



OFFICIAL REPORT  
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

# Meeting of the Parliament

Tuesday 24 September 2024

Session 6



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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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# Scottish Parliament

*Tuesday 24 September 2024*

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

## Time for Reflection

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Good afternoon. The first item of business is time for reflection, for which our leader is the Rev Moira McDonald, the minister of Corstorphine old parish church.

**The Rev Moira McDonald (Corstorphine Old Parish Church):** I wonder, do you like cheese toasties? Scientists have said that cheese toasties in particular make such a satisfying snack because, together, cheese and bread bring just the right amount of salt, sugar and carbohydrates to provide a warm, satisfying and easily made—if not very healthy—meal. White bread and orange cheese, melted together, the warm cheese oozing against the crispy toasted bread—it is impossible to eat without getting grease on your chin or crumbs down your front. The humble, the unexpected and the easily overlooked all coming together to make just the right scientific and gastronomic combination.

The reason I ask about your toastie preference is that, every Thursday during school term, churches in Corstorphine join together to make and serve toasties to pupils from Craigmount high school. We called it, after a lot of thought, toastie Thursday. In the space of two and a half years, we have gone from a standing start of 50 pupils to welcoming nearly 300 pupils over two sittings every week.

It is a highlight of the week for many people: for the pupils, who enjoy the food, the fresh air and the break from school; for the staff at Craigmount, who feel the busyness of the school easing a little as pupils disappear to the church hall; for the parents, who normally provide packed lunches but find that they do not need to on Thursdays, although they do have to find £2 from down the back of the sofa; and for the volunteer toastie makers and servers, who have bonded over the challenges of serving 300 teenagers and have discovered friendships and possibilities in the process—which friendships and possibilities are reflected in the relationships formed between the pupils and the volunteers, between the churches and the school and with our local shops and supermarkets, where we buy the supplies. As we borrowed the idea of toastie Thursday from our colleagues on the south side of Edinburgh, so other churches have asked us for advice, as they

have set up something similar in their own part of the presbytery.

There have been a few logistical hiccups along the way—occasional moments of drama when the toastie machines have blown the church hall fuses or the supermarket has run out of cookies—but nothing that we have not been able to cope with. The combination of unexpected ingredients—teenagers, shopkeepers, schoolteachers, volunteers and ministers—has come together and good things have developed. Who would have thought that all of that could come from the humble cheese toastie?

## Topical Question Time

14:04

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is topical questions. In order to get in as many members as possible, short and succinct questions and responses would be appreciated.

### MV Caledonian Isles

1. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported announcement that issues with the gearbox of the MV Caledonian Isles have been identified, resulting in a further delay to its return to service on the Arran route. (S6T-02111)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop):** As Cabinet Secretary for Transport, my response is to express deep frustration and concern that the people and communities of Arran are facing a further day and a half with one ferry operating to Brodick rather than two, in addition to the Lochranza service. I have spoken to CalMac Ferries this morning and relayed my serious concerns about the latest mechanical issue on the MV Caledonian Isles, which I have been told is a gearbox failure that was identified during berthing trials as the vessel returned from a nine-month overhaul.

The MV Isle of Arran must go for its annual overhaul on Wednesday, and that cannot be delayed. Its last sailing was due today at 1.55 pm. Sailings to Arran on Wednesday will be from Troon, on the MV Alfred, and CalMac will advise later today how it intends to provide resilience cover from then. I have impressed on CalMac the Government's requirement that the Arran route—the busiest on the network—is supported this week from Thursday and for the September weekend.

**Jamie Greene:** The cabinet secretary must be getting a real sense of *déjà vu*. I have lost count of how many times I have stood at the front bench and heard words such as “regret”, “sorry”, “frustration”, “concern” and “apologies” over endless breakdowns and cancellations on the route.

We are talking about a 1,000-passenger, three-decades-old vessel—it is no wonder that it is breaking down. It is utterly unbelievable that it has been out of action since February this year. It was due back in service to take over from its replacement, the MV Isle of Arran, which is now off for its annual service. That means that, today, there are no vessels—no services—running out of Ardrossan to the Isle of Arran. People cannot book on the MV Alfred tomorrow; we tried to do so just

five minutes ago. That service is now full—understandably, because of its reduced capacity. The limited capacity is really affecting our island economies. None of that is good enough.

The cabinet secretary mentioned the Government's frustration. What about the islanders' frustration in all this? The problem has been in the making for nearly a decade. How on earth is CalMac going to magic a new vessel out of thin air to cover the Ardrossan to Arran route, and which other island will have to suffer as a consequence of that decision?

**Fiona Hyslop:** In my answer, I specifically stated that I shared the concerns of the people and communities of Arran. I am sure that part of the reason why the member is aware of these issues is that, since Sunday evening, CalMac has been engaging directly with all the various relevant stakeholders. The Isle of Arran ferry committee has already replied with its preferences about what should happen as part of the resilience and prioritisation measures that will now take place to ensure that the capacity is there.

The member is right to identify capacity as an issue—that is why CalMac is moving swiftly to ensure that there is capacity, especially for the coming busy weekend. Arran is obviously not the only community that will be affected, and that is why engagement is on-going. As I set out, there will be an announcement later this evening.

**Jamie Greene:** I really feel sorry for CalMac in all this, because it is constantly engaged in one big juggling act with vessels that are old and are breaking down. It is pulling vessels from other routes, and other islands are suffering. The whole thing is just one endless movement of vessels from one route to another—routes that those vessels should not be on in the first place.

Of course, it is not just the vessels that are breaking down; the whole port infrastructure is crumbling. Even when the Glen Sannox enters service on the Arran route—which I hope will be soon—it will operate out of Troon instead of Ardrossan. For how long that will be the case is anyone's guess. Is it for weeks, months or years, or is it for ever? That is the problem—the people of Ardrossan simply do not know the answer to that question, because the Government decided to build a ferry that is not fit for purpose for the port from which it is intended to operate. That is unbelievable.

I want to raise the effect that the situation is having on Ardrossan's economy, which we do not talk enough about. Tens of thousands of passengers are now trafficking through Troon and not Ardrossan, which is having a substantial effect on local businesses and the local economy. What does the cabinet secretary have to say to local

businesses across North Ayrshire, which are in a situation that is the by-product of such catastrophic handling by the Government?

**Fiona Hyslop:** The focus on business is important. The member will be aware that, for the Isle of Arran in particular, measures to improve the situation have been taken as part of the current budget—for example, on business rates for hospitality businesses on the island.

That is on the island, but the member talked about port support issues on the mainland. Addressing the economic impact of that is part of the on-going work with North Ayrshire Council to help to finalise a business development plan. The frustration with that plan is that aspects of the legal and commercial negotiations are still outstanding and need to be resolved.

I urge all partners to work with my officials at Transport Scotland to find an expedient and beneficial conclusion in order to allow that business case to be finalised, because it can help to provide greater certainty. People—and especially businesses, because they want to be able to plan ahead—are looking for that certainty, so I appreciate the point that the member makes.

**Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** In the past 24 hours, a number of constituents have been in touch with me—people concerned that they will not make hospital appointments; a farmer who will not be able to get their lambs off the island to market tomorrow and so will have to wait another month; and a visitor, whose family of six, in two cars, including a disabled person, are stranded on the island. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the ferry crisis is becoming a national emergency?

**Fiona Hyslop:** On resilience, I made reference to the issue that will arise tomorrow. Katy Clark has laid out the personal impact that that will have on a number of people. The Lochranza service will be available to some, but not all—not least, perhaps, those in the examples that Katy Clark gave. That is why we need far more certainty and resilience, and why it is important that we expect the Glen Sannox to enter into service in the next few months, after delivery in the next few weeks and familiarisation. That will allow for the resilience aspect.

We have this period, which I recognise is a challenge. It is frustrating for individuals. As we have heard, it is also frustrating for CalMac, because it has to deal with reorganisation and with customers and passengers who have serious needs.

I recognise the situation. If anybody has a hospital appointment and there is an issue, they should contact CalMac. There might be capacity issues with booking the MV Alfred, but part of the new changes is about enabling reservations for

people who are in emergency situations. I cannot guarantee that, but I encourage Katy Clark to let her constituents know about that.

**Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** Mr Petticrew, who is currently the chief executive officer of Ferguson Marine, seems to be suffering from more and more delays. David Tydeman was sacked after two; Mr Petticrew has had at least three.

What bunkering arrangements have been made at Troon to handle the liquefied natural gas fuel that is required for the new ferry? We have had 10 years to get that ready, and I would like to know what has been done.

**Fiona Hyslop:** The original question was about a gearbox on another vessel, but I will answer on the basis that I just mentioned the Glen Sannox, which Edward Mountain has asked about. The bunkering is as planned. The fuel will be delivered by vehicle, which was always the intention until such time as the Adrossan port was built. There will be more permanent bunkering as far as that is concerned.

Part of the current delays that we have seen with the Glen Sannox in the past few weeks related to the original issue of the temperature of the LNG. That has now been resolved and successful sea trials have commenced. There will be some further activity, as I just identified in my answer, but I hope that that gives Edward Mountain an understanding that the position has not changed.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** Recent press reports suggest that the MV Isle of Lewis and the MV Isle of Mull will be sold from the fleet when the new ferries join. For more than a decade, I have been asking the Scottish Government to keep capacity in the fleet to provide cover for dry docking and for times of high demand, and to avoid the very circumstances that we are talking about today. Will the cabinet secretary reconsider the sale of those ships and ensure that there are two ships in the fleet at any one time to cover breakdowns, so that communities are not left high and dry in the future?

**Fiona Hyslop:** I will not speculate on media reports. What I can say is that Rhoda Grant makes a point about ensuring resilience in the fleet once the new vessels come in. Of course, that is about not only the Glen Sannox but the Glen Rosa and four other vessels. By 2026, there will be six new major vessels in the fleet.

The important point is how we sensibly use that resilience and how the cascading of vessels is used. I discussed that issue with leaders from our islands at the islands transport forum just last week. Again, this is about not only the six vessels

that are coming on stream but the seven, after that, given the small vessel replacement programme. It is not just about the routes that the new vessels will go on; there will be a cascade impact, which we hope will provide the greater resilience that Rhoda Grant and others want to see.

### **Prisoners (Early Release Scheme)**

2. **Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what its position is regarding whether the early release scheme for prisoners has been a success. (S6T-02115)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):** The previous emergency release process was necessary to ensure that prisons could continue to function safely and effectively following a sharp and unexpected rise in the prison population. The emergency release power was limited to those with under 180 days left to serve; 65 per cent of those who were eligible had 90 days or less left to serve.

Important exclusions were put in place for domestic abuse and sexual offences, and there were additional ways in which victims could find out about the release of the prisoner in their case. I did not take that decision lightly, but it provided some critical breathing space for the Scottish Prison Service.

I made it clear to the Criminal Justice Committee that that was a short-term measure and that a number of other actions were needed. That is why we have increased investment in community-based interventions, alongside wider measures to support a sustainable reduction in the prison population.

**Katy Clark:** We have had two recent prisoner release schemes. We know that, after the Covid releases, there was, at first, a brief decrease in numbers, but prisoner numbers then increased at a faster rate. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that seems to have happened again?

**Angela Constance:** I do not think that I could have been any clearer when I took the emergency release provisions through the Parliament. I will quote remarks that I made to the Criminal Justice Committee on 12 June:

“Emergency release is not the solution to the prison population crisis; it will, however, provide the Prison Service with some time and capacity in the short term. That is critical in order to ensure that prisons can still function safely and focus on those who pose the greatest risk of harm.”—[*Official Report, Criminal Justice Committee, 12 June 2024; c 3.*]

The emergency early release provision did what it was intended to do. That is why, when I made the announcement back in May, I made two

further announcements that were, in my view, critical to achieving a sustained reduction in our prison population.

**Katy Clark:** Only five victims were informed of the prisoner releases. Victim Support Scotland is calling for the victim notification scheme to be reformed. Has the cabinet secretary had the opportunity to look at my amendment to the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill that would create an opt-out scheme rather than an opt-in scheme?

**Angela Constance:** First and foremost, I very much want to improve the victim notification scheme and expand the number of people who choose to be part of it. If we are to adhere to the principles of trauma-informed practice, it is important that we do not provide victims with information that they have not sought. Therefore, supporting registration for the two existing statutory schemes is important.

In due course, with the support of the Minister for Victims and Community Safety and the Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport, I will respond to the independent review's recommendations on the victim notification scheme. It did not recommend an opt-out scheme rather than an opt-in scheme. Nonetheless, there are vital improvements that we can and will make to the scheme, and I will respond to those recommendations in due course.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** It is clear that action is required to ensure that our prisons function safely. However, it remains the case that, compared with the rest of western Europe, we incarcerate proportionately higher numbers of people. What action is being taken to ensure that we have an effective system of punishment that, at the same time, is designed to rehabilitate and prevent societal and other factors from pushing people back into the criminal justice system?

**Angela Constance:** I have always been clear that sustained, whole-system action is needed if we are to reduce the prison population in Scotland. For example, we have taken steps to increase the capacity of community justice services across Scotland, including by investing an additional £14 million in this financial year, which brings the total funding for community justice to £148 million. We have also increased the number of criminal justice social workers.

Continuing to increase community justice capacity is only part of the answer; we also need further and deeper action and reform. That is why I stress the importance of a system-wide response, including cross-Government action, as I outlined to the Criminal Justice Committee previously. Principally, the response is about health, housing

and employability. In addition, as we said in our recent programme for government, we plan to propose legislation relating to the release process for prisoners, and we are establishing an externally led review of sentencing and penal policy.

**Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con):** We now know that the Scottish National Party Government's promises to respect victims were utterly hollow, with hundreds of victims being left in the dark. In May, the cabinet secretary also said that she was considering bringing back automatic early release for long-term prisoners. Is she going to do that? Victims deserve to know.

**Angela Constance:** As I have outlined, we undertook a consultation, as I committed to do, during the summer recess. We have received full and rich responses from our justice delivery partners and, crucially, from victims and victim support organisations. We all care about victims. There is no monopoly on putting victims at the very heart and centre of our criminal justice system.

There has been much to reflect on in the detail of the consultation responses. There has also been some reflection on the measures that have been taken south of the border. Of course, we will not mimic the previous United Kingdom Government, which had a secret release scheme over a period of six months. Without parliamentary approval, it released around 10,000 prisoners. However, other measures are being taken across the UK, the detail of which we will also explore.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** Has the Scottish Government done any analysis of the new UK Government scheme to change the release date of prisoners? As a result of that scheme, around 1,700 prisoners were released initially, and a total of around 5,500 will be released when further tranches take place. Would that be a useful tool for the Scottish prison population?

**Angela Constance:** As I intimated in my earlier answer, the previous and current UK Governments have taken action on that basis, which demonstrates that, across these isles, we are grappling with high prison population and the potential consequences of that.

The member is right: the previous UK Government released more than 10,000 prisoners early, between October 2023 and July 2024, and the actions of the new Labour UK Government will see thousands more released early to ease the high prison population there.

Changing the point of release for prisoners clearly has the potential to reduce the prison population. We would always take a risk-based approach. Our plans to legislate will take into

account the UK Government's programme, as well as the response to our public consultation.

Sustained action is needed if we are to bring about a reduction in our prison population, and that is why the measures that we are taking in the very short term are part of a much broader and wider programme.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes topical question time. I will allow a moment for front-bench members to get organised for the next item of business.

## Health and Social Care Winter Preparedness Plan 2024/25

### **The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):**

The next item of business is a statement by Neil Gray on the “Health and Social Care Winter Preparedness Plan 2024/25”. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care will take questions at the end of his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:23

**The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray):** Our health and social care services provide essential support for people throughout the year. The nature of the demand that they face can shift in the winter months, when we can see an increase in respiratory and weather-related illnesses. That is why, with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we are publishing the “Health and Social Care Winter Preparedness Plan 2024/25”.

I take this opportunity to offer my thanks to all those across the national health service and social care, including the independent, third and voluntary sectors, which support and deliver that work. The national health service and the social care sector plan for winter on an annual basis—after all, winter following autumn each year is far from being a surprise. That is why investment to plan for winter is now baselined into NHS board budgets at the start of the financial year.

The Scottish Government continues to prioritise investment in front-line services, with more than £14.2 billion invested in our NHS boards, with additional funding of more than £0.5 billion, which is a real-terms uplift of almost 3 per cent. The 2024-25 Scottish budget also provided more than £2 billion for social care support.

That means that social care spending has increased by more than £1 billion compared with 2021-22, doubling our investment in Scotland’s care and delivering early on our commitment to increase spending by 25 per cent to more than £840 million in the current parliamentary session.

What is really important, and what the plan is about, is people. Patients and service users are the very reason that our health and social care services exist. That is only made possible by our dedicated workforces, which are at the heart of the excellent care that they provide. I want to put on the record my thanks to the agenda for change unions for agreeing to this year’s pay deal, which sees staff get a 5.5 per cent increase and ensures that Scotland’s nurses and other agenda for change staff are the best paid anywhere in the United Kingdom.

The principles that underpin the plan retain our focus on the individual. We have set those out in our four winter planning priorities that follow a journey through the health and social care system. First, we will prioritise care for people in our communities, enabling them to live well with the support that they choose, utilising effective prevention to keep people well and avoiding the need for hospital care. By reducing the chance that people will need admission into an acute hospital setting, we will not only improve people’s individual health and wellbeing, we will reduce overall demand, which protects our hospital services from being overwhelmed. The prevention and early intervention approach starts by keeping people well in our communities and supporting them to live happy, healthy and independent lives for as long as possible.

Although our first priority is about preventing people from needing additional care in the first place, our second priority is about ensuring that, when they do need support, they receive the care that is right for them in the right place at the right time. We know that people see better outcomes when they receive care at home or as close to home as possible, where it is clinically appropriate.

Our third priority ensures that our integrated health and social care services maximise capacity to meet demand by managing surge pressures effectively. That is a key element of our mission to reduce delayed discharge, which increases capacity by ensuring that people do not remain in hospital longer than is clinically appropriate. Additionally, it is crucial that planned and established care services are protected and that they work to reduce long waits and address unmet needs.

Putting people at the centre of our plan is not just about those who use our services. Our fourth priority therefore focuses on supporting the wellbeing and capacity of our health and social care workforce, and improving retention, as well as recognising and supporting Scotland’s unpaid carers.

Those priorities run throughout our plan to ensure that all the actions within it are part of a cohesive, whole-system approach, with people as the focus. The plan itself sets out those actions in more detail. For example, we will support the provision of excellent care for individuals in their own homes through dedicated care-at-home services. Additional funding of £124 million has been allocated to enhance care-at-home capacity, as well as £3.6 million to support the growth of hospital-at-home services. Such services provide tailored care to the needs of almost 90,000 people across Scotland, enabling people to live as independently as possible in their own homes.

For those who live in care homes, we continue to provide £14 million of funding for NHS boards to enable enhanced support for care in care homes. That has helped to ensure residents get the right care so that they can avoid admission to hospital and get timely discharges from hospital. We know that providing the right care in the right setting, including through hospital at home, prevented more than 10,000 older people from spending time in hospital between April and December 2023, which relieved pressure on accident and emergency services and the Scottish Ambulance Service, and—critically—improved patient outcomes.

All of those efforts go towards helping to develop further resilience in our health and social care system, while recognising that demand is not static. Solidifying targeting our efforts to the right services at the right time means that we are supporting the primary care system to be as resilient as possible heading into winter. A fundamental part of that is ensuring that people are able to access the care that they need within their community, where appropriate. One such example is the Scottish Ambulance Service's integrated clinical hub, which helps to direct patients to the most appropriate point of care without automatically directing them to accident and emergency.

