of decade after decade of Westminster failure.

Keir Starmer has been in office for two weeks and has chucked it already. He says that things can only get worse, but the Scottish National Party's vision is greater than that. When Westminster says, "The game's a bogey; we might as well chuck it," we offer hope. We want to empower the people of Scotland to make their own decisions on the future. Even with the devolution settlement, the SNP has managed to bring 100,000 children out of poverty while the

Tories, Labour and Westminster accelerate further austerity.

I am here to represent the great town of Paisley, as you may have guessed, and its many buddies. They are my people, and it is my town and my place in the world. When Westminster offers more of the same, I and my colleagues in the SNP offer hope. When they say that things can only get worse, we say that there is another way. I hope that we get further down the road to independence and make things better for the people of Scotland.

15:31

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): In 2021, the First Minister, then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, said that free school meals were a landmark policy. Successive First Ministers committed and re-committed to the policy. Those empty promises are now coming home to roost. If it is not school meals, it is the pledge to give an electronic device to every child, which then became every household, being cancelled, or the pledge to give bikes to children in poverty being cancelled after only 6,800 were delivered—that is less than 3 per cent of the 250,000 children who are in poverty. The Scottish Government promised an increase in teachers and teaching assistant numbers by 3,500, but we now have 250 fewer.

Make no mistake, our children are suffering because of these failures. While we have had this SNP Government, education standards have undoubtedly fallen. The programme for international student assessment results from last year made it clear as day. Our science and maths scores in 2006 were 515 and 506, and they have now fallen to 483 and 471. The poverty-related attainment gap grew in the most recent exam results. For a Government that seemingly sees the issue as a priority, that should be a mark of shame.

Another broken promise on increasing non-contact time by 90 minutes is placing teachers under more pressure. A WPI Economics report found that that would be possible only by raising teacher numbers, but they are now falling. Twenty per cent of teachers are leaving during their probation year, with many reporting stress as a factor. Children will experience the consequences of those broken promises, with large classes and overworked teachers. That will serve only to entrench inequalities and increase the attainment gap that the SNP says it wants to eliminate.

The social attitudes survey this year showed trust in the Scottish Government at the lowest it has ever been, and U-turns such as this are fuelling that perception. The public wants the Scottish Government to succeed and to improve people's lives, but announcing policies and then

going back on them is eroding trust. When politicians make promises and fail to deliver, it reflects badly not only on the Government but on us all. We must understand that headlines are not a replacement for good governance. Governments should do what they say they will do; they should not over-promise and then cry foul when they are unable to deliver.

We need tangible action to give children the best start in life. We need a real living wage to ensure that parents have money to put food on the table, an end to zero-hour contracts to allow stable work, and lower energy bills that are not at the mercy of the global market. That is how we can truly deliver.

15:35

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills said that she wanted some context and to engage with the Opposition. Like Willie Rennie, I will take her back a bit in the journey. I will talk specifically about how opinions have changed over time.

When I was first elected to the Parliament, in 2007, the first committee session that I went to on the Education, Lifelong Learning and Culture Committee was a debate about whether free school meals were necessary and, if they were, on what basis. We took extensive—and I have to say, very interesting and, in some cases, surprising—evidence about whether that was the right thing to do. It came not just from Scotland—I remember a big study from Hull City. What was then called the Aberlour Childcare Trust warmly welcomed the committee's engagement, but the trust said that it was "yet to be convinced" about universal school meals.

Barnardo's said the same, and Tam Baillie, who was the Commissioner for Children and Young People at the time, said:

"I am not at all sure that introducing free school meals would be the best way of achieving the desired objective amongst our most vulnerable children."

He also said that many felt that the problems that the committee was trying to address would be far better addressed by giving assistance to those in the earliest years and not necessarily to those who were further into their primary school years.

That was then, and this is now. Fourteen years on, my very strong view is that tackling the problems of unhealthy eating among our schoolchildren—for all the reasons that Brian Whittle set out—should be a major priority during this session of Parliament.

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I will, in a minute.

I presume that that is why the SNP made the manifesto commitment that it did in 2021. It made that promise, which we are debating this afternoon. As we all know, election promises are very important. If voters are attracted to those promises, as they were to those of the SNP, it is wrong to remove them. If the SNP cannot see that, it need only look at the general election, when other parties—mine included—were soundly taken apart in relation to some of the promises that we had broken.

What matters here, of course, is our young people's health. Evidence consistently shows that Scotland's public health is very poor. It also shows that there is a very strong link between poor health and poor attainment. My goodness, the current state of attainment in Scotland is nothing of which to be proud.

There are several issues to be debated. Are free breakfasts better than free lunches? At what age do pupils see the best results from free school meals? Is universalism the way forward? What do we do about the significant waste of food that far too many of our school dining rooms have every day? Those questions are all important but, for the purpose of this afternoon's debate, the SNP made a clear and unequivocal promise, and to suddenly remove it is both disingenuous and deeply worrying to the parents who are finding it difficult to make ends meet. On that basis, I support the motion in Liam Kerr's name.

15:38

Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP): No child should go to school hungry; I think that we can agree on that across the chamber. I grew up receiving free school meals, and I know how important they are to life chances. As I came from a very poor background, they were essential for my development in every way. However, to be clear, universal school meals have not been axed, and currently the Government provides free school meals for nearly 278,000 pupils. The Scottish Government is reducing the cost of the school day by saving families £400 per child, per year. That provision is being expanded even further to those in primary 6 and 7 who are in receipt of the Scottish child payment.

The decision to delay universal roll-out beyond the 2026 target has not been made lightly, and we must consider the financial backdrop to why such a decision was made. It is impossible to explain the choices that are made in Scotland without looking to the finite and unpredictable budget that is handed down from Westminster each year. It is impossible to divorce the size of that budget from the economic situation in the UK, which has been damaged by years of austerity, the catastrophe of Brexit and the 49 days of Liz Truss.

To place the blame squarely on the Scottish Government is to deliberately and disingenuously obscure the national and international contexts. To justify austerity, successive Westminster Governments blame their predecessors for the conditions that they have inherited, but austerity is a political choice. Since 2019, the Scottish Government has spent £750 million to directly mitigate the effect of UK policies such as the bedroom tax and the two-child benefit cap in order to protect our constituents from the draconian policies that were introduced by the Conservatives and are now being continued by Labour.

Of course, to be in a position where the roll-out of universal free school meals must be delayed is deeply upsetting to me. However, we must work together—cross-party and cross-Government—to find solutions not only to the financial situation that Scotland and the UK are facing but to poverty and inequality more broadly.

The Scottish Parliament's think tank, the Futures Forum, had an event last night at which the very issue of inequality was discussed, with wide-ranging views and with passion, and one thing was clear—we need to work together to tackle inequality. We have been elected to make people's lives better, not to participate in a race to the bottom. Austerity has left the poorest even poorer, yet the wealth of the rich soars. The richest 1 per cent of Britons hold more wealth than 70 per cent of the population combined, and 60 per cent of the public think that the rich are not being taxed enough.

The chancellor has been hinting at large cuts ahead without providing the detail that is necessary to plan appropriately. I fear that that may be the first of many difficult decisions, but it does not have to be. The predecessors of our Labour colleagues founded the welfare state as they believed that those in need should have a safety net, and now their Westminster colleagues have the power to end austerity should they choose to do so. Universality is the goal, if we work together.

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

15:42

Ross Greer: In its programme for government last week, the Scottish Government made the welcome commitment that tackling child poverty would continue to be one of its top priorities. The challenge, however, is how the Government expects to hit its existing child poverty targets while rolling back on the very commitments that were key to doing so.

I acknowledge that the Scottish Government's budget is, frankly, hopelessly overcommitted, and

no party in Parliament's hands are clean on that. We have all made extensive spending demands of the Government—my party, in our time in government, secured a number of those demands and has contributed towards that. Far too often, such debates in Parliament—especially when they are about an issue that we all agree on when it comes to the policy—involve quite a lot of fantasy finances.

I have spoken before about my frustration at other Opposition parties for not putting forward proposals, but I am also frustrated by the Government's line this afternoon that it is somehow powerless to act in this situation. That is not true and I will run through some of the proposals that the Scottish Greens would make for how we could fund this. I do not expect there to be widespread agreement for many of them, but this is our position on how we could afford a policy that we acknowledge is expensive.

In the first instance, we would reform and reduce the overall scale of the small business bonus scheme—that is a quarter of a billion pounds a year, and we all acknowledge that many of the businesses that are in receipt of the money are not small businesses. In fact, they are large and profitable businesses, as the Government's own review found; they are simply in low-value property. As I mentioned earlier, every year, between £3 million and £5 million of that scheme goes to give shooting estates tax breaks.

We could condition additional tax breaks on companies meeting fair work and climate standards—at the very least, that would give savings for a few years while those companies made the necessary changes to hit those standards.

We could increase the additional dwelling supplement so that we are raising more from those who have the good fortune to be able to afford a second or holiday home.

We could introduce a levy on supermarkets that sell alcohol and tobacco. The Fraser of Allander Institute's model for that says that it would raise just under £60 million a year. Granted, those in the alcohol health charity sector who have pushed for that believe that money raised from that should be spent specifically in that area, but equally, we could argue that spending on something such as free school meals is preventative health spend.

We could lower the threshold for advanced and higher rates of income tax, which would raise a considerable amount. We could stop standardised tests, which would save us about £5 million a year on the contract with the company that provides them. I note that the Parliament has voted before to end standardised testing, at least in primary 1, yet it still takes place.

We could stop providing grants and other forms of support through our enterprise agencies for the arms dealers that are currently funding the Israeli genocide in Gaza. We could give new powers to councils, such as a demolition levy and a carbon emissions land tax, which would allow them to raise money to fund the policy directly.

We could update council tax valuations from 1991—that is before I was even born, yet it is the foundation of our second most significant form of taxation in Scotland. We could save a fortune by diverting all those who do not need to be in prison to community sentencing options instead.

I could get really niche here—I am sure that everybody is thrilled already—but we could repeal section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, which ring fences parking fine proceeds only for public transport and road network purposes. If we took away the ring fencing, we could spend that money in other areas, such as school meals.

All parties should put forward proposals, perhaps in a more interesting and invigorating way than I just have. It would help the Parliament if we were all honest about how we expect to fund such policies. I disagree with the Conservatives' constant attacks on the Scottish Government's international offices, which I think provide value, but the Conservatives have at least proposed a saving with that, although it is more than cancelled out by the tax cuts that they would introduce.

The Scottish Greens are honest. We want universal free school meals and we want them for children up to S6, which is why our proposed amendment called for a pilot in high schools to be completed. That is an expensive policy, but we have laid out a range of options for how we would pay for it. We all agree at least on the principle of universal provision in primary school, but the debate has not taken us any further forward on the key question of how we can afford to do that.

15:47

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): This have been like a canteen in a high school, as people have rushed through the debate with their four-minute slots. There have been some interesting contributions that I will pick up on. I start by returning, not quite to Liam Kerr—my apologies—but to the cabinet secretary, as I, too, congratulate the debating team winners. It is important that our young people see that their successes are celebrated.

I am slightly disappointed that the SNP Government cannot agree to the motion. We have heard a number of speeches that go around it. I will address Evelyn Tweed's contribution and her point that the Scottish Government is reducing the cost of the school day but that it is impossible to

separate the choices that are made here from what the UK Government is doing. I think that there is a step before that, which is what the motion is about. To disagree with Mr Adam—although it is welcome to see him making his contribution unfettered from the back benches—the debate has been about what it means to promise: to promise in a manifesto, in speeches and in debate.

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Martin Whitfield: I will, simply because of the courtesy in the way in which it has been asked for.

Christine Grahame: At last, I have been called courteous. I think that the member has just walked into a bear trap: the great big promise from Anas Sarwar was that there would be no austerity under Labour. How is that for a broken promise?

Martin Whitfield: The member talks to the heart of what this interesting cross-party debate has been about. We will always hold others to the highest level, but we will forgive our own.

The Scottish Government promised young people free school meals—[*Laughter.*] No. A promise is to assure someone that they will definitely do something.

At lunch time, I had the great privilege to sit at a round-table event when I listened to people discussing promises that have not been kept and what the effect of that was on them. We heard what the effect of being told that something was going to appear in—strangely enough—the programme for government but then seeing that it had been omitted.

Of course, here we are, having a debate about a promise that the Scottish Government made not once, not twice, but on many occasions; a promise that is supported and recognised as being important by members across the chamber, as could be seen in the powerful speech that Liz Smith made about the movement that there has been in the view and the value of free school meals from where we were in 2007.

The Scottish Government promised children free school meals. It assured children that it would definitely do something, but it cannot now deliver that and it wants to address the issue by pointing to challenges from other places—a variety of speeches have pointed to a lack of support from the UK Government down the road, and others have pointed to other areas. However, the question is, did the Scottish Government mean to keep that promise when it made it? The reality is that it has failed to do so. The lived experience of our children is of an SNP Government that has made promises—on bicycles, which Foysol

Choudhury mentioned, on iPads, on smaller class sizes and more teachers—that it has failed to keep.

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): Will the member take an intervention?

Martin Whitfield: Unfortunately, in this vast canteen of delivery and debate, I do not have time to take the intervention.

Maybe the Scottish Government should stand up and say what consideration it actually gave to the matter before it made its promise of free school meals, which it is now unable to keep.

15:51

Jenny Gilruth: This afternoon's debate had the potential to shine a light on how a minority Government can work with the Opposition to deliver improvements for our young people. At times, it failed to live up to that expectation. Nonetheless, I want to respond to some of the points that have been made in what was sometimes quite a frenetic, but important, debate.

Ross Greer spoke to the Finnish example of free school meal provision and the impacts on improved learning outcomes for young people that he and Oliver Mundell observed. I am delighted that he and Mr Mundell benefited from that overseas opportunity. Of course, as education secretary, I do not quite get the opportunity to take part in international travel, but this morning I was at a school in Dundee, where I talked to a number of teachers and young people about their experience of the cost of living crisis in that school. Pam Duncan-Glancy spoke about schools being on their knees and, to some extent, I would agree with that assertion. Today, schools in Scotland such as the one that I visited this morning in Dundee have food banks and clothing banks. They have staff supporting families with the exorbitant costs that are associated with increases in their heating bills. That is austerity in our schools, and it is being challenged by support from the Scottish Government in the form of extra funding for the school clothing grant and the £1 billion investment through the Scottish attainment challenge and funding to remove core curriculum charges.

Monica Lennon: We do not need to travel internationally to find good practice. For example, Inverclyde Council is a Scottish local authority that has rolled out universal free school meals to all primary pupils. We have examples of local producers and young people with ideas. At the round-table discussion that the cabinet secretary and I held, we heard that many councils are ready to go in that direction, but we need leadership, direction and a wee bit of pulling people together.

Will the cabinet secretary pick up the phone to some of those who are doing it already?

Jenny Gilruth: I am more than happy to engage with them. I appreciate the member's interest in the issue and acknowledge that we have worked well together on it in the past. However, what I have not heard from the Opposition thus far—with the exception of Ross Greer this afternoon—are any credible contributions on where the money to fill that funding gap of £256 million will come from. Willie Rennie believes that Graeme Dey has the £256 million up his sleeve. However, I have checked and it is not there, so that is not quite accurate. He went on to traduce the SNP without offering me an answer on the exam question set.

What is our context in Scotland? That context matters. There has been a block grant cut of nearly 9 per cent, which means £1.3 billion less capital for Scotland. [*Interruption.*] I hear the unionist parties heckling from a sedentary position. This is their union. They should take ownership of the cuts that are coming to Scotland—a £1.3 billion cut that we are having to fund to mitigate Westminster austerity in the shape of things such as the bedroom tax. Further, inflationary pressure is largely driven by Liz Truss's disastrous 49 days in office. [*Interruption.*] I hear anger from members on the Conservative benches. However, this is their union: they should own it.

That context is what the unionist parties have bequeathed to the children of Scotland. The Scottish Government is in a financial straitjacket, and there is never a scintilla of recognition that maybe—just maybe—decisions that are taken elsewhere are harming the decisions that are taken in this Parliament.

Let us listen to some of the organisations that are involved with child poverty, because we discussed them last week at length. As CPAG has noted,

“Holyrood policies are working”,

but the UK Government

“must also invest in social security to reverse long-term damage to living standards, starting by scrapping the two-child limit and benefit cap, and restoring the value of child benefit.”

I did not see or hear any commentary on either of those issues this afternoon.

Liz Smith was right to point to the dial shifting on free school meals. It is fair to say that her party has been on somewhat of a journey on that topic, and I note some of the comments from her former colleagues. In 2020, when someone tweeted at Ben Bradley about free school meals, saying

“£20 cash direct to a crack den and brothel really sounds like the way forward with this one”,

Ben Bradley responded:

“That's what FSM vouchers in the summer effectively did”.

Mark Jenkinson, the former MP for Workington, said:

“I know in my constituency that, as tiny as a minority it might be, food parcels are sold or traded for drugs.”

Therefore, the Conservative Party has been on a journey in relation to its views on free school meals.

Liam Kerr: Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Jenny Gilruth: I am conscious that Mr Kerr would like to make an intervention, but I have five seconds to go, so I will not take it.

It is very clear that, while Westminster takes away, the SNP Scottish Government is investing in Scotland's future. Child poverty rates are lower than the UK average, and the Scottish Government policies, such as the Scottish child payment, are helping to keep an estimated 100,000 children out of relative poverty this year. Investment in the school clothing grant is worth up to £150 per child, and the removal of core curriculum charges is driving down the cost of the school day.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude, cabinet secretary.

Jenny Gilruth: I could go on, but I look forward to engaging with the Conservatives and, of course, the Labour Party on these issues through the budget process and on how they intend to meet that £256 million budget gap in order to deliver universality of free school meals in Scotland's schools.

15:57

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to close the Scottish Conservative Party debate on free school meals for all primary school pupils in Scotland.

I have heard SNP members, including the cabinet secretary, ask repeatedly where the money should come from. Solutions and comments have been given, but the problem is that the suggestions are unpalatable to them, so the response is to deny that they are being made. Mr Kerr and Mr Greer gave us a fair selection of suggestions and I will make more in this speech. The suggestions are unpalatable, so it is being stated that they are not forthcoming, and that is simply not the case.

The Scottish Conservatives were the first party to make this proposal. In fact, in our September

2020 manifesto, we proposed to expand free school meals to all primary school pupils.

Jackie Dunbar: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Roz McCall: On the fact that we had it in our manifesto? I am pleased to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Briefly, Ms Dunbar.

Jackie Dunbar: Can the member clarify whether the Conservatives are keen to put food in the bellies of all our bairns or just the first two in a family, because I realise that they are still for the two-child benefit cap.

Roz McCall: The proposal was in our manifesto in 2020. I was glad to see the SNP follow suit shortly after that, when the former First Minister announced the same policy at the SNP conference and in the 2021 SNP manifesto. That promise was not only made to the electorate at that conference and in the manifesto but backed up by the next First Minister, Humza Yousaf, in the Scottish Government's programme for government in 2023-24, when the Government stated that it would

"Work with COSLA in the coming year to prepare schools and infrastructure for the expansion of universal free school meal provision to Primary 6 and Primary 7 pupils".

Therefore, it is disappointing that the SNP has rolled back on its promise. Yet again, commitments are made and then withdrawn. It is now a pattern. Too many times, we have witnessed the SNP Government promise, with definitive statements, and then underdeliver.

As usual, there was an excellent contribution from my colleague Liz Smith. I note that, back in 2007, Barnardo's was unsure about the roll-out of free school meals, which is in stark contrast to Barnardo's report this morning, which highlighted food insecurity and a concern about not expanding school meals to all primary school pupils. That is quite a change. I echo Liz Smith's comments that unhealthy eating by children should be seen as a major priority.

We also heard very competent comments from Pam Duncan-Glancy, Liam Kerr, Brian Whittle and Liz Smith about breakfasts being included. That is certainly something that should be discussed further.

I was interested in Brian Whittle's comment that investing in our education is investing in health and our economy and, therefore, in our future. Mr Rennie stated that the will of Parliament is important, so I guess that we will just need to wait to see what happens later.

Today's debate is about broken promises. It is about more than just the school meal roll-out, as

important as that is. In its amendment, the SNP has again cited funding constraints that are halting its ability to stand by its word. One would assume that any manifesto pledge would be fully costed. One would also assume that the priority placed on manifesto pledges was sacrosanct, but it seems that some pledges are more important than others.

There have been no funding cuts for independence papers and staff, so that manifesto pledge is a priority. Why do we not look at year-on-year mismanagement? HMP Barlinnie's replacement went over budget and £300 million was wasted; £27.6 million was wasted on Scotland's census in 2022 due to delays and deadline extensions; £57.6 million was wasted by the SNP Government on overdue ferries at Ferguson Marine; and £13 million was wasted on admin for the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, which we do not actually agree with.

To spin the financial pressures on the Scottish Government as Westminster austerity is simply not correct, and the electorate are wise to it. Over the past 17 years, the SNP has boldly stated its intention with definitive statements. It was not that long ago that education was the watchword. Education was the answer to Scotland's problems. We have all heard the defining mission—to close the attainment gap, which then became the poverty-related attainment gap. At that time, the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, on her Government's education record, stated:

"Let me be clear—I want to be judged on this."

I do judge the former First Minister on that, and I believe that she has been found wanting.

We are now told that the Scottish Government will eradicate child poverty—another bold statement—but if it cannot commit to its promise to roll out school meals to all primary pupils, I believe that that is deceitful. I urge members to vote for our motion today.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on free school meals for all primary pupils. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business to allow members on the front benches to change over.

Rail Fares

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-14405, in the name of Graham Simpson, on ending peak rail fares on ScotRail trains. I ask members who wish to speak in the debate to please press their request-to-speak buttons.

16:03

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): Just before Parliament returned from the summer recess, Fiona Hyslop announced that peak fares will be returning to Scotland's railways. There was no debate—that was it. Well, here is the debate today, and Parliament can give its view. I hope that the Government listens.

Transport Scotland declared the trial of having a simpler and lower fare structure to have been unsuccessful, even though it led to more people using the trains. With fares having been raised by 9 per cent in April, passengers are to be hit with a double whammy in just 16 days, which will result in someone commuting between Edinburgh and Glasgow facing fares that are nearly double what they were at the start of the year.

When Fiona Hyslop faced a barrage of questions on the topic last week, all she had in her locker was a bizarre claim that people will pay less if they take advantage of season tickets or something called a flexipass, which friends tell me is fiendishly complicated. All that begs the question of the transport secretary, if there is money for her new complicated rail discount schemes, why does she not use some of it to scrap peak fares, which passengers overwhelmingly prefer?

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): I point the member, who I am sure is a regular rail user, to the position in his Central Scotland region. Take a rail journey from Airdrie to Edinburgh. If people use an annual season ticket four days a week, a single trip will cost £14.44. The pilot fare is £15.80.

On good use of public financing, the self-financing of the discounts is a benefit to the public purse, but, more important, it is a benefit to passengers. I am sure that Graham Simpson and all his colleagues will be encouraging people to use the discounts.

Graham Simpson: My fare from East Kilbride to Edinburgh will rocket by 83.8 per cent. That is not a saving.

In March, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, Unite the

union, the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, Transform Scotland, Friends of the Earth Scotland and the Just Transition Partnership issued a letter to Fiona Hyslop. It read:

“If you were to restore peak fares it would be a retrograde step that would send exactly the wrong message at the wrong time. We urge you to do the right thing, scrap peak fares permanently to help Scotland meet its climate targets”.

Mike Robinson of Stop Climate Chaos Scotland will be delighted that I am quoting him. In March, he said:

“If we are serious about tackling the climate crisis, along with reducing inequality and improving health and wellbeing, it's a no-brainer that using public transport should be cheaper than driving.”

I would not want to leave out my good friend Kevin Lindsay of ASLEF, who, in May, said:

“Surely just at the time the Scottish Government has backtracked on its net zero targets they should be doing all they can to make our trains more affordable and reduce CO2 emissions from road travel, which their own policy is committed to.”

Not for the first time, Mr Lindsay is bang on the money, as is Alex Rowley, whose amendment we will support because it calls on the Government to reverse that retrograde step. The Government amendment does not do that, so it should be rejected.

I should say that I would have been happy to support the Greens' amendment, too, had it been selected for debate, and I give them credit for their work in getting peak fares scrapped in the first place, although, of course, others were also calling for the same thing.

If we want to get greater numbers of people to use public transport instead of driving, we have to make it simple and affordable. However, the service also has to be reliable, and it has not been. Almost 6,000 ScotRail trains have been cancelled since April, and more than a quarter of a million pounds has been paid out in compensation for delayed or cancelled trains. Two million pounds has been paid out since the nationalisation that was supposed to make things better. We have an unreliable service, and now it is to be more expensive. If the policy was to get more people on to the roads, that would be genius.

Fiona Hyslop has not been able to explain how increasing fares will help the Scottish Government achieve its ambition of cutting car miles by a fifth by 2030. Last week, the dire programme for government warned darkly of “demand management” measures. People might be tempted to hop in the car rather than taking the train from now on. However, I say to drivers of Scotland, “Beware: the SNP is coming for you”.

The SNP Government is just not saying what it has in store yet. Maybe it is road pricing. It will certainly coin it in on that, at this rate.

It may surprise members to know that I do not always agree with the RMT, but, last week, it produced a critique of the Government's backward decision that was spot on. It said—quite rightly—that the evaluation of the trial looked at the impact on overall demand and did not assess the impact on demand in peak time only.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): It is a pity that the off-peak fares pilot did not create the greater patronage that was expected to cover the costs.

Did Mr Simpson take full advantage of the full-fares pilot to switch to rail travel from his region to Parliament, did he urge his staff to do likewise, and did he urge others to do so, too?

Graham Simpson: I regularly use the train, and my staff use the train all the time. It is just going to become more expensive for them now. That is a real shame, and Mr Stewart should know that.

Fiona Hyslop should have sent back the evaluation for the reasons that I have outlined. In addition, the evaluation measured passenger demand in terms of journey numbers rather than distance travelled, which could give a different picture. The transport secretary has said that the trial cost around £40 million. The RMT suggests that the actual figure is nearer to £20 million, because without the trial, passenger numbers would have increased, similar to the rest of the United Kingdom, and I think that the RMT is right. It is not small change, but it should be seen as investment.

Public transport should be seen as a service, and it should become the go-to choice. When times are tough for people, we should not be making things harder. The reintroduction of peak fares should be reversed, as the motion in my name says. I call on Parliament to do the right thing and back the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament calls on the Scottish Government to reverse its decision to reintroduce peak fares on Scotland's railway.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Fiona Hyslop, the cabinet secretary, to speak to and move amendment S6M-14405.3.

16:11

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): Last October, we introduced the ScotRail peak fares removal pilot, supported by £40 million in Government funding. It was a bold and pioneering initiative, which was only possible due

to the Government's bringing ScotRail under public sector control, which has not been done with railways elsewhere in the UK as yet. We initiated the pilot to achieve two objectives: to encourage more people to choose to travel by train rather than by car, especially at peak commuter times, and to make rail travel more affordable and accessible.

On Tuesday 20 August, Transport Scotland published its full analysis of the pilot. I encourage members to read it if they have not already done so. The analysis shows that, although there was a limited increase in the number of passengers during the pilot, at the ultimate level of 6.8 per cent, the pilot did not achieve its original aim of encouraging a significant modal shift from car to rail. The analysis suggests that around four million extra rail journeys were made during the pilot, two million of which would previously have been made by private car. However, that is in the context of around five billion annual private car journeys in Scotland, and it represents a reduction of less than 0.1 per cent of car-based carbon emissions.

Of the new rail passengers who were identified as switching from other transport modes, 54 per cent had previously used a car as a driver and a third had switched from using a bus. The evidence also suggests that the pilot primarily benefited existing rail users, who tended to be of above-average income.