We are also supporting health boards to make necessary changes to drive the improvement and implementation of key actions, including focusing on increasing alternatives to hospital attendance, reducing the length of stay over 14 days for non-delayed patients and increasing short stays of less than 72 hours to improve occupancy and flow.

We continue to invest in NHS 24 to bolster capacity and provide the highest level of call handlers on record for the service, and we continue to increase clinical staff, which makes the service more efficient for users. That investment has enabled NHS 24 to expand recruitment opportunities in a number of local areas such as Ayrshire and Arran, Inverness, and Dumfries and Galloway. Those staff will give the organisation capacity to provide clinical supervision for at least 150,000 additional calls per year, which in turn will prevent people from unnecessarily attending accident and emergency departments. It will provide NHS 24 with the additional flexibility and capacity to deal with public holidays, improving service performance on those days.

Our hospitals provide specialist, high-quality, safe clinical care, in which nearly 97 per cent of people are discharged without delay. Unfortunately, some remain in hospital longer than clinically necessary. To address that, we continue to take action to embed good practice for discharge processes and, where necessary, to

challenge poor performance. That includes improving effective discharge planning for patients who are admitted to acute or community hospitals, protecting established care-at-home packages and allowing discharge without further delay for assessment. We are offering direct support to systems through a Government-led response team to support areas that are struggling.

It is vital that we involve people and their carers in decisions that relate to their care to enhance choice and control over their support. In hospital, that means engaging the patient, their family and any carers in hospital discharge discussions to ensure that their needs and wants are central to decision making. That will be supported using home-based assessments such as discharge to assess for all home support packages, to ensure accurate person-centred assessments in familiar and homely environments. Crucially, it is important to note that tackling delayed discharge is not just a health issue; it is a whole-system issue that, fundamentally, is about ensuring that people receive the right care in the right place.

Although it is fundamental that we support and safeguard the wellbeing of our health and social care workforce throughout the year, it is particularly vital during periods of increased demand, which might put additional pressures on staff. National workforce policies on supporting work-life balance offer NHS staff a variety of flexible working options. The options support staff in achieving a healthy work-life balance while continuing to deliver and promote the highest standard of care to our patients and service users. We are collaborating with NHS boards to promote part-time work opportunities for healthcare, social care and social work students.

We must ensure that people who provide unpaid care are supported in their caring roles. That means ensuring that carers are supported to look after their own health and wellbeing, alongside engaging in education, training or employment. We are implementing our national carers strategy to drive forward long-term changes to improve the lives of unpaid carers across Scotland.

The plan that we publish today will help our health and social care services to prepare for the challenges that might lie ahead over the coming winter months, recognising that we can never be totally certain how many additional people this year might suffer from respiratory viruses such as flu or Covid, or the extent to which bad winter weather might impact on accidents and falls.

Although the plan will help us to prepare as best we can, there is always the risk that extreme events will overwhelm the available capacity in the system. However, as we have seen in other extreme events, such as Covid, if our preparation is not enough to cope with exceptional surges in

demand, we stand prepared to deploy more significant in extremis interventions in partnership with COSLA and the health and social care sector.

I again thank all the people across our health and social care system who will help to turn the actions that are set out in this plan into the reality of services that support and care for the people of Scotland. The Scottish Government and our partners in COSLA are united in our drive to provide person-centred, safe and timely health and social care services for our people, not only over the winter but all year long.

**The Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary will take questions on the issues raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move on to the next item of business. I would be grateful if members who wish to put a question were to press their request-to-speak button.

**Sandesh Gulhane (Glasgow) (Con):** I declare an interest as a practising NHS general practitioner.

There is nothing new here. Everything is rehashed and the spin is dizzying. Summer A and E waiting times are basically the same as those in winter. There is no credible plan here to address winter pressure. After 17 years of Scottish National Party failure, this is the ultimate show of giving up and going through the motions.

We have had two hours in the chamber to debate independence and we have two hours to debate the United Kingdom budget, despite our having nothing to do with either topic in this Parliament. However, we have only 20 minutes to question this lack of a plan to save lives this winter.

I am terrified about what winter will bring: patients in corridors and ambulances queued around the block. The cabinet secretary's lack of a credible plan will mean that patient safety and staff safety and mental health will be compromised.

Will the cabinet secretary agree to the recording and reporting of instances of patients being cared for in inappropriate areas such as corridors and treatment rooms, or of additional beds being added to wards without the necessary staffing or equipment to ensure patient and staff safety and dignity?

**Neil Gray:** I thank Sandesh Gulhane for his questions and observations.

First, the resourcing of our health service is directly linked to decisions taken by the UK Government, so it is right that we have debate and discussion about the issues that he raises, as well as having the opportunity to interrogate the winter preparedness plan that I have set out.

He says that there is nothing new in the plan, but that is because we are seeking to provide consistency to systems in order to address the issues that they face. We were asked directly to do that and are seeking to provide consistency. We know what works, which is why we have this plan.

Regarding his wider points, I recognise that there are challenges within many of our accident and emergency services and many of our wards and that we are seeing pressure on the system. That is why I so explicitly referred to the work that is being done to address delayed discharge. I would be more than happy to provide further information about the work to reduce the pressure on acute hospital services and in connection with his point about corridor care.

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank the cabinet secretary for advance sight of his statement. The reality for our staff and communities is that winter pressures now happen all year round. I will focus on delayed discharge and will use figures to do that, but we must remember that those are about real people and their families, whose lives are on hold.

The most recent monthly data, which is for July, in the middle of summer, revealed that an average of 1,900 beds were occupied each day as a result of delayed discharge and that 61,165 total bed days were lost, which is the highest ever monthly figure.

The Government talks up its joint plan with local government, but that includes no new money and is just not sustainable. Will the cabinet secretary say what it will take for this Government to take clear action on that particular point?

**Neil Gray:** I recognise Carol Mochan's point about our health service being under year-round pressure. I referred to the fact that the system still faces huge pressure caused by Covid. In July this year, we saw a peak of more than 600 beds being used for Covid patients, which is the equivalent of Wishaw general hospital being utilised for Covid and serves to illustrate the year-round pressure that we face. That is why this is a year-round plan and a surge plan, rather than being a plan purely for winter, and that is why it is funded to give boards a baseline for year-round planning.

Carol Mochan is also right to point to the issue of delayed discharge. As she will know, that is not a Scotland-only phenomenon. We can draw on comparator figures for Wales, which show that around 60 adults per 100,000 are waiting for delayed discharge, compared with 44 in Scotland. I am not saying that we should be comfortable with that position—of course we are not—but that serves to illustrate the pressures on the whole system, in both health and social care, that are

shared by Scotland and Wales and to show why it is so important that we see an increase in investment in health and social care from the UK Government, so that both the Welsh and Scottish Governments can respond accordingly to support health and social care services.

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests: I hold a bank nursing contract with Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board.

It is crucial to free up capacity in our NHS as we head towards a period of higher demand. Will the cabinet secretary outline what work will be undertaken to improve patient flow and to tackle delayed discharge, and will he say how the efficacy of those interventions will be measured?

**Neil Gray:** I reiterate what I set out in my statement, which is that capacity must be seen as a whole-system issue and that tackling it will be about having people receive the care that they need in the right place. Improving the performance of accident and emergency, enhancing patient flow in our acute hospitals and reducing the number of people being held in hospital unnecessarily will continue to be top priorities for this Government.

The vast majority of people—nearly 97 per cent—are discharged without delay, but the delayed discharge figure is still far too high. Some people remain in hospital after it is clinically necessary for them to be there, which can result in poorer outcomes for them and additional pressure on the system, including on hospital flows, particularly during the winter.

Through our improvement programme, significant work has been undertaken with NHS boards over the past year to identify ways to create capacity in the system, resulting in lower occupancy of people and increased flow, and to ensure that every patient has an effective discharge date. We have agreed through multidisciplinary working that we should avoid people being delayed in hospital once they are clinically fit for discharge.

Finally, we are working closely with COSLA and national and local leaders to support improvement, such as through the discharge without delay programme, which offers direct support to systems through a Government-led response team to support those areas that are struggling to meet delayed discharge targets. Having system leaders across health and social care working closely with national improvement teams is essential to jointly implement and deliver sustainable improvements.

**Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** When Shona Robison was health secretary, she promised to eradicate delayed discharge, and she reiterated that commitment last year at First

Minister's question time. In the previous financial year, people spent 666,190 days in hospital because of delayed discharge, which is the highest annual figure that has been reported. Today's statement mentions only reducing delayed discharge. When will this SNP Government stop papering over the cracks and give primary care, and particularly GP practices in relation to the 2018 contract, the support that they need?

**Neil Gray:** I agree with Tess White that we need to do more with regard to delayed discharge. I set out in both my response to Carol Mochan and my statement that we need to do more. We are seeing a situation where we have too many people on delay in our hospitals. That is bad for them, but it is also bad for our health and social care systems.

We are making progress on the implementation of the GP contract. We have made particular improvements and enhancements around the multidisciplinary team support that is available for GP practices and I continue to engage with the GP committee of the British Medical Association, as well as with the Royal College of General Practitioners, on how we can go further.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** When I met the new chief executive of NHS Borders last week, one of the areas that he suggested that we must address, which could provide additional capacity in the NHS for the winter months, is streamlining of the medical assessment process and better implementation of the reablement model to help to address delayed discharge. Will the cabinet secretary provide an update on the work to achieve those aims?

**Neil Gray:** We are working with NHS boards through our urgent and unscheduled care collaborative to support the implementation of a range of measures to improve processes, increase out-of-hospital-based capacity and drive down accident and emergency waiting times. A key part of that work is to optimise assessment and care in our emergency departments by improving access to same-day services, the use of early and effective triage, rapid decision making and streamlining of assessment areas.

In addition, the collaborative response and assurance oversight group is working to identify and promote good practice that supports system flow. That includes national improvement work to look at system-wide issues and targeted local engagement to support areas that face particular challenges to improve their processes and models. I have seen much of that innovation for myself, including the work in the Borders, which is to be commended.

**Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** The statement does not mention rural healthcare

once, yet the cabinet secretary knows that delivering on the four winter planning priorities is more challenging in rural areas, where travel issues, the weather and unfilled vacancies add to the chaos. In Highland, elderly and disabled people have often been asked to travel 50 to 100 miles to access their Covid and flu vaccinations because their GP practices are no longer allowed to deliver them. As a consequence, vaccination numbers are falling, which is definitely not keeping people well. What steps is the cabinet secretary taking to ensure that frail elderly people can access vaccination at home or as near to home as possible in order that they are protected this winter?

**Neil Gray:** As someone who grew up in Orkney, I recognise the challenge that exists in delivering health and social care services in rural and island communities. That is part of the reason why I have to contradict Rhoda Grant with regard to NHS Highland's ability to deliver vaccinations through GPs. There is a flexibility in the contract that allows for that to happen, and I have given NHS Highland a very clear steer, because of the difficulties that it has had with its vaccination programme, to allow it to deliver that through its GPs if that is the best route to do it.

That is happening in some parts of Highland and, as a result, we are seeing an improvement in the vaccination perspective. It is not true to say that vaccination cannot be delivered through the GPs; there just needs to be a clear reason for doing so.

**Ruth Maguire (Cunninghame South) (SNP):** Ensuring that people's homes are promptly adapted to meet their needs is a crucial part of avoiding unnecessary hospital stays. In a number of cases, my constituents have been let down and discharged to home environments that did not offer them dignity in their personal hygiene needs, or safe mobility. We can intuitively understand the negative impact of that on their rehabilitation—and that it might even cause readmission to hospital. What action will the Scottish Government take to ensure that the NHS, local authorities and housing associations fulfil their obligations to my constituents in that regard?

**Neil Gray:** I absolutely agree with Ruth Maguire on the need to make progress. Anyone who requires adaptations to their home should experience a smooth transition through the pathway of care, which ensures that they receive the right intervention at the right time. It is critically important that people are supported to live safely in their home environment, as that can optimise health, avoid admittance to hospital, reduce falls and support effective discharge home.

In January 2023, we published revised guidance on the provision of equipment and adaptations.

The overall aim of that guidance is to deliver a more equitable and accessible approach to the provision of adaptations. We are also working closely with the NHS and local authorities, which have responsibility for delivery, to evaluate whether those local practices are in line with the Scottish Government's guidance, deliver service improvements and influence future policy development—exactly so that we can meet the needs of Ruth Maguire's constituents.

**Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green):** The cabinet secretary mentioned opening up work opportunities for students. Although in some ways that will be welcome experience for them, we need to ensure that their studies are not impacted and that their eagerness to help is not exploited. Will the cabinet secretary outline what band those students will be employed on, whether they will be employed on zero-hour contracts and whether there will be oversight of how many shifts they pick up, to ensure that no one is overworked?

**Neil Gray:** I will respond in more detail to Gillian Mackay, because I do not have all that detail in front of me. Obviously, our work will be in line with the Government's established fair work principles. However, I will get a fuller response to Gillian Mackay on the points that she raised.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** It is essential that we focus on the individual. As the cabinet secretary will remember, he recently visited the Borders general hospital with me to learn about hospital at home. The clue is in the name. At that time, 16 patients were opting for that, freeing 16 beds, and there was more than 90 per cent patient satisfaction, mainly from elderly people. Can that be rolled out further, to increase patients' options?

**Neil Gray:** I thank Christine Grahame for reminding me of the excellent visit that we undertook in her constituency to look at the funding that the Government was releasing to ensure that there was an expansion of hospital-at-home services. I thank again the team in the Borders, which is working so hard on that.

The Scottish Government has continued to invest in the development of its hospital-at-home programme, which, in recent years, has expanded into additional pathways, such as out-patient parenteral antibiotic therapy and respiratory and, more recently, heart failure and paediatric services. In particular, in the past year alone, the older people's programme has delivered 495 older people or acute beds across Scotland—58 per cent more than in the previous year—and has treated almost 14,500 patients, which makes it the largest provider of geriatric beds in Scotland and the country's 12th-largest hospital.

By increasing hospital-at-home capacity, we have been able to directly impact pressures on our hospitals as well as reduce the demand on the Scottish Ambulance Service and improve patient satisfaction. As an alternative to admission, hospital at home also avoids the creation of delayed discharges and enables significant financial savings. This year, £3.6 million has already been provided to 13 boards to establish new services for older people and increase the maturity and efficiency of the 20 or so services that are already in operation across the country. That has enabled more areas than ever to have a hospital-at-home service, and it demonstrates that the Scottish Government is committed to hospital at home and that that is a top priority for us here in Scotland.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** It was reported last week that another care home—in Fort William in the Highlands—is set to close, with the loss of 39 care spaces. At the moment, nobody seems to have an answer as to what happens next, but it is highly likely that some of the residents will be transferred to hospitals, which will impact on the health board's ability to prepare for winter. The loss of perhaps as many as 20 care homes in Highland Council during the past decade is forcing people to leave their communities for care placements that can be as far as 100 miles away, with delayed discharges already through the roof.

Does the health secretary agree that the extra challenges of delivering care in remote and rural health areas—particularly during winter—and the journey times, cost of care and ability to attract care staff mean that the care crisis will only compound the challenge of preparing for winter, and will he say what his plan is to fix it?

**Neil Gray:** I accept the premise of Alex Cole-Hamilton's question. The difficulties in some parts of the care sector have an impact not only on individuals, who are at the heart of everything that we do, but on health services. That is why we have been working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities weekly on the charging for residential accommodation guidance to try to address the delayed discharge issue that we face.

It is true to say that there are some common issues but, because we are able to see variation between partnerships within the same health board area, we know that there are also local issues. As I said in my statement, we are working through providing support with that.

Alex Cole-Hamilton referenced the situation with HC1 forms in Fort William and Stornoway. We are aware of that and we are working with NHS Highland and NHS Western Isles on resilience options and what might be possible in those homes. I will revert to him in due course.

**Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** Cabinet secretary,

"Health and social care is a disgrace."

Those are the words of my constituent Eric Drummond, who called me in a state of distress yesterday. He is largely housebound and has issues with his prostate that have left him incontinent. We heard today about putting people at the centre of the plan, so that when they need support they receive the care that is right for them, in the right place at the right time. However, Mr Drummond will have to wait 16 weeks for a nurse specialist to visit him. How will the plan deal with the challenges ahead when the health service is not prepared for tomorrow—let alone winter?

**Neil Gray:** I thank Sue Webber for raising Eric Drummond's case. If she wishes to pass on the details, I am more than happy to look at it and see what other intervention or support might be available.

I set out in the statement the work that we are doing and what is involved in the plan, as well as the investments that we are making to reduce the pressure on our health and social care systems. I do not think that it is unique to Scotland that we have increased demand, increased complexity and waiting times in our health service. As regrettable as it is to me—and of course it is, because I want to have the best-performing health service—the fact that we have common pressures resulting from the pandemic and on-going issues regarding continued austerity means that those issues are common to all of us and are becoming more challenging to address.

**Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP):** I am sure that many members will recognise the brutal impact that cold weather can have on our elderly population. Will the cabinet secretary outline the Scottish Government's assessment of how the UK Labour Government's cruel decision to cut the winter fuel payment from 860,000 Scottish pensioners will impact not only on the health of our elderly but on the capacity of health services all over the country?

**Neil Gray:** Rona Mackay raised an important issue, which is pertinent to thousands of people across Scotland this winter. If people cannot keep warm at home in the winter, they are at increased risk of ill health, which can put additional pressure on our health and social care services. The UK Government's decision to restrict eligibility for winter fuel payments, which was taken without consulting the Scottish Government, will have a devastating impact on Scotland by removing entitlement from around 900,000 pensioners, just as Ofgem warned that bills will go up by 10 per cent this winter, thanks to the UK Government

failing to intervene, and thus breaking a pre-election promise twice with regard to pensioners.

The Scottish Government is committed to tackling fuel poverty and has consistently supported vulnerable households through a range of actions, including our winter heating payment, which, in contrast to the UK Government's cold weather payment, guarantees a reliable payment of £58.75 each winter to people on low incomes, including those pensioners who are in receipt of pension credit.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the ministerial statement on health and social care.

## UK Budget (Scotland's Priorities)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-14614, in the name of Shona Robison, on the United Kingdom budget, Scotland's priorities. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons. [*Interruption.*] Excuse me. I am speaking, so I would appreciate members listening to what I have to say.

I call the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, Shona Robison, to speak to and move the motion. You have up to 30 minutes, cabinet secretary.

14:55

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison):** Three weeks ago, I set out the challenges facing the Scottish budget and the difficult decisions that this Government was taking to balance the budget and deliver on our priorities. I told Parliament that the new United Kingdom Government had made it clear that funding would continue to be constrained, and the Prime Minister has said that this year's UK budget would be "painful".

For as long as our budget is tied to decisions that are taken in Westminster, we will not be immune from that pain—just as we were unable to avoid all the damage caused by the years of Tory austerity, the chaos of the Truss mini-budget and, of course, Brexit, which has reduced the size of the UK economy by 2.5 per cent, equating to a £2.3 billion annual cut in revenue in Scotland. The UK budget on 30 October will be an opportunity for us to take a different approach. I want to work with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Governments in Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure that the UK budget delivers for all four nations.