The First Minister set out the Government's priorities in his programme for government on 4 September. Due to 14 years of austerity—which was driven by the previous Conservative Westminster Government and is being continued by the current Labour Government—sky-high inflation and the failure of Westminster Governments to increase budgets adequately to address inflation, we have to make difficult decisions to address those circumstances.

Graham Simpson: When the cabinet secretary announced the decision, she admitted that, in some cases, people had saved thousands of pounds through the pilot. Does she agree, then, that ending it will cost people thousands of pounds?

Fiona Hyslop: Although it saved many passengers hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of pounds during the period, it primarily benefited existing train passengers and those with medium to higher incomes, of above £35,000. On the basis of looking at the priorities of tackling child poverty, on which we have just had a debate, and tackling climate change, I made the decision to end the trial of discounted fares from 30 September. It would be difficult to justify such a subsidy, as it did not meet the aims that were originally set out for it.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I am sorry, but I cannot give way, as I have limited time.

I wanted the pilot to succeed, and I am disappointed that it did not. The moderate increase in passenger levels, while welcome, was significantly below the 10 per cent increase that was needed to make the scheme self-financing. In the current climate, it is simply not affordable to continue with that level of additional cost, especially when the scheme did not result in a large-scale switch from car to train and so will have had a minimal impact on carbon emissions.

A significant minority of people cannot choose when they travel to and from work and might find the return to peak fares challenging. I have therefore instructed ScotRail to introduce a 12-month discount on all ScotRail season tickets—weekly, monthly and annual ones—and to permanently amend the terms of flexipasses to allow for 12 single journeys for the price of 10, to be used within 60 days. That is a saving of 32 per cent compared with buying six anytime return tickets. Super off-peak day return fares will return, offering even cheaper fares for those who can travel at less-busy times.

Those measures will offer significant savings from previous peak fare levels for many and may still encourage people to make the switch from car to train for their daily commute. Should Labour rediscover its purpose and recognise that we cannot cut our way to prosperity or to improved public services, and should UK Government budget allocations significantly improve, I remain open to reconsidering future investment to fund the removal of ScotRail peak fares.

I move amendment S6M-14405.3, to leave out from “calls” to end and insert:

“notes that the pioneering Scottish Government 12-month trial removal of peak rail fares has not been introduced anywhere else in Britain; regrets that the trial, which cost up to £40 million of Scottish Government support, was only a partial success in encouraging rail use; notes the reluctant decision by the Scottish Government to end the trial due to the fiscal constraints chosen by successive UK administrations; encourages rail passengers to take advantage of the new range of reduced season, flexi and super off-peak tickets, and calls on the Scottish Government to make use of the valuable data from the trial in further developing its rail fare policy.”

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Alex Rowley to speak to and move amendment S6M-14405.2.

16:16

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): First, I want to highlight the difference in approach

between the Scottish National Party and Scottish Labour on the issue of peak rail fares. The SNP’s view seems to be that withdrawing peak fares was giving a subsidy to workers who travel to and from work by train at certain times of the day. Scottish Labour views peak fares as a tax on workers who use the train to get to and from work. In other words, workers are penalised if they have to use the train between certain hours of the day to get to and from work.

The cabinet secretary says that the pilot mostly benefited those with medium to higher incomes, and we need to talk about what that means. The phrase “middle earners” might mean one thing to the SNP, but I have been contacted by nurses, teaching assistants, a janitor and a hotel worker, all of whom are front-line workers who would fall into the category of middle earners—according to the SNP—and none of those workers felt that it was fair to be charged a premium for overcrowded and unreliable train services that they rely on to get to and from their work.

Even if we accept the SNP’s view that removing peak fares provides a subsidy to middle earners, I ask that we be realistic about the chance of getting more people to leave the car at home and travel by rail. If we want people to move from their car to public transport, ultimately, any measures will have to benefit middle earners, as they are more likely to be driving than people on low incomes. Inspiring modal shifts means targeting those who are driving and giving them a reason to change their mode of transport. That must mean making rail travel affordable, accessible and reliable. It certainly needs to be cheaper to use the train than it is to use the car.

If we do not make modal shifts, we will continue to face an uphill struggle. John Swinney recently said that he believes that the Government will still achieve a 20 per cent reduction in car kilometres travelled by 2030. Personally, I think that that is pie in the sky. However, in reality, the SNP is unlikely to be in power by then, and it is easy to make targets for the future and then take little action to meet them.

The Scottish Government is trying to sell the removal of peak fares as a failure but, during an unprecedented time of SNP chaotic mismanagement that included delays, cancellations and the imposition of an emergency timetable—

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way? It is an important point.

Alex Rowley: No. I am sorry, but I have only a few minutes left.

During that unprecedented time, rail use increased by 6.8 per cent, which was incredible, given all that happened. Just think of the result

that could have been achieved if people could have relied on the services and the scheme had been appropriately advertised at the start instead of being hidden due to concerns about overcrowding on trains. The only way that the pilot has been a failure is in its management and execution.

Even with the removal of peak fares, it is still cheaper to drive than it is to use rail. To achieve a modal shift on the scale that is needed, public transport must be the most affordable and reliable option. If we are serious about hitting our net zero targets and tackling transport issues, we have to invest in public transport. It has to be reliable. People need to know that, when they go for public transport, they will be able to access it, and it has to be affordable.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Rowley, you are over your time.

Alex Rowley: I support the motion.

I move amendment S6M-14405.2, to insert at end:

“, and agrees that making public transport more accessible, affordable and reliable is key to supporting more people to use public transport.”

16:21

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): I welcome the fact that the Tories have chosen the cream of the crop of Scottish Green policies to champion in the chamber. Whether that is just blatant opportunism or a stumble towards one-nation Conservatism, I do not know. However, it is clear that the Tories have noticed the popularity of removing extortionate and confusing peak rail fares.

The Scottish Greens listened to rail unions and championed the scrapping of peak fares when we were in government. Rail union members work with passengers every day, so they know how the railway works, how ludicrously complex the fare system is and how it puts off passengers. The RMT has called the decision to reintroduce peak fares “a retrograde step”. ASLEF said that the decision was “a disaster” for workers. I wholeheartedly agree with the STUC, which said:

“Peak fares are a stealth tax on workers which is bad for the climate, bad for our communities and bad for people’s wallets.”

Public transport is a common good. It is at the heart of everyday life. How we get to work and access learning, how we visit our family and friends and how we engage with our communities delivers tangible positive benefits for all. If the Government is serious about its commitments to cutting emissions from the 5 billion car journeys that are made in Scotland every year and to

transforming the way that people travel, we need radical investment into making bus, tram and train travel cheaper and easier than taking the car. A robust route map for reducing car kilometres by 20 per cent by 2030 will be vital to that, and I look forward to the cabinet secretary producing that soon.

Nearly 750,000 young people in Scotland now have access to free bus travel, and more than 150 million such journeys have been made in just over two years. The national entitlement card for bus travel goes further than that by offering young people 50 per cent off their train fares, so we are already creating a generation whose first choice is public transport.

However, I say to the cabinet secretary that it takes time to change behaviour. The off-peak fares trial led to an extra 4 million journeys over nine months, and half of them would have been made by car previously. It did not pass the success threshold that the Government set of a 10 per cent increase in journeys, but people take time and need certainty to make changes to their lives. At the end of this month, the only certainty will be that fares will dramatically increase on many rail services.

Finlay Carson: Will the member give way?

Mark Ruskell: Is there time in hand, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is no time in hand. It is up to the member whether to take an intervention.

Mark Ruskell: I need to progress. I am sorry.

Ticket prices for the most popular Edinburgh to Glasgow route will more than double, from £14.90 to a staggering £31.40. That is a step in the wrong direction. It cannot be right that it is cheaper, easier and simpler to choose private cars over public transport.

The Government’s fair fares review recognised that rail fares are extremely complex and act as a barrier to encouraging a modal shift from car to rail. Simplification of fares and tickets is key to encouraging people on to public transport, and the off-peak all-day scheme was a great start to that. Returning to a complex picture of multiple ticket prices sends us back in the wrong direction and risks passengers abandoning rail altogether and getting back on the road again. We might also see a return to overcrowding on either side of the peak fare timetable, as passengers scrabble to avoid eye-watering prices, leading to a poor customer experience, which would further fuel frustration and a decline in the use of rail.

If passenger numbers go in reverse because of the decision to bring back peak fares, ScotRail’s fare box income will plummet. The cabinet

secretary will then have no option but to finally scrap peak fares permanently. In that context, the Scottish Greens are content to back the motion and the Labour amendment in today's debate, and I look forward to reflecting on members' comments in my closing speech.

16:25

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of Scottish Liberal Democrats this afternoon. We will support the motion and the Labour amendment, but we will not support the Scottish Government's amendment.

The reintroduction of peak fares comes a few months after the announcement in April of a rise in fares of 8.7 per cent, which was a double whammy for commuters during the cost of living crisis. Some people will now be incentivised to come off the rail network and go back into cars. There will be plenty of real-world experiences out there that illustrate the barrier that the return of peak fares will make to their commute, and there is also a question about the reliability of the rail service. Passengers need reliability. Many experiences highlight commuters finding other means to get to work rather than rail, which perhaps impacted the success of the pilot.

It was hoped that that policy had the climate and sustainable transport in mind. The Scottish Government's announcement stated that a 10 per cent increase in passenger levels would have made the policy self-financing, which poses the question why the Scottish Government was unable to achieve that magic number. What more spending would have been needed to ensure a successful public engagement programme to develop a self-financing policy and a sustainable rail service?

Fiona Hyslop: There were four campaigns during the pilot, with 4 million views on pay television and a radio podcast. People in my town received an A3 fold-out print. Therefore, there was advertising and engagement, particularly for car radio users, so we cannot say that the pilot was not advertised.

Beatrice Wishart: The RMT briefing states that it believes that the methodology that the Scottish Government used to evaluate the trial did not look at demand at peak time, which made it difficult to see the true impact of the trial.

The climate will be the biggest loser from the policy reversal. Scottish Liberal Democrats have long campaigned to get cars and lorries off the roads and to move passengers and freight on to our railways as part of a package to tackle the climate crisis. We also championed reforms to ticket incentives and discounts. Rail fares will now

revert to the more complicated tiered system, with super-off-peak, off-peak and peak rail fares. If we were to design a ticket pricing system as a barrier to travel on our railways, that is what we would create.

Since the pandemic, more people have been choosing to work flexibly, with a mix of some days working from home and some days commuting. Rail season tickets for two or three days a week would provide flexibility and reflect the new hybrid models of working while saving commuters money. I note the Scottish Government's 12-month discount on ScotRail season tickets and the new flexipasses that allow commuters to book 12 single journeys for the price of 10. However, those must be simple to use and purchase, with straightforward terms and conditions, to ensure usability and good uptake. We need to foster a culture of sustainable public transport use that is good for purses and the planet.

We need to invest to cut our carbon emissions, whether by investing in public awareness campaigns on discounts and passes, reopening stations, building new lines or adding new stations to existing routes. It is not just railway infrastructure investment that will help to reduce carbon emissions. Ferries to our island and coastal communities need to be sustainable and, dare I say, for some communities, tunnels to reduce emissions would be a sustainable alternative to recurring cycles of ferry replacements.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. Back benchers' speeches should be of up to four minutes. There is no time in hand.

16:29

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): Despite his authoritarian misrule, Benito Mussolini is credited with making Italy's trains run on time. In fact, a look back in time reveals that he did not, because that was a myth. Instead, Mussolini was a showman. He never missed an opportunity to be associated with great public works, and railways were among his favourites. Whenever a big rail bridge, a station or a new line opened, Mussolini was there to take the credit. Whether he would have gone as far as to launch a ship with painted-on windows is another matter, but there is a similarity between the tactics that were deployed by Il Duce and the modern-day SNP.

Last December, Fiona Hyslop was in East Lothian—

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): Shameful!

Craig Hoy: —smiling for photographers when she proudly opened East Linton station, which has

been warmly welcomed and is much needed by the community.

Joe FitzPatrick: A fascist!

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

I could hear one of the members at the back of the chamber shouting, "Fascist!" I do not know whether you heard that, Presiding Officer. I think that that is disgraceful—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr FitzPatrick should not comment from a sedentary position. If he has something to say, he should stand up and say it. Otherwise, he should keep quiet.

Are you seeking to make a point of order, Mr FitzPatrick?

Joe FitzPatrick: I am happy to make an intervention on the member.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You do not intervene on a point of order.

I thank Mr Lumsden for his point of order. I heard what was said, and I had hoped that Mr FitzPatrick would desist from making any further comment.

Joe FitzPatrick: On a point of order—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr FitzPatrick, I am in the middle of responding to a point of order.

I note Mr Lumsden's point of order. I have listened carefully to the content of what Mr Hoy has been saying. In my view, at the moment, he has been making debating points and has said nothing in terms of the substance of the claim that was made from a sedentary position. Obviously, I will listen very carefully.

Before we go back to Mr Hoy, I will take a point of order from Mr FitzPatrick.

Joe FitzPatrick: Thank you very much. For clarity, I need to make the point that, when I used the word "fascist", I was talking about Mussolini. It is stretching the point to compare a Scottish Government minister with a fascist in Italy, and I thought that it was shameful to do so.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you for your point of order, Mr FitzPatrick. I did not for one second assume that you were referring to Mr Hoy, so that is all good.

With regard to your second point, I listened carefully when Mr Hoy started down that route. Vis-à-vis the substantive point that you make, my feeling was that Mr Hoy was in no way making such a claim about the cabinet secretary—otherwise, I would have intervened in a heartbeat. I did not feel that that was what he was doing. He was seeking to be humorous. Of course, it will be

up to the chamber and members of the public who are watching proceedings to decide whether he succeeded in that, or not.

Please continue, Mr Hoy.

Craig Hoy: Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer. I also read the history books. Let us say, for the purposes of my speech, that Benito Mussolini was a showman. Last December, Fiona Hyslop was a showwoman, because she was smiling for photographers when she arrived in East Lothian to open East Linton station.