Since the new Labour UK Government took office, we have committed to work together constructively. I have written to the chancellor, setting out our priorities and offering to work together to achieve them. I am pleased to have seen a distinct improvement in our relationship with the Treasury since the election, and it is important that that continues. Next month, I will meet the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, along with the Welsh and Northern Irish finance ministers, to discuss Scotland's priorities for the UK budget. I look forward to hearing from members across the chamber on those issues.

In her July statement, the chancellor set out the pressures on the UK's public finances. In dealing with those she is constrained by her own fiscal rules, which limit her room to achieve her own

ambitions and, with that, damage our plans for Scotland. However, we must be clear that it is a political choice to follow the Tories' fiscal rules, and there is another way.

We propose that the rule governing net debt should be replaced with a focus on public sector net worth, which would allow for further borrowing for investment to renew public infrastructure and services. It would allow the chancellor to move away from an approach that risks embedding austerity further. That would help to provide the investment that we need, which could boost jobs and ease some of the fiscal pressures that we face. The chancellor's own spending audit estimated that this year's departmental spending budgets are at least £15 billion lower in real terms compared with those in the 2021 spending review plans. That means that public services have been consistently short changed over the past few years, so it is no wonder that the Governments of all four nations now face such acute pressures.

It is vital that the chancellor uses her upcoming budget to reset spending plans to take account of the inflation of recent years and to make clear the UK Government's plans for investing in public services. Those investment plans should include full funding of pay awards on a recurring basis. If they do not, that will leave a substantial gap between the expectations of the workforce and the available funding.

Yesterday, I noted that the Royal College of Nursing in Scotland accepted the national health service agenda for change pay deal in Scotland but rejected the deal that the UK Government had offered in England. My suggestion to the UK Government would be to ensure that, before the budget, it offers to match the NHS agenda for change pay deal here in Scotland. That would see an experienced nurse in England get an uplift of over £3,200 more than the deal that the RCN rejected. It would also mean that, in 2024-25, an experienced band 5 nurse here would take home £2,233 more, after income tax and national insurance, compared with a nurse on the same band in England.

Our public services are knitted into the very fabric of our country and our daily lives. More funding for our schools, hospitals and local government services helps to grow our economy, enhance quality of life and tackle the scourge of poverty. The First Minister has been clear that ending child poverty is a central priority of the Government. For many years we have had to step in to protect the most vulnerable in our society as best we can from the actions of a UK Government that has pushed households into hardship through austerity. We are spending £134 million this year alone to mitigate damaging welfare policies put in place by the previous UK Government, including

the benefit cap and the bedroom tax. That is money that could have been spent on services such as health and education, or on further ambitious anti-poverty measures.

We are also investing £457 million this year though our Scottish child payment, helping the families of the more than 325,000 under-16s who currently receive it. However, the impacts of this game-changing payment are being counteracted by policies such as the two-child limit. With a limited, fixed budget we cannot mitigate all the UK Government's policies while pursuing our own ambitious policy agenda. That is why the new Labour UK Government must act now to reverse the Tories' welfare decisions and take a different approach, including steps towards delivery of an essentials guarantee. Abolishing the two-child limit should be an easy choice. I know that members will join me in urging the chancellor to consign that dreadful policy to the dustbin. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that abolishing the two-child limit could immediately lift 360,000 children out of poverty across the UK, rising to 500,000 by the time the policy is rolled out in full.

This is also an opportunity for the Labour UK Government to think again about its decision to restrict the winter fuel payment. The decision has been roundly criticised, and it is not too late to reverse it. I read reporting online in *The Guardian* yesterday that suggested:

"Scottish Labour believes access to the winter fuel allowance could be widened in Scotland as it tries to fight off its opponents' attacks before the next Holyrood election."

It seems that, not content with this Parliament mitigating Labour's two-child limit, it now expects us to mitigate Labour's cut to pensioners' winter fuel payments. The question is: would it not be simpler all round if Labour simply did not cut that funding to the elderly in the first place?

Investing in our vital infrastructure is key to growing our economy and achieving net zero, yet we are dealing with the legacy of years of underinvestment by previous UK Governments and the continuing impact of high inflation. Capital investment needs to grow substantially to renew public infrastructure and deliver on net zero projects, but we are facing an expected real-terms reduction to our UK capital funding of 8.7 per cent over five years. That equates to a cumulative loss of £1.3 billion between 2023-24 and 2027-28.

We have successfully used financial transactions funding to deliver affordable housing, fund our Scottish National Investment Bank and invest through our enterprise agencies. However, that funding from the UK Government has fallen by 62 per cent since 2022-23, and we need it to be replaced if we are to continue to support our

businesses and build more of the housing that we so urgently need.

We must also build for the future, investing now to harness the opportunities of a just transition to net zero. We are already ahead of the rest of the UK in renewables, but we need to go further. I am pleased that good progress has been made on a memorandum of understanding with the UK Government on GB energy, which needs to deliver real benefits for the people of Scotland and support a just transition to net zero by 2045. I am pleased to hear that GB energy will be located in Aberdeen—I think that is absolutely the right decision.

I look forward to further discussions with the UK Government on plans for GB energy. I am keen to ensure that Crown Estate Scotland receives equivalent and proportionate benefits to those being granted to the Crown Estate. We also want the UK Government's new national wealth fund to work with Scottish public bodies and the Scottish National Investment Bank to unlock investment and make our net zero ambitions a reality.

Most of the tax levers that can help address the pressures that we face remain with the UK Government. In Scotland, we have used our tax levers to raise revenue to support investment in our public services. Our progressive decisions on income tax since the devolution of powers will raise up to an estimated £1.5 billion of additional revenue in 2024-25 compared with if we had matched UK Government policy. However, income tax revenues alone are not sufficient to deliver fiscal sustainability over the medium term. The UK Government currently holds wider levers on tax and funding and must consider how they are used to allow necessary investment in public services.

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** On the issue of tax, given everything that the cabinet secretary has said about the use of tax levers, does she now regret the decision taken by the Cabinet to freeze council tax for the current year?

**Shona Robison:** The decision to freeze council tax was a support measure in response to the pressure on household incomes due to the cost of living crisis that has been driven by the decisions of Murdo Fraser's UK Tory Government and, of course, the catastrophic mini-budget that sent inflation sky high. I think that Murdo Fraser was a supporter of Liz Truss and wanted us to follow her tax decisions, so I am not sure that he is in the best position to give me any advice on income tax or any other tax in this place.

I will present the Scottish budget on 4 December, and I have already told Parliament that it will be a challenging budget. However, despite being only 71 days away from our budget, I simply

do not yet know how much funding we will have for next year. I am looking to the chancellor to give further clarity on 30 October.

We have called for a move away from an approach that is focused on annual funding. We need greater certainty of funding to help the devolved Governments to plan further ahead, so I welcome the chancellor's intention to move to multiyear budgets. I want to work with her to ensure that they provide the certainty that we need for our medium-term budget planning.

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I appreciate what the cabinet secretary is saying about the lack of certainty from the UK Government on the financial settlement, but we do have clarity on the reserves that the Scottish Government is sitting on, not least the revenues that were forthcoming as a result of the ScotWind leasing round. Can she confirm to the Scottish Parliament how much of that money is left for next year's budget?

**Shona Robison:** I confirmed that in our written answer to Alex Cole-Hamilton, which shows that we have utilised only around £96 million of ScotWind revenues for 2023-24. The point about the £460 million is that I have said that it would have to be set against a path to balance. The thing that will change and reduce that, which I am very keen happens, is if the UK pay review body awards are funded in full. The more that they are funded, the less ScotWind revenue I will need to use. There is an absolute direct correlation there, so we wait to hear what the Chancellor of the Exchequer has to say.

I want to make one final point, Presiding Officer, if that is okay. The new UK Government has said that it will respect devolution. In June it was splashed on the front page of *The Daily Record* that a £150 million war chest would be handed to the Scotland Office to spend in devolved areas, along with lines from the new Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Murray. What is stranger still is that at the weekend, Ian Murray gave an interview in which he said that a journalist had made up the £150 million figure. Then yesterday, he gave further clarification that despite his slur, the journalist had not made it up and instead what he meant was that he did not have the money yet.

At this stage, my best guess to explain Ian Murray's behaviour is that he does not think that he is actually getting £150 million from the Treasury, or perhaps he is demanding that there should be no more bypassing of this Parliament through the UK Government spending money in devolved areas—something we would welcome.

It is really important that Labour's clear manifesto commitment to end the practice of

bypassing devolved nations is delivered and delivered in full.

I want to work with the chancellor to ensure that the UK budget delivers for Scotland. It does not need to be another budget of austerity and underinvestment. Instead, it can be a budget that renews public infrastructure, helps to tackle child poverty and supports keeping and attracting jobs, with fiscal rules that value public services. Those are the choices that I encourage the chancellor to make. I urge all members to support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of the UK Budget on 30 October 2024 to Scotland's budget; supports the call from prominent economists, including Professor Mariana Mazzucato, Professor Anton Muscatelli, Lord Gus O'Donnell and Professor Simon Wren-Lewis, for the UK Government to use the forthcoming UK Budget to halt "the under-investment that has resulted in a vicious circle of stagnation and decline, whereby low investment leads to both a weaker economy and greater social and environmental problems"; calls on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to replace the current austerity fiscal rules that the UK Government is operating under, in order to allow for greater investment to renew and enhance public infrastructure and deliver projects that support the transition to net zero; believes that the UK Government should reverse its cut to the Winter Fuel Payment, as this cut will impact many of the most vulnerable older people in society, and urges the UK Government to use its first Budget to remove the two-child limit on benefits and deliver greater investment to tackle child poverty, and deliver a sizeable increase in investment in the NHS and schools, which would deliver consequentials for application in these vital public services in Scotland.

15:10

**Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):**

It is a novel experience for those of us on this side of the chamber that, for the first time in 14 years, we are not in government in Westminster and, therefore, will not have to defend a budget that is on its way. That will bring an interesting new slant to my remarks. To borrow a line that we have heard several times from members on the other side of the chamber, I can say with all integrity that Scotland is being failed by both its Governments—the one in Holyrood and the one in Westminster—because we have had a dismal start from the new Labour Government. It is not surprising that the Prime Minister's ratings are already in free fall.

Before I turn to the Scottish National Party, let us look at what will come from the budget of the Labour Party in government. The economic legacy that was inherited by the Labour Government is far better than it would suggest. Despite the headwinds that all western Governments have faced since the financial crash of 2008-09—a financial crash that happened, of course, under the watch of a Labour chancellor and Government—the UK economy has performed well in relation to many competitor economies. In

that period, UK gross domestic product grew faster than GDP in any other European country in the G7 and faster than that in the European Union as a whole, and we avoided the depth of recession that was seen in, for example, Germany.

In that same period, 4 million new jobs were created, there were record levels of employment and inflation returned very close to the Bank of England target of 2 per cent. Therefore, the economic legacy that was inherited by the Labour Government was a strong one in relative terms—as, indeed, was the financial one in relative terms—the Office for Budget Responsibility, the deficit that Labour inherited was 4.5 per cent. Mr Johnson is shaking his head at that, but I remind him that, when Labour left office in 2010, the financial deficit was 10.3 per cent—more than double the deficit that the Conservatives left Labour. If the Deputy First Minister wants to intervene to defend the Labour Government, I will give way to her instead.

**The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic (Kate Forbes):** Can the member confirm the deficit of the Scottish Government, which, by law, is required to balance its budget every year?

**Murdo Fraser:** I think that the Deputy First Minister is very familiar with her own "Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland"—GERS—figures, which set out the nominal deficit of the Scottish Government were we to become an independent country. It would be double the rate of the UK as a whole—

**Kate Forbes:** Will the member take another intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** Of course I will take another intervention.

**Kate Forbes:** I did not think that the member needed a lesson on the difference between the Scottish Government's budget and projected figures, but can he confirm whether the Scottish Government has balanced its budget every year for the past 17 years?

**Murdo Fraser:** Well, what the Deputy First Minister is tempting me to do is congratulate the Scottish Government on not breaking the law, because the law says that it has to balance its budget. If the height of the Deputy First Minister's ambition is that we should congratulate the Government on not breaking the law, it will have to do better than that.

As we know, the deficit the last time Labour left office was far greater than the current deficit. Labour talks about the fabled £22 billion black hole, yet we know from all the independent analysis that £9.4 billion of that total has come not from the previous Conservative Government but

from the above-inflation pay deals that have been agreed by Labour since it came to power.

It is no wonder that Labour is confused about its sums. As the cabinet secretary reminded us, the new Secretary of State for Scotland is in total confusion about the amount of money that is available to him. With regard to the fabled £150 million, which his Scotland Office was supposedly going to get, he accused journalists of making up that figure, but it turned out that he misspoke and that that was indeed his figure.

That is not surprising—after all, this is the man whose first major intervention in his new office was to diss Larry the cat, the nation’s favourite feline. How did Ian Murray describe the nation’s favourite pussycat? I could not use that language in a speech in Parliament. That is the mark of the man. Alister Jack would never have said such things about Larry the cat, but Ian Murray did.

What do we see now from Labour? We see a shameful attack on pensioners, with the removal of the winter fuel allowance. Nearly 900,000 pensioners in Scotland will be affected by that—it is no wonder that Labour’s ratings are plummeting. Of course, it is correct to say that the Scottish National Party Government could do something about that if it wanted to.

Let us look at the choices in the Labour budget. The Labour Party has said that it will not increase VAT, income tax or national insurance. What taxes are we going to see increased? Are we going to see fuel duty increased, which would hit people who have to rely on their cars to travel around? Are we going to see capital gains tax increased? When Jeremy Hunt reduced the top rate of capital gains tax from 26 per cent to 24 per cent in the spring budget, the estimates at that point were that such a move would actually increase revenue, because it would stimulate activity. An increase in capital gains tax will hit entrepreneurs and those who want to invest in businesses and sell them on. Is that going to help to stimulate economic growth?

Will it be inheritance tax that is increased, which would hit those who have built up savings over their lives and want to pass them on to their families? Will the energy profits levy be extended still further? According to energy experts, the levy risks more than 2,000 jobs—it is a reckless attack on the oil and gas sector, which is so important to the economy of Scotland and of the north-east in particular.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** The member described the energy profits levy as “a reckless attack”. Would he remind the chamber which party of government introduced that levy?

**Murdo Fraser:** We are not proposing to take away the allowances in the way that the Labour

Party is currently doing. We are not proposing to turn off the tap on North Sea oil and gas as the Labour Party is threatening to do. If members were to ask businesses in Aberdeen and the north-east which party they think can be trusted on oil and gas, they would find that it is certainly not the Labour Party. We will hear more on that from my colleague Douglas Lumsden shortly.

Having spoken about the Labour Party for too long, I turn to some of the choices that the SNP has to make. The budget challenges that the SNP is currently facing are a result of its own choices. That is not my analysis; it is the analysis of the Institute for Fiscal Studies and of the Scottish Fiscal Commission, which has said that it is

“the Scottish Government’s own decisions”

that are to blame for

“much of the pressure”

facing the country’s finances.

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

**Murdo Fraser:** Yes—if I have time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Briefly, cabinet secretary.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I wonder how the member might react to the stage 2 amendments to the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill that were lodged by his Conservative colleagues, which propose to add to social security. He cannot come to the chamber as an Opposition spokesperson demanding that we cut that funding, while at the same time, in committee, his party are asking for it to be increased.

**Murdo Fraser:** The cabinet secretary should listen to what the Scottish Fiscal Commission has said about the need for growth. If we matched UK economic growth, that would, in the current year alone, deliver £624 million extra in tax revenues. The way in which we get more money to spend is by delivering growth. That is a lesson that the Government needs to learn.

What the SNP Government never tells us is that, according to its own figures—the GERS figures—the Barnett formula gives us £2,400 per head of population more to spend in Scotland than the UK average. That is the result of our being in the United Kingdom—the very United Kingdom that the SNP wants to take us out of. We currently benefit by that additional sum, which the SNP Government has to spend as it chooses.

We know what choices the SNP has made. We know about the fact that it has increased income taxes in Scotland. According to a recent survey by

the Fraser of Allander Institute, more than one in three businesses are reporting that that has had

“a fair amount to a lot of impact”

on their ability to recruit. We hear that all the time from businesses across Scotland, in construction, manufacturing, hospitality and financial services. The tax gap between Scotland and the rest of the UK is actively deterring their ability—

**Shona Robison:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Murdo Fraser:** I have taken lots of interventions.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is bringing his remarks to a close.

**Murdo Fraser:** The tax gap is actively deterring them from attracting talent to come and work in Scotland. I know that the Deputy First Minister gets that, but I am not sure that the finance secretary does.

I think that I am probably running out of time, so let me say, in closing, what both Governments should be doing. Both Governments should be going for growth: lowering taxes, not raising taxes; passing the rates relief that has been given by the UK Government on to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses; supporting North Sea oil and gas and not seeking to close it down, as Labour is trying to do; bringing in a national workforce plan for skills; and investing in infrastructure in roads such as the A9, the A96, the A75, the A77 and the A1.

We need to have a positive vision for Scotland. Instead, it is going backwards under the SNP and, under Labour, the UK is heading in the same direction. We are being failed by two Governments, and we need to do better.

I move amendment S6M-14614.2, to leave out from “supports” to end and insert:

“acknowledges the crucial role of the previous UK Conservative administrations in securing the largest ever block grants for Scotland, in curtailing inflation, guiding the country through and out of the COVID-19 pandemic, protecting businesses through the furlough scheme, and in providing non-domestic rates relief, which the Scottish National Party (SNP) administration chose not to pass on to businesses in Scotland; credits the Conservative administration for ensuring consistent economic growth for the UK, frequently outpacing the rest of the G7, and protecting UK pensions; notes that the current UK Labour administration, despite this legacy, has created a budget deficit by paying above-inflation pay awards to the public sector; condemns the UK Labour administration for scrapping the Winter Fuel Payment, thereby putting 900,000 Scottish pensioners in Scotland at risk this winter, and acknowledges the legacy of 17 years of economic mismanagement by the SNP administration in Scotland, which has resulted in stagnant growth, high taxes, underinvestment, spending cuts, and difficulties in attracting skilled workers to Scotland.”

15:21

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I have to say that Murdo Fraser standing up and describing things being in free fall is somewhat ironic. I remember that, this time almost exactly two years ago, the thing that was in free fall was UK gilts and that mortgage products were being removed from the market as a direct consequence of the reckless decision made by his Government—the previous Tory Government. So, this is a bit of a strange—[*Interruption.*] I do not know what the First Minister is saying from his sedentary position, but perhaps we could have a bit more of a constructive debate.

It is a little bit strange to have a debate about a budget five weeks before it is published. I gently point out that, since the general election, the First Minister has met the new Prime Minister, the new Deputy Prime Minister and the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. If the budget was so important, that might have been the appropriate time to raise it.

The serious point is that we have heard much—[*Interruption.*] I acknowledge the point made by the finance secretary about the need for constructive dialogue

**The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Daniel Johnson:** If I could take a moment to finish the point.

There is a danger of sending a mixed message—that today’s debate is something of a hasty attempt to cry betrayal before we have even had the budget instead of seeking the cross-party co-operation that we seem to be being promised and that seems to be on offer.

If the cabinet secretary would like to intervene, I am happy to take the intervention.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I think that Siobhian Brown was seeking to intervene.

**Daniel Johnson:** Apologies.

**Siobhian Brown:** First, given the importance of the UK budget, and the consequential to the Scottish Government, to delivering for the people of Scotland, whom we all represent, it is really disappointing that only three Labour MSPs are in attendance for this debate.

Secondly, I note that the Labour amendment would remove mention of urging the UK Government to reverse cuts to the winter fuel payment and to remove the two-child limit on benefits. Does Mr Johnson not agree that the UK Government should be doing those things to protect the people of Scotland, whom we all represent?

**Daniel Johnson:** That was a very well-read intervention. However, there are serious issues at hand. Siobhian Brown wants to know where my Labour colleagues are—well, they are listening to the Prime Minister and to the plans that we have set out. *[Interruption.]*

If this was such an important debate, maybe the Finance and Public Administration Committee would be here rather than in Estonia. We all know fine well that the debate was tabled very much at the last minute. Let us not pretend that this is some serious attempt at discussion. It is a last-minute intervention. Let us not pretend that it is anything other than a political stunt.

**Shona Robison:** The reason that it is important to have the debate at this point is that I am going to meet all the other finance ministers and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury next week, and it is important that I can relay what this Parliament thinks about the priorities for the chancellor's upcoming budget at the end of October. I am very surprised that Daniel Johnson does not agree.

**Daniel Johnson:** The debate is so important that it was tabled only at the end of last week. *[Interruption.]* If we want to talk about budgets, maybe the cabinet secretary should be a little bit more reflective, given what she said three weeks ago, when she was forced into an emergency budget revision—for the third time—having identified a £1 billion black hole. As the Fraser of Allander Institute and other organisations have made clear, the cuts are a direct result of the Scottish Government's decision making.

There is an important contrast: the UK Government has had to make difficult decisions because of assumptions that were made by the previous Government, such as the cynical assumption that public sector pay increases could be held down to between 2 and 3 per cent, whereas the SNP Government has had to fix its own errors in its own budget, which—what is worse—was based on the same cynical assumption about being able to hold down public sector pay increases to between 2 and 3 per cent.

We know that there will be one big difference between the UK Government's budget and the Scottish Government's budget, though, because we know one big fact about the Scottish Government's budget, as Alex Cole-Hamilton pointed out. Almost half of the £1 billion black hole is being filled using non-recurring ScotWind funding sources, and £0.5 billion-worth of cuts are coming down the road in December.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** Will the member give way?

**Daniel Johnson:** I have given way plenty of times.

If we want to talk about budgets ahead of time, perhaps the Scottish Government should come clean on where those £0.5 billion-worth of cuts will fall.

The Scottish Government might want to focus on the jobs and opportunities that are being lost here because of the £600 million performance gap, as identified by the Scottish Fiscal Commission, which is simply a result of its failure to keep pace with the sluggish rate that was achieved by the Conservative Government. Across the UK, GDP per head of population grew by a mere 6 per cent over the past 14 years of Conservative rule. Poor performance on growth has meant that wages today are barely higher than they were in 2010.

**The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Daniel Johnson:** I am afraid that I do not have time.

By comparison, if the UK economy had continued to grow at the pace it was growing at in 2008, under a Labour Government, real GDP per capita would be £10,000 more per person than it is today. That is the cost of Conservative failure, of Liz Truss's mini-budget and of reckless, unfunded tax cuts that sent the value of the pound tumbling. We have had to make tough decisions to fix the £22 billion black hole that the previous Government left us.

Let us look at what we have been left, because it was not just cynical assumptions about subsequent pay increases. There is the £6 billion on the asylum system. Jeremy Hunt tried to claim that that money would not need to be spent, because the Rwanda scheme would work. That was ridiculous and shameless. There is the £3 billion on rail projects to which the previous Government had not allocated funding. Those commitments led to the national reserve being applied three times over. That is the inheritance that the Conservative Government left, and the Labour Government is having to fix the mess.

However, let us be clear that, in order to fix that reckless inheritance, there can be no return to Conservative austerity. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer made clear yesterday, we need to look carefully at how we understand investment. She said:

"it is time that the Treasury moved on from just counting the costs of investments"

in our economy

"to recognising the benefits too."

As we do so, it is vital that spending and borrowing remain affordable.

Another fiscal rule states that the

“Upper limit on debt servicing costs”

must

“allow explicit consideration of the sustainability of the stock of debt”.

That is not our fiscal rule; it is the SNP’s fiscal rule from its previous manifesto. We can talk about investment and the need for a growing economy, but we must have a responsible approach to debt.

We need an active industrial strategy that drives growth, and we need to secure long-term growth, unlock investment and empower our nations and regions.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** Will Daniel Johnson take an intervention?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is bringing his remarks to a close.

**Daniel Johnson:** Above all, we must ensure that there is no return to austerity under the UK Labour Government.

I move amendment S6M-14614.3, to leave out from “recognises” to end and insert:

“believes that Scotland’s priorities were reflected in the overwhelming mandate that the people of Scotland gave to the Labour Party on 4 July 2024; recognises that the new UK Labour administration inherited a black hole of £22 billion from the previous Conservative administration; understands that the only way to deliver fairness and opportunity for people is to fix the foundations of the economy; welcomes the renewed commitment from the Chancellor of the Exchequer that there will be no return to austerity; calls on the Scottish Government to work with the UK Government to ensure that the benefits of economic stability and the opportunities of national renewal are felt across Scotland, and further calls on the Scottish Government to reflect the importance of financial competence, economic stability and transparency in its management of Scotland’s finances.”

15:28

**Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** Two weeks ago, the UK Government’s fiscal watchdog reported that the UK’s finances are unsustainable, partly because the UK Government does not have a credible plan for funding the costs that are associated with tackling climate change.

Governments have choices. They can do as the Tories did and maintain that growth will solve all problems if only we cut taxes, environmental regulations and workers’ rights enough. However, that did not work. Britain’s economy has suffered from historically weak growth over the past 14 years.

Austerity was a choice and it did not achieve that problem-solving growth. What it did was wreck public services, drive working people into desperation and poverty, and drive down

investment in the UK compared with investment in similar countries. A different choice can be made. We clearly desperately need an increase in public investment to get public services back on their feet and to tackle the climate and nature emergencies.

**Daniel Johnson:** Does Lorna Slater acknowledge that the £7.3 billion that we have pledged to the national wealth fund and the £8 billion for GB energy are exactly the sort of investment in growth that she is looking for?

**Lorna Slater:** We look forward, of course, to seeing detailed plans for investment and, more specifically, for how the incoming Government intends to pay for them.

I have some suggestions. The UK Government must look at the revenue-raising options of taxing polluters and the very wealthy. Indeed, one of the outcomes of the austerity years in the UK is that the wealth of billionaires and the super-rich has ballooned—slow clap for the Tories for taking from the poor and giving to the mega-rich. Trickle-up economics is what we have had. We need to tax that money back into our economy.

Windfall taxes are all very well, but a consistent approach to the taxation of big polluters in order to fund the transition to net zero would be more effective. Simply stopping tax breaks for oil, gas and aviation would be a start. Last week in the chamber, we all agreed that one of the best things that we can do for small businesses is ensure that big businesses pay fair taxes. *The Observer* found that, between 2018 and 2020, Shell and BP paid no corporation tax or production levies on North Sea oil operations while claiming tax reliefs of nearly £400 million. How are small, clean energy companies in the UK supposed to compete when big oil gets massive tax breaks? Jet fuel has always been tax exempt in the UK. How are small, clean transportation businesses or publicly owned buses and trains supposed to compete with a polluting aviation industry that does not pay tax on its fuel?

The UK needs to collect that money and to revise the capital budget strategy to align with climate goals. We have a whole bunch of stuff that we need to build—wind turbines, energy storage, grid infrastructure, train stations, hydrogen-powered buses and low-carbon homes. Let us get on with it. There is no shortage of money. Follow the trickle-up economics and tax dodgers to see where it has gone.

I challenge the UK Government to take a different approach and to rebalance the UK economy in favour of hope, to get money into the pockets of people who need it and can spend it, and not to be shy about making those who can and should contribute more do so.

Our devolved Government in Scotland has a role to play, too: the Scottish Government has not exhausted all our tools to address the current financial crisis. In recent weeks, the Scottish Greens have been highly critical of some of the spending decisions that the Government has made. The cuts to climate spending and the nature restoration fund, and the scrapping of policies to cut peak rail fares and to give free bus travel to asylum seekers have all been active decisions made by this Government while protecting other areas of spending and maintaining tax cuts for businesses. We cannot sit back and say that this is all Westminster's fault when we are making decisions such as those and are failing to explore all options to establish sustainable revenue streams to support public services and investment.

The Scottish Greens have a range of proposals on such solutions. There must be strategic reprioritisation towards critical areas including climate action, social security and public health, with a focus on efficiency and impact.

I challenge the Scottish Government to review unconditional handouts to large landowners and the approach of putting money into unsustainable infrastructure projects such as the A9 and A96, and into fossil fuel derivatives. Significant untapped revenue-raising opportunities include carbon emissions land tax, devolution of air passenger duty and reforms to non-domestic rates relief, landfill tax and council tax. Those should be pursued aggressively in order to create a more sustainable fiscal framework.

Last week, a major report by Oxfam confirmed that bringing in the devolved air departure tax and using it to target private jets would raise enough money to scrap peak rail fares permanently, thereby supporting more commuters to make the switch to low-carbon travel.

When the Scottish Greens were in government, development of a carbon land tax and cruise ship levy were well under way, as was the long-overdue reform to council tax. Will the minister confirm in closing today what the Scottish Government's plans are now for those important measures?

It is time to think again about taxation.

I move amendment S6M-14614.1, to insert at end:

“; believes that, whilst the fiscal levers available to the Scottish Government are inadequate to fully protect public services and communities from UK Government austerity, it must use every power available to address the urgent social, economic and environmental challenges that Scotland faces, and calls, therefore, on the Scottish Government to explore all avenues to fiscal sustainability, including maximal use of existing tax powers, a review of tax reliefs and other subsidies, reform of local government

finances, and the creation of new local revenue raising powers, such as the carbon emissions land tax and cruise ship levy, and to reprioritise spending away from programmes that undermine its core missions of tackling child poverty and the climate emergency.”

15:35

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this afternoon's debate.

At the United Kingdom general election in July, the people sent a message. They rendered a judgment on the UK Conservative Government and the Scottish National Party Government at Holyrood. The message was clear and unequivocal: people want things to be done differently. They are tired of the old politics, but the early days of this UK Labour Administration will not have given them comfort, as yet. I hope that that changes. We need the narrative to shift. We need some hope in our politics and in our country.

While the Conservatives fight among themselves, the Liberal Democrats will act as a constructive Opposition, both in this place and on the green benches at Westminster, working in the national interest to hold the new UK Government to account. We will support it when we agree with it. We will look to improve Labour's plans when we feel that they lack ambition and we will oppose them when we think that they are wrong. That is our responsibility and it is our job.

A responsible Opposition has an essential role in any democracy, and there are now a record 72 Liberal Democrat members of the UK Parliament to do that. They are the largest third party in a century, and they are ready to champion our policies and to hold the Government to account. Those strong Liberal Opposition voices will be louder and more important than ever before.

There is no time to waste in repairing the damage that has been done by years of chaos at the heart of number 10. It is perhaps surprising that the Scottish Government's motion does not address that chaos and its inheritance. It does not refer to the context of the disastrous state in which the Conservative Party left the nation's finances. I understand why, but it is important that we contextualise the debate and frame it in that way.

Nor would we know that from Murdo Fraser's amendment. It does not offer any hint of contrition. It makes no mention of Liz Truss—the Prime Minister who, with an agenda that he and Russell Findlay championed in this place, crashed the economy, sent mortgages through the roof, sent gilts into apoplexy and cost our country untold billions.

Looking ahead to the UK budget, what would Liberal Democrats do differently? The top priority

of the new Labour Administration's first UK budget must be to fix the NHS across these islands. Although policy for that vital area of public service is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, the UK Government has at its disposal much that it can do to improve the context. The Prime Minister recently promised a 10-year plan for the NHS, but without the pledge of any additional funding. Our health service needs reform—of course it does—but reform alone will not be enough to replace ageing equipment, to fix crumbling hospitals and to relieve pressure on our health service so that it will allow people to see a general practitioner at the first time of asking.

We need proper investment, as well as reform, or the crisis will get worse. In particular, we need reinstatement of capital funding. We have heard the Government repeat time and again that the cuts to the capital budget that it received from Westminster are the reason for the hard stop on so many aspects of our health service, such as the reprovisioning of the Princess Alexandra eye pavilion, the national treatment service and the Belford hospital in Fort William. I could go on. However, with latitude and extra extension of funding, those projects can continue.

I do not, however, excuse the Scottish Government for its role in our Scottish health crisis, but there are certainly keys to its resolution and salvation that are available to the UK Labour Government, and we need that: it is so necessary. The Royal College of Nursing Scotland's intervention today was clear that patient care is being compromised daily. I agree with it on another point, which is that good care costs, but missed care costs more.

Our ministers can invest to save by investing in public health and in early access to GPs, pharmacists and dentists, so that fewer people need to go to hospital in the first place. There are steps that the UK Government can also take.

We need to fix the crisis in social care. If we do that, we can prevent people from being stuck in hospital beds. On any given night in Scotland, there are 2,000 patients who are well enough to go home, but too frail to do so without a care package to receive them there. We need to make social care a profession of choice again. Liberal Democrats across the United Kingdom have urged the UK Government to create in the budget a new national minimum wage that is £2 higher than the national average for our nation's carers in order to make social care a profession of choice. By helping people to stay healthy for longer, we can bring down waiting lists, get people back to work and give the economy the boost that it needs.

Liberal Democrats are clear on what the people's priorities are, because we have asked them and listened to them, door by door and street

by street. Those people are telling us now that the Labour Party has got it wrong, particularly on its decision to retain the two-child benefit cap—originally, in 2016, our MPs walked through the lobbies of Westminster with Labour MPs to oppose it—which plunges thousands of children into poverty.

Labour has got it wrong on scrapping the winter fuel payment for pensioners just as bills are set to rise again in the teeth of winter. Hundreds of thousands of people should be on pension credit but are not, so that is the wrong way to means test it. I remember, as many members will, the days of the cold weather payment, which was brought in to stop the annual body count of pensioners who died because they felt too uncomfortable, or were unable, to switch the household heating on.

We would raise billions of pounds in tax revenues in a fair way by reversing the Conservative Administration's tax cuts for the big banks; by closing loopholes on capital gains that are exploited by the very wealthiest people—the top 0.1 per cent; and by taxing the social media giants. We must make sure that the latter pay their fair share, and we should hypothecate that revenue to pump prime our investment in mental health services, because it is the social media giants that do so much of the harm to our young people. That would, in turn, lead to consequentials that we would spend in Scotland.

The Liberal Democrats will be a responsible Opposition in this Parliament and we will urge the UK Labour Government to be bolder. We will tell it when it is wrong, and we will support it when we think that it has got it right. That is what constructive opposition looks like.

I move amendment S6M-14614.4, to leave out from "importance of" to end and insert:

"terrible state of the public finances caused by the mismanagement of the previous UK Conservative administration; believes that the top priority of the new Labour administration's first UK Budget must be fixing the NHS and social care crisis so that people across the UK can get the care that they need; considers that it would not be right to further squeeze households that have seen their living standards fall, and believes that a fair deal would see the removal of the two-child limit on benefits, the reversal of the cut to the Winter Fuel Payment, and tax revenues raised in a fair way, including by reversing the previous Conservative administration's tax cuts for the big banks, closing loopholes in capital gains tax exploited by the top 0.1% wealthiest people, and taxing the social media giants so that they pay their fair share."

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We move to the open debate. There will be back-bench speeches of up to six minutes. There is no time in hand, so interventions must be absorbed within members' time allocation.

15:42

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** I welcome the decision to locate GB energy to Aberdeen, the announcement of which was made this afternoon. That was the only logical choice, and we await the detail with some interest.

I disagree with Daniel Johnson's remark that five weeks before a budget is not the time to discuss it—now is exactly the right time to discuss it. I can tell Mr Johnson and other members that the forthcoming budget is the talk of the steamie in my airts and pairts. I met academics at the University of Aberdeen on Friday to discuss energy, and the focus was on what Ms Reeves is going to do in her budget, because, among the industry, the unions and academics in Aberdeen, there is a real worry about the decisions that Ms Reeves will make on oil and gas.

It is not often that I agree with Murdo Fraser, but the allowances regime is extremely important to the oil and gas industry. I am really concerned that, if Labour MPs, the chancellor and the Prime Minister do not start listening, we might well see a flight of capital and the demise of the North Sea industry before a just transition.

**Liam Kerr:** I associate myself with much of what Mr Stewart has said so far. It has been said that Labour's policies could cost tens of thousands of jobs up in the north-east. Labour has said that GB energy will come up to Aberdeen. Does he know how many jobs that might provide?

**Kevin Stewart:** As I laid out at the beginning of my speech, we need to see the detail on GB energy. We do not know how many jobs it will provide, but according to Unite the union, if Labour carries on with the policies that it has on the table so far, that will lead to 30,000 job losses. Of course, others say that there could be up to 100,000 job losses if we do not get this right. Renewables are our future, but we require a just transition and will need oil and gas for some years to come. The chancellor must listen and must get that right.

In the past couple of days, I have also spoken to the housing sector. Yesterday, I met the chief executive of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations and, once again, the budget was at the forefront of our discussions because housing associations, like many others, want to see capital investment. We know that our capital budgets have been slashed by £1.5 billion and, if I remember rightly, the financial transactions budget—the loans budget—has been dramatically slashed by some 62 per cent. The housing sector, and others, want to see capital investment, and I hope that Ms Reeves will listen.

What is also on the mind of many of my constituents is the nonsense that has gone on of

late. Free-gear Keir is definitely the talk of the steamie, and all his freebies are top of the agenda in any pub, cafe or community discussion. Although Labour MPs seem to be happy about that freebie situation, people cannot understand why, at a time when vital benefits and public services are being cut, affecting the most vulnerable in our society, others are getting free suits, glasses and hospitality. The list goes on, but that must stop.

During the election campaign, Labour promised change, but people did not expect change for the worse, which is what has happened thus far. We had the Labour leader in this Parliament, Anas Sarwar, saying during the course of that election:

“Read my lips: no austerity under Labour.”

That went at the very beginning with the massive cuts to winter fuel payments that are austerity on steroids. Of my constituents, 821 will lose their winter fuel payments because of that dire decision by the Labour Party.

**Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP):** Does the member agree that the winter fuel payment is vital because, even today, the temperature in Aberdeen sits at 9° while Westminster sits at 17°? That is what we are facing: Scotland has lower temperatures.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please bring your remarks to a close, Mr Stewart.

**Kevin Stewart:** I agree completely and I know that more than 13,000 folk in Ms Dunbar's constituency will lose their payments.

Labour has made a choice to cut services that support the most vulnerable, but that is not the choice of the SNP or of Scotland and it should not be the choice of Westminster either. The chancellor can choose to take a different path with the budget and not to follow Tory austerity rules. I hope that she will choose to make a difference.

15:48

**Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con):** We are here to debate Scotland's priorities, but it is clear that the SNP has no idea what the priorities of the Scottish people are. Time after time, we have watched ministers announce new policies, legislation and vanity projects, only to be forced into a U-turn when they discover that they have their sums wrong. The reintroduction of peak fares on ScotRail and the scrapping of the commitment to free school meals are the latest examples.

This Government continues putting taxpayers' money down the drain with unnecessary and unwanted independence papers that even Humza Yousaf admitted no one reads, while failing to

provide some of the most basic public services or to deliver on repeated promises made during its time in power.