However, now, months later, services have been slashed and peak-time fares are soaring. As a result of the SNP's restricted emergency timetable there are only five trains a day from East Linton to Edinburgh, with only two trains each morning and only a single ScotRail service each day. Anyone who wants to return to East Linton after 5.42 pm will have to wait until 11 pm to get home. The trains are meant to take 20 to 30 minutes, which is half the time of the local East Coast Buses service, but this coming Saturday, a passenger—

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way on that point?

Craig Hoy: I will not, because I have had enough interruptions, and I think that I am probably on the clock.

This coming Saturday, a passenger who boards the 6.09 am service bound for Edinburgh will face a journey of two hours and 11 minutes, involving a rail replacement bus south of Dunbar and a one-hour wait on the platform before boarding a northbound London train to Edinburgh. That is two hours and 11 minutes to go just 23 miles. For that shocking level of service, the single fare is £9.90. The only saving grace is that the train is operated by London North Eastern Railway rather than SNP-run ScotRail, so passengers will be able to have a drink to quell their understandable anger.

Under the SNP, service levels on our railways are shocking and ticket fares are scandalous. The residents of East Linton are not alone. Commuters from North Berwick are set to see peak fares soaring despite receiving a reduced service, with ticket prices rising by 70 per cent from £8.80 to a staggering £15.

That is why I urge colleagues from across the chamber to join the Scottish Conservatives in calling on the Scottish Government to reverse its plan to reintroduce peak fares. The decision will be disastrous for passengers and will punish hard-working Scots, who will now have to pay hundreds and—according to the cabinet secretary's own concession—thousands of pounds more to commute to work.

People are being forced back into their cars, which is resulting in increased congestion on the A1 and damage to the environment. Ticket prices are already up by nine per cent and peak fares are returning. A reduced timetable is causing misery for commuters. Far too many Scottish services are being cancelled—a staggering 6,000 and counting since April alone. Satisfaction levels with public transport are plummeting.

Last week, I spoke in the chamber of the Scottish National Party's reverse Midas touch—everything that it touches turns to dust. It is a sorry state of affairs, not only for residents in East Lothian but for those across the South Scotland region that I represent. It is a state of affairs that is being played out across our transport network and our public services, the blame for which lies solely at the feet of the SNP Government.

16:35

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): Given the last speech, I note that Conservative colleagues who brought the debate to the chamber should consider that the people whom we represent know what is going on across these isles, and they know about the absolute folly of privatisation of rail services from the 1990s by the Conservative Party, which is having ramifications to this day. For example, there was the very long delay through the night that some of my constituents experienced on the Avanti service just a few days ago, as has been reported in *The Scotsman* in the past days.

We also know that, compared with elsewhere, the value for money that consumers receive from ScotRail is superior, and that there is strong support across the country for ScotRail's having been in public hands since 2022.

I am a bit perplexed by members on the Conservative benches who have, in their previous contributions, spoken critically about public ownership of ScotRail but now seem to be demanding continued subsidy that can be utilised and delivered only because of public ownership. What does the Scottish Conservative Party stand for, in this instance? Is it in favour of public ownership or not? It is a mystery.

Graham Simpson: Will the member take an intervention?

Ben Macpherson: Please. Enlighten me.

Graham Simpson: Would Ben Macpherson not accept that this is about the way that ScotRail is run? It is now nationalised. Surely he would accept that putting fares up—as is about to happen, in just over two weeks—is not what should be happening. Does he accept that?

Ben Macpherson: That was not an answer to the question that I put.

The nationalisation of ScotRail enabled a subsidy, in the form of £40 million of public money, to be used to reduce fares at a time when there was a cost of living crisis. For many families, that was induced by the folly of the Liz Truss Government and the effect that it had on their mortgage costs and elsewhere, which came as well as the damage that the pandemic brought to the economy. Reduction of fares also helped with the stimulus of economic recovery.

I have not heard from the Conservatives today about what recurring spend they would cut elsewhere in the revenue budget in order to meet that £40 million. We have not heard that from the Labour Party, either. In fact, for the past two weeks, on all the issues of public finance, we have not heard any detailed proposals from the Labour Party about how it would change spending priorities. There have been only sweeping statements of criticism without serious policy proposals or solutions.

We are in the situation where the Scottish Government, through nationalisation and making the right choices, was able to bring in a subsidy, which made a positive impact during the period when it was in place. We know that the investment that is going into ScotRail is creating an improved service for people every single week, and it is going up more and more. The cabinet secretary set out the savings and methods, including the fact that ScotRail ticket fares are already some of the lowest in the UK, being 20 per cent lower on average than fares in the rest of the UK. We have also heard about flexi passes and all the initiatives that are already in place, and last week the cabinet secretary made an announcement to Parliament about improvement that is to come to the rolling stock.

Public ownership has made a positive impact, this policy has made a positive impact, and I commend the Government for doing it.

16:39

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): It was notable that Ben Macpherson could not answer Graham Simpson's intervention. He seems unable to make a judgment on whether it is a good thing that many of our constituents are about to be faced with what Alex Rowley rightly identifies as an SNP tax increase on working people.

Ben Macpherson: I was clear that the policy has made a difference but we are in a situation of public finance restraint. I am sure that Mr Kerr will tell me where, in the Conservative Party's proposals, the cut to the revenue budget would fall if it were to reinstate the policy.

Stephen Kerr: That was, of course, the speech that Ben Macpherson just gave.

Kevin Stewart—who is not in his place, by the way—might best ask ministers how many of them gave up their ministerial cars to take advantage of this period of reduced-price rail travel. The cabinet secretary must accept that this is a cost-of-travelling-by-rail crisis of her own making. Only John Swinney has more experience in Government than her, so she knows how this works. As Nigel Lawson said,

“To govern is to choose. To appear to be unable to choose is to appear to be unable to govern.”

We have heard the predictable and usual grievance agenda from what is now clearly accepted as an incompetent SNP Government. Scots across our country can now see straight through all the excuses—no policy area is exempt. Getting people back on the railway was never going to be simply about reducing price, because many other elements go into how people make their travel choices, but there is no question that the unaffordability of rail travel is an issue.

It is also naive to assume that cutting prices will automatically make up for the loss of revenue through increased demand. I was involved in business for more than 30 years, and one of the first lessons you learn in business is that if you cut your prices it is very hard to get them up again. That is the reality, because people will exercise their choice.

That is how this SNP Government classically governs. It never gets to grips with any of the real issues that we face, because it is always far too busy trying to find an angle that will give it some political advantage when it comes to the only thing that it exists for, which is, of course, independence.

Members: Oh!

Stephen Kerr: Well, it is a fact. SNP members can say “Oh!” all they like, but that is the reality of the politics of this Parliament. It is all about independence.

The new peak fares that are about to be foisted on the Scottish people will drive people off the railway and back into cars. Under the new fares, the cost of a peak return journey from Stirling to Edinburgh, for example, will increase by 64.5 per cent, from £12.10 to £19.90. The fare rise between Perth and Glasgow will be 100 per cent, from £20 to £40.10, and the fare from Aberdeen to Inverness will go up 84 per cent, from £37.70 to £69.50.

Fiona Hyslop: Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his final minute.

Stephen Kerr: I know what the minister is going to say. She is going to say, “They should buy an annual ticket or a monthly ticket,” but that is not the reality.

By the way, it does not help the Government’s case that it has decided to reduce the regularity of services on some of our major routes, because reduced services become less convenient and so less attractive to potential customers. The suggestion that the Government is doing this to increase reliability is, frankly, ridiculous.

Rachel Amery of *The Scotsman* made a video last week detailing her typical journey from Perth to her offices in Edinburgh. It took her nearly two hours to make that journey, which would have taken just over an hour when Queen Victoria was on the throne. If the cabinet secretary wishes to understand why people who could use the train continue to use cars, I recommend that she watch Rachel Amery’s video.

It is worth reminding ourselves that, for a whole section of the Scottish public, the opportunity to use any form of public transport is an alternative that is practically non-existent.

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

Stephen Kerr: To conclude, the Government will tell us, in its favourite phrase, that it takes no lessons from anyone. How true that is, because it never learns.

16:44

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I remind members of my voluntary register of interests.

Back in June, the last time that Parliament debated peak fares, the cabinet secretary accused me of having a “glass-half-empty analysis” and proceeded to give me a lecture on the savings that ScotRail passengers were making. So, the cabinet secretary was claiming the credit in June for rescuing Scotland’s commuters from the cost of living crisis, but by August she was blaming the very same commuters for being too middle class or too upper class. Last week, in Parliament, the cabinet secretary called them “middle to upper-income passengers”. Well, I call them working-class passengers. They are travelling by train before 9.30 in the morning and after 4.30 in the afternoon because they are going to and coming back from their work.

I invite the cabinet secretary to come with me one morning to Linlithgow station, look her constituents in the eye and tell them that they are all middle-to-upper earners, so they can afford the big hike in rail fares that her Government is imposing in two weeks’ time. Let her try to tell my

constituents in Falkirk what she tried to tell us in Parliament just last week—that they can simply buy a flexi-pass with a 20 per cent reduction or an annual season ticket with a 20 per cent reduction, which, it turns out, is not a 20 per cent reduction but the equivalent of a 20 per cent reduction. An annual season ticket to commute from Falkirk to Edinburgh costs over £2,500, which passengers have to pay up front. If they pay monthly, it costs them over £3,000 a year. Is the cabinet secretary seriously arguing that people can easily afford that?

I suggest that the cabinet secretary also listen to the ScotRail staff who are working in our stations, who tell me that rail passengers are being forced to give up their jobs because they cannot afford to commute any more. Last week, we were told, in answer to questions posed by Opposition MSPs, that one of the other reasons for reintroducing peak fares was the fact that there was a limited increase in the number of passengers during the year. The fact is that there were 4 million extra journeys. We were also told that the number of journeys had tailed off, but might that be because the number of trains had tailed off, because the number of driver hours available had tailed off and a temporary timetable had been brought in, so the chances of getting a seat on a train had tailed off?

Finally, let me say this. When the First Minister was elected, back in May, he told us of his commitment to transparency and openness. He emphasised the importance of Parliament in scrutinising our record and our plans. Yet, barely three months later, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport put out a press release, days before Parliament was due to return, announcing the scrapping of the scheme. It was a pre-packaged decision accompanied by dishonest data and made behind the back of the Parliament.

It has taken an Opposition party this week and a barrage of Opposition MSPs' questions last week for the cabinet secretary to be forced to come to Parliament to explain herself. In my view, that reflects not just a disdain for the Parliament but a disdain for democracy and—most of all—a disdain for the people, including all those commuters whose votes send us here. In return, all they expect of us is that we act in the public interest, have consistency of principles and promote the common good. I call on Government ministers to remember that and reverse this disastrous decision.

16:48

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): Well, if gongs were being handed out for brass necks, everyone on the Opposition benches would be wearing them—and proudly, no doubt.

Before the recent general election, the Office for Budget Responsibility and the Institute for Fiscal Studies warned that there was an £18 billion hole in the UK Government's finances. True to form, when Labour opened the books, it feigned shock that, in fact, the hole was £22 billion—but what is a billion or so between Governments?

Before the election, Anas "Read my lips" Sarwar proclaimed no austerity under Labour. Now, the Starmer mantra is, "Things will get worse." Pensioners already know what that means.

Against that economic climate, the Tories—in this debate and in the previous one on free school meals—are demanding more money for services. On what planet do they live? Ditto for Labour. The ruin of the UK economy is simple. In 2008, under Gordon Brown, the banks crashed, although he at least admitted that he had made a "big mistake". Boris pursued Brexit slap bang in the middle of a global pandemic—so much for Brexit being "oven ready" and for the side-of-a-bus promise of £350 million a week for the NHS.

As if things were not bad enough, along came 49-day Truss, who, with a stroke of her quill, crashed the economy, pushing inflation up to 11 per cent. We would have been better off with a lettuce—at least that is good for your health. Yet the Scottish Government, although it depends for the majority of its funding on Westminster, somehow has a very large sofa, with coins just waiting to be liberated, to provide £40 million a year to subsidise on-peak fares. Even with all that, I repeat that this was a pilot scheme to move people back on to trains, especially after Covid, when trains were all pretty well cut back out of necessity and the need for compliance in public transport. There was to be a specific return in passenger numbers for that money. That return was not reached—end of pilot.

I will make a further comment—work practices have radically changed since Covid. We moved to Teams, WhatsApp and Zoom, and we still use those either fully or in a hybrid way. Commuting to work for five days a week is, for many, in the past. The new balance of home working and office working is here to stay. There are offices across Scotland—Borders Council headquarters is one such—where, on weekdays, it feels like the Mary Celeste. This place is another such example: some MSPs are delivering speeches from their homes, and Mr Eagle has actually delivered a speech from his lambing shed.

Some time ago, I discussed that change in working practices with Alex Hynes, who was ScotRail's chief executive. He advised that ScotRail's business model had to adapt and that ScotRail would look to increasing train usage through pleasure journeys, because commuting had completely changed.

As always, I wish to be consensual, so I look forward to the Opposition parties specifying in their closing speeches—because I know that they have done their homework—where the £40 million for the recurring annual cost is to come from. Is it from health or education, or should we just scrap the millions that we give every year to mitigate the effect of UK austerity? That would do it, because I have news for them—there is no coin-laden sofa.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:52

Mark Ruskell: I will address Christine Grahame's comment first. This is a bit of a frustrating debate, because we always talk about peak fares and higher prices to manage demand on the railways, but we never talk about peak pricing on the roads. We never talk about putting in road charges to manage demand during periods of congestion—which, of course, could then be used to invest in public transport and in our road infrastructure.

Christine Grahame: Will the member give way?

Mark Ruskell: I think that I am short for time.

The reality is that those are the choices that people, if they are fortunate enough to own a car and be able to drive, have to make every single day. Do they pick up the car keys or do they pay upwards of £30 to travel between Edinburgh and Glasgow on the railway? The reality is that, if people want to drive between Glasgow Queen Street and Edinburgh Waverley, it is actually free—there is no pricing on the roads. However, we all know that private use of motor cars results in cost to the economy, cost to the environment and cost to communities through congestion.