If we were to ask the people who live and work in the north-east of Scotland for their priority, I am sure that they would tell us that it is to finally see this Government deliver on what it has continually promised and consistently failed to deliver for the region. It promised to dual the A96, but that has still not been done. It promised to dual the A90 north of Ellon by 2025, but there is still nothing. It made a promise eight years ago to spend £200 million to cut rail journey times between the north-east and the central belt by 20 minutes, but not a second has come off journey times and barely any of the money that was promised has been committed to make that vital improvement for the people of the north-east. There is a list of broken promises by this devolved Government.

The Labour Government is no better. Its honeymoon period has resulted in the callous decision to rip away the winter fuel payment from those who have worked for their entire lives and contributed to this country. Simultaneously, it has handed over inflation-busting pay rises to its union paymasters.

Sadly, it appears that this failing devolved Government is meekly following suit. Across Scotland, communities are no stranger to the cold. Indeed, Braemar, in the north-east, holds the record, jointly, for the coldest temperature in the UK—a chilling  $-27^{\circ}$  in 1982. However, across the north-east of Scotland, more than 128,000 pensioners are having their winter fuel payments snatched from them. This winter, pensioners the length and breadth of the country are going to freeze in their homes thanks to the decisions that have been made by the parties opposite. Let us be clear that those are political decisions by the Labour and SNP Governments, which reveal their true colours and what they view as priorities.

How about prioritising our energy industry? How about prioritising the thousands of oil and gas workers who are facing a future of uncertainty and the inevitable job losses that are resulting from the hostility of this devolved Government and the extremists whom they invited into Bute house? Meanwhile, we have a Labour Government that has placed the likes of Ed Miliband in charge of our energy security—a man who seems intent on destroying the north-east of Scotland. Both parties have insisted on prioritising the premature decline of our oil and gas industry, slamming our region with increased taxation without a single thought for the economy of the north-east or the impact that their economically and environmentally illiterate positions will have on thousands of families across the region.

**Daniel Johnson:** The member is absolutely right about the criticality of the energy sector, but does he recognise that we have already lost around 30,000 jobs over the past decade and that, with no other interventions, we would continue to see a decline of between 5 and 15 per cent? This is about managing the transition and ensuring that there is investment. Will he at least concede that point, even if he disagrees with the detail of how we are trying to produce it?

**Douglas Lumsden:** I thank the member for the intervention, but it is also about managing the decline. The Labour Party seems not to be doing that just now. It wants to accelerate that decline and see thousands of jobs lost right across the north-east.

In June, a poll showed that 75 per cent of Scots back our oil and gas industry. That is because the Scottish people have the common sense to understand the impact to the environment and the economy of stopping domestic production before we have reduced demand. Sadly, the sense that the Scottish people have seems far less common in the parties opposite.

Representing the north-east of Scotland, I feel that we are suffering from a double whammy—not just the destruction of the oil and gas industry but the constant raiding of the rural budget, which is having a hugely negative impact. We have seen £32 million cut from the forestry grant scheme and £5 million cut from the nature restoration fund, and £33 million of agricultural support funding from the Bew review has been snatched from our farmers. The rural sector is key to our economy and also to our drive towards net zero, but it seems to be an easy target for this central belt-biased SNP Government.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon):** It is really important to inject some truth into this situation. Money is not missing. The money was ring fenced and it will be returned to the portfolio. Would the member like to account for the £358 million that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs did not spend in the UK on its agricultural budgets?

**Douglas Lumsden:** There we have it. We know that the £33 million of Bew money has been taken, and there is no timetable for when that money will be returned to our farmers.

The Scottish people know that strong public services have to be paid for. We need a thriving economy and an environment that increases opportunities for employment and we need a Government and policies that will help that economy to grow, yet in Scotland, we have a Government that, since using devolved income tax powers, cost the country over half a billion pounds

in lost revenue in 2022-23 alone. We can couple that with the £2.7 billion over the course of this parliamentary session that has been wasted on botched schemes such as the failed ferry fiasco. Money is tight, but only because of the SNP's financial incompetence.

15:55

**Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** This past weekend, what commentators predicted would be a victory lap for the new UK Labour Government at its party conference has been overshadowed by fights, fall-outs and scandal. While the new Deputy Prime Minister told her party's conference that "Now is our moment," major trade unions were railing against its first steps in office.

What first steps those have been: cutting winter fuel payments from 10 million pensioners in England and Wales and more than 800,000 in Scotland, including more than 50,000 in South Lanarkshire, where my Rutherglen constituency is based. The general secretary of Unite, Sharon Graham, did not mince her words when she described the cuts as

"cruel",

saying that the chancellor was

"picking the pockets of pensioners"

while leaving

"the ... wealthiest ... pretty much untouched."

The new Prime Minister has admitted that there was no impact assessment ahead of the decision to strip that payment. Incredibly, he added that the UK Government was not legally required to produce one. I am sure that members across the parties will agree that the Prime Minister's statement that he slashed the payment "with a heavy heart" is of no comfort to our constituents, who are desperately worried about how they are going to get through the winter—not least because the energy price cap is set to rise next month, adding an additional 10 per cent to their fuel bills.

The Prime Minister's hand wringing does not wash with my constituents, and it certainly does not wash with me. The message from every member of this Parliament should be crystal clear: the cut to the winter fuel payment is unreasonable and cruel, and the UK Government should reverse it immediately.

Of course, when there was a flicker of rebellion among Labour MPs at Westminster, it was squashed immediately. When SNP MPs tabled an amendment to immediately abolish the two-child benefit cap, only seven Labour MPs put their heads above the parapet and voted with them. Not a single Scottish Labour MP joined them.

One in nine families across the UK is now affected by the two-child cap. That is a rise from previous figures. Limiting the support that is available to families with more than two children has been widely recognised as the key driver of child poverty. The chief executive of the Child Poverty Action Group, Alison Garnham, has stated that it

"makes life harder for kids,"

by

"punishing them for having brothers and sisters."

Less than an hour after that Westminster vote concluded, the whip was removed from those seven MPs—a ruthless move, from a ruthless Prime Minister. I say to my Labour colleagues that, if so few of their MP colleagues are prepared to do the right thing, all eyes are now on them—on all three of them who have turned up to the chamber.

As Alison Garnham from CPAG also stated,

"Children are losing their life chances to the two-child limit now—they can't wait for the new government to align every star before the policy is scrapped."

The two-child cap is keeping families in poverty, and the UK Government must use its first budget to scrap it immediately.

Before the general election, Scots were promised a Labour Government that would give the Scotland Office £150 million to tackle poverty. The then shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, Ian Murray, appeared on the front page of newspapers saying it was

"the change Scotland ... can get".

Confusingly, the new Scottish secretary—the very same Ian Murray—said last weekend that the £150 million figure was "made up", before retracting that claim and admitting that he does not have the cash in a "war chest". The change that Scotland has seen instead has been a £160 million cut to the Scottish Government budget, before the UK budget has even been announced.

In that context, it is little wonder that prominent economists are sounding the alarm before the UK budget, calling for the brakes to be pulled on the vicious cycle of underinvestment and continuation of Tory fiscal rules and austerity.

The call is also coming from inside the house. One of the seven suspended Labour MPs, Richard Burgon, managed to speak at a Labour conference fringe event. He warned against the UK Government heeding the

"siren voices on the political Right, in the media, for austerity and for cuts to living standards."

He also pleaded with the new Government to make a fresh start on living standards and the funding of public services. Given all that I have

described and all that we have heard so far, I am afraid that his words might be in vain. As a constituent related to me last week, the Labour Party continues to hammer a message of change on social media and in the press, but for many of my constituents, while there has indeed been change, that change has been for the worse.

Let us be under no illusion about what is happening: the new Labour Government is publicly laying the groundwork for another brutal round of austerity. That may not be what it calls it, but that is what it is. Fourteen years of Westminster failure have left public services in the UK at breaking point. The SNP Government in Scotland continues to push at the constraints of devolution by delivering game-changing policies such as the Scottish child payment, and spending millions of pounds to mitigate punitive UK policies such as the bedroom tax. However, it is impossible to mitigate everything, and Westminster's painful economic decisions severely impact the Scottish Government's spending powers.

Since its election, the new UK Labour Government has dodged and brushed off scrutiny, rowed back on promises and slashed budgets. Labour's cuts have been a political choice. When its budget is delivered in October, it has the opportunity to deliver the change that it promised. It must take ownership of the privilege of office that has been handed to it, and put an end to the politics of austerity for once and for all.

16:01

**Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab):** The budget on 30 October will be a significant event. It will be the first budget of the new Labour Government after 14 years of Tory economic mismanagement, and it will be historically significant too, as Rachel Reeves will be the first female Chancellor of the Exchequer to announce a budget. The fourth of December will also be an important date—indeed, arguably the most important date in the Scottish parliamentary calendar—as it will be when Shona Robison gives her budget statement. However, that will be far less unique, in that it will be the SNP Government's 17th budget in a row. Perhaps the key difference between the two Governments is that it is the Scottish Parliament's job to hold the Scottish Government to account on the latter, not to grandstand on the former.

The phrase "I will take no lectures" is frequently heard in the chamber. I do not think that I am alone in thinking that it is overused, but what else are we meant to say to the SNP Government when it tries to tell anyone how to manage the public's finances? The SNP Government needs to get its own house in order before telling anyone else what to do. The reality is that people in

Scotland are paying more and getting less under the Scottish Government. Working people in Scotland who are earning only £29,000 are paying more in income tax than their counterparts in the rest of the UK.

Similar to the Tories, the Scottish Government has wasted billions of pounds of Scottish taxpayers' money since it came to power, because of its incompetence—and that is before we get to the pet projects and the gimmicks—and public services are getting weaker as a result.

The SNP, under John Swinney, Kate Forbes and Shona Robison, has spent budget after budget failing to focus on growing the economy, never mind delivering it, and we are now paying the price for that failure. According to the Office for National Statistics, since 2014, GDP per head in Scotland has grown by only 4.3 per cent, compared with the rest of the UK, where it has grown by 6 per cent. That means that Scotland's growth rate is only just more than two-thirds of the UK's growth rate during the last decade. That has consequences for our economy, living standards and the Scottish Government's budget. Those consequences have been laid out by the Scottish Fiscal Commission, which said that if the Scottish economy had simply matched the economic performance of the rest of the UK since income tax was devolved in 2016, the Scottish budget would be significantly better off.

Professor Graeme Roy of the commission told the Finance and Public Administration Committee that

"because of relatively slower growth in the Scottish economy since income tax was devolved ... We estimate that the economic performance gap means that the net position in 2022-23 was around £624 million lower than it would have been had Scottish economic performance matched that of the rest of the UK."—[*Official Report, Finance and Public Administration Committee*, 3 September 2024; c 3]

That leads, for example, to the SNP making decisions to abandon policies such as free school meals for all primary aged children and to reintroduce peak fares—things that it does not want to talk about today.

Let us not forget that, less than 12 weeks ago, the people of Scotland gave their verdict on the Tories and the SNP when they supported the election of the new UK Labour Government and 37 Scottish Labour MPs. If the SNP wishes to spend time discussing the UK budget, that is of course its prerogative, but it is for its nine MPs at Westminster—that is what is left of them—to take that forward.

Scottish Labour MPs and the new UK Labour Government have been clear that their number 1 priority is economic growth. For nearly three years, the SNP-Green Scottish Government could not

even agree on the concept of economic growth, let alone deliver it in any way that could be seen as a priority. Meanwhile, the new UK Labour Government is focused on fixing the foundations to create such growth, so that we can raise living standards for everyone and rebuild public finances to enable us to invest in public services. That will be the budget priority.

As Daniel Johnson mentioned, yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was clear that there will be no return to austerity—although we should not underestimate the legacy that the Tories have left the new UK Government. Murdo Fraser mentioned borrowing. It is now more than double what it was before the pandemic, and overall debt is now nearly 100 per cent of GDP, which represents the highest level since the 1960s. Before the election, the previous Conservative Government did not factor in the impact of a series of new challenging pressures on the public finances. Spending commitments were made without funding being put behind them. As Mr Johnson said, wrong assumptions were made about this year's public sector pay award. Therefore difficult decisions might need to be made. Politics is about choices, but this budget is an opportunity to start to turn the page on years of economic mismanagement and for the new Government to deliver on our manifesto commitments.

The new Labour Government's top priority is economic growth. Key to achieving that will be fixing the foundations of the economy. The UK Government might have changed, but it is clear that the SNP's approach remains the same: to blame someone else for its own failures, mismanagement and incompetence. This debate has been another attempt to distract from those failures.

As I said earlier, too often in the chamber we hear the phrase "I will take no lectures." The one phrase that we never hear from either the SNP or the Tories, though, is "Mea culpa." Perhaps we should hear that more often when we discuss the current state of our public finances.

16:07

**Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):**

Given that Scotland's budget is tied to decisions on public spending that are made by the UK Government south of the border, I am sure that members across the chamber will recognise the importance of the upcoming UK budget. As Labour minister Wes Streeting said,

"All roads lead back to Westminster,"

because decisions that are taken there have an impact on every part of the UK, irrespective of devolution.

In the past few years, Scotland has been dragged out of the European Union against our will. We have had to endure Prime Ministers such as Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, who people in Scotland did not vote for. We have lived through a pandemic, and we are still suffering from the Westminster-caused cost of living crisis.

As the finance secretary highlighted, prominent economists, including University of Glasgow principal Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli, are asking the UK Government to stop the underinvestment that has resulted in a vicious circle of stagnation and decline. We have faced more than a decade of austerity under the previous Conservative Government. Despite its protestations, Labour is continuing that pattern by keeping to Tory fiscal rules. It should learn the lessons of the past 14 years and not repeat the same damaging mistakes as the Tories. Now is the time for the UK Labour Government, which has all the necessary economic levers, to invest in our people and public services. In a briefing published yesterday, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation was clear that that is essential, because

"business-as-usual economic growth in the UK"

will not reduce poverty. Similarly, Shelter Scotland was very clear in its key asks of the UK Government, which are to end austerity, scrap the benefit cap, the bedroom tax and the two-child limit, and increase Scotland's capital budget. To me, those are simple, reasonable calls. With all the powers that the Westminster Treasury has, they should be easy choices for the UK Government to make. Instead, we are told by Keir Starmer that his first budget is going to be "painful".

The SNP is calling on the UK Government to scrap the two-child cap and reinstate the winter fuel payment for pensioners. Scottish Labour is today arguing against those ideas. Not content with continuing cruel Tory policies such as the two-child cap and austerity fiscal rules, Keir Starmer's Government has gone further, taking the winter fuel payment from thousands of vulnerable pensioners. Rather than delivering change, the UK Labour Government is short-changing the people of Scotland.

The Labour amendment is full of hubris. Back in Downing Street for five minutes, Labour is already taking voters for granted. That arrogance is the mistake that Labour made in Scotland in 2007, and it is why it is currently the third party in this Parliament. In fact, recent polling shows that most voters think that the Labour Government is just as bad as or worse than the last Tory Government, while Keir Starmer's approval ratings are at their lowest level ever, at -26. Furthermore, more than half of voters in Scotland think that the Labour

Government is not acting in the best interests of Scotland, and a majority oppose Labour's cuts to winter fuel payments. If Labour politicians do not want to listen to reasonable calls from SNP politicians, or from experts or stakeholders, perhaps they should reflect on those poll findings and listen to the electorate, many of whom lent them a vote to kick out the Tories.

The Scottish Government motion should not be controversial for any MSP who believes in fairness and social justice. We in the SNP are quite clear that the Labour Government in Westminster must scrap cruel Tory policies such as the two-child cap and the bedroom tax, and they must put an end to the Conservative fiscal rules that underpin austerity. If those measures are still in place after Labour's first budget in October, then those policies will become Labour's rape clause, Labour's bedroom tax and Labour's austerity. With policy choices like that, alongside the cuts to winter fuel payments, it is clear that Labour does not serve the people of Scotland from cradle to grave.

In contrast, the SNP is investing in the people of Scotland. In Government, the SNP has created the game-changing Scottish child payment, championed the roll-out of the real living wage, expanded access to free personal care and delivered free bus travel for under-22s, alongside older and disabled people.

The SNP Scottish Government will always do its best with the powers that it has—but, with Westminster decisions continuing to make life more difficult for households, communities and businesses, it is clear that independence is a vital necessity for Scotland.

16:13

**Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I start with an assumption that the Government has brought the debate to the chamber in good faith, so that we can debate the budget priorities of the Labour Government. If that is the case, the cabinet secretary—who will perhaps catch up on this when she comes back into the chamber—may be in position to take a clear-eyed look at where the UK's bank balance has been left by the outgoing Conservative Government. It is not that the Tories just dipped into the country's overdraft to get through a tight spot in the hope or knowledge that they could pay the money back later; the Tories drove a horse and cart through the country's overdraft limit—and kept going and going and going. The Treasury had a £9 billion reserve.

**Ivan McKee:** Will Mark Griffin take an intervention?

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con) rose—**

**Mark Griffin:** I am spoilt for choice.

**Ivan McKee:** Will Mark Griffin member take an intervention from the front bench?

**Mark Griffin:** I will take Mr McKee's intervention.

**Ivan McKee:** Thank you very much.

Mark Griffin is going on about the "overdraft", as he calls it, that was inherited by the UK Labour Government. Why did the Labour Party go through the general election denying—despite us, experts and others telling it—that there was a £20 billion black hole in the finances? As soon as Labour got into power, it recognised that there is indeed a £20 billion hole in the public finances.

**Mark Griffin:** The Labour Party was clear throughout the general election that there were going to be tough decisions as a result of the mess that the Conservatives had left, but we did not realise how bad that mess was going to be. The chancellor set that out and said that there would be an immediate review by the Treasury. BBC Verify and the OBR have also confirmed that. The Conservatives committed to spending that money because they knew that there was no way that they would ever be asked to pay it back, and now the country finds itself with that £22 billion bill.

**Brian Whittle:** I did not hear the member complaining much when the Conservative Government spent £400 billion on the furlough scheme to make sure that businesses in Britain would still be there after the Covid pandemic.

**Mark Griffin:** We are comparing apples and oranges here—of course we did not complain when the Government spent money on furlough. We complained when the Government spent a ridiculous sum of money on the Rwanda scheme, which we knew was never going to come to fruition. Taxpayers' money was marched right out of the country.

Labour will fix the £22 billion mess that the Conservative Government left, not because it is easy or because it will win us elections or make us more popular but because some things are more important and because it is the right thing to do.

**Kevin Stewart:** Will the member give way?

**Mark Griffin:** I am sorry, Mr Stewart, but I have taken a number of interventions and I am halfway through my time already.

By taking those tough decisions now, getting our public finances under control and offering stability after years of chaos, we can maximise the chances of spreading fairness and opportunity across the country for the next five. I assume that this Government has no intention of suggesting ways of fixing the foundation of our economy, which will help us to get out of that black hole,

because it has been in power for 17 years. What advice could this Government offer the new chancellor? With the Government having delivered three emergency in-year budget cuts in a row, what wisdom is this Government best placed to offer the new chancellor on financial management and sound decision making?

The chancellor has talked about removing waste by removing spending on consultancy and refusing to pay any more money towards the dodgy Covid contracts that the Tories gave their friends, and she has vowed to recoup that money. The SNP has 17 years of failed financial interventions, incompetence, waste and inefficiency to look back on, and that wasted money has come at a price of more than £5 billion of taxpayers' money. When it comes to offering suggestions and learning lessons, I suggest that the Government takes a page out of the new chancellor's book rather than the other way round.