To be honest, people in France are quite frankly astonished that we do not have road pricing here, because they have road pricing. We can see the impact of that investment on the quality of the autoroutes and the roads in France, as well as on the quality of public transport there, so I hope that the cabinet secretary is preparing to launch the much-wanted 20 per cent vehicle mileage reduction route map—to give it its long title—in the weeks to come, because we need to get a grip on what the acceptable measures are to drive down demand.

Graham Simpson says that he does not back demand management, but we have to address the other side of the coin. I will give one example—again, it is from France, where residents of Montpellier have had free public transport since December 2023. In the first few months of the scheme, passenger numbers have increased by

about a quarter. The scheme is paid for by a mobility payment from companies that have more than 11 employees and by ticket sales from those visiting the town. There is still significant public investment, which is funded by higher tax payers, but a model has been found to invest in public transport that gives people a real choice to leave their car keys at home and get on to public transport.

We need to be open to new ways in which we can invest in our capital infrastructure and support revenue measures such as scrapping peak fares. The cabinet secretary made a heroic attempt to market the new plethora of tickets that are being introduced, including super-off-peak tickets, which most people do not use because they are at times of the day when nobody needs them. A lot of the longer-term tickets need a longer-term commitment from people to invest up front. As Beatrice Wishart said, if we were going to design a ticket system to be a barrier for people to adopting public transport, this would be it—it is too confusing.

The cabinet secretary made the point that the people who have benefited from the pilot are those who are on an above-average income, but we will not encourage people whose income is below average to start using the railways by increasing prices. Richard Leonard and Alex Rowley made that point strongly. If we look at who gets the trains these days, we see that it is middle-income earners, nurses and front-line workers. They are the people I see on the railways day in and day out, and I know that they are the people Fiona Hyslop sees on her journey to work.

I urge the cabinet secretary to look for opportunities to fund a scheme such as this and to reconsider it. Last week, she made a commitment in the chamber to reconsider the policy if a better budget deal comes from the Labour Government in Westminster. We need to open the conversation about how we fund such measures. I look forward to that coming in the route map for reducing vehicle mileage.

16:56

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): The debate has highlighted the short-sightedness of the Scottish Government's decision to reintroduce peak fares. It has shown that positive policies are being sacrificed because of the SNP's mismanagement of our public finances. It has exposed the fact that the SNP has given up on Scotland's climate crisis—a crisis that the cabinet secretary did not even mention—with no serious plan to bring down emissions from our biggest emitter, which is transport.

The 6.8 per cent rise in passenger numbers as a result of axing peak fares was positive progress. It should have been built on, and it could have been with proper long-term promotion of rail, a proper timetable of services and a proper review of fares. As Alex Rowley said, we will not get more people back on our trains if they are not accessible, affordable and reliable. Instead, Scotland's commuters will soon face not a return to pre-pilot peak rail fares but, because of the 8.7 per cent rail fare hike in April, the highest-ever rail fares for peak journeys, alongside some of the poorest-ever levels of service.

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Colin Smyth: I will, if I have time.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There is no extra time. It is a matter for the member.

Colin Smyth: What angers many of my constituents in Dumfries and Galloway is the fact that they will face the biggest hikes in fares in Scotland because of the Government's failure to change the illogical, irrational and discriminatory way in which ScotRail fixes its prices.

I will give one quick example. From 27 September, commuters travelling between Dumfries and Carlisle will see their day return rail fare rise from £7.60 to £23.50, which is an increase of 211 per cent. How do we explain that a day return on the same line from Kilmarnock to Glasgow will increase from £8.80 to £13.90—which is bad enough at 58 per cent—but that a return journey that is of a similar distance from Dumfries to Carlisle will increase by four times that to almost twice the price of the Kilmarnock to Glasgow return ticket?

What conceivable reason is there for the fact that a 40-mile journey on the Borders railway from Tweedbank to Edinburgh will increase from a £14.50 return fare to £21.70—which is an eye-watering 49 per cent—but the cost of the shorter 30-mile journey from Dumfries to Carlisle will soon be more expensive, at £23.50? It will be more expensive for a journey that is 25 per cent shorter.

The issue is not just about the Dumfries to Carlisle journey. On the same Nith valley line, passengers travelling from Dumfries to Glasgow will see an 80 per cent hike in their day return fare. Passengers on the Nith valley line who travel from Dumfries and Galloway find themselves paying significantly more per mile if their journey begins in Dumfries and Galloway rather than in the former Strathclyde Region. That shows what a mess our fares are.

We have the ridiculous situation that passengers from Kirkconnell in upper Nithsdale

are jumping in their car to drive the five minutes to New Cumnock to get the train to Glasgow, because the return fare from there is 25 per cent cheaper than it is from Kirkconnell. From 27 September, that will be a saving of more than £10 per return journey, just by driving a couple of miles up the road. When I have raised those anomalies with ministers, the response has been that there is going to be a fair fares review. However, the only substantive measure in that damp-squib review of rail fares is the removal of peak fares, which has now been ditched.

In 16 days' time, Scotland's rail commuters will be hit by record-high fares. That is bad news for families at a time when they face a cost of living crisis. In just 16 days, more people will move from using the train to using the car. That is bad news for our environment. In 16 days' time, after 17 years of inaction by this tired, failing Government, my constituents will find themselves having never been further away from fairer fares when it comes to Scotland's rip-off rail fares.

17:01

Fiona Hyslop: Public transport is a key enabler of economic and social growth, providing a vital link between the places where people live, learn, earn and socialise. Access to affordable and reliable public transport services helps people and communities to unlock opportunities to connect to jobs, education, retail, public services, leisure, recreation, friends and family networks, and Labour's amendment reflects our transport strategy wording, so I am happy to vote for it.

The SNP Government chose to extend and fund the pilot again in June, after the ending of the Bute house agreement.

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: No, I will make progress, as I want to address some of the points in the debate.

The pilot was a bold initiative that aimed to simplify complex fares and ticketing options and encourage more people to choose to travel by train rather than by car. However, despite the Government urging all members, the rail unions and others to encourage more work colleagues, family, friends and neighbours to switch to rail for more journeys—as we also did during Mr Ruskell's debate on 6 June—we just did not achieve the shift that was required to justify the funding to continue the removal of ScotRail peak fares.

The analysis shows that the pilot did not make a significant contribution to the First Minister's four priorities, particularly tackling child poverty and climate change. Instead, it primarily benefited existing train passengers—I acknowledge that it

has been welcomed by them over the past year. On that point, I say to Richard Leonard that I regularly use the train, and I was at Linlithgow train station only this morning.

I want to address the point that Graham Simpson made about cancellations. He referred to 5,000 cancellations, but I am not sure that he realises that ScotRail operates an average of more than 1,800 trains each day and that, last year, when it had 82 million passenger journeys, it had fewer compensation claims than it did the year before, when it moved fewer customers. ScotRail has fewer than one claim per 1,000 passengers, compared with nearly five claims per 1,000 across the rest of the rail services in Great Britain.

The points that Alex Rowley made show why it is important to look at the figures. He referred to the impact that he thinks the introduction of the emergency timetable in July had on the figures. I assure him that the figures that we used were collected in early July, before the move to the emergency timetable.

I want to point out to Mark Ruskell that, as he might be aware, on the Edinburgh to Glasgow line, a weekly season ticket used for four days will result in each return journey costing £24, and the use of a flexipass will bring that cost to £21.25.

Mr Ruskell and Beatrice Wishart made an important point about how to make the process easier for people. Beatrice Wishart talked about people working three days a week. It is in recognition of that working pattern that changes have been made to the flexipass to enable six return journeys to be made over a two-month period, resulting in a 32 per cent saving. I am sure that she and her colleagues will publicise that.

On the timing of the decision, which I am being criticised for, the decision had to be taken in August to enable the ticket process to be amended or the pilot to be continued.

Of course, none of the financial pressures that affect decisions that we have to make here matter to either Scottish Labour or the Tories. They do not care that, first, the Tory Westminster Government and, now, the Labour Westminster Government have imposed financial constraints on themselves, on us and, indeed, on the people of Scotland. As we are told by the Prime Minister, things are going to get worse in public finance. The Westminster Labour Government is warning us of a very difficult autumn budget.

There are big, bold things that we want to deliver and achieve for Scotland's railway, but we are constantly financially constrained year to year and through in-year pressures. Those are coming externally from successive Westminster Governments—once Tory, now Labour—and,

without complete control over all the powers, levers and resources that Scotland needs, we will always be held back.

Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary give way?

The Presiding Officer: Mr Marra, your intervention must be brief.

Michael Marra: What would the minister say to the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Scottish Fiscal Commission, which made it absolutely clear that the issues in the budget are the Scottish Government's responsibility?

The Presiding Officer: I can say at this point that the cabinet secretary had, in fact, sat down. I call Douglas Lumsden.

17:06

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I am pleased to support the motion, which calls on the devolved Scottish Government to reverse its poor decision to reintroduce peak-time fares on our railways. Once again, the SNP Government fails to listen to the Scottish people, Scottish businesses, the rail unions and our tourism sector and fails in its promises. The reintroduction of peak-time fares is, simply, a tax on those who seek to go about their daily lives and to do so responsibly.

I have spoken many times in the chamber about how the Scottish people want to do their bit. They want to be environmentally responsible and they want to help us all to achieve net zero, but they are being stymied time and again by this short-sighted and visionless SNP Government.

The SNP amendment sums up a Government that is out of ideas and out of time. It tries to pat itself on the back by calling the removal of peak time fares "pioneering", but it has ditched it and, of course, is trying to blame Westminster once again.

This Government owns and has full control over ScotRail. It should do anything that it can to encourage more people on to ScotRail to enable the modal shift that we desire, but the SNP Government's actions are driving—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Mr Lumsden, I ask you to stop for a moment.

I am aware of conversations, some of which are carrying on even as I suggest that members might like to hold them once we are finished with chamber business this evening.

Douglas Lumsden: The SNP Government's actions are driving people away from the railways. Its reintroduction of peak fares will double fares in some places. Services are being axed—6,000

trains have been cancelled as a result of a temporary timetable.

Let us look at journey times, as mentioned by Stephen Kerr. In 2016, the devolved SNP Government promised to spend £200 million by 2026 to reduce journey times between Aberdeen and the central belt by 20 minutes. That would have provided the north-east with a huge economic boost and encouraged more people to use the railway but, nearly eight years on, less than 5 per cent of that promised money has been spent, and we are now told that the project is under review. That is another broken promise, just like the promises to dual the A96, to dual the A9 by 2025 and to dual the A90 north of Ellon—a list of broken promises to the north-east by the SNP Government.

I will move on to some of the contributions that we have heard today. Craig Hoy reminded us about the temporary alcohol ban on ScotRail that was introduced nearly four years ago. The Government is so weak that it cannot make up its mind what to do about that. A succession of transport ministers seem incapable of making a decision.

Graham Simpson rightly reminded us that the SNP Government has ditched its climate change targets—probably a good job, when they make public transport much more expensive. He also pointed out the flawed survey that his new friends in the RMT highlighted.

Once again, we heard the cabinet secretary pass the buck to Westminster, even though the Scottish Fiscal Commission has said in its publications that the overall budget is up by 0.9 per cent in real terms this year.

Alex Rowley is spot on when he says that targeting drivers and making rail as attractive a choice as possible will get that modal shift. The Government has set a target of a 20 per cent reduction in car mile journeys by 2030, but once again it has no plan.

Mark Ruskell is right to say that fares are extortionate and confusing. We need to simplify, not force people to buy flexipasses or whatever they are called. More time was needed for the pilot.

Ben Macpherson and Christine Grahame both asked where the money would come from. These are political choices, so I will give them some ideas for where the money can come from. The Government should scrap the national care service, scrap the independence unit that it spends money on, trim the constitution budget and grow the economy at the same rate as in the rest of the UK. We would then have plenty of money to spend on things that Scots actually want.

The fact is that only 2 per cent of journeys in Scotland are made by rail. The decision to reintroduce peak fares will not increase that figure, the decision to pause the journey time reduction project at Aberdeen will not increase that figure and the decision to kick new stations—such as the one at Winchburgh that my colleague Sue Webber is campaigning for—into the long grass will not increase that figure.

We have to make it easier for people. We would scrap peak fares and introduce a Scottish smart travel card that can be used on all forms of public transport. The smart card is another SNP broken promise.

The people of Scotland want to do their bit when it comes to net zero. They want to travel sustainably, but they are being prevented from doing so by this SNP Government. The Government is making it harder and more expensive for Scots to use our trains, with cancelled and delayed services, increased fares and poor connectivity. It is not too late for the Government to change its mind on that policy. It is not too late to announce that peak fares will be abolished permanently and that hard-working Scots will not be penalised for trying to do the right thing by using the train.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate on ending peak rail fares on ScotRail trains.

Business Motions

17:11

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of two business motions. The first is motion S6M-14417, 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 17 September 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Scottish Languages Bill
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 18 September 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Constitution, External Affairs and
 Culture, and Parliamentary Business;
 Justice and Home Affairs
followed by Scottish Government Debate: Creating a
 Modern, Diverse, Dynamic Scotland
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 19 September 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:
 Education and Skills
followed by Ministerial Statement: Scottish
 Government Response to the
 Independent Review of Qualifications
 and Assessment
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Judicial Factors
 (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
 Tuesday 24 September 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Topical Questions (if selected)
followed by Scottish Government Business
followed by Committee Announcements
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 25 September 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions
 2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Deputy First Minister Responsibilities,
 Economy and Gaelic;
 Finance and Local Government
followed by Education, Children and Young People
 Committee Debate: Additional Support
 for Learning
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 26 September 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:
 Net Zero and Energy, and Transport
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 16 September 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 business motion is S6M-14418, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 2 timetable.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2 be completed by 4 October 2024.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:12

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of two Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-14419, on committee membership, and S6M-14420, on substitution on committees.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that—

James Dornan be appointed to replace Fulton MacGregor as a member of the Public Audit Committee;

Fulton MacGregor be appointed to replace Gordon MacDonald as a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee; and

Michael Matheson be appointed to replace Ben Macpherson as a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Ben Macpherson be appointed to replace Collette Stevenson as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:13

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-14406.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14406, in the name of Liam Kerr, on free school meals for all primary pupils, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

17:13

Meeting suspended.