Rachel Reeves spoke about the fundamental link between economic growth and housing for everyone. Labour has already begun to deliver on the commitment to build 1.5 million homes over this Parliament. In contrast, the Scottish Government took the decision to strip affordable housing budgets, and we have today the worst homelessness figures on record. There are 10,000 children in temporary accommodation, and housing starts and completions at the lowest level in years. That is the SNP's financial decisions—the inefficiency, waste and mismanagement—coming home to roost, and children in temporary accommodation are paying the price for that.

To govern is to choose. The chancellor has made difficult decisions, but she has had to. They will mean that, when the foundations of the economy have been rebuilt, Britain's public services, the national health service and people's mortgage payments can never be put in the danger that Liz Truss and the Tories put them in. The chancellor has been clear that there will be no return to austerity and that budgets will grow.

Let us assume that this debate has not been a waste of parliamentary time attempting to distract voters from the Government's ever-increasing list of abject failures. Let us assume that there was merit in discussing the priorities of a budget that has not yet been published, but we cannot assume that, can we? This is the real world and this country is crying out for change after years and years of SNP and Tory failure.

16:20

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I say to Mark Griffin that speaking up for Scotland's pensioners is never wasted time.

In 2005, when Labour and the Lib Dems were in power here—and Labour was in power in Westminster—Labour led a debate on closing the opportunity gap. I focused on pensioner poverty, with one in five pensioners then living in poverty. Then, as now, the solution was a decent state pension. That, of course, as my state pension is, is subject to tax, if relevant, but then—as now—the UK state pension, compared to those in other European nations, including Norway, the Netherlands and Iceland, was abysmal. Then, as now, UK pensioners were forced to claim pension credit. Then, as now, the figure for those not claiming was more than 30 per cent. Some 20 years on, the figure for non-claimants is just under 40 per cent, so it has increased.

Therefore, Labour knew those figures then, as it knows them now, and those were, no doubt, factored into the savings that it would make, knowing that millions of pensioners will fall foul of pension credit rules. That was bad enough, but now it denies them their very basic right to their winter fuel payment. The online application form is bad enough, but I have the paper form here—all 24 pages of it, with 24 pages of notes. Here are some samples of the questions. On page 23, one of the questions is:

“Have you claimed Tax Credits in the last 12 months?”

If the answer is no, you go to question 102. Further down the same page, question 111 asks:

“Do you or your partner pay ground rent for the place where you live?”

If you answer yes, it says, “Please send us proof”. There are loads of questions such as that—they are bewildering. It is no wonder that people do not fill in the form. It is set up for people to fail to claim. No wonder applications are desperately low. On top of that, if you survive the application form and get to the end of the 24 pages, you might just be above the cut-off point.

By the way, when I received my winter fuel payment, like many other comfortably-off pensioners, rather than return it to the Treasury, I donated it to charities, many of which are necessary because of successive decades of austerity.

According to Independent Age, in my constituency 1,445 pensioners do not claim pension credit and 92 homes in Midlothian and 133 homes in the Borders will go cold, just because they do not claim pension credit. Of course, those figures are only for those who are entitled to pension credit.

To add insult to injury, in energy-rich Scotland, we have higher energy costs and colder, longer and darker winters, and we are losing this vital support as a result of a cruel policy that was dreamed up in the balmy home counties. Oddly

enough, if you live abroad you will still get the winter fuel payment if you claim pension credit. Maybe we should all move to sunny Spain.

Seriously, in Scotland, there will be excess illnesses and even deaths. Shame on Labour—Labour, which I thought was for the people. It is not for the people. It looks after itself, but it will not look after Scotland's pensioners. Shame on the 37 Scottish Labour MPs, who know the score but failed to speak up for Scotland's pensioners. There is no need to wonder why there was not a single cheep about this in its manifesto, when it was obviously planned. If it had been in the manifesto, I do not think that there would be 37 Scottish Labour MPs.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** I call John Mason, who will be the final speaker in the open debate, after which we will move to closing speeches. You have up to six minutes, Mr Mason.

16:23

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):** It is good to have a bit more freedom, now that I am technically an independent MSP. I think that I am also the only member of the Finance and Public Administration Committee to speak, but I do not pretend to speak for it.

As we consider the upcoming UK budget, there are some issues that deal with the here and now that will impact on the Scottish budgets for 2024-25 and 2025-26, but it would also be good to hear from the Chancellor of the Exchequer about longer-term major changes that would benefit Scotland and the UK.

To start on a positive note, I would certainly welcome suggestions from Rachel Reeves herself that, as the first female chancellor, she would seek to improve life for women and close the gender pay gap. Following the review by Dame Alison Rose, Rachel Reeves has said that she would provide

“a funding pool ... for female-founded businesses”,

which sounds good.

As the Scottish Government motion says, we need more investment, in particular in

“public infrastructure and ... in projects that support the transition to net zero”.

The immediate question, then, is where that money should come from. UK borrowing is already very high at some £2.7 trillion, which is around £49,000 per head of population. However, an argument can be made for more borrowing specifically for capital expenditure. If we spent money on house building, those houses would last for 50 years or more. It is reasonable to borrow for

such a purpose, because that money would be repaid over the lifetime of those houses.

However, I am much less keen on borrowing for day-to-day spending, because all that does is pass the cost of our current expenditure on to our children and grandchildren for them to pay. That is not right or fair. We are a rich country, whether we mean Scotland or the UK, and we should be paying today's costs today, not leaving it to future generations to pick up the bill.

Yes—many people are impacted by the cost of living crisis, but we should remember that many other people are not affected. We see, for example, that some restaurants are frequently packed out. Just last Wednesday, after the independence rally, two of us went out for a meal at 9 pm and had to queue for a table. Some restaurants in my constituency are so busy that people always have to book ahead. We are told that some 200,000 Scots travelled to Germany for the Euros, and people are spending large sums on Taylor Swift and Oasis tickets. Some people are short of money, but some of us have much more money than we need and could be paying more in tax.

Therefore, when it comes to this year's and next year's UK budgets, I would very much support a universal winter fuel payment. After all, we know that many pensioners who are in need are not claiming the pension credit to which they are entitled, as Christine Grahame eloquently set out, so it cannot be right to use pension credit as a test of need.

Similarly, Westminster should get rid of the two-child limit. Apart from anything else, we need more children—not least so that, in the future, we have more people of working age. We should be doing all that we can—as the Scottish Government is doing with the Scottish child payment—to encourage larger families.

Another justifiable UK change would be to reduce VAT on building repairs and maintenance.

If resource, or day-to-day, spending is not to be paid for by borrowing or by cuts to other parts of the budget, how is it to be paid for? It seems logical that that would be done by raising taxes as a whole. We heard some suggestions from the Greens on that. The UK is a relatively low-tax country, in comparison with our neighbours. There are different measures, but according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Eurostat, our tax-to-GDP ratio is 34 per cent, compared with the Netherlands and Germany at 39 per cent, France at 45 per cent and Denmark at 47 per cent.

The Conservatives tell us that we need to be competitive, by which they mean having low taxes, but there is also being competitive in the sense of

having better schools, health services and care for the elderly, and the UK is not currently competitive in those regards.

There are various ways in which the UK could raise more money. Capital gains tax could be raised, including on homes. Is it not unfair that home owners can make big gains on their homes tax free, while tenants have no such possibility, so the gap between the richer and the poor inevitably gets wider?

National insurance contributions stop at age 66, so I am not paying any national insurance, and neither is Christine Grahame. How can that be right? Someone who is earning less than I am, with many family commitments—

**Christine Grahame:** Will the member take an intervention?

**John Mason:** Very quickly.

**Christine Grahame:** I just want to say that the member actually does not benefit from that change, because his tax goes up accordingly.

**John Mason:** Okay—well, we will deal with that another time. [*Laughter.*] The point is still that national insurance contributions should continue with age, and the chancellor could change that.

Thirdly, how about a tax on wealth? If Labour really wants to reduce the gap between the richest and the poorest, surely wealth needs to be taxed to a much greater extent.

As well as those relatively short-term adjustments, we could do with some more fundamental changes to the UK tax system. We could combine income tax and national insurance to create a much simpler and more progressive system. My suggestion would be to start at a combined rate of 10 per cent and then to go up to 20 per cent, 30 per cent and so on. Another suggestion is to make the rates for income tax, capital gains tax and corporation tax much more similar to one another, which would take away the artificial incentives for individuals to incorporate or to use similar tax avoidance measures. Both those changes would make it much simpler for the devolved Parliaments to use tax measures themselves.

To end on a more positive note, I welcome the suggestions from Labour that it would introduce multiyear funding as the norm. That would help Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to budget ourselves. It cannot be right that, during an actual fiscal year, Westminster starts spending more money—be it on a pay increase or whatever—and we have, in effect, to match that by making cuts elsewhere.

We await the UK budget on 30 October. I confess that I am not optimistic: I fear that Scotland will be left to pick up the pieces.

16:30

**Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD):** A fortnight ago, I engaged in a very fun activity with Martin Whitfield MSP and Monica Lennon MSP at the University of St Andrews union. It was the show debate for its freshers week, and it was a great event. The motion that was before the house, for which I was lead proposition, was that “This House has no faith in His Majesty’s Government”. Just 10 weeks in, as we were, I thought that that was a little miserly, but it was an interesting thought experiment, to which I applied myself.

A large part of my argument was around the idea that it is not really possible to have faith in a Government that is elected with a landslide majority, in one of the oldest Parliaments in the world, on just 34 per cent of the vote of the people who bothered to show up and cast their ballot during the election—80 per cent of the adult-age population did not vote for Labour, but such is our arcane voting system.

Since that time, however, the faith that I want to have in Labour has been eroded still further, to a degree. I understand that it needs to move cautiously. I welcome some moves that it has made—in particular, the announcement this afternoon that GB energy will be sited in Aberdeen. I very much hope that that will pump prime the just transition of that vital region of energy security.

However, Liberal Democrats have been surprised and dismayed by some of the other decisions and omissions of which the Labour Party can be found guilty—for example, the retention of the two-child cap, which has been well rehearsed this afternoon, and removal of the winter fuel payment, which I covered in my opening remarks.

I agree in large part with much of the substance of the Government’s motion and the remarks of the finance secretary. The statements and assertions of both are absolutely true, but she fails to acknowledge the analyses of very august institutions such as Scotland’s own Scottish Fiscal Commission—the Government-led body that marks the financial homework of this Government. It has stated that many of the fiscal pressures that we face—in the form of the in-year spending cuts that we were asked to look at very recently and the cuts that we anticipate—are in large part caused by the political decisions of this Administration.

We have yet to see the measure of those cuts, but Murdo Fraser is absolutely right to say that it is

not the hallmark of a progressive Government to lay down a freeze in council tax under the guise—as it may be—of protecting people from the cost of living, when most of us actually agree that the council tax is an iniquitous policy and a regressive tax. By freezing it, we are helping well-off families more than we help those who have nothing.

There is no escaping the malignant inheritance that was handed down by the hapless Conservative Government to the new Labour Administration. I do not think that we can blame it for that. It is astonishing to see the cognitive dissonance of former Prime Minister Liz Truss, who just yesterday—some two years after the failure of her disastrous economic plan—issued an “I told you so” video. I do not know what universe she is living in.

Murdo Fraser made some compelling and amusing remarks in a speech that was for some debate, although I am not sure that it was for this debate. It is a fascinating exercise to hear him offer his insight on tax policy. I am old enough to remember when Murdo Fraser came to this chamber proselytising for the Truss-Kwarteng mini-budget and demanding that the Scottish Government reflect that budget’s tax policy in its own. It is a position that perished alongside the lettuce that defeated Liz Truss in longevity.

Daniel Johnson picked up the theme of how a panic in the city was created by the financial incompetence of the Conservative Party under Liz Truss. He rightly pointed to the subsequent collapse of the gilts markets, which we have not really seen in modern British economic history. It set the markets into panic, massively devalued our currency and set interest rates sky-rocketing—the cost of which is being felt by our constituents in the mortgage bills that they pay.

In a typically measured contribution, Daniel Johnson called for patience for his Government. I understand that. He asked us to wait, but the straws in the wind are still troubling. I come back to the fact that Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs walked through the “no” lobby together in opposition to the two-child cap when it was first introduced. The Liberal Democrats spent five years preventing the Tory Government from introducing the policy, and I am very sorry that the Labour Party does not still hold to the principle that the policy is iniquitous and is causing material harm to people.

Also, what was true about the iniquities of the rape clause then is equally true now.

On the winter fuel allowance, I made reference to the fact that we can all remember the days before the cold weather payment, which was introduced to stop the spectre of pensioners in our modern developed country dying for want of

putting the heating on. I hope that we do not go back to those days.

It was interesting to hear Kevin Stewart reference capital flight several times in his speech. Clearly, he is a late convert to that notion. On several occasions, my party has supported his Government on tax policy, but we have stopped doing so in the past couple of years because of capital flight: behavioural change is a thing.

Liberal Democrats would fill the hole that has been created in our national finances by doing several things. We would reverse the tax decisions on big banks, hammer the social media giants—which cause so much harm to the mental health of our young people—and close loopholes in capital gains tax. All those things represent cogent economic policy that would not harm the most vulnerable people in our society.

16:36

**Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** In reflecting on the debate, I note that quite a few members have spoken about the causes of the financial situation that both Governments face, but something has been missing from the reflections on the causes.

There was substantial opposition to what the Conservative Government did over the past 15 years, whether it was the austerity that began under the coalition Government; the obsession with public sector debt, which should be seen as a source of investment rather than something to be ashamed of; the decision to allow huge amounts of private wealth to be hoarded by super-rich individuals and corporations, which has resulted in a drag on investment; the decision to go for the hardest of hard Brexits; or Liz Truss’s mini-budget. However, the Conservatives crashed on with their own agenda, despite that solid opposition. After hearing some Conservative members’ speeches today, I think that one or two of them might have contributed to the script for Liz Truss’s bizarre self-pity video yesterday—“If only I’d been allowed to crash on with the mini-budget after all.”

We can contrast that with the criticisms that have been made relating to the reasons for the Scottish Government being in a very difficult financial situation. Some of the difficulties have been imposed from outside as a result of UK changes, but some of them, to be sure, are the result of the Scottish Government’s decisions.

The difference is that most of those decisions were supported by a large majority of members of the Scottish Parliament. I did not support some of them. For example, for many years, the council tax freeze has had a damaging impact on public sector finances and has benefited the wealthiest, but most members supported that policy. I

criticised capital budgets being committed to funding wildly expensive, unsustainable and high-carbon infrastructure, but most members supported that. However, I strongly supported the Scottish child payment and fair pay for public sector workers, and most members supported those policies, too. Therefore, most of the decisions that have been made in Scotland that have worsened the Scottish Government's financial position have been made with political support from across the parties. That is worth reflecting on.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Does Patrick Harvie now regret supporting the council tax freeze that was Government policy quite recently?

**Patrick Harvie:** I never did. In fact, the policy was criticised not only by dangerous extremists but by many others, including anti-poverty organisations. It was a bad policy and it was bad politics.

I understand why the Government has lodged the motion, and I do not disagree with anything in it. The Government wants to draw attention to the impact of austerity to date, the on-going austerity fiscal rules and the lack of a serious investment plan from the UK Government. Daniel Johnson mentioned some areas where the UK Government intends to invest, but, even before the election, Labour had dropped the £28 billion investment pledge on net zero, which would just have brought the UK up to a level of investment comparable with that of our neighbouring countries.

The Scottish Government is also criticising the process and the lack of co-operation with the UK Government. Even the winter fuel payment decision came with barely a moment's notice to the Scottish Government. There are also points about the lack of Scottish autonomy and the severe limits on Scotland's ability to make different choices. I understand why those points are being made.

The Government motion states the truth, but it is an incomplete truth. The Green amendment seeks to add to the motion, because some important parts are missing. In particular, there is a lack of recognition that wealth taxes and taxes on high incomes and corporate profits are an absolutely necessary part of the Scottish and the UK path out of the incredible fiscal challenges.

**Brian Whittle:** Will Patrick Harvie give way?

**Patrick Harvie:** I am afraid that I need to make progress.

Also missing from the motion are the choices that we have. The cabinet secretary and the Government want policy change from the UK Government and a change in the powers that are available to the Scottish Government, and I want

both of those changes as well. However, whatever context we face of UK policy or Scotland's powers, the Scottish Government and Parliament still have the responsibility to use the powers that we have to the maximum, and we are not yet doing so.

The Scottish Greens not only have made the case for policies such as the Scottish child payment but have successfully brought to the chamber solutions showing how we can pay for them. It is because of the work of Greens over the years that we have progressive taxation in this country and an extra £1.5 billion in the Scottish budget every year. It is because of the work of the Scottish Greens that we have already made progress on more local powers as options for councils, such as council tax on second and empty homes, the transient visitor levy and the workplace parking levy. As my colleague mentioned, there is more to come on that, with measures such as the carbon land tax and others. We need to go further on that.

Finally, we need to cut unsustainable investment in high-cost, high-carbon infrastructure and instead invest in infrastructure that will cut costs and emissions, such as energy-efficient homes and buildings that use renewables rather than fossil fuels. Today, we will support not only the Green amendment but the Government motion. However, whatever happens with the vote, the challenge will remain.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** You need to finish.

**Patrick Harvie:** Regardless of the policy context or the power context, the Scottish Government will have to go further with the powers that it has.

16:43

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** It has been a fascinating debate, and I have to say, not churlishly, that I expected worse than we heard. There have actually been some very interesting and fascinating contributions. I want to start with the cabinet secretary's confirmation that there is better communication between the two Governments. At the end of the day, politicians who are elected to any venue represent the people who send them there, and it is an obligation to have those discussions. They are sometimes difficult, but it is only through those discussions that solutions will come about.

There is also the welcoming of GB energy and, in particular, the Scottish Government's input to the memorandum of understanding, which is important. I am sure that, as many speakers have done, all members welcome the announcement that GB energy will be based in Aberdeen, which is the right place, and that, in the future, there will be sites in Edinburgh and Glasgow, so that the

challenge of drawing on the expertise in this country can be met.

With my tongue slightly in my cheek, I welcome Murdo Fraser's contribution from his new-found wonderful world of not being in government anywhere, with the freedoms that that allows him. I look forward to the future, when we will have more and more of those contributions.

I agree with Mark Griffin that important things have been discussed during this debate on Scotland's priorities, which sits in an environment in which the Scottish Government will sit down with the UK and Welsh Governments to discuss these matters. It also sits in the environment of a general election that happened only a few months ago. A number of speakers have talked about polling, and it was only 12 weeks ago that 37 Labour MPs were sent to Westminster to fight for Scotland—not just from the sidelines but from inside the Cabinet and around it, and they will do that.

**Kevin Stewart:** It is a short period of time since those Labour MPs were elected, but, from what I have heard, there is a lot of buyer's regret. Does Mr Whitfield not recognise that continued austerity and the cuts to winter fuel payments are having a real impact on folk and that people have already lost trust in the Labour Government?

**Martin Whitfield:** With regard to buyer's regret, I could point to a number of doors that I have knocked at in the past decade, and certainly in the run-up to the election, and to people who have changed their view. On buyer's regret about the Government that they voted for, what they now have in the UK is a Government that is being bitterly honest about the position in which it has found itself.

It is right that members talked about the winter fuel allowance, but it is also right to say that the UK Government has identified £6 billion spent on the asylum system with nowhere for that money to come from, as well as £3 billion spent on rail projects. The Conservative Government delayed the spending review until after the election and then updated the individual departments' budgets at fiscal events, putting even greater pressure on. Indeed, the Treasury reserves have been spent three times—

**Christine Grahame:** Will the member give way?

**Martin Whitfield:** I ask the member to give me one moment, because I have an apology to offer to her before I let her in.

The Treasury reserves were spent three times in just three months, and that was 18 months after the economy was crashed by the underfunded promises that were made previously.

It is also right to say that discretionary spending commitments were made by the previous Government without putting them into any spending envelope. The fact is that, when the Labour UK Government went in, it was not just the politicians but those who advise them who were completely and utterly unaware of that. The risk to the UK economy was phenomenal.

I must apologise to Christine Grahame for missing her contribution, which I will review later. As some recompense, I will give way.

**Christine Grahame:** That is very gentlemanly of you, Mr Whitfield.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Through the chair.

**Christine Grahame:** I beg your pardon, Presiding Officer. The member is a gentleman. Does he think that making the winter fuel payment dependent on claiming pension credit is the right thing to do for Scotland's pensioners? Yes or no?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I am less of a gentleman.

**Martin Whitfield:** I redirect the gentlemanly comment to the Deputy Presiding Officer.

At the time, with the financial crisis that the Government faced, it was a way of identifying a saving. We should remember the £150 warm home discount and the £500 million household support fund, which will deliver consequential to the SNP Government and support low-income pensioners. Hard decisions have to be made—indeed, we have heard both the cabinet secretary and the chancellor talk about the challenges of the budgets that they have to present.

I would like to make comments about a number of other contributions that were particularly valuable, but I am conscious of the time.

I find it disappointing that this very important debate has taken place in the absence of a committee. The committee's journey abroad was fixed many months ago. To echo John Mason, a newer member of that committee, although he was not speaking on behalf of the committee, we have the missed contributions of those voices this afternoon.

I am grateful, Deputy Presiding Officer.

16:49

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I just want to say at the outset that, when listening to Martin Whitfield say that the Government was being bitterly honest, I thought that the public might have welcomed that bitter honesty during the election.

I would say that I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate—

**Daniel Johnson:** Will Brian Whittle give way?

**Brian Whittle:** I am just warming up. I am a wee bit older now and I need a wee bit more of a warm-up.

I would say that I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate, but let us be honest: we have spent two hours on a topic that could basically have been a letter from the cabinet secretary to the chancellor. All this after a mere 30 minutes devoted to winter preparedness in Scotland's NHS—but what else should we expect from a Scottish Government that always prioritises grandstanding over efficacy?

Even a brief glance at the Government motion demonstrates a total lack of self-awareness and economic credibility. It attacks others for underinvestment, resulting in stagnation and decline, yet Scotland's economic growth under the SNP's stewardship has failed to keep pace with that of the rest of the UK. There is an economic performance gap to the tune of £624 million. To give some context, that is about 10 times what the Scottish Government would have needed to avoid real-terms cuts to local authority core funding.

**Shona Robison:** On that point, where is the Conservatives' economic and fiscal credibility? On the one hand, we have heard calls for tax cuts this afternoon and, on the other hand, there have been calls for expenditure in a number of areas of Government expenditure. That is economic illiteracy. Will Brian Whittle not accept that that does not add up?

**Brian Whittle:** Actually, I am very grateful to the cabinet secretary for that intervention, because it highlights why the Scottish Government continues to fail. The cabinet secretary should understand that, when we invest in certain portfolios, we do not have to spend in other portfolios. She well knows, because she has been health secretary, that investing in things such as education is an investment in health and in many other portfolios. However, the way in which the Scottish Government views investment in portfolios is why it continually fails.

I should commend Scottish Labour members for their contributions today, because they have clearly learned their lessons well at the SNP school of blame shifting, where rule 1 is that it does not matter if you are the one in power—it is still somebody else's fault. Labour has slashed the winter fuel payment, a benefit that was introduced by Gordon Brown and left untouched by six Conservative chancellors, even as they fought to clean up the mess of the 2008 financial crash, met the huge costs of furlough in the pandemic and supported households through the cost of living

crisis; it was axed by a Labour chancellor within weeks of taking office. I am not surprised that that decision has shocked the SNP; after all, it has been saying that anyone earning more than £28,000 is a high earner, and here is a Labour chancellor saying that people earning as little as £11,300 are well enough off to manage. This UK Labour Government came in promising change, and change it has delivered.

**Daniel Johnson:** Given that the Office for Budget Responsibility is on the record as saying that the budget black hole was not known about or established, would Brian Whittle acknowledge that the facts were not known, and that that was the responsibility of his Government?

**Brian Whittle:** As Murdo Fraser said, £9 billion of that was down to the increases that Labour has given in public sector pay. Those were unfunded. *[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** Let us hear Mr Whittle.

**Brian Whittle:** All the promises that the Labour Government made prior to coming into office were unfunded.

**Daniel Johnson:** Will Brian Whittle give way on that point?

**Brian Whittle:** I will need to make some progress.

Pensioners are losing benefits to help to cover the gap between the cost of bumper public sector pay deals that Labour has agreed to and what it can actually afford. My colleague Douglas Lumsden eloquently described an oil and gas sector that is reeling from extensions to the energy profits levy, which is presumably to fund Ed Miliband's social media team, since Sue Gray's salary is swallowing up the special adviser budget. Pledges not to increase tax are disappearing faster than the receipts for Keir Starmer's wardrobe. Britpop was riding high in the charts when Labour last came to power. Unfortunately, it looks as though this Government has misheard the lyrics: Blur sang "Parklife", not perk life.

**Members:** Oh!

**Brian Whittle:** Thank you. I particularly liked that one.

I do not want to spend too much time on the Labour Government, which is just in the door and still learning that being the Government is much harder than blaming the Government. The Scottish National Party, on the other hand, has no excuses. It has been in government for 17 years and, in the past decade, we have half the growth of that of the rest of the United Kingdom; we have record NHS waiting lists, an education system in disarray and a justice system that is straining at the seams;

and, for years, transport investment has been promised that has never materialised.

The Scottish Government titled this debate “The UK Budget—Scotland’s Priorities”. I suggest that this time in the chamber would have been better spent on the latter than on the former. I appreciate that Stephen Flynn clearly believes that he could do the First Minister’s job, but does the current First Minister really have to dedicate this time to trying to prove that he could do Stephen Flynn’s?

Scotland has priorities, but they are increasingly not those of the SNP, if they ever were. During a business day at the SNP conference, the glossy programme talked about Scotland being open for business and listed different sectors of the economy, but missed out energy, which generates more than £65 billion in turnover, and financial services. Those are our two most valuable industries, employing between them around 250,000 people. That was just a minor failure in the grand tapestry of the SNP’s abysmal approach to economic growth, but it is symptomatic of a lack of focus.

Kate Forbes makes many of the right noises about a new approach to the economy, but this Government has a long track record of saying all the right things and then launching 16 separate consultations on a feasibility plan for how to do the right things. That is never more obvious than with our infrastructure, a subject highlighted by my colleagues Murdo Fraser and Douglas Lumsden. Across Scotland, our road and rail networks are in desperate need of investment, not only to create economic benefit but because of safety. The Greens do not seem to understand the need to get goods in and out. From the A9 and the A96 in the north-east to the A77 and the A75 in the south-west, we have had years of promises and consultations with little tangible improvement.

I am aware of the time. The Government talks about the UK Government investment to deliver net zero—

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude, Mr Whittle.

**Brian Whittle:** —but it has wasted years by failing to put skills and training in place while crowing about its now-abandoned target for 1 million homes to have heat pumps.

Some of the Scottish Government’s cuts have been dramatic—

**The Presiding Officer:** Please conclude, Mr Whittle.

**Brian Whittle:** —but the self-awareness budget has apparently been eliminated altogether.

**The Presiding Officer:** I call Ivan McKee to wind up the debate.

16:56

**The Minister for Public Finance (Ivan McKee):** I will start in a most unlikely place, by following on from where Mark Griffin left off. To govern is indeed to choose, and the UK’s new Labour Government is learning that the hard way after perhaps the shortest honeymoon on record.

I will say more about that later, but first I will talk about the choices that this SNP Scottish Government has made in office, where, as the Deputy First Minister highlighted, we are constrained every year by the need to balance our budget and by the limited borrowing powers that we all understand and recognise.

We recognise the value of public sector workers. Those in Scotland are paid significantly more and there are significantly more of them. We have 25 per cent more police officers per head of population, 30 per cent more nurses and midwives, 30 per cent more GPs and 32 per cent more teachers. Police officers are paid £1,500 more, nurses £1,800 more and teachers £2,000 more because we recognise the value of public sector workers. Those are our priorities in government.

**Brian Whittle:** If there is so much more investment in health and education here, why are we still the unhealthiest nation in Europe? *[Interruption.]* I hear the First Minister, but we are the unhealthiest nation in Europe and our education standards—*[Interruption.]*

**The Presiding Officer:** Let us hear Mr Whittle.

**Brian Whittle:** —are sliding downwards.

**Ivan McKee:** If Mr Whittle looked at the statistics, he would recognise that Scotland has the best-performing accident and emergency service in the whole of the UK. A key priority of this Government, as articulated by the First Minister, is tackling child poverty. We are spending £1 billion more on social security than the sum that comes from the UK Government in Barnett consequential, and we are using £137 million of that to mitigate UK Government welfare policies that, tragically and sadly, have been continued by the new UK Labour Government.

The Scottish child payment, which 320,000 of our under-16s are in receipt of, is helping 100,000 children in Scotland to stay out of poverty. Choices made by this Government raise £1 billion extra in tax to support the social contract between the Government and the people. We have free university tuition in Scotland, free prescriptions and free bus travel for under-22s. As a consequence of that, more taxpayers are moving from the south to the north, and we are seeing a growth in the number of top-rate taxpayers in Scotland.

We agree with Labour on the need to grow the economy. Since this Government came to power in 2007, GDP per head has gone up by 10.7 per cent in Scotland, in comparison with the less than 6 per cent that Daniel Johnson rightly identified as the figure for UK growth per head. Productivity has also doubled under this SNP Government, compared with the growth rate across the rest of the UK. The most recent statistics show wage growth being higher in Scotland, and the Federation of Small Businesses' small business index shows that confidence among small businesses is higher in Scotland than in the rest of the UK. We have a lower unemployment claimant count than the rest of the UK, and we have the best-performing foreign direct investment anywhere in the UK outside of London.

I turn to the new Labour Government and its tragic failure so far. Daniel Johnson asked why we are having this debate now. This is exactly the time to have this debate in order to influence the new UK Government and the new chancellor, and to make clear Scotland's priorities for what she should include in her first budget. Why does Scottish Labour not want to talk about that? Indeed, why have only three of its members turned up to not talk about Scotland's asks of the UK Government?

I will tell members about somebody who does want to talk about the UK Government and get their asks on the record. Cammy Day, the Labour leader of the City of Edinburgh Council, in the same city that Daniel Johnson represents, has written to the UK Government to ask it to end the two-child cap and the cuts to the pensioner winter fuel allowance. While he was at it, on the subject of economic growth, he has asked it to reverse the planned cancellation of the £800 million investment in the exascale supercomputer at the University of Edinburgh. Cammy Day gets it, but Daniel Johnson does not.

What else is going on? Energy prices are going up and not—as was promised in Labour's election campaign—down. In an energy-rich Scotland, fuel poverty is being continued by Labour.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Will the minister take an intervention?

**Ivan McKee:** I ask the member to give me a minute.

This morning, I listened to Anas Austerity Sarwar on "Good Morning Scotland", spinning and struggling to give timescales for when GB energy will deliver the promised £300 reduction in energy prices for the people of Scotland. Maybe it will be in this session of Parliament and maybe not; maybe it will be in the next session. Who knows? Meanwhile, Ian Missing War Chest Murray is

desperately seeking his £150 million war chest. Where is it?

**The Presiding Officer:** Minister, I remind you that we do not use nicknames in the chamber.

**Ivan McKee:** Oh—sorry.

I will take Mr Lumsden's intervention.

**Douglas Lumsden:** Does the minister agree that we would be in a better position if the SNP Government scrapped its presumption against oil and gas?

**Ivan McKee:** This Government supports our energy sector, which is one of the most important sectors in Scotland, and it supports driving forward investment to ensure that the transition to net zero is a just transition.

Let us talk about winter fuel payments. I note again that there are not many Labour members in the chamber, but they tell us privately in the corridors that they are deeply embarrassed and upset by what has happened on winter fuel payments. Christine Grahame articulated the impact of that very well. Labour is putting party before pensioners.

John Mason made the astute comment that some people pay lots of money for Taylor Swift tickets but, then again, some do not. The new Prime Minister certainly does not have his troubles to seek. I suggest that we want to see fewer designer suits from Keir Starmer, although I think that what we are seeing is more empty suits. There is no honeymoon—no wonder.

I turn to our asks of the new UK Labour Government. As the cabinet secretary outlined, it should fully fund public sector pay increases so that Scotland gets the money that is due to it as a consequence. Better still, why does the UK Government not commit to raising public sector pay in England to the same level as Scotland's? That would be interesting. How about reversing the £1.3 billion of cuts to capital and nearly £300 million of cuts to financial transactions? If the UK Government is serious about investing to grow the economy, that would be a good place to start in order to grow the economy and deliver net zero.

The UK Government should allow the Scottish Government to have greater borrowing powers so that we can take the steps that are needed to invest in the economy. It should reinstate the winter fuel payments and remove the two-child cap. Frankly, I am not ambitious enough to ask it to copy the groundbreaking Scottish child payment, but maybe it wants to get that on its radar as well and deliver the same thing down south that we have delivered for the people of Scotland in tackling child poverty.

The UK Government should change course on austerity. Our motion rightly mentions the letter from leading economists that identifies the problem with the austerity measures that the UK Government is taking. It is focusing on austerity and not on investment to grow the economy. That direction needs to change.

While we are at it, the UK Government might want to consider reversing Brexit. The £40 billion that is lost every year to public sector revenue is more than double the black hole that it talks about endlessly. I will say that again: the £40 billion that is lost as a consequence of the misguided, disastrous decision to leave the European Union, which is supported by the Labour Government, is double the black hole that it is trying to fill. Pensioners in Scotland are paying the price for that misguided approach.

I will comment briefly on the amendments from the Greens and the Lib Dems. They are much more considered than the Conservative and Labour offerings, and there are many elements in them that I and the Government would strongly support, not least on the continuing work to explore levy powers for local government, support for social care investment, and taxing social media companies properly, which is mentioned in the Green amendment. However, we are, unfortunately, unable to support those amendments because of other elements in them. The Lib Dems' amendment seeks to delete much of the substance of our motion. I do not understand why they want to do that.

I will move to a close. This Government has been determined to work constructively with the UK Government. The First Minister and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government have met the chancellor and made it clear that our Government wants to work together with the UK Government for the benefit of Scotland. The finance secretary will meet the Chief Secretary to the Treasury next month to put forward Scotland's priorities for the budget. The Prime Minister has said that he wants to reset relations with the devolved Governments, and we are taking him at his word, but the budget will be a test of that reset.

In her opening speech, the finance secretary said that the chancellor faces a choice in the budget, and I remind members of that choice. The chancellor can choose to follow the tired playbook of previous UK Governments—cuts to spending, low investment and no long-term ambition—or she can choose to chart a new course that promotes investment, looks to the long term and works with, not against, devolved Governments, in a budget that protects and values public services, invests in the infrastructure that we need to grow our economy and make the transition to net zero—

**The Presiding Officer:** You must conclude, minister.

**Ivan McKee:** —abolishes the previous Government's damaging social security policies and takes real action to tackle child poverty.

I urge members to support the Government's motion.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes the debate on the UK budget, Scotland's priorities.

## Business Motion

17:06

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-14639, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a change to the business programme. Any member who wishes to speak to the motion should press their request-to-speak button.

*Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees to the following revisions to the programme of business for Thursday 26 September 2024—

delete

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

and insert

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:  
Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

*followed by* Ministerial Statement: The Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion—[*Jamie Hepburn.*]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Decision Time

17:06

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-14614.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14614, in the name of Shona Robison, on the United Kingdom budget, Scotland's priorities, 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 digital voting.

17:06

*Meeting suspended.*

17:08

*On resuming—*

**The Presiding Officer:** We move to the vote on amendment S6M-14614.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser.

### For

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### Against

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

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)  
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)  
 Don-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)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 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)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)

Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-14614.2, in the name of Murdo Fraser, is: For 28, Against 80, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Daniel Johnson is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-14614.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14614, in the name of Shona Robison, on the UK budget, Scotland's priorities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

**For**

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

**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)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 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)  
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 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)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)  
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)  
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)

Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)  
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)  
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and  
 Lauderdale) (SNP)  
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)  
 (Con)  
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)  
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)  
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by  
 Jamie Hepburn]  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 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)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)  
 (SNP)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)  
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)  
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)  
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)  
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)

(SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)  
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on amendment S6M-14614.3, in the name of Daniel Johnson, is: For 10, Against 98, Abstentions 0.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-14614.4, in the name of Lorna Slater, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14614, in the name of Shona Robison, on the UK budget, Scotland's priorities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My app would not connect. I would have voted no.

**The Presiding Officer:** We will ensure that that is recorded.

#### For

Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)

#### Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)  
 (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### 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, 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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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-14614.4, in the name of Lorna Slater, is: For 6, Against 43, Abstentions 59.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The next question is, that amendment S6M-14614.4, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, which seeks to amend motion S6M-14614, in the name of Shona Robison, on the UK budget, Scotland's priorities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

#### For

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

#### Against

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)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)

Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

### 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, 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)  
 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)  
 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)  
 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-14614.4, in the name of Alex Cole-Hamilton, is: For 4, Against 45, Abstentions 59.

*Amendment disagreed to.*

**The Presiding Officer:** The final question is, that motion S6M-14614, in the name of Shona Robison, on the UK budget, Scotland's priorities, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

**Members:** No.

**The Presiding Officer:** There will be a division.

### For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)  
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)  
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)  
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)  
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)  
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)  
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)  
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)  
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)  
 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)  
 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)  
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)  
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)  
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)  
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)  
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)  
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)  
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)  
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)  
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)  
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)  
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)  
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)  
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (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)  
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)  
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)  
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)  
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)  
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)  
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)  
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)  
 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

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)  
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)  
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)  
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)  
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)  
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)  
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)  
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)  
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)  
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)  
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)  
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)  
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)  
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)  
 (Con)  
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)  
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)  
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)  
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)  
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)  
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)  
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)  
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)  
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)  
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)  
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)  
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)  
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)  
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

**The Presiding Officer:** The result of the division on motion S6M-14614, in the name of Shona Robison, on the UK budget, Scotland's priorities, is: For 65, Against 42, Abstentions 0.

*Motion agreed to,*

That the Parliament recognises the importance of the UK Budget on 30 October 2024 to Scotland's budget; supports the call from prominent economists, including Professor Mariana Mazzucato, Professor Anton Muscatelli, Lord Gus O'Donnell and Professor Simon Wren-Lewis, for the UK Government to use the forthcoming UK Budget to halt "the under-investment that has resulted in a vicious circle of stagnation and decline, whereby low investment leads to both a weaker economy and greater social and environmental problems"; calls on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to replace the current austerity fiscal rules that the UK Government is operating under, in order to allow for greater investment to renew and enhance public infrastructure and deliver projects that support the transition to net zero; believes that the UK Government should reverse its cut to the Winter Fuel Payment, as this cut will impact many of the most vulnerable older people in society, and urges the UK Government to use its first Budget to remove the two-child limit on benefits and deliver greater investment to tackle child poverty, and deliver a sizeable increase in investment in the NHS and schools, which would deliver consequentials for application in these vital public services in Scotland.

**The Presiding Officer:** That concludes decision time.

## Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-12935, in the name of Martin Whitfield, on Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament congratulates Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity on what it considers to be a successful first six months of its No Time To Wait campaign, which launched a pilot wellbeing and resilience service, The Haven, in September 2023 in Tranent, East Lothian, as an intervention to avert the potential mental health crisis facing children and young people in Scotland; notes that, since it opened, there have been 1,264 visits to The Haven, of which 274 were unique visitors who were directly supported by the service; understands that the service is fully funded by the charity, and aims to complement child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and to help prevent problems escalating to the point where professional intervention is needed; notes reports that Scotland's mental health crisis affects children across Scotland, impacting their childhoods, their futures and their families' lives, and further notes the belief that, without access to effective early intervention, there is a risk that the mental health problems of Scotland's children today become the mental health problems of the adults of tomorrow.

17:20

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank members on all sides of the chamber today, and across the Parliament, who have made possible this members' business debate on my motion with regard to Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity.

Scotland's children and young people are facing an unprecedented mental health, wellbeing and resilience crisis. That is self-evidently a challenge for children and young people and for their families, but it is also a problem for us all and for Scotland, because they are the future of Scotland—they are our future society and economy.

Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity has been keen to work closely with politicians and policy makers to tackle that growing problem. Last year, the charity commissioned research, which found that, sadly,

“nearly six in 10 families in Scotland have a child who”,

they believe,

“has experienced a mental health concern at some point in their life.”

Children and young people can face mental health challenges such as anxiety, low mood and issues relating to school. Early intervention is vital in addressing those concerns, as that can help both

the child and their family not just to overcome such issues, but to thrive.

However, we are aware of the significant pressures on child and adolescent mental health services, which must focus on the most severe cases first. That often means that children with less critical issues are left without support, often for extended periods, and such a delay leads only to a worsening of their mental health, causing problems that could have been prevented with timely intervention.

Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity declared that there was “no time to wait” and, as a charity, it secured funding to launch its own pilot wellbeing and resilience service, which has now been fully operational for almost 12 months. That service has been transformational for the young people and their family members who have been able to access mental health support without having to be put on lengthy waiting lists or to meet tight criteria. The pilot wellbeing and resilience service resulting from the no time to wait campaign is designed to complement CAMHS in helping to prevent problems from escalating to the point at which psychiatric intervention is needed.

The haven wellbeing and resilience service, which is the site of the no time to wait service pilot, opened last September at the Fraser centre in Tranent in East Lothian. Data that has been collected over the first year of its operation is showing tangible results, which give the charity hope that Scotland's paediatric mental health crisis is reversible. In the short time in which the service has been up and running, it has played its own part—albeit in a small way relative to the situation across Scotland—in alleviating the pressure on CAMHS by helping children and young people with their wellbeing.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** I am grateful to my friend Martin Whitfield for giving way, in part so that I can express my thanks to Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity. As the parent of a child who spent some time at the sick kids hospital, as it was, I know about the work that the charity does. When a child goes into hospital, the whole family is put under immense pressure. It comes as no surprise to me, therefore, to learn that the charity is supporting young people in that holistic way, because that is what it has always done. The point that the member raises about the need to look at wider wellbeing in such difficult circumstances goes to the heart of what the ECHC, as an organisation, is, and what it does. Does the member agree with that point?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you the time back, Mr Whitfield.

**Martin Whitfield:** I am grateful for that intervention. From its inception, Edinburgh

Children's Hospital Charity has always taken a holistic approach, from, in the first instance, providing pyjamas to children who come in with nothing, to offering cups of tea and rooms that allow parents just to have a break from it all, get a shower and take a few minutes to grasp what is going on.

That takes us to the heart of why Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity is so important, because it is partly what we would want for every child who comes into contact with any health service. It is right to note that the initiative that we are discussing is almost unique, in that the charity has stepped out of the hospital environment to work with children in the Fraser centre, where those children feel comfortable and safe. The centre is an environment that they know and understand, and the charity, in running the no time to wait pilot, fully understands that children require that confidence and need to be able to build connections, and that they do that best where they feel safe. The majority of attendees have mental health concerns around feelings of anxiety and loneliness and issues at school, or even around attendance at school. Those feelings can be reversed, and children can be helped, if the issues are handled early enough.

Around one third of those who have attended the haven have struggled with school attendance, and one third have reported self-harm. However, the early data shows that the children and young people who attend the haven are themselves reporting improvements. For example, more than 80 per cent report that their self-harm has reduced. Those are small successes, but to a child who has found it difficult to have their voice listened to, or a child who is concerned that they are putting pressure on their family because of how they feel and who is choosing to deal with that pressure in a self-harming way, it is an enormous thing to have that break and to start to see improvement.

Others report improved communication skills, simply feeling better and more positive, becoming more involved in community projects and having improved self-confidence. That is absolutely the route that we would want for every young person. When I visited the haven, I had the pleasure of meeting a young person who was brilliantly articulate and asked incredibly difficult and challenging questions. She shared with me the fact that she was looking forward to taking her singing ability to a festival in East Lothian during the Edinburgh festivals, where I know that she performed brilliantly.

The Scottish Government has some of the broadest powers available to any devolved Government, and I welcome that, in relation to the programme for government, the First Minister has

talked about finding local solutions to national problems, saying that one solution does not necessarily need to fit all scenarios. I can say, with honesty and passion, that, having had the opportunity to see the haven and the people who are working there, I know that the skill, passion, ability and empathy of the haven team is a solution. I ask the Scottish Government whether it will take that solution forward, because there is no time to waste.

17:28

**Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP):** First, I pay tribute to Martin Whitfield, whom it is—as he would say—a pleasure to follow. I commend him for bringing the debate to the chamber to allow us to raise awareness of and pay tribute to Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity, and for his on-going work as a parliamentarian on issues around children's rights and wellbeing.

As Mr Whitfield has set out, the ECHC offers additional support to seriously ill babies, children and young people, along with their families, when they face a hospital experience. The charity offers a range of services that are designed to improve the hospital experience for children and young people by providing wellbeing support; facilitating arts activities; helping to make improvements to hospital spaces; and distributing grants to national health service teams to fund initiatives designed to enhance children's care. It is clearly an important charity for the whole of Edinburgh and the Lothians and, as an Edinburgh MSP, I put on record my thanks for all the work that the charity does, and I pay tribute to it as an organisation.

Although the motion focuses on the haven initiative, I am reminded of an organisation in my constituency called the Junction, which I have talked about in the Parliament a number of times. Third sector organisations, initiatives and projects that facilitate mental health support, either by providing early intervention before there is a need for CAMHS or by relieving some of the workload of and demand on CAMHS, make an important difference. In raising awareness of organisations such as the haven in East Lothian or the Junction in Leith—and I am sure that other members across the chamber can point to local organisations in their communities—we should note that such local charities, with their local networks, local connections and local understanding and their being accessible to communities, really do make a difference, alongside some of the bigger charities. This is an excellent debate, because it focuses on those local charities, particularly the haven as part of ECHC.

The wider point in the motion about the need to support our young people because they are tomorrow's population—the servants, the workers, the carers or the parents; you name it—cannot be overstated. It often crosses my mind, both in my constituency work and more widely, just how much younger generations are having to cope with, even compared with how things were at the turn of the century. Of course, history has seen harder times, but, internally or domestically speaking, young people have faced an austerity crisis attached to a financial crisis and then, one would argue, a Brexit crisis, followed by a pandemic. If we also add in external concerns about war and peace and climate breakdown, we see that young people are having to deal with a lot in their day-to-day considerations, not least with what is happening in their communities.

**Martin Whitfield:** Does the member agree that young people—rather than children—feel an expectation on them to help those around them, including their families, that previous generations of young people perhaps did not? Does he agree that that is adding to the stress that already exists in families and which young people are absorbing?

**Ben Macpherson:** I agree that that is part of it. The challenge for us, as parliamentarians, with the powers that we have in this institution, is how we relieve some of that demand, pressure and anxiety, and the expectation that comes with it. Devolution, now in its 25th year, has helped, and I am sure that the minister will touch on the additional support in schools and the social security support that are available, as well as the increased funding for mental health services and a reduction in the stigma experienced in seeking help with mental ill health.

We have made plenty of progress, but is there still much to do? Absolutely. For our young people, we should all focus on doing it.

17:33

**Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank Martin Whitfield for securing this important members' business debate. As Ben Macpherson has said, it is a pleasure to follow on from him.

Like Mr Whitfield, I have had the pleasure of meeting the team from Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity on two occasions, the first being here in the garden lobby of the Parliament, and then this week at the haven. When I visited the team at the haven in their home at the Fraser centre, Fiona O'Sullivan illustrated to me at first hand how committed the staff were to delivering innovative early intervention and family-focused services for young people who, as Mr Whitfield has said, are struggling with their mental health—often anxiety, but also depression and self-harm.

Since Covid, there has been a much greater focus on the mental health of children and young people and on the pressures faced by the CAMHS system. Much of that coverage has been negative in nature—about, for example, how the system is stretched, long waits and rejected referrals. Those problems should, can and, hopefully, will be addressed by ministers over time. However, solving them will, I suspect, never address the needs of every young person, which is why we need services such as the haven.

The haven does not work in isolation. Where it needs to, as it frequently does, it integrates seamlessly with the CAMHS system. It uses the same language and techniques, creating a continuum of care that ensures that children and young people receive the support that they need.

However, we must remember that the haven is a pilot, which I was acutely aware of when visiting this week. Although early-stage evaluation underlines its positive impact, its future is not a given, even in the microclimate that it occupies, in one town in one part of Scotland. At the moment, Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity is entirely funding the facility; in the long term, however, it will need Scottish Government funding to make it sustainable and scalable across the country.

As Mr Whitfield's motion makes clear, 1,264 visits have been made to the haven since it opened, with 274 made by unique visitors whom the service supported directly. If we think in a cumulative way of those 274 individuals in a single town, we can just imagine the impact of such a service if it had reach across the whole of Scotland.

As the motion also makes clear, without places such as the haven, there is a risk that the mental health problems of Scotland's children today will become the mental health problems of the adults of tomorrow. There is also a risk that, in the absence of alternative pathways and without early intervention, the problems of too many children and young people will reach such levels of acuteness that they will require in-patient CAMHS services, which are in very short supply in Lothian. Having visited the haven and spoken to the team, I know how committed they are to the principle of early intervention and non-time-sensitive care.

The service is open to young people themselves, which is important, but it is open to their families, too. Having talked to constituents as well as friends and family who have experienced their children going through such services, I know that they often feel locked out of the process of treatment, counselling and recovery.

With CAMHS, young people go into a service that generally has a deadline for each stage of the process; however, the facility at the haven does

not and instead allows each child to go at their own pace. Another point that came out of the recent discussion that I had with the service was that families do not need to keep telling their story time and time again, which is traumatic for them. I got the impression that it is literally seeking to get it right for every child.

I know that Mr Whitfield has visited the haven, and I encourage the minister and others to do so. I know that it is very keen to invite politicians and other stakeholders, because it is only through that collaboration that it will be able to get the pilot on a long-term and sure footing. I also encourage senior representatives of East Lothian Council—the chief executive, the head of education and other senior officers—to visit and engage with the service, because only through council collaboration will it be able to drive change on the ground.

I will close not with my own words, but with those of the haven, which sum up what it offers and what I hope that it could offer right throughout Scotland, if we managed to put it on a sustainable financial footing. It says:

“We offer support in a fully accessible, relaxed and informal setting. We do this through a range of activities we know young people will enjoy. Or, if all you need is a cup of tea and a listening ear, we’re here to help you cope. Our team is there on the good days, the bad days, and everything else in between.”

That is the kind of service that we need at the heart of our communities, and I hope that the Government, local authorities and the third sector can work together to deliver projects out of the haven right across Scotland.

17:38

**Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab):** Like others, I thank my colleague Martin Whitfield for bringing the debate to the chamber. I am not surprised to see it under his name; I think that we can all agree that this issue and the rights of children and young people are always a priority for my friend on these Labour benches.

Martin Whitfield has spoken to me before about the excellent work of the no time to wait campaign, which, as we have heard, launched a pilot wellbeing and resilience service called the haven in September 2023 in Tranent. It is super to hear that others have been along to that; I think that the minister has also been.

From the discussions that I have had with Martin Whitfield about his visit, I know that he met the most amazing young people, such as we all have in all our communities. It is not just the young people but their families, too, who have benefited from the scheme. From Martin Whitfield’s experience, we know that the staff have also

benefited from the service. As many people out there in our communities do, the staff are going way above and beyond the call to help our young people and ensure that we do not have young people unnecessarily going into mental health crisis.

As we know, the service is designed to work with and complement CAMHS. That is an important point—the more our local services join up with our public services, the better our outcomes will be. Providing a service that means that a young person might not have to go into a more psychiatric or clinical environment is a super intervention. My colleague Ben Macpherson mentioned other services out there that are doing that. We are so lucky to have those services, and we need to ensure that we work together to get it right.

Across the chamber, we all talk about taking a preventative approach, which, from the speeches that we have heard today and at other times in the chamber and in our committees, I think that we all believe in. That is why it is important that such members’ business debates take place.

For me, the important point is that we want young people and their families to know that they do not need to go into crisis and that there are services out there in the informal local space where young people and families can talk about their struggles, what they might do and what might help them. We are not just talking about the service; we have heard that the scheme has been successful. From its six-month report, we know that 52 per cent of those who visited felt that their situation had improved. That is an example of the lived experience that we talk about so much across the Scottish Parliament.

I was fortunate enough to visit Edinburgh Children’s Hospital Charity last year, which the haven is linked to. I could tell that it does tremendous work. On its website, the first thing that comes up when someone is going to donate is a message that says, “Will you give more than medicine to children in hospital?” That shows what the charity is seeking to do. The staff at the site that I visited showed me that the great facility there, which is mirrored at the haven site, is about understanding relationships and having a sense of play in normal space and in family time. It was very impressive.

The staff team is dedicated, and we know that young people are advantaged by having the service in the local community. We can all agree that we should get behind local community-based projects. I hope that the minister will refer to that in her closing remarks and that she will give us a sense of how we can all work together. Sometimes, members’ business debates allow us to have conversations about how we can all work

together. I thank all the speakers in the debate, and I hope that our constituents can get the benefit of such services across Scotland.

17:43

**The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd):** I thank members for their contributions and I extend my congratulations to Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of third sector organisations such as Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity in supporting work to improve mental health and wellbeing.

I was delighted to visit the charity's hub at the Royal hospital for children and young people in Edinburgh last year to see the incredible work that it is doing to support children and their families. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care also visited the haven services recently, and I know that he found that visit inspiring.

Our vision is to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up in—a place where everyone's rights are respected and where children and young people can access the right support at the right time from the right people, so that they grow up feeling loved, safe and respected. It is very clear that supporting good mental health and wellbeing is absolutely critical in that vision. That is not to say that it is straightforward. As other members have done, I acknowledge the many challenges that our children and young people face and the added pressure that growing up through the pandemic and in a cost of living crisis presents.

The mental health and wellbeing strategy, which we published jointly last year with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, rightly takes a whole-system approach, in the recognition that improving mental health and wellbeing must be a cross-Government priority. It recognises the need to place greater emphasis on early intervention and prevention, to improve access to and the quality of mental health services and to increase community-based support and services, as well as to support growth and alignment of the mental health workforce.

Those priorities are echoed in our funding. In the past four years, the Scottish Government has provided significant investment in support and services for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. That includes an annual investment of £16 million to support the provision of counselling services in secondary schools that are available to all children in Scotland who are 10 years old and over.

Since 2020, we have also provided local authorities with more than £50 million to develop

and deliver new and enhanced community-based mental health supports and services for children and young people and their families, and a further £15 million is available this year. Those supports and services are focused on prevention and early intervention, promoting positive mental health and wellbeing and tackling emotional distress. Where appropriate, the services offer an alternative to CAMHS by providing support in a community setting.

Supports and services are available in every local authority area. In the first half of 2023 alone, they were accessed by more than 58,000 children and young people and their families. Last year, I had the privilege of visiting one of those services—back on track in Edinburgh. It is clear from speaking to some who are receiving support just how vital that intervention is for children, young people and their families.

Our communities mental health and wellbeing fund for adults supports a range of community-led projects for those who are aged 16 years and older, with grass-roots projects benefiting from £66 million in funding since 2021. In seeking to go further upstream, we have provided funding to a range of children's and young people's organisations to create a suite of online resources, information and advice that supports the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people. That includes work that has been undertaken by Young Scot to build and promote the ayefeel online hub.

We have also funded the Scottish Youth Parliament's Mind Yer Time resource, which was designed by children and young people to support healthy use of social media and screens. We have also worked with Parent Club to provide a range of advice for parents and carers on supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their children and young people; most recently, new resources have been made available for the parents of teenage children.

We are seeing sustained progress in other key areas of support for children and young people's mental health. In the first half of this year, we saw the best national performance against CAMHS waiting times since the 18-week standard was introduced 10 years ago. One in two children and young people who are referred to CAMHS now start treatment within six weeks, and CAMHS staffing has increased by more than 63 per cent in the past decade.

Although we have made progress, we are far from complacent. We are clear that long waits are unacceptable, and we remain committed to supporting all NHS boards to meet the expected standards. Likewise, we are committed to further enhancing support for children and young people at the earliest opportunity. That is why early

intervention and prevention is one of the four key priorities that the new joint strategic board for child and family mental health has agreed. With COSLA and other partners, we will continue to pursue that, along with other priorities of improving support for children and young people in crisis, caring for those who are in vulnerable situations and continuing to enhance perinatal and infant mental health.

**Martin Whitfield:** It is right to register that so much of the support—particularly from the haven—might not prevent young people from needing to see CAMHS. However, they will present to CAMHS in a better position than they would have been in if they had not had such support while they were working their way through the waiting list.

**Maree Todd:** I am keen to see the outcome of the study that is being done. When I met representatives of the charity, I was hugely impressed by the work that it is doing, which is holistic. It helps children to access timely support and it might enable some to wait well while they wait for the NHS intervention that they undoubtedly need. I am keen to hear more about that.

One note of caution is that we all agree that local developments are usually the best. They can recognise the assets that are available in communities. The care and support that is available in the member's part of the country, in Edinburgh and the Lothians, is very different from what is available in my area in the rural west Highlands. It is not so easy to pick up the learning from such single projects and spread it everywhere. However, as a Government, we need to be better and cleverer at learning and scaling when things work.

I restate my thanks and congratulations to all the staff from Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity for their unwavering commitment to supporting children, young people and families in the Edinburgh and Lothians area. I am grateful to them and to all in our third sector organisations who work tirelessly for the care, support and wellbeing of our children and young people. Those people play a vital role in supporting us to achieve our strategic vision of a Scotland that is free from stigma and inequality, where everyone claims their right to achieve the best mental health and wellbeing possible.

*Meeting closed at 17:51.*



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The deadline for corrections to this edition is:

**Tuesday 22 October 2024**

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

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