17:15

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on amendment S6M-14406.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14406, in the name of Liam Kerr. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I have a very poor connection and could not connect to the voting app on my mobile device. I would have voted yes.

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

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

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

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I have no connection. I would have voted no.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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-Innes, 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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (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) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 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)
 Gosal, Pam (West 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)
 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)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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-14406.3, in the name of Jenny Gilruth, is: For 62, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-14406.2, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14406, in the name of Liam Kerr, on free school meals for all primary pupils, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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)
 Gosal, Pam (West 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)
 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)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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-Innes, 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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (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) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-14406.2, in the name of Pam Duncan-Glancy, is: For 63, Against 63, 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 a decision for the Parliament. The established convention is for the chair to vote in favour of the status quo, because the chair is required to act impartially. Therefore, I cast my vote against the amendment.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-14406, in the name of Liam Kerr, on free school meals for all primary pupils, 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.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I was unable to connect in the app. I would have abstained.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Haughey. We will make sure that that is recorded.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app froze. I just want to check that my “yes” vote was recorded.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm, Mr O’Kane, that your vote was 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)
 Gosal, Pam (West 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)
 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)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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

Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)

Abstentions

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, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, 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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (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) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the vote on motion S6M-14406, in the name of Liam Kerr, is: For 64, Against 2, Abstentions 60.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament believes that free school lunches should be provided for all primary school children, including provision in the school holidays, in this parliamentary session, as promised by the Scottish Government.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-14405.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14405, in the name of Graham Simpson, on ending peak rail fares on ScotRail trains, 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.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted no.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote was recorded, Ms Clark.

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not open. I would have voted no.

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

Clare Haughey: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am unsure whether my vote was recorded.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote has been recorded.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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-Innes, 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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (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) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollak) (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, 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)
 Gosal, Pam (West 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)
 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)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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-14405.3, in the name of Fiona Hyslop, is: For 62, Against 64, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-14405.2, in the name of Alex Rowley, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14405, in the name of Graham Simpson, on ending peak rail fares on ScotRail trains, be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-14405, in the name of Graham Simpson, on ending peak rail fares on ScotRail trains, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

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

The vote is closed.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app tells me that I have lost connection. Can I just check that my vote was registered?

The Presiding Officer: Your vote has been registered, Mr Cole-Hamilton.

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)
 Gosal, Pam (West 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)
 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)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 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-Innes, 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)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (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) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)

(SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-14405, in the name of Graham Simpson, as amended, is: For 64, Against 62, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament calls on the Scottish Government to reverse its decision to reintroduce peak fares on Scotland's railway and agrees that making public transport more accessible, affordable and reliable is key to supporting more people to use public transport.

The Presiding Officer: Unless any member objects, I propose to ask a single question on two Parliamentary Bureau motions. The question is, that motions S6M-14419, on committee membership, and S6M-14420, on substitution on committees, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that—

James Dornan be appointed to replace Fulton MacGregor as a member of the Public Audit Committee;

Fulton MacGregor be appointed to replace Gordon MacDonald as a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee; and

Michael Matheson be appointed to replace Ben Macpherson as a member of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

That the Parliament agrees that Ben Macpherson be appointed to replace Collette Stevenson as the Scottish National Party substitute on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. It would be wrong to let this moment pass. It is significant that the Government has lost two votes on manifesto promises. Have you had any indication from the

Government that it plans to make a statement before the end of the week?

The Presiding Officer: Mr Rennie, I am in no doubt whatsoever that you know that that is not a point of order.

That concludes decision time. We will now move on to members' business.

Retrofitting and Tenement Maintenance

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-14024, in the name of Graham Simpson, on retrofitting and tenement maintenance. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament welcomes the publication of the report, Meeting Scotland's Retrofit Challenge: solutions from the industry, jointly published by 14 leading built environment sector organisations; recognises that this paper follows a "Retrofit Roundtable" meeting convened at the Scottish Parliament in May 2023; notes the support for the report's key policy recommendations to establish a Ministerial Oversight Group on Retrofit and to develop a long-term Retrofit Delivery Plan with a joined-up approach to funding, regulating and incentivising retrofit work across Scotland, including in the Central Scotland region; further notes the calls on the Scottish Government to significantly increase the pace and scale of retrofit projects being undertaken across the country; welcomes the publication of the Scottish Law Commission's discussion paper on the proposed scheme for owners' associations; recognises that this discussion paper follows the work of the Tenement Maintenance Working Group, convened at the Scottish Parliament in March 2018, which was established to explore actions that could be taken to improve the condition of Scotland's tenements; acknowledges that the Scottish Law Commission's discussion project responds to the Tenement Maintenance Working Group's recommendation that every tenement building in Scotland should have an owners' association to coordinate work to the building and a corresponding reference received from the Scottish Government to that effect in January 2022, and notes the discussion paper's proposals concerning the functions, powers and duties of a tenement owners' association, including the role of an association manager, decision-making procedures, liability of owners for costs and the implementation of an annual budgeting system.

17:32

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): I start by apologising: first, to my colleagues for their having had to listen to me twice today; I spotted the ones who filed out of the chamber just now. I also apologise for the length of the motion, which is—to be frank—ludicrous. I have poked fun at other members for producing similar epics in the past, so I deserve whatever ridicule comes my way.

However, as members may recall, I had originally—well before recess—lodged a motion on tenement maintenance and the Scottish Law Commission's consultation on the issue. That motion got immediate cross-party support and could have been debated, but, sadly, my whip's office preferred other topics, so here we are.

There is a benefit to that delay, as it has allowed me to encompass retrofitting in the motion for

debate today, which is very much linked to the original topic. I thank all those members who have signed the new, longer motion. There has always been cross-party interest in this important topic, which affects so many lives.

In March 2018, some of us, as MSPs, established the tenement maintenance working group to see what we could suggest to improve the condition of Scotland's tenements. Around a third of tenement flats were built prior to 1919; another third were built between 1919 and 1982; and the final third were built after 1982. Many tenement flats were in a state of critical disrepair when we started our work, and they are probably worse now.

Members will know from their casework of the difficulties that people can face in getting work done to shared buildings. People can sometimes wait for years to get agreement to have essential work, such as fixing the roof, done. The existing tenement law is not strong enough to get us to a place where our housing stock is brought up to scratch, maintained and made fit for the future. Housing impacts on people's lives: it can affect their health, both physical and mental, as well as their work, relationships and wellbeing. Living in poor housing is depressing, and no one should have to put up with it.

I accept that the subject of the debate may appear to some to be a little dry, but there is nothing that is more important for people than the condition of where they live. In May 2019, the working group made a number of recommendations: there should be compulsory owners associations, sinking funds and five-yearly inspections. We sent our "Working Group on Maintenance of Tenement Scheme Property—Final Recommendations Report" to the Scottish Government, and it produced a work plan. In May 2022, the Government asked the Scottish Law Commission to make recommendations, but only on the proposal for owners associations. That consultation ran until 1 August.

I will talk about that in a moment. As members will see, that has all taken a long time, and it has been frustrating, so in 2022, we reconvened the working group. The group has been one of the best examples that I can think of that has involved parties working together in the Parliament, with outside experts, for the common good. We really should see more of that kind of thing.

I thank the Scottish Law Commission for the work that it is doing, too. In particular, I thank Professor Frankie McCarthy, who is leading on that work, and who has become something of an expert on tenement law, if she was not one already. The Scottish Law Commission's discussion paper explores proposals to replace the existing tenement management scheme with

an owners association scheme. That would make owners associations compulsory for every tenement building in Scotland and give those associations the power to enter contracts and appoint managers. It would also introduce duties on those associations, including an obligation to organise meetings, approve budgets and standardise titles to ensure that maintenance rules are consistent across tenements.

In its paper, the Scottish Law Commission posed 79 questions. Those included questions on which powers should be made available to owners associations, who should be eligible to act as the manager of those bodies, and in which circumstances an owner should be able to challenge a majority decision. The results of that consultation—I believe that there was a good response to it—will inform the final recommendations, as well as a draft bill, which should be introduced by the Scottish Law Commission in 2026. That will be after the next Scottish Parliament elections, so it will be for whoever is elected then to take the matter forward. That will be no easy task, but it is essential.

That brings me to retrofitting. In order for Scotland to tackle climate change, it is critical that we reduce carbon emissions from existing buildings. Across the United Kingdom, 80 per cent of buildings that will be in use in 2050 have already been built, and those could represent 95 per cent of future built environment emissions. Reducing emissions to net zero will require retrofit work on up to 27 million domestic buildings and 2 million non-domestic buildings across the UK. According to the UK Climate Change Committee, £45 billion of investment will be needed for energy efficiency improvements in homes to 2035. Those are massive numbers.

The motion mentions the publication of the report, “Meeting Scotland’s Retrofit Challenge: solutions from the industry”, which was jointly published by 14 leading built environment sector organisations. That followed a retrofit round-table meeting that was convened at the Parliament in May last year. The report calls on the Government to

“Establish a Ministerial Oversight Group on Retrofit”,

stating that

“Retrofit is a complicated, cross-portfolio issue”

on which “relevant ministers” must be brought together. The report also says that the Scottish Government should

“Develop ... a long-term Retrofit Delivery Plan with a joined-up approach to funding, regulating and incentivising retrofit work across Scotland.”

The report goes on to list some items that the plan should address, stating that it should

“Establish long-term targets and measurement tools”

and consider

“the human resources ... necessary ... to undertake”

retrofit “projects properly”. That really means skills.

In addition, the report calls for “a fabric first approach”, which means that heat conservation repairs and improvements should be prioritised before any changes are made to heat generation, such as installing a heat pump. People should do work to their property before they put a heat pump in.

None of that is headline grabbing; housing tends not to be, until things go wrong.

In my foreword to the tenement maintenance working group’s final report, I wrote about the tragic death of an Australian, Christine Foster, who was killed by falling masonry while she was working in an Edinburgh city centre pub in June 2000. She was just 26. Her dad called on the Government to lay down tougher regulations to ensure safer construction in Scotland, but not much has happened since then, which is why the action that I have set out is essential. I look forward to hearing today from other members, and from the minister.

17:40

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): First, I pay tribute to Graham Simpson for bringing the debate to the chamber, following the members’ business debate on maintenance of tenement communal property that I brought to the chamber—in which I debated the issue with Graham Simpson—in 2018. There has been much progress since then, including one Opposition debate and one Government debate, as well as this debate. The subject is important, and it is right that we are having more debates about it in the Parliament.

I declare an interest, as someone who lives in one of the approximately 900,000 tenements in Scotland. The issue of tenement maintenance is relevant to a huge number of my constituents, many of whom, like me, live in a tenement.

The casework that I have had on tenement issues during the time—more than eight years—that I have had the privilege of representing the communities of Edinburgh Northern and Leith has been significant. People are really struggling to get repairs done on their properties. Although the Tenements (Scotland) Act 2004 is better than the legislation that was previously in place, we do not have a suitable legal structure to incentivise and necessitate people to organise and finance the repair and maintenance of their properties

The work that the group of MSPs and expert advisers has done over the past eight years has done a lot of heavy lifting for the Government. I know that we have the Acting Minister for Climate Action in the chamber today, but this issue is fundamentally one for the Minister for Housing and his colleagues, and I hope that this debate will be brought to their attention.

Many of Scotland's tenements are factored, but we know—again from our casework, and from a news item that was reported by BBC Scotland this week—about the difficulties that people have with factoring in terms of difficulty and value for money. Some factoring is done very well, but not every tenement will necessarily want to sign up to that, for various reasons.

We need ways of ensuring, therefore, that tenements are self-organised, and that people are necessitated to undertake repairs and maintenance and that they have funding available to do so. That is where we are. We are nowhere near the point of considering retrofitting, which needs to be done not only in order to meet our climate obligations, but—importantly—to ensure that our homes are warm and watertight and that quality of life is enhanced. We have to make these changes just to get to the point at which enough repair and maintenance is taking place to ensure public safety and the integrity of people's properties, and to ensure that our stock is enhanced at a time when we have a housing crisis.

The issue needs more focus from the Parliament as a whole, and from the Government, because it affects all those in urban Scotland, including my constituents. The Scottish Law Commission is doing excellent work, and its consultation is important. We need work to be undertaken on the consideration of sinking funds. Thereafter, as a Parliament and as a political community of representatives and parties, we need a shared position of agreement as we go into the next Scottish Parliament elections in 2026, so that a bill on tenement maintenance is one of the first pieces of legislation that is considered in the next session of Parliament. We need to take the time now to work through the development of the hard law and the human rights considerations that are part of the issue. In the next session of Parliament, we will need to legislate quickly, and implement the changes as soon as possible after that. If we do not do that, we will not get on to even the idea of retrofitting.

The heat in buildings bill that will be introduced as part of the programme for government is worth while and important, but people will not be able to undertake the changes that it will necessitate in tenements unless tenement law is reformed. The practical function and legal operation to enable

such retrofit will not be in place. Therefore we need both a new act on tenements and a shared commitment. The debate is an important step forward in achieving those.

17:45

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank my colleague Graham Simpson for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I also thank the organisations that provided members with helpful briefings for it. I pay tribute to Graham Simpson and Ben Macpherson for their campaigning work on tenement issues, and to the Parliament's cross-party group on housing that has also been working on those issues—it is important that we then debate those issues in the chamber.

When I was first elected eight years ago, one of my early cases concerned stair cleaning in a tenement here in the capital. There was an issue with shared payments towards communal cleaning and maintenance. To some extent, eight years on, it does not feel as though we have made any progress on such matters. That case provided me with a good, early lesson on the legal pitfalls and problems that people who live in tenements often face and on the need for organised and legal frameworks to improve conditions in all tenements across Scotland for the people who call them home.

As the motion notes, there is a pressing need for solutions to be developed, as was highlighted in the recent publication "Meeting Scotland's Retrofit Challenge: solutions from the industry", which was co-ordinated by the Chartered Institute of Building and jointly published by 14 leading organisations from across the built environment sector.

Retrofit presents a complicated, multifaceted, cross-portfolio challenge for which there will be no silver-bullet solution. We must consider the problems and the potential future pitfalls if we are to achieve our net zero ambitions in tenements across Scotland and in order to develop such a legal framework sooner rather than later.

I agree with Ben Macpherson that we will find that the net zero legislation in the heat in buildings strategy does not fit with tenement law in Scotland and so it will not make early progress. A joined-up, holistic policy-making approach will be needed if Scotland is to reach its targets and ensure not only that our existing buildings are warm and energy efficient but that they promote the health and wellbeing of the people who live there and use them.

The solutions and key industry recommendations in "Meeting Scotland's Retrofit Challenge" therefore act as a welcome focus on

how the Government could identify opportunities and either remove or mitigate existing barriers.

At the heart of such an approach are the challenges identified in the Local Government and Housing Committee's recent work on the Housing (Cladding Remediation) (Scotland) Bill. Many of the challenges on tenement issues, such as surveying buildings and gaining access to them, will be the same. The Government is already aware of those aspects, having taken that bill through as emergency legislation, so we might see discussion of exactly the same challenges in the context of tenements.

The Scottish Law Commission's discussion paper on tenement law represents a welcome first step in establishing the necessary governance structures to address the maintenance of tenement buildings across Scotland, which operate within a complex multitenure system that we need to get to grips with sooner rather than later. As Graham Simpson stated, the development of compulsory owners associations could be one way of addressing that. We must look towards having a solution-driven approach where, regardless of who owns which flat in a tenement property, we see group effort and group funding of what are, let us face it, expensive works.

The Scottish Law Commission's proposals would provide a legal framework for establishing the relevant powers and duties. Should they be adopted in legislation, along with suitable guidance and advice, owners associations, managers and individual property owners—individual owners will also want to be at the heart of such a solution—will have a suitable legal framework to enable us to move forward with retrofit in the future.

It is clear to those of us who represent communities with a large number of tenements that we will face many challenges—existing and future—especially in relation to the retrofit of tenement properties. However, as Ben Macpherson and Graham Simpson have outlined, Parliament, in a collective and cross-party way, needs to look now at what actions can be taken early in the next parliamentary session. For example, a commitment is needed from all parties to support a tenement maintenance bill in the next session of Parliament. We can build on the positive work that has been done and the solutions that have been developed—sometimes not by Government but by outside bodies. We must ensure that we get solutions in place for people who live in tenements, because they need those solutions.

I go back to the example of my constituent whom I met eight years ago. We need to ensure that those issues are addressed. They have not

been addressed, and all of us in this chamber have an opportunity to help to fix that.

17:50

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): I start by congratulating my Central Scotland regional colleague Graham Simpson on securing this evening's debate. It is an important issue that we have not covered regularly enough, and I am glad that we are getting the chance to discuss it in Parliament.

Buildings are one of the highest carbon emitters in Scotland, behind only industry and transport. One in five of Scotland's homes is traditionally built, and heat leaks out of those tenements' historic windows and walls. In the UK, the new Labour Government has pledged an extra £6.6 billion over the next parliamentary session towards its warm home plans. I hope that the Scottish Government can work with colleagues in the UK Government to make that plan a reality in homes across Scotland, too.

Although we have discussed the issue before, and we have known for a long time that we have to bring our homes up to standard, we still have not worked out the nuts and bolts of how we will do that and, crucially, how we will finance it. Retrofitting homes in Scotland remains complicated and, crucially, too expensive for lots of homeowners who are now struggling with mortgage payments.

Ben Macpherson: I ask Mark Griffin in good faith whether he will agree that an important point for consideration, which many campaigners and those involved in the working group have suggested before, is whether we could reduce VAT on retrofitting and home improvements in order to help people to afford and facilitate that work.

Mark Griffin: Yes, absolutely, and I have called on previous UK Governments of different colours to do that. There is clearly an imbalance in the VAT structure, in that improvements are not covered by VAT, but new-build customers can request changes and adaptations to avoid that VAT bill further down the line, after they have taken ownership. I am more than happy to work on that on a cross-party basis, because it will be critical when it comes to retrofitting the many houses that we need to bring up to standard in order to meet our obligations on net zero, climate change and fuel poverty. I am more than happy to work with Mr Macpherson and others to continue lobbying for that.

That process will be crucial, particularly with regard to our older homes, which are all uniquely built. Many of them have also been uniquely modified over the years and are used in different

ways by their occupants, so a simple one-size-fits-all solution is not possible.

The tenement maintenance working group has shown that, as well as the complication around technical solutions, the law on tenement maintenance adds an extra layer of complexity to the process of retrofit. Therefore, it is reassuring to know that industry experts are engaged in addressing those thorny issues. I was pleased to read the report, “Meeting Scotland’s Retrofit Challenge: solutions from the industry”, following the retrofit round-table meeting in May 2023. That group’s report and recommendations form a vital first step towards retrofitting our homes quickly and effectively.

I also note the recommendations of the tenement maintenance working group, which include establishing compulsory owners associations for tenements that would have a legal personality and the ability to enter into contracts in their own name. However, legislating for that initiative raises some questions around the interaction of a potential new law with existing tenement title conditions, and there are possible concerns around compliance with the property rights of flat owners under article 1 of the European convention on human rights.

The work of the Scottish Law Commission on mandatory owners associations for tenements in Scotland is therefore invaluable for us, particularly as it should, I hope, inform the Government’s thinking—whichever Government comes to office in 2026, it is crucial that it leans heavily on the work that is being done by the Law Commission.

Lowering emissions from Scotland’s housing stock is essential in reducing fuel poverty. If we are to get to net zero, 2.25 million homes in Scotland, including almost 900,000 tenements, need to be retrofitted.

I am grateful for the hard work of all the organisations that have been mentioned in the debate. With 48 per cent of our buildings in critical disrepair and spiralling fuel costs for residents—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Griffin, I hope that you are bringing your remarks to a close.

Mark Griffin: I am, Presiding Officer. Retrofitting is a critical element of lifting Scotland out of the housing emergency and alleviating fuel poverty.

17:56

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank Graham Simpson for securing the debate. I attended a number of the working group meetings prior to the Covid pandemic. I put on my record my thanks to Mr Simpson and his

predecessor, Ben Macpherson, for taking forward this much-needed work.

The “Working Group on Maintenance of Tenement Scheme Property: Final Recommendations Report”, published in 2019, to which Graham Simpson referred, is a hugely important document. My constituency, like those of other members across the chamber, has many tenements in it. Many of us have an acute knowledge of the condition of those tenements because of the issues raised by our constituents, and, in addition—to be light-hearted for a moment—from when we do the morning leaflet runs when it comes to election periods, carrying out surveys and the delivery of annual reports.

Across the country, there are many stunning tenements that are well maintained and in very good condition, but, regrettably, many are also in a poor or very poor state. That is down to a variety of reasons. Some residents might not have the finance to make the repairs, some might not want to make the repairs if the issue does not affect them, and there might also be absentee landlords who are not willing to contribute. Those are just three examples, but there will be many more. That leads to buildings becoming undesirable and people becoming effectively trapped in a property, which has a negative effect on the local community.

Unfortunately, Inverclyde has many people in negative equity because their property has reduced in value over the years and repairs have not taken place. That means that they cannot sell and they often cannot afford to pay their share of the communal repair costs. It is a vicious cycle and something needs to be done. That is where the work of the tenement maintenance working group is hugely important.

We have heard from members across the chamber about the importance of getting an outcome or result. I agree with my colleague Ben Macpherson’s comments on the heat in buildings bill that was announced in the programme for government and on the issue of progressing a tenement bill. That is where the work of the Scottish Law Commission is important. Graham Simpson will recall, from our days early in this session on the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee, that we pushed the boundaries and the envelope of what the committee could and should be doing with regard to the work of the SLC. One of our recommendations was to refer the matter to the relevant committee of the Scottish Parliament, but that did not stop the dialogue with the SLC, which was hugely important.

We all recognise and accept that the SLC work is taking a long time, and that was one of the frustrations that we had in the Delegated Powers

and Law Reform Committee. However, I would rather that it took a wee bit of extra time to get it right than to have to go back—at some point in the next parliamentary session or the one after that—to fix a problem that we could have got right at the outset.

The point that Ben Macpherson made about factoring was touched on not just earlier today but in the report. Factoring is one of the key problems that we face. Inverclyde Council in my constituency is fifth out of the 32 local authorities with regard to the number of tenements in the area, so I know how important the issue is from helping my constituents. It is a huge frustration.

However, I genuinely believe that, if the work that the SLC is undertaking can be done right, we can make a hugely positive difference for future generations across the country. We will have to wait and see whether the VAT issue can be addressed going forward. The tenement maintenance issue is one of the key problems that the country faces, even before we get to retrofitting, which is hugely important for tackling climate change. If we can build flexibility into the heat in buildings bill, then when the tenement bill is introduced, we can get tenements sorted. I would like to think that—potentially, in the next session after the SLC work is completed—anyone who lives in or owns a tenement will be in a better place to deal with the maintenance issue and move forward, so that all our communities can be in a better place.

18:01

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I, too, thank Graham Simpson for bringing this important issue to the chamber. It is time to get serious about retrofitting our building stock to meet our climate goals—not just tenements, but all of Scotland's housing stock. The report "Meeting Scotland's Retrofit Challenge: solutions from the industry" is a wake-up call for the Government. Rather than repeating what has been said, I will highlight a few points from the report, as well as points that have come up in the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee and as part of the work of the Existing Homes Alliance.

First, we absolutely need a fabric-first approach to retrofitting. That means improving the building envelope—walls, roofs, floors, windows and doors—before installing new technology. Proper insulation is key. Without it, advanced heating technology is just a waste of money. By focusing on the building fabric first, we can maximise energy efficiency and provide long-term benefits to home owners. Too many people are installing heat pumps in leaky buildings, which leads to higher energy bills. That could be avoided with bespoke

whole-building plans. Each house or tenement needs a tailored approach that considers its unique characteristics. A one-size-fits-all solution will not work for Scotland's diverse housing stock. Tailored plans ensure that retrofitting is effective and efficient, which will save energy and improve comfort.

Secondly, we must push the new Labour Government to remove the 20 per cent VAT on retrofitting buildings and push the Scottish Government to give local authorities powers to raise a demolition levy. The current VAT set-up disincentivises contractors and slows down progress. Removing the tax would make retrofitting more affordable and accelerate our efforts to cut carbon emissions from heating.

As well as moving us towards our climate ambitions, retrofitting could help us tackle homelessness through the retrofit and adaptive reuse of the countless empty properties across Scotland. Through retrofitting, we could create three homes for the price of one new build. Communities and councils have been leading the way on that, with work being done, for example, by Midsteeple Quarter in Dumfries, Argyll and Bute Council and Perth and Kinross Council. Support is needed to help those leaders to share best practice.

We also need a local approach to engage private home owners and the private rented sector. The Existing Homes Alliance is doing great work in that area, and we need to do more.

Leveraging climate action networks and hubs could be a game changer. Those networks can spread information through local events, raising awareness and providing guidance to home owners and landlords to take the step. That grassroots approach ensures that the retrofitting message reaches all corners of Scotland, thereby encouraging widespread participation.

I also welcome the publication of the Scottish Law Commission's discussion paper on the proposed scheme for owners associations. I listened with interest to Stuart McMillan's contribution on some of the issues that he is aware of.

The proposal for every tenement building in Scotland to have an owners association is a sensible and necessary step. Those associations exist in tenements in New York City, where I lived for 20 years, and having them here would ensure that maintenance work was carried out efficiently and that costs were fairly distributed among owners.

I agree with Ben Macpherson about the urgency of beginning work at the start of the next session of Parliament. Whole-building plans could fit that model well. The Government must incentivise

technological innovation in heat distribution networks for whole tenements and in heat-source technology that could easily be installed in individual flats.

I urge the Scottish Government to act swiftly on the recommendations of both the retrofit report and the Scottish Law Commission's discussion paper. By adopting a fabric-first approach, creating whole-house plans, removing VAT from the cost of retrofitting, bringing in a demolition levy, engaging local communities through action networks and incentivising innovation in heat technology, we can make significant strides towards a more sustainable, energy-efficient and well-maintained built environment for Scotland. Let us seize the opportunity and get on with the urgent work that will ensure that we meet our legally binding climate obligations.

18:06

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I congratulate Mr Simpson on securing this timely debate. As he highlighted, this is not a matter of self-interest by building owners—it is a public health emergency. Having shelter and security in the home is one of the essential components of any hierarchy of needs, but the condition of Scotland's housing stock leaves a lot to be desired. We certainly have some of the oldest housing stock in Europe, which has been a perennial challenge for the city of Glasgow for more than a century.

The Housing (Financial Provisions) Act 1924 was created to address sanitation issues that were affecting housing in Glasgow, but it focused largely on the construction of new municipal housing estates and did not tackle inner city tenement challenges and the collapse of factoring that took place after emergency legislation was introduced in 1915 to restrict rents. Laudable as that was at the time, it was not revised or amended and, as a result, there was no factoring of tenements in Glasgow for half a century.

We can fast forward to the post-war period, when emergency slum clearances in the city and the building of overspill estates and new towns were also intended to address the problem. The result was the designation of large parts of the city of Glasgow as comprehensive development areas, of which there were 29 in total. Within the space of 30 years, 40 per cent of Glasgow's housing stock was demolished. That is an extraordinary figure: 40 per cent of the city's houses were demolished in 30 years.

That is the scale of the challenge that we face if we do not deal with it. Glasgow City Council has highlighted the scale of the maintenance backlog; it recently conducted a survey that showed that 46,600 tenement properties in the city are in an

urgent state of disrepair and that that maintenance backlog will cost £2.9 billion. That is an urgent crisis. Glasgow City Heritage Trust, of which I am a trustee, has an annual budget of £1 million to dispense in grants. That is an absurdly inadequate figure.

The structures for how we assist people to improve their tenements are also inadequate. Grant funding alone is not sufficient. We must be far more intelligent about providing patient loan finance to allow property owners to carry out larger-scale improvements and to address fundamental fabric challenges. In Glasgow alone, we have 76,000 residential buildings that predate the first world war, of which about 70,000 are tenements, so about one in four Glaswegians live in a tenement that was built before that war.

There are big challenges, but we must find hope in the solutions that Glasgow found a generation ago, in the 1970s. Many people of that generation will be familiar with the cludgie. My grandparents talked about the toilet in their shared stair, where the seat was always warm. That came about as a result of the Burgh Police (Scotland) Act 1892, which insisted on indoor sanitation but not necessarily on indoor toilets for individual private flats. Even in the 1970s, one in four Scots had no toilet in their own home and had to share one, but, by 1990, Scotland was the best-toileted nation in Europe.

That came about not by accident but by the innovations that were carried out in Govan, Partick and other districts in Glasgow by people such as Raymond Young, a young architect who was involved with Assist Architects, which was an experimental practice that spun out of the University of Strathclyde's architecture department. He went to meet a lady called Annie Gibbons in Luath Street in Govan. She said, "I've heard all about your work on putting indoor toilets into flats. I want one," so she became the experiment—the guinea pig—in putting an indoor toilet into a tenement. Eventually, the housing convener of the city, Pat Lally, came to cut the ribbon on her toilet.

The authorities realised that they had spent the past 30 years demolishing a hundred thousand tenements when they might have better deployed those resources in retrofit. As a result, the growth of the community housing association movement took place in Glasgow, with the passing of the Housing Act 1974. That formed the basis of what we are talking about now, such as owners associations, sinking funds and the management of properties. As a result, about a quarter of the city's housing stock is managed by registered social landlords. In total, there are about 80 housing associations in Glasgow.

The infrastructure is there and we have done it before. We committed with positive action, coherence and the sort of consensual approach that the member for Edinburgh Northern and Leith talked about, and solved a major social problem in Scotland. We moved from one in four Scots sharing toilets in the 1970s to being the best-toileted nation in Europe.

We can do the same with other fabric repairs now, but we need to implement urgently the recommendations that the tenement maintenance working group identified in concert with the Scottish Law Commission. We cannot continue to dawdle. We have seen the pathway, we can pilot a lot of this stuff with our existing infrastructure, we can look at our housing associations and we can get ahead of the problem in Glasgow. We can start to effect the practical operation of this very early in a city such as Glasgow, and I urge members to look at how we move forward with that. The Law Commission is certainly keen to look at such pilots, so that it can write the legislation to reflect the reality. Let us move ahead with that, because there are big opportunities. If we do that, we can solve a lot of the housing problems that Scotland faces.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Given the number of members who wish to speak, I am minded to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Graham Simpson to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

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

Motion agreed to.

18:11

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): I thank Graham Simpson for securing the debate. There has been cross-party concern about tenement maintenance since Ben Macpherson led the working group originally, and I think that all we independent MSPs share that concern.

It is great that the Scottish Government has responded positively and that the Scottish Law Commission proposes a way forward—in particular, that every tenement building should have an owners association. Many of us have been frustrated at the slow progress, but I guess that any progress is better than none. We need to accept that, politically, some of the proposals may be unpopular—for example, once we get on to reserves or sinking funds. However, we need to remember that tenement buildings—I live in one—are gradually deteriorating, day by day and year by year.

Barlanark, where I live, was an area of post-war council housing in greater Easterhouse. It had become notorious by the 1980s. If a car was stolen in Glasgow, Sandaig Road—where I live—was where the police looked first. Bellway took over the whole area and did a major refurbishment that involved lowering the height of the buildings from four to two or three storeys, and the area completely changed, with all 270 or so flats being sold—they were called “yuppie flats” when I moved in, in 1990. I gather that John Swinney, in a previous life, was involved in the project.

However, over the past 34 years, no serious maintenance has been done at all. People have spent thousands on kitchens, bathrooms and double glazing, but there has been virtually no communal maintenance. That is a problem for my 270 neighbours, but it is also part of a national problem. We all suffer if a large part of our housing stock is not maintained.

We have factors, but the estate has a very poor payment record and the factors do not have the powers to ensure maintenance. We are on our third set of factors. I fully accept that factors, too, need supervision; however, in our case, as in many others, it is not the factors that are to blame for a lack of progress. From my experience, it is even worse if there are no factors. The whole system is broken, and I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government accepts that and that the Scottish Law Commission is getting the ball rolling.

Ben Macpherson: Does John Mason agree with a point that Miles Briggs has made on several occasions this year—that, if we are to reform the Tenement (Scotland) Act 2004, perhaps there is also a need to make changes to the Property Factors (Scotland) Act 2011?

John Mason: I confess that I am not an expert on all the different bits of legislation, but there certainly needs to be change. I am more than happy to be guided by others on what form that should take, but I certainly support some form of change.

I turn to the other half of Graham Simpson’s motion. The report “Meeting Scotland’s Retrofit Challenge: solutions from the industry” makes interesting reading, and it raises important points and questions, including the point that clarity needs to be provided on the funding of any retrofitting and on how much of that will be public investment or private investment. As has been mentioned, the report suggests that the fabric of a building should be the first priority—that is, ensuring that it is wind and watertight—and that, secondly, the building should be properly insulated, with consideration being given to the heating system only as the third priority. The report questions the energy performance certificate ratings and suggests that the EPC

assessment criteria need to be reformed. It also says that the workforce needs to be large enough and properly trained.

In 2020-21, a pilot full retrofit was carried out on a pre-1919 sandstone tenement building in the Queen's Park area of Glasgow, which brought the eight flats in the building up to the Passivhaus standard. If less thorough work was done on a greater scale, the cost per unit would, one would hope, be substantially less. That work cost about £1 million for the eight flats, which is about £125,000 per flat. That is quite a substantial cost.

Funding of tenement maintenance and retrofit is going to be a substantial challenge. Some owners will be able and willing to pay substantial sums, but many will not, even including housing associations. One challenge is whether owners will need to receive grants or loans in order to get work completed. What would happen to an owner-occupier in a dilapidated flat that was worth less than £50,000 who had no savings and only a minimum income?

Today's debate flags up more questions than answers, but a number of us want to keep the topic firmly on the agenda. No party can afford to say that the problem is too difficult or too expensive. Scotland needs us to move forward towards a solution.

18:16

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I also thank Graham Simpson for bringing this important debate to the chamber. In my contribution, I will talk specifically about the workforce that we need now and into the future to address all the important points that colleagues have raised. I have been fascinated by the knowledge of colleagues, and I have learned a great deal. I can generally get a lot of information about buildings in Scotland by following my dear colleague Paul Sweeney on social media.

Tonight's debate is such an important one. The work to ensure the continued existence of the buildings that we are talking about must be done in tandem with the progression of construction training. Members have made many important points about legislation, but we need the workforce to be able to do all the work that is required to tackle the retrofitting challenges that we face.

During the summer, I had the great pleasure of meeting a number of trades workers from a great variety of trades and backgrounds across my South Scotland region. Young workers in particular recognise that they need the skills to enable us to meet the challenge of reaching net zero and deliver on the retrofitting of buildings, not only now but way into the future. There are lots of skills that they need to develop.

The consistent message that I have heard from businesses and workers across the sector is that the Scottish Government must set policies to establish clearer training routes, to invest in local training, in particular, and to drive a desire to save some of the skills and understanding in what is a craft industry. I have previously raised in the chamber the challenge that young apprentices face in accessing the local education that will allow us to keep those craft skills. People seem to find it difficult to find the right provision to enable them to keep up their competencies and qualifications and become professional in the sector.

A number of points made by members have made me realise that we need to support the workforce, and I hope that the minister might consider some of the points that have been raised with me. We need to champion some skills from a very early age—from primary school—and ensure that people see them as offering a lifelong career and as linked to the future of our environment in our desire to get to net zero.

We perhaps also need to address some of the further education complexities for apprentices, such as the long distances that they might require to travel to get some of the skills they need. We should consider how to support apprentices with that. We should perhaps consider a model of education infrastructure that helps people who might be challenged if they have to go and work far away, particularly if they are young. There has been a suggestion about mobile education facilities, and I wonder whether the minister could speak with his colleagues in the education and economy portfolios to explore what we can do to progress that.

I thank everybody for their interesting contributions, and I thank Graham Simpson for bringing the debate to the chamber.

18:21

The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan): I start by thanking members for their contributions in what has been a useful debate. In particular, I thank Mr Simpson for bringing the debate to the chamber. I also pay tribute to the organisations that were involved in producing the "Meeting Scotland's Retrofit Challenge" report.

I very much look forward to meeting the representatives of the 14 bodies that collaborated on the report next week to hear directly from them on the challenges that we face, and to discuss their recommendations to ensure that the pace and scale of retrofit across Scotland match our net zero ambitions. I accept that that requires cross-portfolio working within Government.

I thank all those who are involved in the Scottish Parliament working group on tenement maintenance, including Graham Simpson, the convener of the group, for their continued work. One of the group's key recommendations was to instruct the Scottish Law Commission to undertake a reform project on compulsory owners associations for tenement properties. We welcome the discussion paper that was published by the commission, and we look forward to receiving further recommendations from it next spring, as well as its draft bill.

On the issue of tenements, on which the debate has rightly focused, I will pick up on a point that Ben Macpherson made. The subject is important to him, given that pretty much his whole constituency consists of old tenements. I refer to the recommendation of a short-life working group, which I hope will lead to new ways of providing information to owners in tenement properties, on everything from communal heating to energy efficiency measures.

Paul Sweeney: When it comes to finding a way forward in establishing such best practice, does the minister recognise the work of Under One Roof in providing an interface and a one-stop shop for advice, as well as the work of organisations such as the Loco Home Retrofit co-operative in Glasgow, which was established in 2021? It has provided a great example of how to build confidence between owners and contractors, bring people together and build best practice, and we need to scale up that sort of work.

Alasdair Allan: Yes, I very much wish to acknowledge the work that has been done by those organisations. The Government aims to publish a future public consultation on some of the issues that we have been talking about, particularly on new cross-tenure housing standards. I agree that any future legislation should consider the recommendations of the tenements maintenance working group. It is worth mentioning that the Tenements (Scotland) Act 2004 was amended in 2009 to include the installation of insulation. I accept, however that we need to continue to engage on that.

As Mark Griffin pointed out, around a fifth of Scotland's emissions come from our buildings. To address that, we must work to improve the energy efficiency of our homes and transition them to clean heating systems. We must do that at scale and pace but, vitally, in a way that is fair and just that brings the people of Scotland with us.

The publication of the report that we are discussing today serves as a timely reminder of the importance of joined-up policy making in achieving all that we want to achieve. Paul Sweeney provided a historical context, which was

really valuable, and pointed out the intrinsic value of tenement properties across Scotland.

Legislation can certainly play a vital role in driving the transition. As part of the recent programme for government, the First Minister announced that the Government will introduce a heat in buildings bill, which will be a significant step forward in that journey. The bill will be a significant means by which we can set a long-term direction of travel that is deliverable and affordable for households and businesses, and it will also provide certainty to building owners and those in the supply chain.

Graham Simpson: Does the minister agree with Ben Macpherson's very good point that the heat in buildings bill needs to work with tenement law, so the Government needs to ensure that there is flexibility in the bill when such law comes along?

While I am on my feet, I thank everyone who has taken part in the debate. It is good to see such interest in the subject. If anyone wishes to be part of the tenement maintenance working group, please let me know.

Alasdair Allan: With legislation, it is important that we scan the horizon for anything that might come in the future, but I hope that, in its own right, the heat in buildings bill will be relevant to tenements. Next year, we plan to publish a heat in buildings delivery plan, which will set out some of the foundations for a clearer path towards the 2045 targets.

Ben Macpherson: I will build on the point that Mr Simpson made. If we do not have tenement law reform that obliges tenement owners to organise through owners associations and enables finance to be obtained and raised together, it could be very difficult, practically, to deliver on the 2045 targets. That will be the case if organising and getting all the owners of a tenement property to agree on a position remains as difficult as it is today.

Alasdair Allan: I certainly acknowledge that we will not reach the 2045 targets unless we include tenement properties. That has to be part of our thinking, so today's debate is very useful in raising some of those issues.

I might be running out of time, but I will touch on a couple of other points that have been made. Carol Mochan made some important points about skills. It is worth saying that, in 2023, the Home Energy Scotland grant and loan scheme funded significantly more installations of heat pumps in Scotland per capita than the boiler upgrade scheme in England and Wales—in fact, it did so at almost double the rate. That has implications for skills, so the Government is very much alive to the issue.

The independent green heat finance task force, which will publish its part 2 report shortly, has been considering some of the barriers that constrain private finance provision for installing clean heating systems, and it has been identifying opportunities to develop new products along the way.

I also draw attention to the importance of the reform to energy performance certificates and to the role of other assessment methods. Those issues were rightly raised in the report. We are aware of the limitations of the EPC system, particularly in providing recommendations for home owners, and we are considering other assessment methods to improve the situation.

Retrofitting existing homes across Scotland—not least tenements—to make them warmer and more energy efficient, and to transition them to climate-friendly heating systems, is a vital part of our plans and our responsibility to address the climate emergency and meet our net zero ambitions. However, we remain clear that we will achieve that in a way that is proportionate, fair and just for everyone, including people living in Scotland's tenements.

Meeting closed at 18:29.

This is a draft *Official Report* and is subject to correction between publication and archiving, which will take place no later than 35 working days after the date of the meeting. The most up-to-date version is available here:
www.parliament.scot/officialreport

Members and other meeting participants who wish to suggest corrections to their contributions should contact the Official Report.

Official Report
Room T2.20
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Email: official.report@parliament.scot
Telephone: 0131 348 5447
Fax: 0131 348 5423

The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

Wednesday 9 October 2024

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

All documents are available on the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000
Textphone: 0800 092 7100
Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba