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Wednesday 13 November 2024

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 13 November 2024

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

Portfolio Question Time

Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, and Parliamentary Business

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. Colleagues will be aware of some issues with the corporate wi-fi in the Parliament, and efforts are on-going to stabilise it. We will do what we can to connect members who are joining us remotely, so that they are able to participate.

I advise members in the chamber that, if they plug in their devices, that should allow them to operate as normal. It is simply the wi-fi that is affected, but, as I have said, we are doing what we can to resolve the matter as soon as possible.

The first item of business is portfolio questions, and the first portfolio is constitution, external affairs and culture, and parliamentary business. Members who wish to ask a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak buttons during the relevant question.

Library Usage (Mid Scotland and Fife)

1. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to encourage library usage in the Mid Scotland and Fife region. (S6O-03941)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Public libraries are devolved to local authorities, which have a statutory duty to secure the provision of adequate library facilities in their area.

We encourage library usage through our support for the Scottish Library and Information Council. That includes £450,000 for the public library improvement fund. The funding supports creative, sustainable and innovative public library projects throughout Scotland and is on top of our general revenue funding to local authorities.

Examples of that work in the Mid Scotland and Fife region include the evidencing the social impact of libraries in Stirling project and the sustainable communities project in Perth and Kinross.

Roz McCall: Library closures, such as those proposed in Perth and Kinross, are a direct

consequence of budget decisions that are made at Holyrood but which primarily impact rural communities. Those communities have already lost their banks, post offices, police stations, public toilets and other vital local services, and the loss of libraries would be yet another significant blow to the communities that they serve.

Given the uplift in the Scottish Government's budget, will the cabinet secretary commit to making more resources available to local authorities so that they can retain those rural community assets?

Angus Robertson: As Roz McCall knows, I used to represent a rural constituency, so I very much understand the point that she makes about local services. The community hub role that libraries serve in many rural areas is changing and developing and is hugely important. I watch with great concern wherever there are local authority decisions in relation to library closures.

The member obviously feels strongly about that, too, so I have no doubt that she will have taken part in the consultation that was conducted by Perth and Kinross Council. If she is happy to share the details with me, I will look closely at them.

As for the budget process, I am delighted that the member is looking for a rise in provision for culture and the arts in Scotland, and I look forward to her voting for the Scottish National Party budget in due course.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): It is clear that libraries are about much more than borrowing books. When I met the community in Scone on Saturday, I heard moving testimony from local people who have been impacted by the closures. The closure of Scone library would result in the loss of services in their community for young people with additional support needs, vulnerable families and older people with dementia.

What further support can the Government give to councils that are struggling with financial decisions? Could part of the mix be a tourism levy to support culture and library facilities across Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I respectfully and generously accept the point that has been made across the chamber about the importance of libraries—there is cross-party agreement on that. The point that Mark Ruskell makes about the provision of services through local libraries to communities is one that I discussed with the Scottish Library and Information Council only last week, so I am up to speed on the case that it is making for the protection of the provision of local libraries.

It is the case that the provision of funding will determine the future of those local libraries. The Scottish Government is very committed to the preservation of those services, but at the end of the day, the decision is for local councils to take. I will add my voice to the call from colleagues across the parties for the maintenance of library services. Through the Scottish Library and Information Council, the public library improvement fund and the provision of funding for local government, we will do as much as we can to make sure that that is the case.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I am aware that, in Edinburgh and Perth, there are dog-friendly library days to help increase footfall without the need for extra money. Does the cabinet secretary consider that such diversification could be done elsewhere?

Angus Robertson: I should declare an interest as the owner of three dogs. Were it to be the case that I could take my dogs to the library, I am sure that it would make any visit all the more welcome.

Libraries and library managers across Scotland are looking at new ways of making libraries open and welcoming and of providing online support in addition to their fantastic range of books. Being imaginative about how one can provide the services that are required by communities, families and individuals in 2024 will be the best way of assuring the provision of library services across the country.

Arts and Culture (Young People's Access)

2. Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure that young people across Scotland have access to facilities that can support their involvement in arts and culture. (S6O-03942)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The Scottish Government's long-standing investment in the youth music initiative helps young people throughout Scotland to access music-making opportunities. In 2021-22, that funding reached more than 360,000 children and young people across all of Scotland's local authority areas.

We provide Creative Scotland with £500,000 annually to administer the youth arts open fund. In 2023-24, the fund supported 73 community-focused projects across 27 local authority areas, delivering to more than 6,000 children and young people.

Since 2012, the Scottish Government has provided funding to Sistema Scotland to deliver its Big Noise projects, which offer children and young people access to music making.

Brian Whittle: I am sure that the cabinet secretary will agree that involvement in activities such as the arts and culture can have a positive influence on young minds that will go a long way with them through their life. However, the truth is that, whether it be in schools or in our communities, access to those outlets is in sharp decline, and the cuts will be picked up in the budgets for other portfolios, such as health and education. What will the cabinet secretary do to reverse that decline?

Angus Robertson: I do not recognise the decline that has been outlined, but I would share a concern if there were to be any reduction in the provision of music tuition and access to musical instruments. If Brian Whittle is aware of examples of that, I am keen to hear from him.

I benefited from an education that included music provision at Broughton high school, and it stood me and all my peers in good stead. It is important that children of all backgrounds have the opportunity to learn music. I make that offer to Brian Whittle, and I will look at what he sends to me with great interest.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): It was disappointing to see Labour make a cut to the United Kingdom Department for Culture, Media and Sport's revenue budget. Given that towns such as Paisley are looking at using cultural activities as a regeneration tool, is the cabinet secretary disappointed about that, too? Will he set out the Scottish Government's contrasting approach to supporting people's involvement in arts and culture?

Angus Robertson: George Adam is correct: the UK Government has cut revenue funding to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which is responsible for culture and the arts in England. By contrast, Scottish ministers have this financial year increased culture sector funding as a first step to achieving the First Minister's commitment to investing at least £100 million more annually in culture and the arts by 2028-29. That means that programmes such as the YMI, Sistema Scotland and the youth arts open fund, which I have just spoken about, are able to operate and ensure that Scotland's young people have access to the arts and culture. Details of the 2025-26 budget will be published later this year.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 was not lodged.

Humanitarian Crises (Resilience)

4. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): To ask the Scottish Government what conversations it has had with its international development partners regarding building resilience to increasing humanitarian crises. (S6O-03944)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Our humanitarian emergency fund is activated on the advice of a panel of eight non-governmental organisations. Through that mechanism, and in collaboration with their partners in country, expert guidance is provided on how best to respond to communities in urgent need. That includes building resilience to future humanitarian crises.

We will continue to seek the sector's views on how we can improve the fund's responsiveness and resilience through the upcoming HEF review, which is due to begin in early 2025.

Maggie Chapman: At a time when climate impact is both rapid and slow, and increasing global inequality and horrific violence are combining to produce unprecedented humanitarian crises, the compassionate solidarity of Scotland's civil society is more vital than ever.

The Dundee International Women's Centre does phenomenal work supporting people who have made their way to Scotland from places bearing the heaviest burdens of these crises, including Yemen and Palestine. Will the cabinet secretary outline how the Scottish Government is supporting organisations such as the DIWC that carry out life-saving work in difficult circumstances, beyond the conversations that he is having with external partners?

Angus Robertson: The eight leading humanitarian organisations based in Scotland that form part of the humanitarian fund panel are the British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Islamic Relief, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, Tearfund and Save the Children. It is, however, excellent to hear about the work that is happening on the ground in communities. If Maggie Chapman wishes to highlight the good efforts of the organisation that she mentioned and to raise any specific elements of the important work that it is delivering on the ground, I will look very closely at that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 5 was not lodged.

Creative Scotland (Impact of United Kingdom Budget)

6. Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what it anticipates the impact of the recent United Kingdom budget will be on funding for Creative Scotland. (S6O-03946)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): The additional funding that was announced in the UK autumn statement is welcome and, along with the savings that were

announced in the fiscal statement on 3 September, it will support the cost of pay deals and other pressures. However, the budget still leaves us facing significant cost pressures. We are now considering the full implications of the UK budget.

I appreciate that the culture sector needs certainty regarding future funding in order to fulfil its potential, and I look forward to providing that certainty when the Scottish Government budget is published on 4 December.

Michelle Thomson: Creative Scotland supports small businesses across the arts sector—they are often considered as simply artists and individuals, but they are, in fact, small businesses. Given the UK Government's decision to increase national insurance contributions for employers, is the Scottish Government concerned that the funds that are dedicated to supporting Scotland's arts and culture will now not go as far as they did previously in helping those businesses to grow and in promoting the arts sector?

Angus Robertson: Michelle Thomson makes an important point. The Scottish Government is considering the implications for our public finances and the culture sector of the actions that were announced by the UK chancellor on 30 October.

Despite the challenging budget situation, the Scottish Government remains committed to providing £100 million additional funding for the culture sector by 2028-29. We are already increasing funding to the sector by £15.8 million this financial year, bringing it to £196.6 million. In 2025-26, we aim to provide additional funding to the sector and, in line with normal budgetary procedure, the Scottish Government will publish a draft budget for 2025-26 on 4 December. I invite members right across the chamber to support culture by voting for that budget.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We have a number of supplementaries. They will need to be brief, as will the responses.

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Over the past two years, culture funding has been subjected to repeated in-year cuts and U-turns. What assurances can the cabinet secretary give the sector that it will not be placed in a precarious position due to last-minute cuts in this financial year?

Angus Robertson: The first thing that I would say to Alexander Stewart is that I already addressed that point in my previous answer, when I said that we are increasing spending this year for culture and the arts towards the £100 million annual increase to which the Scottish Government is committed. I am making the case vigorously within Government that we should do that as quickly as possible. If Mr Stewart and his

colleagues want to support that increase in culture funding as much as I do, they will join me in voting for the budget after it is shared with Parliament at the beginning of December.

Neil Bibby (West Scotland) (Lab): I know that panto season is coming up, but people do not want to hear continuing excuses from the cabinet secretary who has overseen a crisis in Scotland's culture sector. The facts are that the Scottish budget is going up by £1.5 billion this year and £3.4 billion next year, thanks to the UK Labour Government's budget decisions. There is now no good reason why the Scottish Government cannot give certainty to the culture sector and meet its commitment to deliver at least £25 million extra next year, and to give councils a fair deal so that they can protect local cultural provision. Given that, will the cabinet secretary make a cast-iron guarantee today to fulfil his already stated promises, or will the uncertainty in the sector continue?

Angus Robertson: Panto season would be making budgetary announcements before the budget, as Mr Bibby well knows.

The Scottish Government is already increasing culture spending while the member's Government in the UK is cutting it. I stand on the record of this Government increasing spending while his Government is decreasing it. The revenue budget of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is going down. I look forward to Labour members listening intently to the budget at the beginning of December, when, I am confident, we will continue to increase culture spending in Scotland while the member's party in government in England is cutting it.

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): Given the controversy surrounding Creative Scotland's funding of the explicit Rein project, what assurances can the Scottish Government provide to the public that substantive measures have now been taken to address governance failures in the public funding model of allocation and oversight? Can the cabinet secretary confirm whether that happens directly or via the charity Inspiring Scotland?

Angus Robertson: I will have to write to Ash Regan about the second part of her question.

In answer to the first part, Creative Scotland senior managers gave detailed evidence to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee about Government procedures in relation to the case that she has raised. I know that she is not a member of that committee, but I invite her to look closely at that evidence. I have looked closely at the assurances that Creative Scotland has given. The issue matters to me, and I am sure that it matters to her.

This is particularly important because we look forward to the rolling out of multiyear funding across the culture sector next year, which will be a step change in supporting culture and the arts. Ash Regan is right to highlight the fact that it is important that we have governance procedures that are fit for purpose. Creative Scotland has given me and the relevant committee in the Scottish Parliament those guarantees.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 7 is from James Dornan, who joins us remotely.

Humanitarian Assistance (Gaza)

7. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its funding for humanitarian assistance in Gaza. (S6O-03947)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): In response to the deteriorating situation in the middle east, the Scottish Government has committed £250,000 for Gaza from our humanitarian emergency fund, which includes £200,000 to the Disasters Emergency Committee's humanitarian appeal. That money will provide food, water, medical assistance and shelter to displaced people in the region.

As the crisis in Gaza enters its second year and hostilities spread into Lebanon, the Scottish Government reiterates calls for a ceasefire, the immediate provision of humanitarian aid and progress towards a two-state solution through which all people in the middle east can live in peace and security.

James Dornan: Scotland has played a vital part in trying to provide aid to the people of Palestine who are caught in Israel's genocidal actions. Any further aid that we can provide to Gaza would be very welcome in the effort to mitigate the effects of the deliberate ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

Can the cabinet secretary tell the Parliament what steps it has taken to encourage Governments, including the United Kingdom and Israeli Governments, towards a speedy ceasefire and to ensure that aid reaches the beleaguered people of Gaza?

Angus Robertson: Scottish Government ministers have repeatedly called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire by all sides and for unimpeded humanitarian access. We have demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. We wrote to the UK Government asking it to ensure that all potential breaches of international law are investigated and that Israeli and Hamas leaders are held accountable. We have called for an end to UK arms sales to Israel and for the UK Government to

recognise a sovereign Palestinian state as part of a two-state solution to secure lasting peace in the region.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): The new UK Government reinstated funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in July. Now the Israeli Parliament has voted to ban it from operating within Israel. That decision means less life-saving aid getting into Palestine.

When the cabinet secretary met the deputy ambassador of Israel, did he raise the importance of UNRWA? Will he join me in condemning the Israeli Parliament's decision?

Angus Robertson: I do join Foysoyl Choudhury in condemning the decision. The role of the UNRWA, which I had the honour of covering when it was headquartered in Vienna, is absolutely critical to the provision of humanitarian supplies to people in Gaza. I call on the Israeli Government to revisit the decision that has been taken. We need to support the United Nations and the provision of humanitarian assistance. If Foysoyl Choudhury thinks that anything more needs to be done to persuade the United Kingdom Government to make that case at the United Nations, I would be happy to join him in doing so.

Arts and Culture Funding (Glasgow)

8. Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government, in light of the United Kingdom Government announcing the largest funding settlement in real terms since devolution, how it will use any increase in funding to ensure that Glasgow's arts and culture sector is able to thrive. (S6O-03948)

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): Details of the 2025-26 budget will be published later this year. However, Scottish ministers have already increased culture sector funding in this financial year as the first step to achieving the First Minister's commitment to invest at least £100 million more annually in culture and the arts by 2028-29. The Scottish Government wants to ensure that the public money that is invested in the arts and culture benefits those right across Scotland and, as part of that, the Government continues to provide support to Glasgow's arts and culture sector.

Paul Sweeney: As the cabinet secretary will be aware, the past couple of years have been very hard for Glasgow's arts and culture sector. Funding cuts to Creative Scotland, as well as the inflationary impacts of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine and so on have led to some of Glasgow's iconic cultural institutions being pushed to the brink. Local authorities have also faced

pressure and have taken steps to raise extra revenue, such as removing the rates relief on empty listed buildings.

That has had an unintended consequence. For example, the Govanhill Baths Community Trust has already raised nearly £10 million to restore that historic building in Govanhill but still faces a £6.5 million shortfall. It is unable to use the building, which is in the midst of restoration, but it now faces a rates bill from Glasgow City Council, which threatens the viability of the restoration project.

Will the cabinet secretary undertake to engage with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and local authorities to see whether there can be amelioration or mitigation of the rates burdens that are faced by not-for-profits that are trying to restore listed buildings so that they are not undermined by those burdens?

Angus Robertson: I very much agree with Paul Sweeney about the importance of the provision of culture and the arts in Glasgow. That was a subject of discussion that I had with Glasgow Life a number of months ago.

He is right to raise community-based projects. I would be grateful if he could forward the details of the situation that he has outlined. I will look at any way in which I can use my good offices to support the sort of local community arts projects that he has raised.

Justice and Home Affairs

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next portfolio is justice and home affairs. If members wish to request a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

E-bikes and E-scooters

1. Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action Police Scotland can take to ensure the safe and legal use of e-bikes and e-scooters. (S6O-03949)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): The Scottish Government recognises the harm endured by communities that is caused by dangerous and antisocial vehicle nuisance. Use of e-scooters on public roads, footpaths and cycle lanes is illegal, and likewise for e-bikes that exceed permitted criteria.

Police Scotland, in partnership with local authorities, has a critical role in ensuring safe roads through various activities. Enforcement of all traffic offences is for Police Scotland, which operates independently of ministers. We support

Police Scotland in tackling misuse of such vehicles and ensuring safety where legal use is permitted. Local policing teams identify misuse of vehicles and ensure that areas are prioritised for action. Police Scotland, including local policing divisions, raises awareness of the dangers of misuse and promotes safety.

Gordon MacDonald: I have been approached by a number of constituents raising their concerns regarding e-bike and e-scooter use on roads and pavements across my constituency, which is often linked to antisocial behaviour. The legislation that covers the registration of those vehicles is reserved to the United Kingdom Government. However, will the minister outline what discussions, if any, have taken place with the UK Government regarding the surge in their illegal use and how best to tackle it, such as by introducing tighter legislation on ownership and registration?

Siobhian Brown: We are aware that the Home Office has said that it is not planning to introduce a registration scheme or other new requirements concerning ownership, but that it will be looking at other proactive approaches, such as increased powers to seize vehicles, which we already have as an option.

We regularly engage with the UK Government, and that engagement includes the sharing of best practice. The Minister of State for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention, the Rt Hon Dame Diana Johnson MP, spoke to the UK tackling antisocial behaviour conference in October about developing technology to safely stop e-scooters and e-bikes, and to enhance the ability of the police to prevent them from being used to commit criminal acts. We aim to be involved with any on-going work or proposals, especially where improvements can be made in Scotland.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): As the minister said, the use of e-scooters is illegal. However, they are being sold and used here, and in quite big numbers in some parts of the country. The minister will be aware that there have been some trials in parts of England; the nearest one to Scotland is, I think, in Newcastle. Would she be minded to consider trialling a scheme somewhere in Scotland?

Siobhian Brown: I am not aware of the specific scheme that Mr Simpson refers to, but I am happy for him to write to me about it. The issue of vehicles is covered between my portfolio and Mr Fairlie's and we are happy to look at anything that could make things better.

Malicious and Vexatious Criminal Complaints

2. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with the Crown Office and

Procurator Fiscal Service in relation to its handling of malicious and vexatious criminal complaints. (S6O-03950)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Scottish Government has had no discussions with the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service on those matters. The handling of malicious and vexatious criminal complaints is an independent prosecutorial matter for the Crown Office and the Lord Advocate.

Murdo Fraser: I of course recognise the operational independence of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. However, as we saw in the case of the Rangers Football Club prosecutions, errors that are made can come at a high cost to the taxpayer—in that case, it is already nearly £60 million.

Last year, my constituent Dame Ann Gloag and three members of her family were charged with human trafficking offences following malicious and vexatious complaints against them. Those allegations had a devastating effect on Dame Ann, who is 81 years old and is not only a leading business figure but also renowned for her philanthropy and charitable work, both here and overseas. Now, nearly two years later, she and her family members have been told that there will be no proceedings. However, that does not make up for what she and her family describe as a “Kafkaesque nightmare” or the enormous damage to her personal reputation.

Surely the cabinet secretary agrees that there is something far wrong with a system that allows innocent people to be treated in that way.

Angela Constance: I say to Mr Fraser that there can be no acceptance in the criminal justice system of complaints that are made with the intent to harm a person who has done nothing wrong. That is of course a burden to the person who is subjected to those complaints, and to the justice system.

I am grateful that he appreciates that I cannot get into the specifics of any case of that nature. I encourage him to use his office as an MSP to represent his constituent and engage with the Crown Office or other players in the justice system as appropriate.

With regard to the financial costs arising from the matters that Mr Fraser mentioned, the fact is that—as the Crown Office has indicated—the incurring of that expenditure at any time, and especially now, given the pressures on the public finances, is highly and deeply regrettable.

Police Officer Court Citations

3. John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind):

To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to address unnecessary court citations for police officers, in light of reports that over 500 officers are summoned to court each day, with only 10 per cent required to give evidence, leading to an estimated £22.5 million per annum in lost productivity for Police Scotland. (S6O-03951)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The citation of witnesses is a matter for the independent Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. The Scottish Government is, however, supporting justice partners to drive reforms to improve our criminal justice system to make it more efficient and ensure that it works better for everyone. That will include reducing the number of police witnesses who are required to attend court and reducing the length of time that cases take. It will also mean enabling more cases to be concluded earlier, and fewer victims and civil witnesses needing to come to court. Two key programmes are the summary case management programme, which provides a new approach to summary criminal cases, and the digital evidence sharing capability programme, which allows digital evidence to be shared at the earliest opportunity.

John Mason: I thank the cabinet secretary for that answer, which I find quite encouraging. Would she agree that what matters is not just how many police we have in this country but how we use them? The Finance and Public Administration Committee is constantly hearing about how we need to increase productivity in Scotland across the board. It seems to me, and I hope that the cabinet secretary would agree, that the courts also need to update their procedures and improve productivity.

Angela Constance: Yes—I agree with the member's point that how we use our resources matters. That is true for the deployment of front-line personnel resources as well as our finances. I hope that he will be reassured by some of the work in the case management pilot, which is judicially led. Its recent evaluation report demonstrated really positive benefits. For example, as a result of summary case management, an estimated 18,000 witnesses were not cited or re-cited, and a proportion of those—11,000—were police witnesses who were not required to attend court. If that pilot was in place at a national level, it would mean that nearly 90,000 witnesses, 50,000 of them police officers, would not require to be cited to attend court.

There is wide support for summary case management, and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service has said that the ambition is to roll it out as soon as possible, but that is subject to

agreement and will be determined by the project team, which is judicially led.

Sharon Dowe (South Scotland) (Con): Needless appearances at court are not just inefficient; they put a strain on police officers, with many being forced to return from holiday or to abandon rest days, often just to be told that the case is not going ahead. Although the current pilot scheme has been welcomed by many, Police Scotland wants further improvements, and the Scottish Police Federation has described the changes as a “drop in the ocean”. Can the cabinet secretary offer reassurances to officers that the model will be widened and improved, so that they will be less likely to face disruption in the future?

Angela Constance: We all want to see further improvements, for many of the reasons that Ms Dowe outlines. I hope that she can be reassured that, for example, the digital evidence sharing capability scheme will be rolled out, as was announced during the summer. It is a world-leading project that has benefited from £33 million of Scottish Government investment, and it is being rolled out between the summer gone by and next autumn. The roll-out of DESC is, in many ways, a precursor that will help to enable the roll-out of summary case management, which will have huge benefits for both civil and professional witnesses.

Police Numbers

4. Jamie Halcro Johnston (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact of the reduction in police numbers since 2010 on Police Scotland's ability to respond to all incidents of crime, including antisocial behaviour, within its responsibilities. (S6O-03952)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance):

Scottish policing has been completely transformed since the formation of Police Scotland, with a more strategic and consistent approach to policing across the country. Scotland continues to be a safe place in which to live, with recorded crime down by 40 per cent since 2006-07. We have increased police funding year on year since 2016-17 and have invested more than £13.2 billion since the establishment of Police Scotland.

Last week, the chief constable confirmed that the number of police officers in Police Scotland would reach 16,600. Throughout 2024-25, Police Scotland is undertaking the largest recruitment of officers since its establishment in 2013, and it has already recruited more than 940 officers since March.

Jamie Halcro Johnston: In many rural and island communities across my Highlands and Islands region, there is concern that reduced

police numbers mean that more low-level crimes and incidents of antisocial behaviour are not being investigated. As a result, some individuals are less likely to report such incidents. Despite the best efforts of officers, many of my constituents who live in more remote communities feel further away from policing cover than ever. What concerns does the cabinet secretary have about the number of crimes and incidents of antisocial behaviour that are simply not being reported across rural Scotland? What would she say to my constituents about what they believe is a reduced police presence in their communities?

Angela Constance: I hope that the member will be reassured by the recently published revised model for policing, which has a specific and central focus on the importance of front-line policing. The chief constable and others are on the record as saying that they want front-line policing to be on its strongest possible footing. That, of course, applies to our rural areas as well as to our city areas.

All members in the chamber should send a very strong message that people should report antisocial behaviour in their communities. Some antisocial behaviour is criminal and some is not, which is why the partnerships between local authorities and Police Scotland, as well as local policing plans, remain so important.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I know that the cabinet secretary is aware of the significant growth in Edinburgh's population and of the serious issues that there have been this year, in my constituency and across the capital more widely, regarding a small minority of youths engaging in very concerning antisocial behaviour, including theft and violence. What is the Scottish Government's response to those concerning trends and to the pressures in Edinburgh?

Angela Constance: We all take very seriously the impacts of antisocial behaviour and crime. Everyone has the right to be safe and to feel safe in their community. Under the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004, every local authority and police partner must periodically prepare, publish and review a strategy for preventing and tackling antisocial behaviour in their local authority area, thereby building safer communities.

The member will be aware that decisions on how to deploy resources are, of course, for the chief constable, but I can confirm that, at 30 September, E division, which covers Edinburgh, had 1,103 officers deployed across the city. In addition, it is important to recognise that all divisions can call on resources outwith their core officer base, should that be required.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

This week, I will try again to get a straight answer from the cabinet secretary. Are the Scottish Government figures correct in saying that crime has increased by 4 per cent, or is John Swinney correct to say that crime is at a 40-year low?

Angela Constance: Having looked at the record to see the specifics of what the First Minister said, I think that he was correct, but the statistics are also correct. As I often say to members, it is important to look at year-on-year changes, some of which are going in the wrong direction, but the fact of the matter remains that this country remains a safer place under the Scottish National Party.

Facial Recognition Technology (Police Use)

5. **Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to ensure appropriate oversight of the police use of facial recognition technology. (S6O-03953)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): We are committed to the legal, ethical and proportionate use of new technologies in policing that take account of ethical and human rights obligations and secure public confidence. Any decision to deploy facial recognition technology is an operational matter for the chief constable under the scrutiny of the Scottish Police Authority. I wrote to the authorities seeking assurance that a transparent and robust process will be adopted in considering and scrutinising any plans for the future deployment of the technology. The authority has confirmed its joint commitment with Police Scotland to taking forward a broad and transparent public discussion at the earliest opportunity to better inform the decision making on future deployment.

Liam McArthur: In 2018, so-called cyber kiosk technology was introduced by Police Scotland on an ambiguous legal basis and with limited prior engagement or consultation. An independent review in 2023 said that lessons would be learned and that any new technologies would be fully compliant with human rights. However, although the cabinet secretary is correct in saying that oversight of operational matters is, of course, for the Scottish Police Authority, given the evidence and the legal challenges in England and Wales that point to the risks of live facial recognition technology misidentifying people, particularly those from ethnic minorities, what specific steps can the Government take to ensure that any decision to roll out the live tracking of citizens is properly regulated and managed?

Angela Constance: I appreciate the member's long-standing interest in the matter. It is imperative that any lessons from the past and, indeed, from across the UK and beyond are learned. I

recognise the member's in-depth interest in the matter, bearing in mind the fact that he has recently lodged 37 written parliamentary questions on the matter.

The safeguards relate to data protection and the European convention on human rights, and I know that the member is familiar with the role of the Scottish Biometrics Commissioner, because I think that he played a part in the establishment of that role. There is a statutory code of practice, which is based on human rights and says that any practice must be non-discriminatory. I am open to doing anything that I can with members or other partners to ensure that we have a proper and well-informed debate on the matter.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): Will the cabinet secretary say whether the use of the technology has a place in combating crime, as long as it is used properly and has the oversight that was noted in her previous answer?

Angela Constance: I agree with the balanced view that Ms Nicoll has presented. We must recognise that technological advances can bring benefits to the police and, indeed, other justice agencies in detecting, preventing and prosecuting crime. It is important that Police Scotland officers are provided with technology to keep our communities safe, while ensuring that it is robust, fit for purpose and non-discriminatory. I note that the chief constable confirmed to the Criminal Justice Committee on 30 October that she is closely following the lessons learned from how technology is being used by police forces elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The Scottish Police Authority has also confirmed to me the importance of the principle of proportionality between human rights and the requirement to strike a balance between the privacy of individuals and the safety of our communities.

Victim Notification Scheme

6. David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its work to reform the victim notification scheme in the coming year, to ensure that it operates in a more trauma-informed way. (S6O-03954)

The Minister for Victims and Community Safety (Siobhian Brown): As outlined in our response, we accepted the majority of the recommendations of the independent review of the victim notification scheme, including the central proposal of creating a victim contact team to provide personalised trauma-informed support. That will be based on the individual needs of victims, who will automatically be referred to the team for a discussion about their options and an explanation of their rights.

We are taking the opportunity of the Victims, Witnesses, and Justice Reform (Scotland) Bill, which is currently before Parliament, to prioritise the necessary changes to primary legislation. We will work with justice partners and victim support organisations in the coming months to deliver the reforms to ensure that the legislation operates in a more trauma-informed way.

David Torrance: The independent review of the victim notification scheme heard directly from victims and their families about their experience of the justice system and the scheme itself. Does the minister share my gratitude for their participation and strength, and does she agree that we must continue to listen to their voices as we progress with these reforms?

Siobhian Brown: I, too, extend my thanks to the victims and their families who contributed their experiences of the justice system as part of the review. We know from the report that that engagement came at a personal cost. I reiterate my whole-hearted respect and admiration for the courage of the people who came forward to talk about their personal experience.

We absolutely must listen to the voices of victims and their families as we progress the reforms to the scheme. Indeed, that is vital if we are to take a victim-centred and trauma-informed approach to the changes that we need in the victim notification scheme. As well as engaging with victim support organisations and our justice partners, we will engage through the victims task force and other means to collaborate appropriately for victims.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): In September, it was reported that, after the release of 477 prisoners under the emergency release scheme, a mere 1 per cent of victims were notified. Given that the cabinet secretary has stated that emergency release might need to be used again, and given the upcoming legislation that proposes that more prisoners be released earlier in their sentence, what is the minister doing to ensure that as many victims of crime as possible are properly supported and notified if the Scottish Government proceeds with more releases?

Siobhian Brown: Should the proposed changes be agreed by the Parliament in due course, we will continue that engagement.

I will give a bit of historical background to the early release in the summer. Victims of only 11 of the 700 prisoners who were considered for emergency release had registered an interest in the victim notification scheme. That reflects the fact that offender groups such as prisoners serving longer sentences were automatically excluded. The cabinet secretary ensured that, out of those

11 cases, only six prisoners were permitted early release.

As part of that scheme, the cabinet secretary ensured that, through the preparations for the recent emergency release, two new ways for victims to receive information were added. Victims were able to go through one of the four victim support organisations. Alternatively, they could contact the Scottish Prison Service directly to receive information on any potential release. We learned lessons from that and we will continue to do so.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): How much money has been allocated to the contact centre that has been set up to manage victims who sign up to the victim notification scheme? Can the minister confirm that that is new money that will not come from funds for victim support organisations or other third sector partners?

Siobhian Brown: I do not have the exact figures here, but I will write to the member with those details.

Raptor Persecution

7. **Evelyn Tweed (Stirling) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs has had with ministerial colleagues regarding police action to tackle raptor persecution, in light of reports of a dead golden eagle being found recently in the Stirling constituency. (S6O-03955)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): Wildlife crime and the persecution of raptors are unacceptable. I am aware of the case to which the member refers, but it would, of course, be inappropriate to comment on an on-going investigation.

Wildlife crime is a matter for the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity, and I know that he will be following the case closely. In recent years, the Scottish Government has taken action to tackle wildlife crime through increased penalties for the most serious offences and a new licensing scheme for grouse shooting. I encourage anyone with information relating to any wildlife crime to report it to Police Scotland.

Evelyn Tweed: This was clearly a wildlife crime, given the terrible condition in which the golden eagle was found. What steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that the public are aware of what constitutes a wildlife crime and of the steps that should be taken to report dead or injured raptors?

Angela Constance: The Scottish Government works with a number of partners, including Police Scotland, land managers and conservation groups, to raise awareness of, and to take steps to

tackle, wildlife crime. That is predominantly done through the partnership for action against wildlife crime in Scotland. This summer, the partnership attended the Royal Highland Show and the Scottish Game Fair, where partnership members raised awareness and provided education on how to spot and report wildlife crime.

In addition, Police Scotland has a number of dedicated wildlife crime officers located across Scotland. They work closely with the National Wildlife Crime Unit on projects to prevent and detect wildlife crime, which regularly include public engagement.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): It is becoming clear that the way in which land is defined through the Wildlife Management and Muirburn (Scotland) Act 2024 has severely compromised the most important legal deterrent to wildlife crime that we have. Will the cabinet secretary discuss the issue with other Cabinet colleagues, with a view to introducing an amendment to the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill to close the vast loophole that now exists? The illegal persecution of birds of prey clearly must end.

Angela Constance: I will ask ministers and the cabinet secretary responsible for issues in and around land reform to engage directly with the member.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions.

Agricultural and Business Property Reliefs (Farms)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-15400, in the name of Tim Eagle, on reversing the family farm tax. I invite those members who wish to speak in the debate to please press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call Tim Eagle to speak to and move the motion. You have up to seven minutes.

14:51

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, which states that I am a farmer and a former land agent. Those interests are particularly relevant today as we talk about farming and the very future of the industry—the survival of family farms.

On 30 October, Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced that, from April 2026, Labour will reduce the agricultural property relief and business property relief for farms with combined business and agricultural assets worth more than £1 million. Those long-standing reliefs have been in place since 1992. To put it simply, those reliefs protected working farm businesses following the death of a member of the family and allowed the land to be passed to another family member to carry on working the unit. The change matters because it risks the very future of family farming units across Scotland and the United Kingdom, and, in so doing, it poses a serious risk to the future of our rural communities and national food security.

Today, Labour will—I have no doubt about it—repeat the Treasury's claim that the changes will impact only a very small number of farms. Labour's calculations are wrong. The National Farmers Union, along with other organisations, disputes Labour's calculations, claiming that the move will hit capital-rich, cash-poor family farms. It is a tax raid that has been described as "disastrous".

I call myself a farmer and I am proud to do so. I love working the land. However, I have always been a small-scale farmer with a few sheep here and there, and sometimes a bit of arable. The change will not affect me personally, but it will affect many people I know in the industry, and it is evident that Labour simply does not understand how the majority of farms work.

In one of my previous roles, I was a Quality Meat Scotland and Scottish Quality Crops farm assurance assessor. I imagine that some members will know the role of farm assurance

voluntary schemes, which cover the majority of farmers in Scotland and put in place the highest possible standards for animal welfare, hygiene, transport and so on. Every year, each member of the scheme is visited on their farm by an assessor. The first part of the visit is spent outside, walking around the unit, and the second part often happens inside, over a coffee, looking at record keeping. I never calculated how many farms I visited, but I am pretty sure that it was more than 1,000 across the north-east and the Highlands. I do not remember a single unit that was a large business entity—a branded corporation with legal departments and accounts teams. No, I met fathers, mothers, sons and daughters—proud people running small-time businesses and just trying to get by.

My trick when inspecting was to find a positive quickly, whether it was by pointing out a bonnie cow or a healthy sheep or by complimenting the farmer on how good the crops looked. It would relax the farmer, who would proudly tell me of the years it had taken to get the flock just right for the farm or how one of the cows had been with him for 30 years and a calf had come second in the Royal Highland Show. They would recount stories of their grandfather putting up the now-old cattle shed and the days spent sweeping the grain lofts as children.

Many of these families have served for generations, growing food for us all. They provide a service to their country and they are custodians of the countryside. Years of hard work have gone into making farms what they are, but farming families are not just farmers. When the snow falls heavily in winter, it is the farmers who clear country lanes so that local people can get out and about, and, when the delivery driver gets stuck in the ditch, it is often the farmers who help them to get out. Family members connected to farming can often be found working as care workers, doctors, teachers, shop assistants and more.

Farming families are not just in our rural communities—they are our rural communities. They are the lifeblood of those areas. That is the key point that I want to make. The key reason why the changes made by Labour are devastating is that they will impact those very families. They will force the sale of land, which will make family farms economically unviable and lead to more depopulation in our rural areas.

It is all very well for Labour ministers and civil servants to talk about farmers handing over the farm early or using the inheritance tax allowances, but those suggestions fundamentally miss the point of how these units work. Often, children go away to work in other areas to gain experience before returning home to work the farm. With little

profit, farmers tend not to retire but are an active part of the unit for a long time.

Although I would always urge farmers to consider early succession planning, having been part of such discussions with farmers and having monitored the books for them, I know that it is not that simple. Jim Walker, a former president of NFU Scotland, has calculated that a medium-sized, 500-acre farm worth around £5 million that previously had no inheritance tax liability could incur an £800,000 bill, which, if amortised over 25 years at 8 per cent, would mean an annual repayment of £75,000. He asks:

“Who’s going to break the news to the children that want to farm it?”

Farming is already a difficult business, but the changes risk the very future of our family farms. They risk breaking up viable units across Scotland and land being purchased for investment such as carbon credits, and they risk the future of communities and food security. We can talk about land reform, new entrants to farming, succession planning and innovation in farming, and we can put in place plans that would help farming to thrive, but all of that is undone by Labour’s damaging changes. Trust is now broken, because, during the election, Labour gave farmers a cast-iron guarantee that, if it won, it would not tinker with agricultural property relief, and it has broken that promise.

The Scottish Conservatives have launched a petition at stopthefarmtax.com, calling on people to send Rachel Reeves and the Labour Government a clear message that the changes could spell the end of family farms being passed down to future generations. I want rural communities to thrive. I want top-quality food production in Scotland that we are not ashamed to shout about. I do not want our unique family farms to be destroyed. Labour has underestimated how many farms this will affect, and it has underestimated the anger that the changes have created. The Scottish Conservatives urgently call for the family farm tax to be reversed.

I move,

That the Parliament calls on the UK Government to reverse its decision to impose a so-called family farm tax on agricultural businesses.

14:58

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands (Mairi Gougeon): I welcome the fact that we are having this debate, and I appreciate Tim Eagle’s contribution and his bringing his personal experience to the chamber.

I want to make it clear that this Government wants a tax system that supports rather than hinders orderly succession planning and the

transfer of land to the next generation of custodians. However, that is not what the new UK Government has put in place. The UK budget is not just a disappointment; frankly, it is a disgrace. The unnecessary worry, stress and severe concern that it has caused, and is causing, farmers and crofters in Scotland is simply unacceptable.

The UK Government’s decision to change inheritance tax, which is a reserved matter, was taken without consultation with the farming community, its representatives or the Scottish Government. The changes were not included in the Labour manifesto, so we had no warning at any point that they were coming. As Tim Eagle outlined, not only were they not mentioned but Labour stated before the election that it had no plans to change inheritance tax or agricultural property relief. It is an entirely arbitrary decision, and we are left—as farmers and crofters in Scotland are—to try to work out the extent of the impact, as no assessments have been made or published.

And that is not the full extent of the indifference that has been shown to rural Scotland by the new UK Government in its budget. Although I welcome the fact that future funding allocations will be a Scottish Government decision, baselining and removing ring fencing from funding for agriculture—and, indeed, marine—add to the pressures that we are under. Unlike other farming nations, such as Denmark and Ireland, we no longer have any long-term funding certainty. What we have now can only be described as an inadequate settlement. Any move to break the link between the area of land farmed and funding increases for Scotland ignores our on-going commitment to active farming and direct payments, and it risks our efforts to transform our industry for the future.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I am slightly puzzled by the cabinet secretary’s concern about the ring fence being removed. Surely there is nothing to prevent her from putting that ring fence in place for Scottish farmers.

Mairi Gougeon: My point is that we should not be in this position because of decisions that have been taken by the UK Government. The Scottish Government will continue to do what it always has done—we will stand up for the rights of our farmers and crofters in Scotland and will protect their interests as much as we possibly can. However, the fact is that we have a baselined budget that has not increased in line with inflation during the past six years, so we are already being short changed.

The Barnett formula fails to recognise Scotland’s unique relationship with the land and the contribution that our farmers and crofters make

to our nation and, especially, our rural economy. Since Brexit, many promises have been made on funding and they have been broken by successive Westminster Governments. As I have said, by contrast, the Scottish National Party Government is wholly committed to supporting Scottish agriculture and to working with our farmers and crofters to give them certainty and stability and to help them to plan for the future.

It is important to highlight what support is available, because it is vital that families who are reliant on farming can access professional support for business planning and decision making and that generational transition is enabled. That is critical for the next generation, as is increasing the number of women who are leading farming businesses as part of building a more innovative and resilient 21st century agriculture sector.

That is why the Scottish Government is supporting agribusinesses to plan for the future through succession planning. That support is provided by the Farm Advisory Service, which helps them to access up to £1,000-worth of Government funding for specialist succession planning advice. Such planning is critical for everyone, and, regardless of approaches that are taken elsewhere, we are continuing to increase fairness by modernising assignation and succession and by improving the legal framework for agricultural tenancies through the Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced to the Parliament earlier this year.

My officials continue to work closely with all members of the tenant farming advisory forum and the tenant farming commissioner on the bill proposals and to explore solutions to any concerns that they have identified. Scottish tenant farmers are different from those in England, as more than half of our tenancies are secure, heritable tenancies that pass through the generations, unlike those south of the border. The tax changes could directly impact some of our tenant farmers, including those with larger farms on higher-quality land.

Although agriculture is a policy area that has long been devolved to Scotland, this tax change, which is a reserved matter, will have a clear impact on our farming industry. We believe that, as a priority, the Scottish Government must be engaged on reserved tax changes that will impact directly on devolved policy. It is vital that we, and our farmers and crofters, see the details of the proposed changes and that more engagement and consultation take place with affected Scottish rural businesses, to ensure that people are not inadvertently harmed—especially when, as a result of the changes, Scottish farmers will be paying more into Treasury coffers with no

guarantee of getting any of that money back in future funding settlements.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con) *rose*—

Mairi Gougeon: I am drawing to a close.

The UK Government must acknowledge that its handling of the matter has been a boorach. It should recognise the need to review the changes, to engage with the agriculture sector and devolved Governments and to either fully assess the impacts or publish any information that it already has. Scotland's farmers and crofters deserve and need nothing less.

I move amendment S6M-15400.2, to insert at end:

“and urgently commit to undertake and publish impact assessments on the cumulative impact of its budget proposals on farmers and crofters in Scotland.”

15:04

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I cannot believe the brass neck of the Tories. They trash the economy and leave others to clean up the mess, and then they shamelessly complain. From Liz Truss's budget to the Covid cronies' handouts; they have no shame. I wonder what people who are struggling to feed their families, living day to day from food banks, which became a necessity under the Tories' watch, think when they hear the Conservatives crying foul over policies that protect people from paying tax on assets worth up to £3 million in certain areas.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): What would Rhoda Grant say to my constituent Kenny Campbell, who has just invested over £1 million in a new dairy but is a cancer survivor? If he were to die in the next seven years, he would leave his son with a tax bill of over £1 million, meaning that his son would have repayments of over £100,000 year on year. That would be a family business going down the drain. What would she say to Mr Campbell?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I can give you back your time, Ms Grant.

Rhoda Grant: I would say to Mr Campbell that he needs to put his affairs in order to make sure—*[Interruption.]*

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members!

Rhoda Grant: He needs to make sure that, if his son is investing time in the business, he is getting the fruits of his labour. *[Interruption.]* If the son is working in the business, and I will come to that, he should be paid, because we have heard way too often of situations where a member of the family who is working on a farm loses out at the time of succession to other members of the family

who have done nothing if there has not been succession planning.

Let me be clear, Presiding Officer: very few family farms are worth in excess—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Ms Grant, please resume your seat for a second.

I say to the members on the Conservative benches that, when a member has the floor, they have the floor and members who are in a sedentary position do not, unless they wish to seek to make an intervention.

Please resume, Ms Grant.

Rhoda Grant: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

Let me be clear that very few family farms are worth in excess of several million pounds. Indeed, the latest figures show that, across the UK, the top 7 per cent—the largest 117 claims—account for 40 per cent of the total value of agricultural property relief. That shows that it is not all farms; it is the minority.

The Labour Party will put the public finances on a secure footing and that means tough decisions. The £22 billion black hole left in this year's budget alone has had devastating consequences for the country.

We also need to recoup some of the billions of pounds given to the Tory cronies during Covid. [*Interruption.*] While citizens followed the rules, the Tories splurged, lining the pockets of their pals, and partied into the night. [*Interruption.*] Their arrogance is breathtaking.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Rhoda Grant: I have already taken an intervention.

Farming communities tell us of their concerns that good agricultural land is changing hands at excessive prices for tax avoidance and also to be used for carbon trading. Polluters are allowed to pollute and then to ease their conscience by planting trees in the wrong place, preventing new entrants from getting into farming at all. That increases the value of farms beyond the reach of the farming community—something that the last Conservative Government did nothing at all about. The Conservative Government also had an underspend for agriculture funding of £358 million over the last three years, withholding support from farmers in England. Things are not much better in Scotland, where the SNP is raiding agricultural funding.

Although the Conservative Party withheld money from all farmers, it is now picking up the cudgels to fight for the very few who have millions

of pounds in assets. Those are often large estates, owned by the privileged few.

If this policy has an outcome of ensuring that land holdings are smaller, giving people access to farming, it will have a wider benefit for society as a whole. It will also ensure that those living and working on the land have their fair share of the investment.

Let us be honest—it is the Conservatives who are trying to stir up strife, trying to get those who have modest assets to fight for the privileged few—

Tim Eagle rose—

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

Rhoda Grant: What is very clear is that none of the tough decisions that have been taken in the budget would have been required at all had it not been for the Conservatives, who ran the country into the ground. They should be hanging their heads in shame rather than playing politics.

I move amendment S6M-15400.1, to leave out from “calls” to end and insert:

“agrees that the Conservative Party should apologise to the country for its fiscal recklessness, which left the public finances in a dire state and required the Autumn Budget to put the country back on a sound footing, and recognises that, despite this, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has continued to put in place inheritance tax reliefs for family farms potentially worth up to £3 million and increased the Scottish devolved budget by £3.4 billion in 2025-26.”

15:09

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): The agricultural property relief changes that were announced in the UK budget have created a lot of concern in rural areas and the farming community. There is a distinct lack of clarity over whom the UK Government's plans will actually hit. The Scottish Greens support inheritance tax because it is pre-distributive, and we also believe that land in Scotland should not be in the hands of a small number of individuals, so we must hear more from Westminster about how its changes will impact farms.

As everyone in the chamber will agree, Whitehall must step in immediately if it becomes clear that small, regenerative food producers are being harmed. We must not become more reliant on food imports from countries that have lower environmental and welfare standards.

The UK Government must also intervene if the measure pushes Scotland in the wrong direction on its land reform journey. If, as my Conservative rural affairs counterpart claims, family farms will sell up en masse due to the new rate of inheritance tax, the big question will be who buys

the land when it gets sold because people cannot afford the tax. It will not be new entrants or young farmers; instead, it will be agribusinesses. Greater consolidation is in the interests of a very small number of individuals and it is not in the interests of our nation. Half of all of Scotland's land is owned by just 433 people. That is a shocking statistic—it is bad for climate, nature and communities. Scottish people deserve better.

New rules could also obscure exactly who owns what in Scotland. I have heard concerns that even more landholders will hide behind corporate or trust structures in order to get around inheritance tax. Although that practice is not illegal in our lax UK tax system, it prevents proper scrutiny and denies taxpayers what they are due. If that scenario comes to pass, it will do so at a time when public finances are in a dire state and an unacceptable number of people are in deprivation.

The motion and amendments that we have before us today do not address the actual issues that most of our food producers face. They completely fail to address why farmers and growers face such challenging circumstances. That says to me that other parties would rather play politics than use this platform to raise the problems that our constituents face.

I will remind members of some of the key issues that our growers face. As we discussed last week, Brexit is ravaging the rural economy; farmers and growers are quitting the industry because of labour shortages that have come about as a direct result of leaving the European Union; seed prices have rocketed since 2020, and fewer varieties are available; and the UK Government is choosing to export our carbon emissions by importing food from countries that have poor standards and light-touch regulation. Those are the problems that we need to talk about, because they all pose a greater threat to farming than changes to inheritance tax.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Beatrice Wishart, who is opening the debate on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, joins us remotely.

15:13

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Scottish Liberal Democrats will support the motion that is before us today, as well as the Scottish Government's amendment.

The UK Government's announced changes to the agriculture and business property relief schemes during the autumn budget are a Treasury-driven tax hike with little regard for the affected families or the impact on farming in rural communities. What affects farmers will affect the wider supply chain—vets, agriculture merchants, hauliers, local shops and post offices—in some of the most economically fragile communities in the

country. The food and drink sector is a significant contributor to Scotland's export economy, and it, too, will feel the impact from those changes.

Although farming might be seen as a capital-rich sector, it is also revenue poor, and some farms barely break even. The new rules might force the next generation to sell land in order to retain some of the family farm. The change will certainly have an impact on members of the younger generation who hope to keep the family farm going but are struggling to hold on. The land that is sold might not be dedicated to farming or food production, or to protecting the environment, natural habitats or biodiversity.

We could see smaller plots of that sold-off land bought up by big businesses that have little incentive to be custodians. If we want to be serious about food security and tackling the climate and biodiversity crises, we should support those who are making a tangible difference every day. As the Scottish Government's amendment presses for, we need to know the assessment of the cumulative impact of the proposals on crofters, farmers and growers in Scotland.

Last week, I met local members of NFU Scotland, who expressed their concerns about the announced changes in the autumn budget on family farms and about the lack of ring-fenced agricultural funds and the obvious impact that that will have on our Scottish agricultural community. With the loss of the ring-fence safety net, which has been part of agriculture funding for decades, there is real concern about how the lump sum from the UK Government will be used by the Scottish Government.

During the passage of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024, I raised the issue of multi-annual funding and the need for certainty for our crofters, farmers and growers. In Shetland, food production costs are already higher than they are on mainland Scotland as a consequence of our island location and the impact of transport costs through the supply chain, along with a shorter growing season. I have written to the cabinet secretary about that, as it would be useful to understand the Scottish Government's intentions with regard to multi-annual and ring-fenced funding.

In the meantime, I note today's press release from Martin Kennedy of NFU Scotland, which says:

"Scottish farmers and crofters are continually being asked to do more and more on a support budget that has only half the buying power it had 10 years ago. The blunt fact is that whatever funding now goes towards Scottish agriculture is 100% within the power of Scottish Government."

During the general election campaign, the Liberal Democrats demanded an extra £1 billion to support farmers. Family farming has become increasingly difficult due to the impact from Brexit—as we debated last week—the impact of climate change and increased competition. That money would have supported our efforts in food security and in tackling the climate and biodiversity crises, and it would have provided investment in our rural economies and communities.

I recognise the tough economic inheritance of the new UK Government, but that should not be used as an excuse to punch down on farming communities. We need to change course.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to the open debate. There is virtually no time in hand, so any interventions should be absorbed in members' allocated speaking times.

15:17

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am delighted to stand up this afternoon and speak about small family farms, which is a subject that is close to my heart. I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests. I own a small family farm.

I must say that, if I had made Ms Grant's speech this afternoon, I would hang my head in shame. We should be under no illusions. I am a third-generation farmer. I farm 500 acres, which is not very much in the big scheme of things, and I have seen 25 generations of cows come through in my lifetime. There are 160 of them now, and I am extremely proud of them. I also grow 300 acres of barley and my farm is a winter home to 700 ewes. I let some houses that are part of the original farm, and I have three farm workers, whose wage bill is more than £100,000 a year.

My farm is not dissimilar to other family farms of that size. I am proud that such farms provide local employment and create local expenditure. The farmers have a huge amount of local knowledge through local management, and they take a long-term view of the countryside, their assets and the land that they manage.

My farm is like the hundreds of local farms that I visited across the Highlands when I was a rural surveyor. I absolutely assure you that they are like the farms that belong to the hundreds of farmers who have contacted me regarding the tax. I would like to think that I have prepared—I have had reason to prepare—for when I die. Let me be clear that, if I die tomorrow, the tax will hit me and my family, and it will mean that my family farm will no longer exist.

That is the case because figures indicate—I hope that you are paying attention to this, Ms

Grant—that a 200-acre farm with a profit of about £27,000 a year and the normal assets that such a farm has would face an inheritance tax liability of about £400,000. I am happy to sit down in your office and explain the figures to you. That means that the family would have to commit 159 per cent of their profits to pay their tax, having sold about 20 per cent of their land. Those are the real figures that are involved. That is what you and your Government south of the border are going to be destroying, Ms Grant.

As has been made clear, there are other people who will suffer as a result of the situation. There is a massive supply chain. I could mention the hundreds of people who our farm deals with, including Harbro, to whom we pay massive bills for food, and Gleaner, which supplies the farm with oil on a daily basis. If farming and small family farms stop, that will go.

Let me be clear: farmers are asset rich—they have land—but, on the whole, they are cash poor, and this tax will cripple them, as it will cripple many crofters across the Highlands. Members should be under no illusion: crofters will be affected as well.

I have tried to work out in my mind what the reason is for introducing the tax, and I struggled to understand it. However, when I listened to the comments of John McTernan, it became clear that the motivation was spiteful, vindictive and unjustifiable.

Ms Grant, I remind you and your colleagues south of the border that, if you have no farmers, you will have no food. There will be no future for the environment if you destroy the family farms.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I take this opportunity to remind members that they must speak through the chair at all times. References to "you" are references to me, and I do not think that that is what the member intended.

15:21

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I shall try hard to temper my words in order to obey that instruction, Deputy Presiding Officer.

I thank the Conservatives for bringing this debate to the chamber. I want to lay to rest the notion that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government do not understand rural communities and, at worst, do not represent them. I represented the South of Scotland region for 12 years and I have represented Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale for the past 13 years. Indeed, I lived in rural Galloway for more than a decade. Therefore, like many people here—because, across the chamber, many of us

represent wholly or largely rural communities—I hope that I am sufficiently appraised of the varying requirements of rural areas. During those 25 years, I have visited many estates, such as Burncastle and Arniston, and farms in the Borders, such as Baddinsgill, Moorfoot and Eastside. Although I cannot begin to approach the knowledge of Tim Eagle, I am not completely a townie.

The party that appears to have little concept of rurality and, in particular, rural farming communities and landscapes in Scotland is the Labour Party. I do not think that I am being unfair when I say that, because the recent actions of Sir Keir Starmer in respect of inheritance tax and changes to agricultural property relief, on top of changes to farming payments following Brexit, are evidence of it. I add to those actions the additional national insurance obligations, which will also fall on those farmers who are employers, and the pressure on farmers from supermarkets to always keep prices down.

In December 2023, Steve Reed MP—who is now the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and was then the shadow secretary for the department—stated that Labour had no plans to change inheritance tax, including APR. Well, we know what happened there, and what happened with regard to the national insurance contributions of employers, including farmers, who are apparently not “working people.”

There are many farms across Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale that will be affected, because it does not take much for a farm’s assets to cross the £1 million barrier when a high-end combine harvester can cost nearly £750,000. I am therefore grateful to the NFUS for its briefing, which includes working examples of the impact of inheritance tax and APR. It says:

“an IHT qualifying farm with a value of £4 million would mean £1 million will have 100 per cent relief. The remaining £3 million will receive 50 per cent relief, seeing £1.5 million subject to IHT at a 40 per cent rate. That would equate to a £600,000 IHT bill in this example. Although the payments can be spread over 10 years, the first £60,000 will require to be paid within six months. Many farm businesses would not have this amount available which will mean some land would need to be sold thereby bringing into question the future viability of the farm.”

Farming is a family matter for many, as others have said. It is personal, intergenerational and a vocation. It is literally—not to abuse that much-used word—under farmers’ fingernails. Farmers provide not only the quality food on our tables, high animal welfare standards and quality exports, but the landscape that we take for granted. I add in passing that there may well also be an additional punitive levy on exports to the USA.

The levies have been set with no impact assessment or engagement with the sector, and

the UK Government has completely failed to respect devolution by engaging with the Scottish Government. There is no rural visa on the horizon, either. What more does the Labour UK Government intend to do to undermine our farming and rural communities, many of which, as Beatrice Wishart said, are reliant on local farms? Those things will affect not just the farms, but all the local businesses.

15:25

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): Much of the language in this debate has been intemperate, inaccurate and deliberately inflammatory. The new Tory rural affairs spokesperson stood up in Parliament last week and accused the UK Labour Government of “taking our land”. The Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture said in response that he was “sympathetic to the criticism”. The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity went even further the day before. He said that ending 100 per cent relief on inheritance tax for farm assets of more than £1 million was

“catastrophic for the farming industry in Scotland”.—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2024; c 5.]

Omitting to draw our attention to his entry in the register of interests, he went on to read out in Parliament a 140-word statement on the subject by the NFU. He was supposed to be answering MSPs’ questions as a minister of the Government, but I am not sure whether, last Wednesday afternoon, he was setting out the Scottish Government’s position or that of the National Farmers Union.

Jim Fairlie: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Leonard, please resume your seat. There is a point of order from the minister, Jim Fairlie.

Jim Fairlie: I would like to draw attention to what Mr Leonard said. He made the accusation against me that I did not declare my register of interests. I do not have an interest. I do not farm and I do not have stock or land. I have absolutely no interest and I have no membership of any organisation. I have been a farmer, and if that requires that I declare an interest, I would apologise to the Parliament. However, I am under the impression that that does not require a declaration of interest, and I ask Mr Leonard to withdraw that comment.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, minister. The matter has been put on the record. Mr Leonard, please resume.

Richard Leonard: Thank you, Deputy Presiding Officer.

I turn to the Tory rural affairs spokesperson. Writing in a Sunday newspaper at the weekend, he said that he had to admit that he would not be affected by the inheritance tax proposals. He must know that very few of the local farmers across the Highlands and Islands and the crofting counties that he represents in Parliament will be affected either. In fact, the NFU sent out a briefing just yesterday afternoon in which it claimed that the Treasury figures were

“skewed by the inclusion of ... small holdings”,

so which is it? Are smaller farmers affected or not?

Big landowners will have to start paying inheritance tax. Absentee landlords and those who view farmland as a tax shelter will have to start paying inheritance tax, although I am not sure that the trusts, the limited companies and the offshore interests will not seek to avoid it.

The whole debate reminds us once again that there is no one so militant as the old nobility and the new establishment combining to defend their vested hereditary interests in order to ossify the distribution of wealth from one generation to the next, making absolutely sure that the meek do not inherit the earth. Private wealth has never been so great and private fortunes have never been higher, yet investment in public services—in the common good—has fallen behind. I am not surprised to see the Conservatives posing as arch-defenders of the status quo and backing this revolt, but how telling is it that the SNP is joining them in defence of this ugly inequality?

I finish with a reminder of the tax treatment of farmers as farmers. Under this proposal, there remains 100 per cent inheritance tax relief below £1 million. The inheritance tax threshold for everybody else who leaves property in their estate to children is £500,000. No capital gains tax will be paid. Agricultural land and buildings remain exempt from non-domestic rates. Farmers will still be consuming red diesel, paying a rebated duty that is more than five times lower than that for other users of diesel.

Edward Mountain: Will the member give way?

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

Richard Leonard: There is a zero rating for VAT. Farm income from subsidies and grants is outside the scope of VAT altogether. So, the major tax advantages for farmers as farmers remain in place.

This is about how we equalise the taxation of inherited wealth. That is why this budget proposal should not be reversed. It should be embraced and it should be implemented in full.

15:30

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

There are three Labour MSPs in the chamber today. I can only assume that all the others are back in their offices, with their heads in their hands, in shame at what they have heard today. Farmers watching Richard Leonard will not be embracing the budget or the changes, and they will not be embracing the support from Scottish Labour. Instead, they will be looking on in dismay at what the Scottish Labour Party and the UK Labour Party are doing to them.

On 30 October, Labour delivered a budget of betrayal. Farmers and other people across Scotland and the United Kingdom had been promised a lot about what an incoming Labour Government would do. We have already heard that, less than a year ago, Steve Reed, when he was shadow rural affairs spokesman, said that Labour had no plans to change inheritance tax, including agricultural property relief. Less than a year later, that change is in the budget, and it is causing so much angst among our farmers and crofters.

It was not just Steve Reed. Sir Keir Starmer, now the Prime Minister, said to the NFU that he knows what losing a farm means. He said:

“Losing a farm is not like losing any other business, you can’t come back.”

Farmers watched that speech and believed and trusted that the leader of the Labour Party understood what they were going through and what they faced as custodians of the countryside. He lied to farmers and crofters across Scotland and the UK, and Labour should pay the price for that.

Rhoda Grant: How would Douglas Ross fill the £22 billion black hole that was left by the previous UK Government?

Douglas Ross: I am happy to come on to that. The amendment from Labour today does not apologise for what it is doing to farmers, nor does it say sorry for lying and misleading people in the countryside. Labour just says, “Look at what the Tory party did and the £22 billion black hole.” In answer to Rhoda Grant, I go to the Office for Budget Responsibility document that was published on the same day as the budget. Not only could the OBR not substantiate the claims about a £22 billion black hole, but it could not even substantiate the figure of £9.5 billion that Rachel Reeves was talking about.

I will take no lectures from Rhoda Grant. She is someone whom I previously respected and who has represented the same region as me for some time. However, I have to say that hers was one of the most appalling speeches that I have ever listened to in this Parliament. Her response to

Finlay Carson, who was speaking on behalf of a constituent suffering from cancer, was, quite frankly, disgusting. To say that that gentleman should get his affairs in order and not worry about the implications of these Labour policies is shameful and something that I hope Rhoda Grant will reflect on and regret.

I will quote from a farmer, Jennifer Struthers, who wrote to *The Scottish Farmer* this week. She has written to her Labour MP and is encouraging others to do the same. In her letter, Jennifer says:

“Farmers do not view themselves as owners of the land, but merely custodians for the next generation.”

In other words, they invest in their farms to pass on a business in a better condition for the future. She ends her letter by saying:

“I hope common sense can prevail to overturn this ridiculous tax on the food producers of our country.”

I whole-heartedly agree with Jennifer and the many other farmers who are saying the same. We need a U-turn from the UK Labour Government.

The front page of *The Scottish Farmer* this week is very clear—it says “Fight For Our Future”. That is what the Scottish Conservatives are doing today—fighting for the future of our farmers and crofters and our future farmers and crofters. Tonight, the Scottish Parliament can add its voice to that, unite behind the motion from Tim Eagle and the amendment from the SNP cabinet secretary, and send the strongest possible message to the Labour Government that it needs to listen to Scottish farmers and to people in the countryside here in Scotland and across the UK, and U-turn on this dangerous policy.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Elena Whitham joins us remotely.

15:34

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I am extremely grateful to see this important issue raised in the chamber once again, as it affects many of my constituents across rural Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley.

These changes to inheritance tax and agricultural property relief, which have never been consulted on, will be devastating to the vast majority of farms in Scotland. It is not only Opposition politicians saying that; the National Farmers Union of Scotland, and many of my farming constituents, have confirmed the new reality that they are facing.

Before the election, Labour made lots of promises. It specifically promised that it would not change APR, but now it has announced that 100 per cent relief will apply only to the first £1 million, leaving farmers fearing that they will be unable to

pass their farms on to the next generation. Despite what many in Labour seem to think, it does not take much to reach those thresholds, even if spouses join the relief. Farms can be asset rich and cash poor, meaning that we are at real risk of family farms being taxed into oblivion.

Before the election, there was a clear and united voice across the country that farming needed multi-annual ring-fenced funding to be increased from previous levels, along with collective engagement to agree the principles of future intra-UK allocations. That would have ensured the same certainty that we had while part of the EU. Instead, Labour’s approach to farming is worse than before. The removal of ring fencing and the Barnettising of funding were among the biggest fears the very first day after the Brexit vote, but sadly, they have now come to pass under the Labour Party.

We are only a few short months into this Labour Government, and what have we discovered so far? We have discovered that the chancellor, and potentially the rest of the UK Government, has a complete lack of understanding of how agriculture works in Scotland. The chancellor has claimed that the new approach should protect small farms. After meticulous analysis, Johnston Carmichael, tax adviser to the NFUS, has confirmed that, given the value of land, livestock and machinery, and the average size of a commercial farm being around 200 acres, the changes are likely to see a significant number of farm businesses brought within the scope of inheritance tax.

Family farms are being left in an unknown space, not knowing how best to manage succession of the business in an organised fashion while at the same time protecting against exposure to a punitive inheritance tax, charged upon death, that could lead to the breakup of their family farm, and to factory farming and further depopulation.

Scotland’s farmers have already suffered massively as a result of Brexit, with loss of access to the single market and higher supply chain costs, not to mention the impact of continuously rising energy costs. Our farmers need and deserve our support, not more uncertainty and a brutal hammering from a Government that either does not know or—worse still—does not care about the net effects of its budget decisions on farming communities here in Scotland.

I am sure that we were all dismayed to hear a leading Labour voice proclaiming that we do not need small farmers and that they can be done away with, akin to the miners. Whether it be mining or farming, we cannot continue to allow UK Governments, of any colour, to have the deciding say on Scotland’s most critical industries. Our farmers deserve better.

We must all collectively remember—indeed, we forget much to our peril—that the vast majority of farmers own land to feed the nation, not to dodge tax. They work, sometimes for less than minimum wage, to put food on our plates. How can we plan for food security with such folly coming from those who seem to know very little about the farming way of life?

15:38

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): I have listened closely this afternoon, and I am concerned that what we have heard is not shedding any further light on how the UK Government's inheritance tax changes will affect our food producers.

I will pick up on a few points. Beatrice Wishart pointed out concerns about small farms being sold off. I appreciate her calling on the UK Government to come forward with more information so that we know about the cumulative impact of those measures.

Richard Leonard talked about the NFUS briefing and the confusion about the scale of farms that will be affected. Again, we need clarity about what will happen to our farmers.

Rachael Hamilton: Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: I also appreciate Elena Whitham's point about the impact of Brexit and the need for farmers to have certainty. I mentioned Brexit in my opening speech, but Brexit is not the only problem that our rural economy faces; there are several other long-term issues that previous UK Governments have allowed to fester for decades, and I hope that that will not continue under the new Government.

One of the biggest of those issues is Westminster's on-going policy of surrendering responsibility for food to the major supermarkets. Since the 1990s—

Finlay Carson: Will the member take an intervention?

Ariane Burgess: I need to get on.

Since the 1990s, such an approach has led to a race to the bottom on pricing and standards. It has left farmers unable to invest properly in regenerative solutions that will safeguard their futures and bolster our national food security.

Food security has been further endangered by the lack of investment in science, and the UK and Scottish Governments have failed to provide enough resource for agricultural research and development. It means that we do not have the capacity to develop climate-resilient food varieties

in the UK. In our increasingly unstable growing climate—

Rachael Hamilton: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Could Ariane Burgess please resume her seat for a second? Rachel Hamilton has a point of order.

Rachael Hamilton: Presiding Officer, I seek your advice. The motion was a very simple one-liner. I do not believe that Ariane Burgess, on behalf of the Green Party, is speaking to it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I thank Rachael Hamilton for the point of order. It seems to me that a number of issues have been raised in the debate. When a member follows on from the debate, it is not unreasonable for them, in their closing speech, to reflect on the debate that has taken place.

Please resume, Ms Burgess.

Ariane Burgess: Thank you, Presiding Officer.

In our increasingly unstable growing climate, the current approach is exposing our growers to the worst of the climate emergency. Meanwhile, our rural communities are facing depopulation after years of underinvestment.

The Scottish Greens have been working tirelessly to ensure that farmers and growers have the support that they need to keep going in the face of environmental challenges. In the recently passed Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024, we secured vital amendments that make it easier to secure direct payments, provide financial support for wool and boost soil health. We are also proud of our progressive reforms to income tax from our time in Government.

To see the SNP and the Conservatives siding with each other on the issues that we are discussing today suggests that they are more inclined to protect vested interests than to give the industry what it really needs. We get the real challenges that farmers face. We know how to help growers thrive and survive in a rapidly changing world. Those concerned farmers, growers, crofters and communities who are watching today can leave the Parliament knowing that the Scottish Greens understand their plight and are working towards a better future.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Colin Smyth to close the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour. You have up to four minutes, Mr Smyth.

15:42

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): After 14 years of chaos and decline, last month's UK

Government budget started to turn the page on those Tory years. It began to rebuild our broken public finances, jump-started economic growth and ended austerity. It delivered the largest budget settlement in the history of devolution—an extra £1.5 billion this financial year and £3.4 billion more next year—and the highest ever agricultural budget.

The biggest threat to agricultural support does not come from devolving that support in full to a Scottish budget that Labour is committed to growing year after year. The biggest threat comes from the Tories calling for that support to remain as part of a UK budget that they have said today they want to see cut by £40 billion over the next two years.

Speaker after speaker from the Tories and the SNP has said that they oppose changes to inheritance tax and national insurance, but every one of them has failed to say where the cuts will be made. It takes a Liz Truss-level of economic illiteracy to believe that there is only one side of a balance sheet and that we can cut taxes without reducing public spending.

I have seen at first hand the impact of Tory austerity and the SNP's incompetence on the rural communities that I represent—closed cottage hospitals, dental deserts, mothballed primary schools, banks shut, post offices axed, bus routes dismantled, crumbling road infrastructure and record rural depopulation as young people leave because of a lack of jobs and a lack of affordable housing. Thank goodness that I do not have any Caledonian MacBrayne ferry routes in my region. Tory and SNP MSPs—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Smyth, please resume your seat for a second. I always try to allow a lot of latitude in debates, but I think that getting on to ferries is perhaps not quite where we should be going.

Colin Smyth: Tory and SNP MSPs should be coming to the chamber to apologise to rural Scotland for the mess that they have left, not to propose cuts to those communities.

There is always a debate to be had about where the threshold should lie with any tax, including the level of agricultural property relief and, indeed, income tax thresholds, which the Tories and the SNP chose to freeze to absolutely hammer ordinary workers. However, there was no mention of thresholds today. At a time when tough decisions are needed to rebuild the country's public finances, it is not credible to argue that agriculture should be completely exempt from inheritance tax, no matter whether the value of a farm be £1 million or £10 million, but that is what the Tories and the SNP have called for today.

Frankly, it makes a mockery of their claim that the debate is about small family farms.

It is also not credible for the Tories and the SNP to pretend that there is not an issue with wealthy landowners buying agricultural land to dodge inheritance tax and, by doing so, driving up the price of land for locals. It is astonishing to hear SNP MSPs arguing in the chamber that an ordinary farm worker in Scotland on £29,000 a year should pay more income tax than their counterpart in England while at the same time being silent about Anders Holch Povlsen being able to buy 89,000 hectares of land in Scotland, thereby avoiding paying hundreds of millions of pounds of inheritance tax and driving up land prices for families in the Highlands.

Today, we could have had a serious debate about how we use the record agriculture budget to support our farmers and crofters, including by returning the millions of pounds that were cut from that budget by the SNP. We could have had a debate about how we back our food producers, who are drowning in the sea of red tape that has been caused by the Tories' disastrous Brexit deal and sell-out trade deals.

Tim Eagle: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

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

Colin Smyth: We could have talked about the delays and dithering of the SNP Government, which still does not have a plan for future rural support. We could have debated how we use the record public sector investment from the UK Government's budget to ensure that more of the food that is purchased across the public sector is locally produced.

Instead, the Tories and the SNP—two peas in a pod—have called for cuts to the agriculture budget. In doing so, they are calling for a return to austerity, which would be devastating for our rural communities.

15:47

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): I very much welcome the fact that Tim Eagle has brought this debate to the chamber. He attacked the Labour Party and disputed the calculations that it has made. Mr Eagle can correct me if I am wrong, but I think that the point that he was trying to make is that the policy takes no account of the high value of land against the income that can be derived from that land. For years, the value of capital that is tied up in land has been out of kilter with the income from that land.

As Mr Eagle said, family farms are the glue in many communities. That is the point that Labour has misunderstood; its decision clearly shows that it does not have a proper understanding. That is particularly true if we listen to the likes of Mr John McTernan. Edward Mountain has already mentioned him, but let me remind members that he said that we can do to farmers what

“Thatcher did to the miners ... It is an industry we could do without ... We don't need the small farmers.”

That is a terrible thing for anyone to say about such a hugely valuable community, which we represent.

Colin Smyth talked about there being record funding for agriculture, but he got that wrong. Funding has flatlined—it is exactly the same as it has been for the past six years.

Rhoda Grant: Will the minister take an intervention?

Jim Fairlie: How are we for time, Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You have the time that you have, minister. It is up to you whether you take the intervention.

Jim Fairlie: I will not take the intervention, then.

This morning, I visited AgriScot with the First Minister. I assure members that the palpable anger in the community is very real. People are not only angry but fearful of what the policy will mean when they try to pass on their farms.

The First Minister has given assurances that the Scottish Government will continue to support agriculture as much as we can, but there are complications around the lack of ring fencing and Barnettising, not least the fact that the Scottish Government does not have multiyear certainty. Yet again, Westminster delivers a hammer blow to a sector and then expects the Scottish Government to clean up its mess.

The previous UK Government agreed to the Bew review, which would involve bringing together all four nations to discuss the way forward on funding, but that has been kicked out the door.

Rhoda Grant says that very few farms will be affected. What she clearly does not know is that there are no figures for Scottish farming. The UK Government is as frustrated as the Scottish Government is that there are no clear figures that enable us to do any kind of work. There was no consultation. There was no understanding of what was going to be delivered, because the UK Government did not ask anyone. It did not talk to the farmers. It did not talk to the farming unions. It did not talk to this Government. There is literally nothing.

Rhoda Grant: Is the minister seriously saying that he does not know the value of farms in Scotland and that that is not something that his Government is interested in?

Jim Fairlie: The point that the member is missing is that this is a reserved tax. We have no idea how it will affect the family farms that we are talking about.

Ariane Burgess said that she would like to see tax on the big landowners. I go back to the point that I made earlier. The value of the land does not reflect the income that is derived from it, and the UK Government has never tackled that. That is why the UK Government needs to reverse its decision. It needs to do a proper impact assessment on family farms and communities and come back with proposals that will ensure the smooth transition of productive family farms and that the bedrock of our food and drink sector and our rural communities is maintained.

Beatrice Wishart of the Lib Dems called for a £1 billion funding uplift before the election. She is absolutely correct. That was the call from NFU Scotland, and it was the call from the Scottish Government. It is, however, disappointing that she did not mention that, while we were in the EU, we had seven-year multi-annual budgets. That is now gone, as is the Bew review, which would have allowed us to have conversations about what that funding would look like for Scotland's farmers, who carry a huge weight in terms of what we expect them to do. There was supposed to have been a fair settlement for Scotland's farmers, but, as I said, that has been binned by the Labour Party.

Christine Grahame's point about Labour not understanding rural Scotland is absolutely correct. When I recently attended a local NFUS meeting in my constituency, I was joined by Dave Doogan MP and Pete Wishart MP. Dave Doogan said that, when they were in the chamber when the budget was being discussed, when the reaction came—as it rightly did—as the announcements were made, the chancellor looked shocked. She did not understand what was being said. She then went through the same performance when she was on the Laura Kuenssberg show on Sunday. She does not understand what she has done.

Richard Leonard's contribution absolutely confirmed that Labour does not know what it is talking about, but I will waste no more time trying to educate him, because he is absolutely beyond redemption. [*Interruption.*]

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

Jim Fairlie: There are 21,000 crofts in Scotland and 33,000 people living in crofting households. It is impossible to gauge the impact of the policy on that sector, because we simply do not have the

information. The Labour Government is simply wrong on this, and it needs to do something about it. It needs to reconsider its position in the light of the reaction from industry stakeholders and farmers across the UK.

The Scottish Government stands ready to work with the UK Government on these matters. However, the lack of engagement with Scotland on the changes highlights the need for inheritance tax powers to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament to allow them to be designed and tailored for a Scottish context.

15:53

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I welcome the opportunity to close on behalf of my colleagues in the Scottish Conservatives. The role of the Scottish farming community is absolutely immeasurable; we have heard that today. We know that farmers are one of the hardest-working sectors in Scotland. They are the hardest-working people. They work 24/7 to put food on our plates. They are the custodians of our countryside. They protect the environment, they restore nature and they have to face all the challenges of climate change—they are expected to do so by our Governments.

Livelihoods are at risk from Labour's shameful budget betrayal, which could see more than 12,000 farms affected. Rhoda Grant continues to shake her head. She should be absolutely ashamed of what she said. Douglas Ross was absolutely right. Labour's mask has dropped over this—it is a terrible trio of high-taxing farmer bashers.

This is nothing short of a betrayal. Rachel Reeves promised not to raise taxes, as we heard from Douglas Ross. Anas Sarwar must be so embarrassed by the budget. When he spoke at the Scottish Land & Estates annual conference, he explained that Labour understood the vital importance of the rural sector and suggested that Labour was determined to do all that was in its power to ensure that vibrant community.

Colin Smyth: Will the member take an intervention?

Rachael Hamilton: Yes, if it is quick.

Colin Smyth: Rachael Hamilton says a lot about the taxes that she is opposed to. She is opposed to inheritance tax and to the change in national insurance. Will she say a bit more about the areas of the budget presented by the UK Government in which she would make cuts? We are talking about £40 billion over two years. Where would she make cuts?

Rachael Hamilton: The UK economy is the fastest-growing economy in the G7 and it has the highest employment.

Furthermore, Anas Sarwar has the gall to suggest that the valid concerns of farmers in Scotland are based on "misinformation". In reality, it is Labour that is misinformed. It has misinformed the public, and it is now trying to pull the wool over farmers' eyes. As my colleague Tim Eagle noted, Labour's calculations are wrong and its figures are strongly disputed by various organisations, including the NFUS and the NFU. I find Labour's botched calculations, coupled with its socialist ideologies, alarming. It was really alarming to listen to Richard Leonard.

Agriculture is one of the main economic drivers of the Scottish economy. Without our farmers, rural businesses would go to the wall, as would the supply chain, and there would be further rural depopulation. One farmer in my constituency told me:

"Labour have shown themselves to be ignorant and inept."

He said that most farmers in the Borders are

"living in fear of their financial future"

and that

"future investment is simply not going to happen."

The impact is deeply dark. There is a risk of depopulation, as I said. My colleague Edward Mountain has already noted that, without farmers, there is no food, and Labour's policies threaten to put many farms out of business. That will further weaken the fragile national food security that has already been a challenge as a result of the war in Ukraine and the pandemic. Beatrice Wishart rightly asked for a rural impact assessment to be carried out on Labour's policy.

What I find most alarming is Labour's refusal to accept and acknowledge the impact that its cruel family farm tax will have. Labour is disconnected from reality. It continues to justify its actions and to blame the situation on Liz Truss, rather than accepting that it was wrong. Anas Sarwar called the tax "proportionate". Steve Reed has said that farmers will simply have to

"learn to do more with less".

In response to my colleague Finlay Carson, Rhoda Grant said that farmers should get their affairs in order. That is totally offensive. It speaks volumes about the lack of understanding of the intricacies of the challenges that family farms face. People do not decide when they are going to die, Ms Grant.

Jim Walker, former president of the NFUS, agrees and has stated that the tax increases

"show that agriculture and food production don't matter to the UK government".

We have the written comments of the commentariat, who believe that the family farm tax is absolutely wrong.

Labour needs to admit that it was wrong to introduce a family farm tax. It is not often that the SNP and the Conservatives agree on anything to do with rural affairs, but we both recognise that the family farm tax needs to be reversed immediately. We are calling for a U-turn. We are calling for this shameful tax to be ditched.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): That concludes the debate on reversing the family farm tax. There will be a brief pause before we move on to the next item of business, to allow for a changeover of front-bench members.

Housing Emergency

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-15401, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on Scotland's housing emergency. I invite members who wish to participate in the debate to press their request-to-speak buttons, and I call Meghan Gallacher to speak to and move the motion.

15:59

Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con): The Housing (Scotland) Bill was a golden opportunity to address Scotland's housing emergency, yet the bill that the Government introduced does not even mention the building of homes. There is a severe lack of spades in the ground at a time when communities right across the country are in desperate need of new housing developments.

The Scottish National Party promised that it would deliver 110,000 affordable homes by 2032, but it is miles off meeting its target. Its anti-house-building agenda has undoubtedly caused the market to stagnate. The SNP has exacerbated the problem through rent controls and by cutting £200 million from the housing budget. It is no wonder that half of Scotland's population now lives in a local authority area that has declared a housing emergency, including the Minister for Housing's backyard.

We are in the midst of a deepening housing crisis. More than 15,000 children are homeless; the number of applications from households that are assessed as homeless is at its highest level since 2012; hundreds of thousands of people are stranded on local authority waiting lists; and more than 10,000 children are in temporary accommodation.

The solution to the housing emergency is to build more mixed-tenure homes, but we have a bill that is fundamentally flawed. Parliament is due to debate the bill at stage 1 by the end of November, but given the serious concerns that stakeholders and developers have raised, we are calling for the bill to be rewritten. We do not take that decision lightly, as there are sections of the bill that we support in principle—those around homelessness prevention and the duty to act. However, given the issues that I have just outlined and the number of people, especially children, who are without a safe and secure home, why did the SNP not introduce a stand-alone bill on homelessness? That would have shown that the SNP is serious about ending homelessness for good, instead of attaching the issue to other housing-related matters.

The main reason for my party's opposition to the bill relates to rent controls. Studies going back decades, from those on New York in the 1980s to more recent ones on Berlin, show that rent controls have serious unintended consequences with reduced supply and increased costs. Rent controls in Scotland have been described as "ruinous" and likely to damage a part of our economy that has suffered at the hands of the Government's meddling in recent years. They will do much more harm than good.

Recent figures show that around 70 private housing providers are leaving the property market every single month, according to data from the Scottish Landlord Register. That is no coincidence—it is a direct consequence of the SNP's policy on rent controls.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): The member makes a point about property owners selling their property. However, surely that will not destroy the housing stock; it will simply transfer it to different ownership, which is not necessarily a bad thing. It is perhaps about people who own multiple homes simply redistributing that property in a way that might be more efficient for future occupation.

Meghan Gallacher: What we need is mixed-tenure housing to fix the housing emergency that we are currently in, and rent controls will not fix the situation.

Rent controls will result in a shrinkage of available property and a lack of coherence between the supply of and the demand for rental properties. Homes for Scotland has warned that the SNP's proposed changes to housing legislation will increase the cost of a new home by £30,000 through changes to rent controls. That is an eye-watering amount that will only make it harder for first-time buyers to get on the housing ladder. It makes no sense whatsoever to prevent people—especially young people—from becoming proud home owners.

Regretfully, that will not be the only problem, should the bill continue through stage 1. We have already seen the loss of potential investment in the build-to-rent sector. Hundreds of millions of pounds-worth of potential development has not proceeded due to uncertainty around the Scottish Government's lack of strategy. The result is that investors will take their money elsewhere, which means less growth in our economy. With the lack of council housing, there is a dependence on the private sector to provide more homes and affordable housing. We simply cannot afford for more private housing providers to leave the market.

I will be fair to the minister. He inherited this disastrous bill and the ideas behind it from a former Green minister. However, he must have

known that whatever he would inherit would be economically incoherent.

Despite a year of consultations and significant engagement with the housing industry—particularly the much-referenced housing investment task force—the Government has continued to ignore practical suggestions such as the creation of a balanced framework to protect tenants while offering greater predictability for investors. When we combine that with a lack of common sense and the Government's obsession with ideologically driven policies, we can see that the bill was always a recipe for disaster.

We have heard a lot of outrage directed at the bill recently from the Greens, no less, who have a question to the First Minister tomorrow on the topic. That is why I cannot understand why they will not support our motion at decision time. Both we and they disagree with the Scottish Government's approach and how it has taken forward its policy on rent controls, albeit for different reasons. Surely there is common ground to send the Government back to the drawing board to listen to the housing sector and stakeholders and bring back a bill that will not harm the housing sector but will tackle the housing emergency.

The SNP may wish to swing a wrecking ball at the private sector, but in doing so, it is harming our economy and preventing young people from climbing the housing ladder. That is why the bill should be demolished, with rent controls reduced to the pile of rubble that they deserve to be.

I move,

That the Parliament believes that the Scottish Government should redraft the Housing (Scotland) Bill, as it fails to address the key factors that created the housing emergency.

16:06

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): This is a good opportunity to give another further update on the Housing (Scotland) Bill in the chamber, because although addressing the housing emergency is not confined to measures in primary legislation, they are an important part of that work. Dealing with the housing emergency obviously extends to much more than just legislation.

The Government declared a housing emergency to move past the debating of definitions and move on to focused actions. Since that declaration, we have worked with local authorities to boost the supply of affordable housing. We have worked closely with those who received the biggest share of the additional £40 million that was committed to the affordable housing supply programme to bring into use or acquire existing properties that can be

delivered this year. We will utilise this year's almost £600 million budget by progressing affordable housing approvals and site starts, and we have published a dedicated delivery plan so that planning plays its full part in addressing the housing emergency.

Having listened to representations, we have responded by confirming the rent cap that will underpin our approach to rent control under the Housing (Scotland) Bill, bringing certainty to that sector.

Introduced in March, the bill proposes a reform package to help ensure that people have a safe, secure and affordable place to live. The bill will help to end homelessness and strengthen tenants' rights. It will also address long-term factors, helping Scotland to address the housing emergency.

Meghan Gallacher: Does the cabinet secretary understand that the policies that her Government is trying to push through the Parliament have stalled roughly £3.2 billion-worth of housing developments in Scotland? How does she reconcile that with the housing emergency that we are trying to tackle?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As a minority Government, we cannot push a bill through Parliament. Stages 2 and 3 of the bill are coming up, and we look forward to continuing discussions with colleagues across the chamber on the changes that they wish to see. That is the productive way to deal with the bill, rather than calling for it to be scrapped.

Our homelessness prevention measures will shift the focus away from crisis intervention and towards prevention. We need to avoid households going through the trauma of homelessness in the first place. Rented sector reforms will make renting a home more affordable for private tenants through stabilising rent levels in rent control areas. We know that a good-quality, affordable and well-regulated housing system can help tackle poverty, including for families with children.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): The cabinet secretary says that the measures will make rents more affordable. Will she explain how rent will be made more affordable by amendments that require the maximum action that could ever be taken in a rent control area to keep rents rising faster than other prices and inflation?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That aspect of rent controls is one of the areas where Patrick Harvie and I fundamentally disagree. Although the Government's continuing priority is to eradicate child poverty—and rent controls are one aspect of that—we need to provide certainty to private investors to ensure that we have investment in the capital city and across the country. There needs to

be a balance that achieves appropriate protections for the property rights of landlords and support for investment, but we must also always ensure that we protect tenants.

However, let us be very clear that we continue to listen. That is why, in the minister's very recent statement, we said that we will move forward with consultation on exemptions to rent controls, whether those relate to issues such as those that have been raised with us about the build-to-rent market or those in relation to mid-market rent. That is a conscious attempt by the Government to continue to listen and to ensure that we strike the right balance.

I point to what is in the motion, which will also be read into support by the Parliament for the Conservatives' motion. The motion talks about redrafting the bill, and there is talk in the press about scrapping the bill. That means scrapping prevention from homelessness, which does not help us to tackle the housing emergency. It means scrapping protection from overly high rents, which also does not help with the housing emergency, nor does it help those in poverty who are in difficulty in the private rented sector. The Parliament will have the opportunity to debate the bill at stage 1, stage 2 and stage 3, and to lodge amendments. The Government is keen to continue the dialogue, but we will not sway from our determination to move forward, tackle the housing emergency, have rent controls, protect those in poverty, provide certainty for private investors and, most importantly, introduce the prevention duties that are in the bill. The Tories want to scrap the bill, and that will in no way, shape or form tackle the housing emergency; it will make it worse.

I move amendment S6M-15401.3, to leave out from "believes" to end and insert:

"welcomes the Scottish Government's Housing (Scotland) Bill, which delivers a package of support for tenants across Scotland, including rent controls and homelessness prevention duties."

16:12

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): We are quite often suspected by the public—and often by each other—of making capital from issues that affect people's lives. Last year, there were 40,000 homeless cases across Scotland. Those of us in the Parliament have been accused of standing in the chamber, wringing our hands and doing not much about it. We are accused of repeating the same numbers at each other: 10,000 children are homeless, there are 110 deaths in our streets, one in four face a form of housing need, and there is 20 per cent less money available for affordable homes. Those accusations have been made because we are not elected to make sympathetic

speeches. Our job is to pass the laws of this country in order to stop those everyday tragedies.

We have the power, motivation and means to give families the safe, warm and secure homes that they need, to prevent the harm that is being caused to them while they are homeless. When we talk about becoming MSPs to change the world, we do not mean that we will make grand, sweeping statements or gestures; we mean that we will make sure that no one is using shower or toilet water to cook their meals on our watch.

When the Government talked about introducing a housing bill, we were engaged, positive and keen to get going, because things are horrendous and we believe that we can help. However, I am not sure what has happened between the ambition and the development of the legislation, because the bill was—and is—a mess. Yes, it talks about rent controls, and we support regulation, but the gap between the legislation and the ability to deliver is a chasm. Yes, the bill talks about homelessness prevention, but cash-strapped public services have no confidence in delivering on such lofty ideals.

The widest chasm is the total lack of any mention of the number 1 issue that we face, which is that we do not have enough homes. The bill provides a golden opportunity to put solving the housing emergency at the front and centre of the Parliament's and the Government's mission. Instead of talking endlessly, we could do what needs to be done and get on with building houses and helping people. It seems to be a radical suggestion, but it should not be. We should be driving up the supply of homes, getting the ones that are already there back into use and getting families into them. We can—absolutely—fix this. We have the power to do it. We have a housing bill waiting and ready—

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Griffin: As long as it is brief, because I am really restricted on time.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The best way to deliver more affordable homes is through the budget. If we present a budget that has funding for more affordable homes, will Labour vote for it?

Mark Griffin: I hope that that is in the budget. For the past six months, the cabinet secretary and the minister have talked about me, as a Labour spokesperson, lobbying an incoming Government to provide additional funds. The UK Government has delivered. The Scottish Government talked about housing being its number 1 priority before it got extra money. Now that the extra money has come, it does not seem to be quite as high a priority as it once was.

We find ourselves in a situation that is not entirely surprising. Scotland is being run by a Government of wasted opportunity. We have a national care service bill that fails to deliver care, a land reform bill that does not reform land ownership, and a human rights bill that has disappeared and does not exist any more. Now, we have a housing bill that will not build a single house. The Scottish Government seems to have forgotten what it is here for, but Scottish Labour has not.

I move amendment S6M-15401.2, to insert at end:

“; calls on the Scottish Government to recognise the housing emergency in the redrafted legislation, and further calls on it to include the requirement for the Scottish Ministers to produce a strategy for the increased supply of houses in Scotland, and to report annually on its progress.”

16:16

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Scottish Greens believe that access to a safe, warm and affordable housing is a fundamental human right that is essential to our health, happiness and ability to fulfil our potential as human beings. That is why the new deal for tenants was a key priority for us in this parliamentary session, and it is why, under the Bute house agreement, Patrick Harvie introduced the Housing (Scotland) Bill earlier this year.

That basic, fundamental right—a place to call home—is far from being realised by far too many Scots. The briefings that we have received for today's debate paint a stark picture of a 143 per cent increase in the number of children stuck in temporary accommodation in 10 years, with more than 10,000 children without a permanent home; gender inequality baked into the system, leaving women exposed to additional and avoidable harm; and minoritised ethnic communities spending, on average, longer stuck in temporary accommodation. Scotland also has the UK's largest disparity between renting and owning, with homeowners paying over 30 per cent less a year than renters.

To focus on that last point, we must use the legislation to strengthen tenants' rights, making housing more affordable for them. That is why rent controls in the private rented sector are vital and must deliver genuine affordability, not just predictability or stabilisation. Rent stabilisation will not protect tenants if it locks them into ever-increasing costs.

Rent controls are normal. Across Europe, they are used to prioritise tenant security, although the mechanisms vary considerably. Rent regulations in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and elsewhere ensure that increases reflect the quality of housing, the environmental considerations and

local affordability standards. They prioritise security of tenure, preventing market volatility from dictating excessive rent rises.

Elsewhere, rent freezes and rent reductions are used to tackle unaffordable rents. The recent Scottish Government rent control proposal, which is set at the consumer prices index plus 1 per cent, up to a maximum of 6 per cent, will not enable those mechanisms in Scotland. It will not adequately tackle the unaffordable housing costs in our country. It shows limited ambition, favouring landlord protections and certainty over those of tenants. It is also misaligned with the urgency of Scotland's housing emergency.

The policy's gradualism contradicts the stated ambition of eradicating poverty, particularly child poverty. Rising housing costs are one of the main factors exacerbating poverty, and, without stricter controls, we risk failing to alleviate that burden. Housing costs are, of course, closely linked to broader economic contexts such as interest rates and broader inflationary trends that drive demand. Effective tenant protections would address those broader pressures by insulating tenants from market fluctuations instead of placing the burden on them to absorb costs.

International practices highlight that capping rent independently of inflation rates and wage growth considerations through rent controls allows tenants more stability for financial planning and more security. The goal of rent controls is genuine affordability, not simply predictability. Our vision for rent controls includes the ability to reduce rents, not just to limit future increases. It includes the possibility of freezing rents, as we did earlier in this parliamentary session through emergency legislation to support tenants during the cost of living crisis.

We believe that rent controls must be attached to the property, not the lease, so that the cost is never a barrier to tenants who are leaving a home and so that new tenants are not hit by sharp increases. The costs must also be linked to quality in order to drive improvements in our housing stock. Therefore, we must not water down the Housing (Scotland) Bill and lock in above-inflation rent rises. I urge colleagues across the chamber to support the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S6M-15401.1, to leave out from "redraft" to end and insert:

"not amend the Housing (Scotland) Bill to weaken the proposed system of rent controls, which must be able to keep rent increases below inflation if they are to improve affordability and allow for rent freezes during a housing emergency."

16:20

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): We see the toll on people who are homeless or desperate for a new house. They live with it all day, every day, all night and all year round. They are drained, anxious and unwell. They are arguing in the family and they are desperate for a change. We members do not know what that is like, because we are living in a different world from the one that they are living in.

That needs to come home in the priorities of this Government, because the Government knows that it has made a mistake. It has made a mistake over a number of years, and that is why it is changing its policy now. We might debate whether the policy changes are right, but the fact that the Government is changing policy now is an indication that it had got it wrong. In many local authorities, including the housing minister's, there is a stark housing emergency. It is stark across the country, and, as we have talked about, 10,000 children are in temporary accommodation, so their lives are in limbo.

When it was clear that a housing crisis was coming, what was most depressing was that the Government cut the affordable housing supply programme by a large degree. The Government says that it was somebody else's fault, but its budget decisions led to that situation and made the emergency even worse.

To give the Government credit, I think that it is taking steps in the right direction. The changes to the planning system that were announced yesterday were an improvement, because they will remove the infrastructure levy, increase the capacity and expertise in planning departments, and create a best practice hub in the centre. Those measures might lead to some pragmatic improvements. I still have concerns about access to land supply in areas that are viable, however, and I hope that the minister will look at that issue.

The changes that were announced yesterday were a step in the right direction. I remain sceptical about rent control as a whole, but the previous week's rent control decisions on CPI plus 1 per cent and, crucially, excluding mid-market rent and build to rent were a good signal to investors that they should look to invest in the sector. It is about restoring confidence in the industry, because its confidence was at rock bottom.

I attended the Homes for Scotland conference just a few weeks ago, and the house builders were desperate to build new homes. We cannot do it without those people. We might not like them, but we cannot do it without them, because they build houses. We are not going to do it all through the Government, councils or housing associations; we

need the builders to make it work. Therefore, we need to build confidence in those people, and the steps that the Government has taken are a move in the right direction.

I urge the minister to consider the language around energy performance, which we have discussed previously. Specifically, the use of the term “Passivhaus” strikes fear into the hearts of some people, who believe that a specific standard is being required when, in fact, we should be aiming for a high energy efficiency standard overall. We need houses to be built at volume and quickly, to a really good standard, but specifying “Passivhaus” would be a mistake.

Patrick Harvie: It is not specified.

Willie Rennie: It has been specified as “Passivhaus”. It is in the language, so we need to have clarity about exactly what the Government means. We should be aiming for a high efficiency standard rather than a specific technique or specification.

Do we redraft the bill? Do we start again? We have the amendment process coming, and we will support the Conservative motion and the Labour amendment today. I believe that we should be getting the Government to go further than it has gone just now, to make sure that we end the housing emergency, because I have had enough of it.

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

16:25

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Presiding Officer,

“Edinburgh is at the epicentre of the housing and homelessness crisis”.—[*Official Report*, 23 April 2023; c 29.]

I spoke those words during my time as shadow housing spokesperson for the Conservatives. We know that support services for vulnerable groups are at breaking point, and the number of people who are experiencing homelessness in the capital is at a record level.

When John Swinney became First Minister, he stated that he wanted to be honest about where the Scottish Government was going wrong. In relation to the housing emergency, I think that we can sum that up in two words: rent controls. All parties across the Parliament have welcomed the fact that the Scottish Government has declared a housing emergency, but we must be honest—and the Scottish Government must be honest—that the bill will not solve those problems. The homelessness crisis that people in Scotland face, especially here in the capital, is only getting worse, and they are living with the consequences of

decisions that have been taken by SNP and Green ministers.

The prevention duties that ministers have pointed to already exist and are being ignored, so we need to see ministers focus on the homelessness crisis now, which means fixing our broken system. Today, local authority homelessness services across the country are in systemic failure, and that is nowhere more pronounced than it is here in Edinburgh. Around 700 households in Edinburgh are currently facing the prospect of not knowing where they will be living come Christmas day, due to the council’s proposal to end the use of temporary accommodation that is not compliant with houses in multiple occupation requirements. It is an incredibly serious situation and it needs an immediate solution. I hope that—

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member take an intervention?

Miles Briggs: If I can get some time back.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You can get most of it back.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Ministers had a meeting with the council on the issue today, and we have offered to have another meeting at ministerial level on Friday. Ministers and officials will be working on it tonight and tomorrow, so we are absolutely engaged at both ministerial and official level.

Miles Briggs: That is welcome, and I hope that the cabinet secretary will update MSPs from across the parties very soon on that. We know that there is concern about a loss of bed space and the fact that the council is now routinely struggling to find accommodation. That has seen not only other councils across Scotland but councils in England being asked to take individual families during the housing emergency.

There should be no prospect of suspending those protections—they need to remain in place for households, including the 25 families with children that are affected. Instead, I hope that ministers will urgently look at what support they can provide the City of Edinburgh Council. We need to see action, because ministers cannot sit idly by while hundreds of households do not know where they will be come 1 December. If we do not see action from the Government and the council, it will completely undermine any remaining pretence that Scotland is leading the world on housing rights and tackling homelessness, as the cabinet secretary said earlier.

In its briefing, Crisis says that

“The Scottish Government should set out a clear vision of what homelessness prevention will look like in practice”

and put in place measures that will get us there.

Local authorities are at breaking point, and the prevention duties that will be introduced, which we all agree should be put in place, will add to the burden that local authorities face. Therefore, we need ministers to urgently outline to Parliament what will change across all Government portfolios and what fresh leadership will be brought to the housing emergency.

For some time, charities and experts in the homelessness sector have warned ministers that the bill will not fix the housing emergency, but all the energy of the Scottish Government and its officials is going into it. The Scottish Government should pause and redraft the bill as a homelessness emergency bill, so that we can focus on what we agree on and get the emergency action that we need across our country.

We need a bespoke approach for Edinburgh and the crisis that my constituents in the capital face. We are not seeing that, and ministers saying that they are having meetings on meetings on meetings is an example of the failure to address the housing emergency and the homelessness crisis. The Scottish Conservatives call on ministers to redraft the housing bill, because it fails to address the factors that are creating the housing emergency. I support the motion in Meghan Gallacher's name.

16:30

Gordon MacDonald (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP): When the Housing (Scotland) Bill was introduced, I was a member of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. We took evidence on parts 1 to 4 of the bill, with only the section on rent controls creating much discussion.

It is important to understand the current housing situation across Scotland and all the key factors that are impacting on the Edinburgh housing situation, especially in relation to the 5,000 families who are currently homeless.

In 2022-23, the total supply of new housing reached the highest annual level since the financial crash of 2008-09. There are now 624,000 social homes in Scotland, which, at 23 per cent of all homes, is the highest proportion in the UK. A National Records of Scotland report that was published in June highlights that, across Scotland, there are 2.7 million homes and 2.5 million households. To be clear, that means that 186,000 homes are lying empty. Since 2007, the Scottish Government has supported the building of 133,000 affordable and social homes. Across all tenures and sectors, 293,000 homes have been built, which is a 12 per cent increase compared with a population increase of only 7 per cent.

I will set out the key factors that are impacting on the Edinburgh emergency housing situation, despite 33,500 homes being built in the city across all sectors since 2007. The capital's population has increased by 15 per cent since 2007, while short-term let businesses have removed more than 8,000 properties to serve the ever-growing tourist market. The previous Tory Government policies pushed up construction inflation and reduced workforces through Brexit, forcing house building to construct less for more. The cost of living crisis pushed more families out of home ownership due to high mortgage rates, adding to the 7,000 private homes lying empty in the city. In the past year, there has been a 14 per cent increase in the rents for two-bedroom properties in the private rented sector, taking monthly payments to £1,000, compared with £400 for social rent. The situation is also not helped by the previous Conservative Government's freezing of local housing allowance rates for a number of years, and they look likely to be frozen again by Labour next year.

The number of students is yet another factor, and that number has increased in recent years. Students now make up 20 per cent of the Edinburgh population, and there are now 50 per cent more students than school pupils in the city. Although there has been some building of purpose-built student accommodation in the city, it is only enough to guarantee a student's first-year accommodation place, in most cases. After that, they join the general population looking for a home.

To tackle those increasing demands on the social rented sector, the City of Edinburgh Council has a stock of 20,000 homes, with a further 20,000 homes in the housing association sector. However, the council, which is a Labour-Conservative administration, has 1,200 empty council homes. The average time that a void council home is not available for rent in Edinburgh is 555 days, and the associated loss of rent is estimated at £1.7 million over a nine-month period.

Edinburgh is a challenging case in relation to housing, due to the many moving factors that impact on the availability of homes.

In addition to record house building, the Scottish Government has put in place policies that address some of the issues that I have raised, including funding the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, the second home double council tax charge, short-term letting licences and rent control areas.

We need to get the balance right in the bill between protecting tenants in private lets and encouraging developers to build homes in the private rented sector.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: You need to conclude.

Gordon MacDonald: I also welcome the commitment to build a further 110,000 affordable social rented homes.

16:34

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): Colleagues might be slightly surprised to see me, after 17 and a half years, stand up to make a contribution for the first time in a housing debate. I have left the precocious policy interventions and half-pursued master plans to others throughout that period.

I say to the Scottish Greens that, frankly, fervour over pragmatism leads to a housing emergency. Is it not a tragedy that we are sitting here in a Parliament that is 25 years old, with housing policy wholly devolved to us, discussing today what is in fact an absolute shambles and a housing crisis across Scotland? Perhaps if I, and more parliamentary colleagues than have decided that they are interested in the subject this afternoon, had engaged on the issue in a more pragmatic and collective way, we would have made some progress.

Time and again, in health debates that I have participated in, I have heard the argument put that there is a demographic trend in Scotland that has led to an ageing population and a crisis in healthcare. That ageing demographic is also one of the uncontrollable factors that has led to housing stock not coming on to the market. That is for perfectly good and valid reasons—people have lived longer and they have lived in those houses longer.

There is also the fact that, in my lifetime, a fundamental change has occurred in the way in which people operate socially. There are far more single-occupancy homes than there were historically, and far more people are in further education than there ever were when I started out—it has gone from one in seven to nearly all in seven. That has led to a huge explosion in demand for student accommodation.

All those things are uncontrollables, which I understand we have to wrestle with. However, they have led, to my astonishment, to my small local authority of East Renfrewshire Council declaring a housing emergency, because it had, according to the Scottish Government's figures, the highest percentage increase in households living in temporary accommodation anywhere in Scotland. I recognise directly what Willie Rennie described in his contribution, because, to my astonishment, people in my constituency are now coming to speak to me with casework issues who are in that bereft position. They have no idea

where they are going to live, what they are going to do or how they will fulfil their determination to offer to their young children, to whom they are absolutely devoted, the best start in life, when they are all crammed into temporary accommodation—at times in one room—with no understanding or knowledge of where things will progress after that. We have to do far better.

It would be fair to say that in the earlier debate today we had a bit of a rammy to do with the Labour Party and its Government at Westminster, but in East Renfrewshire we try collectively, on many issues, to be as pragmatic as possible. The local authority there—a Labour-led, minority administration—has set out quite genuinely and pragmatically why we have an increase in homelessness applications in East Renfrewshire. One problem is the abolition of the local connection benchmark, which has meant that people just turn up, present and become part of an issue that that small local authority has to deal with when it does not have the major resources that some other authorities might.

The Labour leader has said that the council acknowledges that the Scottish Government has recognised that there is a national housing crisis and it has declared as much. However, that does not sit well with the removal of some £200 million in funding for the provision of affordable housing. There is not much point in recognising an emergency and then axing one of the tools that was there to deal with it.

The leader of the council has written to the First Minister, informing him of our situation in East Renfrewshire. Yesterday, East Lothian became the 13th council to declare that emergency. The Scottish Government's own figures must surely be a wake-up call to the Government that it needs to take action. That means, as my colleague Meghan Gallacher has argued, that we have to pause the bill and redraft it as a bill that we can pragmatically work together on to achieve and which directly addresses Scotland's homelessness emergency.

16:38

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): Scotland is facing a housing emergency, as borne out by the fact that 13 of Scotland's 32 local authorities have now declared one. The culmination of that disastrous situation has not happened overnight. It has been a long-running trend, and a feature of Scotland's post-war history. An interesting fact is that in the mid-1970s—perhaps the member for Eastwood will recall this era—more than 50 per cent of all housing stock in Scotland was social housing, the highest concentration of any country in the democratic world. In fact, it was surpassed only by the Soviet Union.

Today, the figure is 24 per cent. In large part, that change is due to the Conservative Government's decision in 1980 to introduce the right-to-buy scheme, which led to 494,000 houses being sold to the private sector.

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee City West) (SNP): Does the member think that the fact that the Labour-Liberal Administration in this place failed to remove the right-to-buy scheme has anything to do with the challenges that we face?

Paul Sweeney: It is a good thing that the right-to-buy legislation was repealed. I recognise that that has been helpful in stemming the flow of social housing stock to the private sector, which has been a source of major concern. Indeed, it has been calculated that around £2 billion of profit was generated in the asset growth from those sales. That is, in effect, a massive subsidy from the state to the private sector, at a rate of £25 of profit per day.

The issue that then arises is how to redress the balance. It is one thing to stem the flow, but how do we reverse it? I suggest to the minister that it would be helpful to introduce a national buy-back scheme, whereby the state can recover social housing stock. We want such a scheme to be introduced. We know that many housing associations actively pursue such buy-back schemes, which are a helpful way of recovering social housing stock.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member take an intervention?

Paul Sweeney: I am sorry, but I want to proceed for a moment.

It might be useful to recognise that a large share of the £1.18 billion that is spent on housing benefit goes on subsidising private landlords. A more efficient utilisation of that public expenditure might be to recover ownership of the housing stock. That might also help offset some of the massive cuts that the Government has introduced, such as the whopping 26 per cent cut to the affordable housing supply programme, which has led to 1,800 social housing projects and affordable housing projects stalling across Scotland.

It is helpful to recognise that rent controls and restrictions have a place, certainly in the private rented sector, given the rapacious profiteering that we have seen. As Ms Chapman has mentioned, the privilege of being able to afford a mortgage comes with the bonus of 30 per cent lower housing costs on average, while those in the private rented sector face a massive premium, even though they might be living adjacent to someone paying far less for the same type of property. That gross inequality lies at the heart of many of the issues around poverty in Scotland that we face today.

There are myriad other issues that we need to address as part of the Housing (Scotland) Bill. Rent controls are one thing, but it is important to recognise that housing stock quality is another. One unintended consequence of the 1915 rent controls was that they effectively killed off factoring of tenemental property in Glasgow, leading to large-scale slums in the city by the 1960s and, in turn, the demolition of around 100,000 tenement properties in Glasgow over a 20 to 30-year period.

Today, around three quarters of Glaswegians live in tenement properties, and a number of major reforms are still needed, not least of which is ensuring five-yearly condition and fabric inspections and a compulsion on owners to carry out those inspections, in the same way that people have to have their car pass an MOT. We need to ensure that owners associations are collaborating and co-operating effectively. We need to use our community-based housing association network in Glasgow to build capacity and ensure that we have a much better-performing housing stock, as well as simply introducing rent controls. I hope that the minister will address that in the round in his closing remarks.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The final speaker in the open debate is Bob Doris.

16:43

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the Scottish Government's Housing (Scotland) Bill, because there is much to value in it. It is worth noting parts 5 and 6, on homelessness prevention duties and duties in relation to domestic abuse victims. Those provisions are about doing all that we can to prevent an individual or family from getting into crisis in the first place and potentially ending up under pressure and putting strain on the homelessness system. In other words, the bill is about stopping people feeding into the housing emergency pressures in the first place and stemming the human cost where we can.

I feel that the Conservative motion is wholly ignorant of those important issues. That is because the Conservatives are playing politics and are not looking at the practical policies in the legislation before Parliament that can make a real difference. The bill is not a silver bullet, but it can make a real practical and on-the-ground difference.

Miles Briggs: Will the member take an intervention?

Bob Doris: I would love to, but I have only four minutes, so I am afraid that I cannot.

I am now pleased to turn to those policies. At the heart of the preventive nature of the bill is the ask and act duty, which will be placed on those in public services such as Police Scotland, the national health service, housing associations and various local authority departments. Should someone be concerned that there are vulnerabilities that could, down the line, lead to homelessness, they will have to ask and they will have to act. Risk is identified, and support offered, before homelessness looms.

I acknowledge that such a duty could put additional pressures on the bodies concerned, and we must look at that in the budget process. There has to be trauma-informed training for staff; that, too, has to be looked at. We also have to make sure that this is not simply a signposting process back to local authority homelessness departments. The bill has real potential to do something meaningful about changing the flow of people from precarious tenancies into the homelessness system.

I would add to the list of bodies set out in the legislation the Department for Work and Pensions. We cannot force it to do anything, but we can have a concordat. Likewise, I would add the Home Office, given its role in asylum seeker accommodation in Scotland, and possibly Social Security Scotland, too.

Turning to areas relating to domestic abuse, I note that section 44 has a new pre-action requirement for social landlords who are seeking to evict for rent arrears to take such issues into consideration. Section 45 would link the domestic abuse policy of social landlords to their policies on evictions.

A wonderful group that I have worked with called financially excluded, which is based in Glasgow, has told me about many women—it is nearly always women—who have ran up significant debt as a result of credit cards, store cards, other bills or rent arrears, because they are suffering financial abuse as part of a domestic abuse scenario. They can still be evicted for rent arrears—and that should not be allowed to happen. Often, the abuser keeps the tenancy, and the woman has to flee. Where there is no risk of physical violence, why does the woman have to flee the family home? Can the bill do more in relation to that?

The bill that will deal with house-building programmes—an issue that we have heard a lot about this afternoon—is the budget bill, is it not? We will have to come together as a Parliament and ensure that more money is provided for the bricks and mortar to build houses in this country. We can debate the UK Government's erosion of Scotland's capital budget all we like, but let us

come together on the budget bill to build more houses for Scotland.

Mr Sweeney, with one or two exceptions, gave a very good speech. I say to him that housing associations in my local area are actively seeking to buy back properties from the private sector, using Scottish Government funds. More funds would be welcome, but they are actively doing that.

I commend the Scottish Government's amendment to the chamber.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We move to closing speeches.

16:47

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I am happy to close for the Greens.

I am pleased that Bob Doris finished by recognising some of the wider context of the bill. Up until Mr Doris spoke, relatively few members had spoken about the wider context of the bill, such as the homelessness prevention duties. In addition to those that Bob Doris mentioned, there are measures to address issues around joint tenancies and the way in which they end. Those issues have been raised repeatedly with me, and there is frustration that we do not yet have legislation that can address them. The bill is also about bringing older tenancies up to date, and about some of the—in a sense—softer tenants' rights that are about making a house a home. Such things really matter.

Some members—perhaps those who brought the debate—are clearly motivated principally by an ideological hostility to rent controls, and by an ideological desire always to put the profits of owners and investors ahead of the human right to decent housing.

Miles Briggs: Will the member give way?

Patrick Harvie: I will give way in a moment.

I hope that the Labour members who spoke will work with the bill. The opening speaker seemed to suggest that there were changes that he would like to see to the bill that would address some of the issues that he is concerned about. I would like to see those amendments, too. I would like to see constructive changes being brought to the bill, but we need to get past stage 1. We need to support the bill and let it go forward so that we can debate any amendments.

Having been criticised by Labour in the past for, first of all, rejecting a rent freeze that was clearly unlawful; then, imposing a rent freeze, but doing it too slowly; then, doing it too quickly; then, ending it too soon; and, then, its not lasting long enough, I

do hope that Labour achieves a coherent position on rent controls, and one that we can work with.

Miles Briggs: Has the member ever reflected on the fact that, since the introduction of rent controls, Scotland has had one of the worst records on homelessness? We have 10,110 children trapped in temporary accommodation, and 42 children becoming homeless every day. That is a consequence of rent controls.

Patrick Harvie: No—there is not a jot of evidence that that is the consequence of the temporary rent freeze. Mr Briggs knows very well that a temporary rent freeze was not capable of disincentivising any investment, because it was about only existing tenancies, not new build.

The Tory motion is clearly a demand for housing policy that goes back to putting landlord wealth ahead of the human right to housing. In itself, the SNP amendment is fine, and, if it passes, I will vote for the amended motion. However, given that it pre-empts the Green amendment, we will not be supporting it.

When it comes to proposed amendments, it is important to acknowledge that, even in an area where rental conditions have been assessed and there is the maximum possible evidence of extreme rent levels—even in those circumstances—the strongest action that could be taken would still mean above-inflation rent rises continuing in perpetuity. That means people's rent rising faster than their food prices, faster than their energy prices and faster than their transport costs. That will not achieve affordability. Even in a future inflation crisis, with a similar inflation spike to what we have seen in recent years, it would not be possible to impose a rent freeze under the new proposals.

Of course supply is an important part of the picture. However, the issue is about not only numbers but the type and price of housing that is built. For example, we are seeing build-to-rent housing that costs £1,200, £1,400 or £1,500 a month. That is not the kind of housing that Scotland needs. We need to understand the distinction, which is why I hope that the Government will change its position from treating mid-market rent and build-to-rent housing as though they are the same—they are not.

Let us provide an incentive for developing—and protecting—mid-market rent and genuinely affordable homes, not an incentive for the people who want to build homes that are used merely for price gouging.

16:52

Mark Griffin: I thank Meghan Gallacher for bringing this debate to the chamber. It strikes me

that the only time that we properly debate housing issues is in Opposition time. Maybe the Government will reflect on that.

Before I address the substance of the debate, I thank Miles Briggs for raising the temporary accommodation situation in Edinburgh. Unfortunately, my urgent question on the issue was not picked, so I would appreciate any updates from the cabinet secretary or the minister on that situation, which must be absolutely terrifying for the residents of Edinburgh who are affected.

As my opening remarks set out, there are few better opportunities available to us right now than to use the Housing (Scotland) Bill to end the housing emergency that is ripping through Scotland. The Government will be aware that another council has declared a housing emergency. Only yesterday, East Lothian Council became the 13th local authority to reluctantly declare a housing emergency, citing difficulties in bringing forward sites for the development of homes. Last week, at the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, North Lanarkshire Council talked about being in a situation in which it could declare a housing emergency. That is happening in area after area, demonstrating the urgent need for more homes.

The reason for the housing emergency is simply that we do not have enough homes. During the debate, a number of members have mentioned that we need to take urgent action to drive up the supply of new and appropriate houses.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Will the member take an intervention?

Mark Griffin: I am sorry, but I cannot give way during a four-minute speech.

Willie Rennie mentioned changes to the planning system. We welcome those changes, but we could go much further. We could radically fix the planning system, which developers say is the number 1 problem that holds up developments. Willie Rennie also said that we need those builders and developers to build the homes that we need. We should absolutely give them the confidence to build and to invest, and we should make it easier for them to do so, rather than make it more difficult.

I agree with Bob Doris and Patrick Harvie that there are important parts of the bill that we should not lose. We should have a workable system of rent regulation, we should be preventing homelessness and ensuring that public organisations play their part in that, and we should have more robust rights when it comes to evictions. We support a range of other measures in the bill, too.

However, Miles Briggs made the crucial point that there is no point in having such measures in the bill unless public authorities are funded to deliver them. After more than a decade of cuts, local authorities have no money left, which is why their homelessness prevention services are at systemic risk of failure, as set out by the Scottish Housing Regulator. That is the key issue.

The Finance and Public Administration Committee was scathing in its assessment of the bill's financial memorandum. The key point for me, Patrick Harvie, Bob Doris and others who support such measures is that there must be proper funding. I want the bill to work, so, for it to address the current housing emergency, it should include a statement of intent, define the housing emergency and require the Government to take measures to end it.

I am always willing to engage with the cabinet secretary, the minister and others in the Government on the details, but my point remains that any housing bill must at least acknowledge the primary challenge to Scotland that the housing emergency represents, surely. I ask members to support the amendment in my name, which simply asks the Parliament to recognise the emergency situation in which we find ourselves and to start building the houses that will get us out of it.

16:56

The Minister for Housing (Paul McLennan): It is just over a month since the cabinet secretary and I last updated the Parliament on the Scottish Government's response to the housing emergency. During that time, we have continued to make significant progress, especially in working with the local authorities that face the greatest challenges with homelessness and temporary accommodation. Let me be clear that addressing the emergency requires partnership, and I record my thanks to all local authorities that have intensified their efforts in support of our shared goals.

Meanwhile, the Scottish Government continues to directly support individuals, here and now, by providing £7.9 million to mitigate shortfalls in local housing allowance rates, thereby helping to protect tenancies. The UK Government's freeze of local housing allowance is disappointing. That policy began under the Conservative Government and now, disappointingly, continues under Labour. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation called it "deeply worrying" that no social security adjustments were made to effectively address homelessness and reduce hardship.

Bob Doris: Housing services are under strain right now, so could that £7 million or so to support local housing allowance be redirected to support

tenancies and prevent homelessness if the UK Government stepped up to the plate on local housing allowance?

Paul McLennan: The money could be used for a number of purposes. We are working with local authorities to provide flexibility in the grant funding that they receive.

Short-term actions, such as reducing social housing voids in partnership with local authorities, are already making a difference, but long-term solutions are crucial. The Housing (Scotland) Bill will play a vital role in reforming the rental sector and preventing homelessness by building on Scotland's existing protections.

Meghan Gallacher: Will the minister take an intervention?

Paul McLennan: I have only five minutes. I will pick up on some of the points that the member mentioned earlier.

We remain committed to implementing long-term rent controls to ensure that rents are affordable, which is essential in tackling poverty, especially among families with children, as has been mentioned by a few members today. The rent cap must also apply between tenancies to provide stability for tenants. However, we aim to balance our approach to ensure continued investment in the private rented sector, thereby expanding the supply of quality, affordable options for rent.

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

Paul McLennan: I have only a short time in which to speak.

Many private sector stakeholders have welcomed clarity on the rent cap's form. In spring 2025, we plan to launch a consultation to seek views on how to ensure that powers to exempt certain types of provision from rent control can be used in a way that stabilises rents for tenants in rent control areas while new and improved rented housing continues to be delivered. The consultation will consider new housing that is built specifically for private rent, including mid-market rent properties and other purpose-built private rented accommodation, which have been referenced on a number of occasions. Our approach balances immediate actions to meet urgent housing needs with the establishment of a stable long-term framework.

That is also underpinned by the work of the housing investment task force, through which we have engaged with investors and developers to understand how a rent control system can work for tenants while supporting private investment. Input from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has provided valuable insights into

how rent controls will impact on social landlords who offer mid-market rent provision.

I want to touch on a few points that members made, but I particularly thank Mr Harvie for his work on the bill. He was right to mention—he was the only member to do so—that incredibly point about tenants' rights.

Meghan Gallacher mentioned the number of landlords. Their numbers actually increased by 3 per cent between August 2022 and September 2024. Polling shows that rent controls are supported by 82 per cent of people in Scotland, including 61 per cent of Tory voters. I have mentioned that to Mr Briggs previously.

I want to come back to the point that Mr Griffin made about funding for housing, including capital funding. If the Scottish Government brings that back and increases the funding, will he vote for that? He and his colleagues will have to vote for it to make sure that we get increased funding. I will continue to push that point.

I thank Willie Rennie for his comments and I take on board what he said. I know that the cabinet secretary has met him and I would be happy to engage with him in the future.

Gordon MacDonald touched on outside factors, such as the local housing allowance rates freeze, and there has also been a 62 per cent cut in financial transactions. Mr Carlaw also talked about cuts to funding, but his Conservative UK Government made the choice to cut our capital budget. The right to buy also came through his party, and that made a major impact.

Let us be clear: a vote for the Tory motion will be a vote to scrap the Housing (Scotland) Bill, rent controls and homelessness prevention duties, and a vote to ignore poverty. We will not redraft the bill to solve every economic problem. We will continue to take decisive action across Scotland to deliver the housing that our communities need. The bill gives renters certainty, progresses homelessness prevention duties, quickens investment into housing and tackles child poverty and poverty more generally. Members should support the SNP amendment.

17:01

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): This has been a good debate, and I am glad that we have had it. When the Housing (Scotland) Bill was introduced, we had not declared a housing emergency, but we were certainly in the throes of one, and the bill has made things worse. To be fair, we had rent controls before we saw the bill, and it has led to rents going up and investment drying up—a more ruinous policy we could not imagine. So, what does the Government do? It

includes more rent controls in the bill, with the minister sticking with the policy in his announcement on stage 2 when we were not even at stage 1 yet. He really should know better.

The minister has a housing investment task force that does not include Homes for Scotland. Goodness knows what it talks about, because the money is not coming here any time soon—he has scared investors off.

You might not believe this, Presiding Officer, but the minister and I go way back. He might not remember this, but when we were both councillors, we sat on the commission on school reform. *[Interruption.]* He does remember that. I genuinely want the best for him, so I must advise him, as a friend, to go back to the drawing board on the bill, because landlords are leaving the sector in their thousands. That might please those who think that all private landlords are evil money-grabbers, but those with any sense will know that it is not a good situation to be in.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am grateful to the member for giving me the opportunity to intervene. We have on record organisations such as Crisis and Shelter, which have put in briefings for MSPs. They often call on the Government to do more, as they should, to tackle the housing emergency. Have they asked for the bill to be scrapped, as his party's motion wants to happen?

Graham Simpson: We are calling for the bill to be redrafted. If only the cabinet secretary could be patient—she knows that I am a positive guy—because I have some nice things to say that will please her. The Scottish Property Federation estimates that £3.2 billion in direct housing investment is under threat from the proposals in the bill. A survey by Propertymark suggests that 59 per cent of landlords are selling their properties or leaving the market completely.

The one part of the bill with any promise—this will please the cabinet secretary—is the section that deals with homelessness, and we should concentrate on getting that right. *[Interruption.]* I do not know whether the cabinet secretary is muttering that she is pleased, but she is muttering something.

More than 15,000 children are homeless, and the number of applications from households that have been assessed as homeless is at its highest since 2011-12. Shelter Scotland has condemned the Scottish Government for its record on homelessness. It says that the housing system is “broken” and is in need of “urgent and drastic change”.

Part 5 of the bill deals with homelessness prevention. Of course, the best way to end homelessness is to stop it happening in the first place, which is why the housing first model ought

to be commonplace. The bill introduces an ask and act duty—a duty to ask a person whether they are homeless or threatened with homelessness and to act if they are—on relevant public bodies such as health boards and the police.

That part of the bill has the potential to make some important changes to how homelessness is dealt with in this country, by shifting the approach from a crisis response to an early-action prevention response. That is good, but it is just a legislative framework, and much more work will need to be done. A delivery plan should be built into the bill, and there must be cross-departmental support for homelessness prevention across the Government and public bodies. Prevention is about dealing with the root causes of homelessness.

There have been a number of very good contributions to the debate, but Maggie Chapman's was perhaps not one of them, because she seemed to be rather in denial about the impact of rent controls and the costs that landlords face. Willie Rennie spoke about the impact of homelessness on people. Miles Briggs talked about the situation in Edinburgh, as did Gordon MacDonald, to be fair. I was pleased that, although Paul Sweeney did not mention the tenement maintenance working group, he mentioned the group's recommendations for dealing with the problems of tenements.

I was delighted that Jackson Carlaw mentioned students because, in September, the cross-party group on housing published a report that examined housing options for students in Scotland and their experiences of homelessness. Our report found that there is insufficient suitable and affordable accommodation for students here, and that thousands are at risk of homelessness. We came up with a set of clear and challenging recommendations for the Government, such as the recommendations that student housing be integrated into local housing strategies and that more robust data be gathered on student accommodation.

The Scottish Government must take more action to address student homelessness and answer the concerns that will undoubtedly be expressed at the rally outside Parliament tomorrow, which I will attend.

Frankly, the bill is a mess. The minister inherited some of the bad stuff in it, but he has stuck with it. That is why, as Meghan Gallacher rightly said—

Patrick Harvie: Will the member take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The member must conclude.

Graham Simpson: Patrick Harvie ought to know that I am about to finish.

That is why, as Meghan Gallacher rightly said, the minister needs to start again. If he does, he will have our support.

Point of Order

17:08

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab):
On a point of order, Presiding Officer. In this afternoon's debate on inheritance tax, Jim Fairlie accused me of misleading Parliament. I pointed to the fact that, last week, the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity had omitted to draw to Parliament's attention his entry in the voluntary section of the register of interests, before quoting at considerable length the National Farmers Union Scotland.

Today, the minister made a point of order in which he asked me to withdraw my comment. I have no intention of doing so. His entry in the register of interests, which was last updated in May this year, quite clearly states:

"I am a member of the National Farmers Union Scotland."

Presiding Officer, it is one thing not to register an interest; it is quite another not to know that you have.

Section 1.3(c) of the ministerial code states:

"It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to the Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity. Ministers who knowingly mislead the Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the First Minister".

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):
Thank you, Mr Leonard. The requirements for a declaration of interest are set out in the code of conduct for members, and whether a declaration should be made is a matter for each member, and not one for the chair to rule on.

Business Motions

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-15423, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 19 November 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Impact of the UK Government's Budget on Scotland's Rural Economy

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 20 November 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
Deputy First Minister Responsibilities,
Economy and Gaelic;
Finance and Local Government

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Impact of National Insurance Increase on Public Services

followed by Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill: Emergency Bill Motion

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.15 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 21 November 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

followed by Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time
 Tuesday 26 November 2024

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

5.00 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 27 November 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands;
 Health and Social Care
followed by Scottish Labour Party Business
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time
followed by Members' Business

Thursday 28 November 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions
followed by Members' Business

2.15 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.15 pm Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body
 Questions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:
 Social Justice
followed by Stage 1 Debate: Housing (Scotland) Bill
followed by Financial Resolution: Housing (Scotland)
 Bill
followed by Business Motions
followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 18 November 2024, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

The Presiding Officer: I call Liam Kerr to speak to and move amendment S6M-15423.2. You have up to five minutes, Mr Kerr.

17:10

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I rise to speak to the amendment in my name to the minister's business motion for next week. The minister has lodged a motion that suggests that, next Wednesday, the Parliament will debate whether to treat the proposed prisoners (early release) (Scotland) bill as an emergency bill. In other words, the bill, which we have not seen yet—we will not see it until next Tuesday—will not be subject to the usual parliamentary scrutiny. Instead, if members agree, it will be rushed through with less than a week between stages 1 and 3. That will be a big call for MSPs, and I look forward to robust, well-informed and carefully considered debate. However, the minister's motion goes on to list stage 1 of the bill for the following day—less than 24 hours after the vote on whether to give it emergency status.

I ask colleagues to think about what the minister is saying here. Next Wednesday, we will be asked whether we are prepared to commute a legislative process that was set out in the very founding principles of the Parliament to less than a week. There will be a debate for us to decide whether that is in the interests of the people of Scotland, the Parliament and, indeed, the prisoners and victims whom the bill will directly impact. The minister, however, is so confident that we will all ignore that debate and anything that anyone says in it—so certain is he that we will all dutifully press buttons in accordance with instructions, regardless of the debate—that he has peremptorily scheduled the stage 1 debate less than 24 hours later. The minister believes that, regardless of how significant the decision to treat the bill as an emergency bill is, we will all just do what we are told. How utterly disrespectful.

I will make arguments next Wednesday against treating the bill as emergency legislation. One of the arguments that I will deploy is that the more that we pass bills without scrutiny or challenge, and without the committee input that a unicameral Parliament must surely mandate in all but the most exceptional circumstances, the more that we risk legislation by fiat from a minority Government. I submit that that is exactly what the minister has inadvertently shown himself to be doing.

I believe in the Parliament and its role, so I propose an amendment to the business motion. Although I do not believe that the bill should be deemed emergency legislation, I respect the Government's prerogative to call that debate and, as I respect my MSP colleagues, I do not presuppose its outcome. Instead, my amendment proposes that a stage 1 debate on the bill next week be replaced with a debate on Scotland's prisoner population. Even if MSPs decided that the bill should be treated as an emergency bill, we

would then have a debate on Thursday that would help to inform MSPs on that bill at a future stage 1.

The Parliament should always be genuinely consulted and never dictated to. The minister's presupposing of how a debate will go next Wednesday is as disrespectful as it is arrogant. Those who respect the Parliament and the job that we, as MSPs, were sent here to do will vote for my amendment on principle and against the motion if my amendment falls. Those who feel differently will no doubt fall meekly into line and do what they are told.

I move amendment S6M-15423.2, to leave out "Stage 1 Debate: Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill" and insert:

"Scottish Government Debate: Scotland's Prisoner Population".

17:14

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): The standing orders of the Scottish Parliament provide for emergency bills. They are very specific about the timetabling of an emergency bill, in that it should take place over one day. That has not been provided for in the business motion that the minister lodged on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau. Indeed, it refers only to stage 1. Therefore, there seems to be an attempt to amend the standing orders with regard to the timetabling of an emergency bill. Timetabling of such a bill is acceptable and has happened in the past, but there is no provision in the motion to show when that amendment is likely to happen. I am concerned about that, partly because of what we heard with regard to the proposed amendment to the motion, and because I feel that we are slightly at a loss about how to deal with the matter, given the way that it has been approached.

In October, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs made reference to the proposals for an emergency bill and informed the Parliament of her intention to introduce a bill to contribute to the sustainable long-term management of prisoners. She indicated that there were two elements to the bill. First, in relation to short-term prisoners with sentences of less than four years, she informed the Parliament, rightly, that with work being done, there could be a sustained reduction of some 260 to 390 individuals. The second part of the bill relates to prisoners serving sentences in excess of four years. The cabinet secretary said that the bill needed to contain that because it had been confirmed after consultation that more in-depth consideration was needed with partners. Indeed, she said that she was prioritising actions that can deliver a sustained reduction to the prison population but that

"Public safety remains paramount, which is why I am focusing only on short-term prisoners, with built-in exemptions."—[*Official Report*, 10 October 2024; c 58.]

We seem to have a conflation of two bills. One relates to short-term prisoners, which, on the face of the evidence that has been presented to the Parliament, may indeed meet the criteria for being treated as an emergency. However, the second part of the bill relates to long-term prisoners, which clearly does not amount to an emergency situation from the Scottish Government's evidence.

For those reasons, I have lodged an amendment to remove the reference in the business motion declaring the bill to be an emergency bill, which will allow, I hope, agreement within the bureau on how to deal with the issue in the normal manner before the debate is scheduled to take place.

I move amendment S6M-15423.1, to leave out from "*followed by* Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill: Emergency Bill Motion" to "Stage 1 Debate: Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill" and insert:

<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Approval of SSIs (if required)
5.15 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Thursday 21 November 2024	
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
2.30 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Net Zero and Energy, and Transport
<i>followed by</i>	Scottish Government Business."

17:18

The Minister for Parliamentary Business (Jamie Hepburn): The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that our prisons function safely and effectively for all those who live and work in our prison estate. The Scottish Prison Service must be able to accommodate those who pose the greatest risk of harm to victims and public safety. It must also be able to support rehabilitation to reduce reoffending and future victimisation.

Let me set out why we are in an urgent situation. In previous statements to Parliament, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs has set out the scale of the challenge that we face. The prison population has often exceeded 8,300

this year. That is an on-going challenge to the continued safe and effective operation of the estate.

This is not just about the numbers; it is also about the complex needs of the population and the persistent pressures on prison staff. As a result of the increasing and complex prison population, the prison estate is under substantial pressure. That reduces the capacity that the Scottish Prison Service has to prepare individuals for reintegration into the community, facilitate quality purposeful activity and carry out rehabilitative work, all of which contributes to a safer Scotland. Visits to prisoners are becoming difficult to maintain, and there are increasing challenges to the effective delivery of healthcare.

Liam Kerr: The minister appears to have completely missed the point. The representations from Martin Whitfield and me were about the setting of the business for next week, not whether the bill should be treated as emergency legislation, which is the debate for next Wednesday.

Jamie Hepburn: This is about scheduling to enable us to have that debate. The debate is what Liam Kerr wants not to happen. What I am doing—which was clearly not done by Mr Kerr—is placing the issue in its wider context.

Our position is not unique; other parts of the United Kingdom face a similar challenge. The previous UK Government released more than 10,000 prisoners early between October 2023 and July 2024. The new Administration is now releasing many prisoners who have completed 40 per cent rather than 50 per cent of their sentence. We are taking action, but nonetheless we remain in an urgent situation. That is why the cabinet secretary informed the Parliament on 10 October that we would seek to introduce emergency legislation in November—that is this month, in case anyone has not been paying attention—that would seek to change the release point for most short-term prisoners who are serving sentences of less than four years from 50 per cent of their sentence, as currently happens, to 40 per cent. That was in a very clear parliamentary statement, in which the cabinet secretary specifically stated that she would ask Parliament's permission to progress on an emergency basis. The scheduling of a timetabling motion for the bill and a stage 1 debate should not be a surprise to anybody, but it seemed to be a surprise to Liam Kerr. At least Martin Whitfield seemed to be paying attention in that regard.

Martin Whitfield: Will the minister give way?

Jamie Hepburn: I will happily give way.

Martin Whitfield: Does the minister also agree with the cabinet secretary that the emergency element related to short-term prisoners and,

indeed, that the part that relates to long-term prisoners requires further consultation and discussion with stakeholders?

Jamie Hepburn: There will always have to be on-going consultation with stakeholders as to how we take forward the elements of bills that we seek to lay before Parliament. That is what we should get on with debating, because I laid out the context of the urgency of the situation, which requires an urgent response. We want to put in place a set of measures, which—if implemented in early 2025—will result in a sustained reduction of about 5 per cent in the sentenced population.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Will the minister take an intervention?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, I will give way very briefly.

Maggie Chapman: Can the minister clarify and confirm that if we do not agree to the business motion this evening, we cannot proceed with the stage 1 debate next week? The motion is about allowing the Scottish Prison Service to get on and undertake the actions that it needs to undertake to keep prisoners and victims safe.

Jamie Hepburn: I absolutely concur with that point. I make no assumptions about how people will vote, although it was interesting of Liam Kerr to suggest that he thinks that I am asking people to “meekly” fall in line. I look forward to seeing whether there will be great variance in how the Conservative members vote this evening or whether they will meekly fall in line with Mr Kerr's request.

In relation to Ms Chapman's point, if we do not vote for the business motion that is before us because the amendments in the name of Liam Kerr and/or Martin Whitfield are agreed to, we put in jeopardy our ability to have an urgent response to what we all recognise is an urgent situation that is placing our prison estate under great pressure, which is not good for those who work in the prison estate. Let us remember those who work in that estate as well as those who are incarcerated there. If the business motion that is before us is not agreed to, the Government and the Parliament will not be allowed to respond urgently.

The matter is urgent, as is reflected in the timetable that the Government has developed. The Government's starting point is to maximise parliamentary scrutiny as far as is possible. Mr Whitfield made the point that standing orders ordinarily prescribe that an emergency bill be dealt with and disposed of within one day. I am not asking Parliament to do that. I am asking for an expedited timescale that is quicker than normal, but one that is not as constrained as one day.

On that basis, I urge Parliament to reject the amendments in the names of Mr Kerr and Mr Whitfield and to vote for the business motion that is before us.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that if the amendment in the name of Liam Kerr is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Martin Whitfield will fall.

The question is, that amendment S6M-15423.2, in the name of Liam Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15423, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

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

17:14

Meeting suspended.

17:27

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Liam Kerr is agreed to, the amendment in the name of Martin Whitfield will fall.

We come to the vote on amendment S6M-15423.2, in the name of Liam Kerr, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15423, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

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

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

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 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)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)

MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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)
 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)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-15423.2, in the name of Liam Kerr, is: For 48, Against 70, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-15423.1, in the name of Martin Whitfield, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15423, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)

Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-15423.1, in the name of Martin Whitfield, is: For 51, Against 67, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-15423, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)

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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
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 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)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 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)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (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)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-15423, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, is: For 68, Against 51, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 19 November 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Debate: The Impact of the UK Government’s Budget on Scotland’s Rural Economy

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members’ Business

Wednesday 20 November 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Deputy First Minister Responsibilities, Economy and Gaelic; Finance and Local Government

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Impact of National Insurance Increase on Public Services

followed by Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill: Emergency Bill Motion

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.15 pm Decision Time

followed by Members’ Business

Thursday 21 November 2024

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister’s Questions

followed by Members’ Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 26 November 2024

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Topical Questions (if selected)

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Committee Announcements

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members’ Business

Wednesday 27 November 2024

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

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

followed by Scottish Labour Party Business

followed by Business Motions

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm	Decision Time
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
Thursday 28 November 2024	
11.40 am	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
11.40 am	General Questions
12.00 pm	First Minister's Questions
<i>followed by</i>	Members' Business
2.15 pm	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
2.15 pm	Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Questions
2.30 pm	Portfolio Questions: Social Justice
<i>followed by</i>	Stage 1 Debate: Housing (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Financial Resolution: Housing (Scotland) Bill
<i>followed by</i>	Business Motions
<i>followed by</i>	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 18 November 2024, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or similar subject matter or" are inserted.

The Presiding Officer: The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-15424, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on a stage 2 timetable for the Scottish Languages Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that consideration of the Scottish Languages Bill at stage 2 be completed by 20 December 2024.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:34

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): The next item of business is consideration of Parliamentary Bureau motion S6M-15425, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Winter Heating Assistance (Pension Age) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

The Presiding Officer: I call Jeremy Balfour, who has up to three minutes.

17:34

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con): Politicians have a duty to think about the consequences of the decisions that we make, both intended and unintended. The decision that was made by the Labour Government down south will be directly responsible for thousands of pensioners being cold this year. The decision to cut the winter heating payment was made with no meaningful consultation, and the UK Government has clearly not thought through the devastating consequences.

It is equally unfortunate that the Scottish Government has also decided that it is uninterested in supporting vulnerable pensioners—

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

Jeremy Balfour: I will just finish this point. The Scottish Government will throw up its hands and say that it is not its fault and that it does not have the money—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Balfour.

Jeremy Balfour: That is a pretty hard pill to swallow after it has wasted hundreds of millions of pounds over the years on a variety of disastrous projects, not least the two ferries that islanders are still waiting for.

John Mason: I suspect that the member has wasted money over the years, as we all probably have to some extent. We are where we are, and we do not have the money right now. If we borrowed it to pay out this winter, we would have to pay it back next year, and that would make things even worse.

Jeremy Balfour: That is very cold comfort to the vulnerable pensioners who are being discriminated against today. If the Government paused the many past projects that have still not happened, the money would be available.

We, on the Conservative benches, will abstain from the vote because we want to ensure that even more people do not miss out on the payment. However, I make it clear that we stand totally opposed to both Governments turning their backs on pensioners, many of whom will be forced to choose between eating and heating this winter. We believe that it is the duty of Government to support the most vulnerable, not to punish them. That is what this party is about—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Balfour.

Jeremy Balfour: It is a shame that parties on the other side of the chamber are not.

The Presiding Officer: I call Shirley-Anne Somerville to respond.

17:36

The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice (Shirley-Anne Somerville): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the draft regulations, which will introduce our 16th Scottish benefit—the pension-age winter heating payment. Mirroring the United Kingdom Government's winter fuel payment, our pension-age winter heating payment will provide targeted support to those of pension age who are in receipt of relevant benefits in Scotland.

We have faced significant challenges to get to this point. As members well know, on 29 July, the UK Government announced its decision to restrict entitlement to the winter fuel payment from this winter to those in receipt of pension credit and other means-tested benefits. The chancellor's decision was taken without notice and will reduce this year's block grant adjustment funding by £147 million, which is more than 80 per cent of the cost of our previously proposed universal payment.

We have repeatedly urged the UK Government to reverse that decision. Indeed, the Parliament has supported us in doing so, but our representations have not met with success. Given the budgetary implications of such a significant reduction in funding from the UK Government, we have taken the difficult decision to mirror that approach in our pension-age winter heating payment.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): Scottish Greens do not support the means testing of the winter fuel payment. We know that fuel poverty is very high among older people, especially in some pockets across the country. What actions will the cabinet secretary take to address that specifically, given that we cannot rely on the fuel insecurity payment this year, because it no longer exists?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Maggie Chapman raises an important point. I assure her that

discussions are on-going about what we can do in this situation. Once again, the Scottish Government is having discussions about how to mitigate a decision of a UK Government, but this time it is a Labour Government rather than a Tory Government.

This winter, payments of our proposed new benefit will be delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions under an agency agreement with Scottish ministers. That approach seeks to ensure that eligible individuals in Scotland continue to receive support over the winter. Given the timing of the UK announcement, it was not possible for Social Security Scotland to deliver those payments this year.

The Scottish Government acknowledges that there are other pensioners who are likely to face financial difficulty and who would benefit from that support. We will continue to call on the UK Government to reverse its decision to means test winter fuel payments and to reinstate the payment for all pensioners in future years. I am committed to keeping the eligibility and scope of pension-age winter heating payments under review.

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

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

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will give way to Christine Grahame.

Christine Grahame: Are we not seeing abject hypocrisy from the Conservatives, who, during decades in power, failed to provide pensioners with a decent state pension, requiring pensioners instead to rely on pension credit, even though we know that 40 per cent of eligible pensioners do not claim it because the form has 26 pages to read before they get to the end of it?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Christine Grahame raises an important point.

At this stage, I am happy to give way to Jackson Carlaw.

Jackson Carlaw: I am genuinely intrigued. The Scottish National Party made a commitment to pay the winter fuel allowance. It did not say that it would pay the winter fuel allowance on the condition of receiving support from Westminster. If the argument now is that that commitment was only ever contingent on support from Westminster, the commitment was hollow all along. The Government cannot make a commitment and then say, "Actually, the commitment was worthless unless we were given the money by somebody else."

The Presiding Officer: You must conclude, cabinet secretary.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am genuinely surprised that Jackson Carlaw, for whom I have a great deal of respect, would come out with a question that represents something out of Liz Truss economics, in which we can spend money even if we do not have it. It is genuinely astounding.

The provisions that are laid out in these regulations are not what I had anticipated we would be delivering, and they are not what I want to be in front of Parliament to talk about today. However, they will ensure that vital support is available to help eligible pensioners with their fuel bills this winter. To be clear, without these regulations there will be no legal framework to make any payment this winter to support pensioners in Scotland.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary take an intervention?

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary is concluding.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is a duty of Parliament—I repeat the word “Parliament” for Jeremy Balfour’s benefit—not to take a position of political posturing but to instead ensure that pensioners get what they are entitled to. We may wish to do more, but, if the Tories abstain, they are abstaining on supporting pensioners this winter.

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

The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-15426 to S6M-15428, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments, and S6M-15429, on committee membership.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Town and Country Planning (Amendment of National Planning Framework) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Masterplan Consent Area Scheme (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Free-Range Egg Marketing Standards (Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Gordon MacDonald be appointed to replace Kevin Stewart as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.—[*Jamie Hepburn*]

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

Decision Time

17:42

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): There are nine questions to be put as a result of today’s business. The first question is, that amendment S6M-15400.2, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15400, in the name of Tim Eagle, on reversing the family farm tax, be agreed. 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)
 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)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 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)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central 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, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)

Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (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)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)

Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-15400.2, in the name of Mairi Gougeon, is: For 93, Against 26, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-15400.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15400, in the name of Tim Eagle, on reversing the family farm tax, 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, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

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)
 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 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)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
 (Con)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by
 Jamie Hepburn]
 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)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (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)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (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)
 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-15400.1, in the name of Rhoda Grant, is: For 19, Against 100, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-15400, in the name of Tim Eagle, on reversing the family farm tax, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 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)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 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)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 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)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
 (Con)

Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central 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, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 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)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (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)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (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)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)

Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-15400, in the name of Tim Eagle, on reversing the family farm tax, as amended, is: For 93, Against 26, Abstentions 0.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament calls on the UK Government to reverse its decision to impose a so-called family farm tax on agricultural businesses and urgently commit to undertake and publish impact assessments on the cumulative impact of its budget proposals on farmers and crofters in Scotland.

The Presiding Officer: I remind members that, if the amendment in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville is agreed to, the amendments in the name of Mark Griffin and Maggie Chapman will fall.

The next question is, that amendment S6M-15401.3, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, which seeks to amend motion S6M-15401, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on Scotland's housing emergency, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and

Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollak) (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)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foyso (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)

Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on amendment S6M-15401.3, in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville, is: For 60, Against 57, Abstentions 1.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that amendment S6M-15401.2, in the name of Mark Griffin, which seeks to amend—*[Interruption.]* My apologies, colleagues. Given that the amendment in the name of Shirley-Anne Somerville has been agreed to, the amendments in the name of Mark Griffin and Maggie Chapman have fallen.

The next question is, that motion S6M-15401, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on Scotland's housing emergency, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Clackmannanshire and Dunblane) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)

Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and
 Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 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)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by
 Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse)
 (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)
 (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
 (SNP)
 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)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)

Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
 (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote
 cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-15401, in the name of Meghan Gallacher, on Scotland's housing emergency, as amended, is: For 66, Against 52, Abstentions 1.

Motion, as amended, agreed to,

That the Parliament welcomes the Scottish Government's Housing (Scotland) Bill, which delivers a package of support for tenants across Scotland, including rent controls and homelessness prevention duties.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-15425, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

The vote is closed.

Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I had no connection. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: I will ensure that that is recorded, Ms Minto.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Dr 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)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP)
 Martin, Gillian (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)
 Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Hamilton, Larkhall and Stonehouse) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Abstentions

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)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowe, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gallacher, Meghan (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Sarwar, Anas (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab) [Proxy vote cast by Richard Leonard]
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-15425, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on approval of an SSI, is: For 61, Against 0, Abstentions 57.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Winter Heating Assistance (Pension Age) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

The Presiding Officer: As no member objects, the final question is, that motions S6M-15426 to S6M-15428, on approval of SSIs, and S6M-15429, on committee membership, in the name of Jamie Hepburn, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

Motions agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that the Town and Country Planning (Amendment of National Planning Framework) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Masterplan Consent Area Scheme (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Free-Range Egg Marketing Standards (Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2024 [draft] be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that Gordon MacDonald be appointed to replace Kevin Stewart as a member of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Rural Roads

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-15207, in the name of Douglas Lumsden, on rural roads infrastructure. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament considers that driving is an essential part of daily life for those living in rural communities; believes that those communities deserve the infrastructure to allow connectivity that is safe and enables access to vital services; notes the view that tackling potholes will increase road safety and connectivity, and thereby improve the quality of roads across Scotland; further notes the belief that, to achieve such connectivity within the North East Scotland region, the Scottish Government must honour the longstanding commitment made in 2007 to dual the A90 north of Ellon, in order to make safe the reported accident hotspots such as the Cortes and Toll of Birness junctions, and notes the calls on the Scottish Government to commit to a timescale for when these works will be completed.

17:59

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank members for supporting my motion, which has allowed the debate to take place.

Across Scotland, people in rural communities are dependent on their cars, which are not a luxury but an everyday necessity. Constituents use their cars for every aspect of life—for work, education and shopping, or simply to meet friends and family. For many, the only realistic and reliable option is to drive. They want to do their bit and they work hard to ensure that they use their cars responsibly; they embrace reducing emissions and, wherever possible, they use public transport.

Often, however, there is no alternative. Train lines serve our major cities and towns with little reach to more rural communities and villages. Buses are underfunded and often unreliable, and it is, therefore, difficult to use them regularly. That is despite local councils in north-east Scotland giving generous subsidies and supporting those local communities to remain connected. In Aberdeenshire, we have innovative dial-a-bus services that are key to local communities. Bus companies and local authorities are doing their level best to ensure that local communities remain connected to their towns and villages, but with budgets being squeezed, we all know how difficult those decisions become.

Members who represent rural communities will know all too well the challenges that our constituents face with regard to roads infrastructure, including potholes that make roads near impassable, bridges that are crumbling and

roads that are often simply dangerous. Again, that is all down to the underfunding of local government by the Scottish National Party devolved Government.

We all know that the number 1 issue on the doorstep is potholes on our roads. Once again, we are entering pothole season: the weather gets colder and roads start deteriorating again as a result of years of underinvestment and neglect. However, lack of investment not only leads to potholes—it is causing serious accidents and fatalities on our roads. It is tragic that another fatality has occurred, just a matter of days ago, once again, on the A96. I take this opportunity to send my condolences to the family. Such deaths are heartbreaking and we should be doing so much more to prevent those accidents from happening.

Such news is far too common for communities across the country, which have faced far too many fatal or serious accidents on the roads that they rely on. Those communities have been sorely let down by the Government. We cannot just keep talking about it. Next week is national road safety week—we need action, and we need a Government that will take the issue seriously.

We are rapidly approaching two decades since the SNP first made promises to deliver much-needed improvements to some of Scotland's most dangerous roads. Almost two decades on, however, those promises remain undelivered. The SNP promised that it would dual the A96—it has not. It promised to dual the A90 north of Ellon—it has not. It promised to dual the A9—it has not. I know that my colleagues who represent the south of Scotland will mention other key arterial routes that have been neglected over those 20 years.

There is a long list of broken promises by the SNP Government, with failure after failure. After years of delay, those desperately needed projects have been kicked further into the long grass by the SNP's decision to allow extremists from the Green Party to seize control of roads infrastructure. The Greens, with their daft ideology, have punished rural Scots for the unforgivable transgression of driving their cars, and the SNP has allowed the Greens to do so.

The A96 dualling project is a prime example of that. The SNP allowed the Greens into Government, and the price that it paid was the betrayal of the north-east and the ditching of the A96 project. The much-delayed corridor review was a way for the SNP to kick the project into the long grass to appease its extremist partners, and we still have no idea when the review report will be released. The SNP's war on motorists is, in effect, a war on our rural communities, and the Scottish Conservatives will always stand up for our local communities.

Recently, Harriet Cross MP, Councillor Gillian Owen and the why stop at Ellon? campaign have highlighted the economic impact of those delays. By putting off the upgrades at the Toll of Birness, the Scottish Government is directly threatening the future prosperity of the region. We have an investment zone in the north-east, and the Scottish cluster Acorn carbon capture project is based in the region, but the transport infrastructure is being neglected.

Back in 2006, the then leader of the SNP, Alex Salmond, vowed that, if he became First Minister in 2007, the first decision that he would make would be to dual the road between Ellon and Peterhead. That has still not happened. I would like to see the road dualled, but in the meantime I repeat my call on the Scottish Government to take action at the Toll of Birness and Cortes junctions to make them safer and to save lives.

Towns and villages across the north-east, and in every rural area of Scotland, are working hard to improve their communities, build economic growth, be more environmentally aware and attract investment. At every turn, however, they feel that barriers are being put up in their way.

We know that the Green Party was absolutely happy to hinder the Government's ability to deliver infrastructure upgrades for communities across Scotland, with Patrick Harvie gleefully boasting of how he would cease funding for road-building projects. The Greens are happy to cut crucial funding for upgrades that would not only help to grow the economies of our rural communities and open up new opportunities, but stop rural depopulation in so many areas.

It is clear that these roads are simply not a priority for the Scottish Government. Rural Scotland is not important to the Government. Since 2016, the Government has slashed spending on major road projects, but those projects should not be seen as incompatible with our net zero goals. As Fergus Ewing said in the chamber, we should be anti-emissions, not anti-cars.

Most important—and we must never lose sight of this—is that those improvements would save lives. From north to south and east to west, thousands and thousands of Scots rely on our roads. They need a Government that shares their priorities—a Government that does not focus on ideological agendas, but delivers for the needs of the people who live and work in Scotland.

Our communities across rural Scotland need good roads to ensure their safety, wellbeing and economic growth. The central belt-focused Government needs to open its eyes to what is happening in rural Scotland, and start delivering for all our communities. While the Government is

focused on priorities of independence and digging health ministers out of holes, the Scottish Conservatives are offering commonsense policies to the people of Scotland. It is only the Scottish Conservatives who understand the needs of our rural communities.

18:06

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I thank the member for bringing the debate to the chamber, as I have four major north-to-south roads in my rural constituency of Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale: the A68, the A7, the A701 and the A702. If I may, Deputy Presiding Officer, I will confine myself to speaking about those roads. As members can imagine, over my many years in Parliament, I have become very familiar with them, as I am with lesser highways and byways, too.

I say to Douglas Lumsden that there is no war on the rural Borders and Midlothian—it was the Scottish Government that built the Borders railway, but I digress.

First, I will deal with the ubiquitous potholes. My experience of those is probably more frequent as the roads that I have mentioned approach Edinburgh, although there is a particularly bad stretch on the Auchendinny road that avoids Penicuik, which is a bit of a rat run. Potholes are not only down to the use of private vehicles; they are undoubtedly caused by heavy commercial vehicles. Those vehicles knock the stuffing out of our narrow rural roads, and not simply the surface, but often more so the road edges, because those roads came about to serve horses and carts and were not built for loaded articulated lorries.

I have spoken before about vehicle excise duty, which was once called road tax, but which has long since simply gone into the United Kingdom tax pot. In the budget of 1909, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the roads system would be self-financing, and so from 1910, the proceeds from road vehicle excise duties were dedicated to funding the building and maintenance of the roads system. Even during that period, however, the majority of the cost of road building and improvement came from general and local taxation, owing to the tax take being too low for the upkeep of the roads.

Hypothecation came to an end in 1937, and the proceeds of the vehicle road taxes were subsequently paid directly into the Exchequer. The road fund itself, which was then funded by Government grants, was not abolished until 1955. The fund has long since gone, but my question is, should it be resurrected?

A recent RAC survey of potholes across the UK estimated that there are at least 1 million potholes

UK-wide, yet in 2022-23, the UK Government collected £7.3 billion in vehicle excise duty. As I said, that money is simply swallowed up by the Treasury.

Would it not be fairer if Scotland, and indeed England, collected its own road tax and then used it appropriately by ring fencing it? Some of the money could provide Scotland with £700 million per annum, not simply to plug potholes but to assist in maintaining and modernising the network. That is just a thought.

With regard to road improvements, I appreciate that there are pressures on budgets at both governmental and council level, but what would certainly help on rural roads in my constituency, especially on dark mornings and evenings, would be better road markings. We need central reflectors and white lines not just down the centre of the roads but at the edges, because some of the roads in my constituency outwith the towns and villages can be a very tough drive on a dark night, especially when it is raining.

I am also pleased that staggered speed limits have been introduced, for example when entering and leaving Stow. Extending the 20mph limit, before raising the limit to 40mph to a place called Galabank, and then to 60mph, has helped a great deal with safety on the roads. That has now been extended to Eddleston. I am now campaigning to have the same approach on the A702, which would be to extend the 40mph limit northwards from Dolphinton, at least to what is known as the Garvald junction, because that is a particularly fast and dangerous stretch.

I note the dreadful statistics on road deaths, but roads are not the real culprit. Just because the speed limit is 60mph, it does not mean that you do that speed while going around sharp bends when, in any event, you might come across some of the many cyclists on the Borders roads. There are other issues with city drivers, who may be unaware of the specific challenges of such roads, such as stray farm animals, wildlife and slow-moving farm vehicles, for starters.

Those are just some of my observations on the problems and challenges of rural roads, but I would like us to look again at whether at least some of the vehicle excise duty could be apportioned to Scotland's roads, and indeed to England's roads.

18:11

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I congratulate Douglas Lumsden on bringing the debate to the chamber, particularly because, on the day that the Scottish Conservatives have highlighted the attack on farms and rural life by both the Scottish and UK Governments, he has

highlighted the SNP's long-term failure to address rural infrastructure, especially—but by no means exclusively—in the north-east. What is most galling is that, while the accidents pile up and families suffer, and while the north-east economy is under such huge pressure, nothing of any substance gets done, but the solutions are there.

The other day, a constituent said to me that she travels regularly between Fraserburgh and Aberdeen—in darkness during the winter months, of course. She reports, as many have reported—and as I know from driving the route myself—that, in darkness, it is difficult to see the road markings at the Toll of Birness. She says that street lighting is needed just to illuminate the filter lane on to the A952.

She reports that, as anyone in the north-east knows, the same issue applies at the treacherous Cortes junction, which Douglas Lumsden mentioned. However, the obvious solution has not been implemented, despite being cost effective and quick to implement, and despite the fact that it would solve at least one problem straight away.

As for the promise—nearly two decades old—to dual the roads, I sat down last week with representatives of Gray & Adams, which is one of Fraserburgh's biggest and most important businesses. It transports up to 30 newly manufactured semi-trailers every week from its factory in the Broch. That involves driving south on the A952, taking a right turn on to the A90 at the Toll of Birness and then travelling on to their customers.

In addition, every week, about 70 heavy goods vehicles, many of which are articulated lorries, head the other way, whether it be for accident repair or refurbishing, or to deliver materials to the factory, and then, of course, they return again. In total, Gray & Adams-related HGVs, which can have a combination length of 18m or more, use the Toll of Birness junction about 170 times every week. In other words, these people know what they are talking about. The representatives told me that if the—

Christine Grahame: Will the member give way?

Liam Kerr: Do I have time, Deputy Presiding Officer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: If the intervention is brief, yes.

Christine Grahame: It will be.

Does the member share my view that we should look at some of the vehicle excise duty going towards the upkeep of roads? Given that lorries and commercial vehicles pay more, perhaps they would not feel so bad about it if that money was being apportioned to the roads network.

Liam Kerr: I listened to Christine Grahame's comments earlier, and it is certainly worth reflecting on that point. We would have to look at the consequences of her proposal and at whether it would result in less money, but I recognise that it is worth reflecting on.

What I am trying to say is that the people at Gray & Adams know what they are doing. They told me that, if the SNP shows no signs of dualling the roads, as it promised to do two decades ago, it could surely at least consider some passing lanes on the A952, to avoid frustration and risky manoeuvres, or at the Toll of Birness, where HGV drivers take their lives in their hands when exiting the junction on to the A90 from the A952.

Those from Gray & Adams note that concerns have been raised that a roundabout might not solve the issue, as it would slow the flow of traffic and still present risks, given the number of HGVs, buses and agricultural tractors at that point. They highlight that a number of knowledgeable voices have proposed a single-carriageway flyover from the A952 on to the southbound A90, with an additional slip road for traffic turning north off the A952 going north. I hear that that solution could address the safety concerns about that junction, allow for free-flowing traffic in all directions and require a fraction of the cost and, I presume, the planning that other suggestions would involve.

The key point is that the people who know the road, and know the dangers of turning in an HGV, have the solutions, which they are happy to share with anyone who will listen. They will be as disappointed as I am that not one SNP MSP who represents the north-east has bothered to come to the chamber tonight to listen to the debate. It is a disgrace. The solutions that those MSPs would have heard about are cheaper, easier and quicker.

A few years ago, when I was learning about the dangerous Candy junction, I sat in the cab of a Douglas F Mitchell haulage HGV to experience the terror of a right turn on the A90. The experience has never left me. That is why representatives from Gray & Adams have offered the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, and any other member from the chamber or from the council—or, indeed, anyone who can help and needs to understand—the opportunity to join them. They propose to collect in Ellon, take the A90 to Peterhead, go round the Broch and go down to Ellon via the A952 and through Mintlaw, with a right turn at the Toll of Birness. I know that anyone who sees what it is really like to drive those roads in an HGV will definitely take notice and start actively seeking to change things—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, I have been generous.

Liam Kerr: —instead of kicking the issue into the long grass. That is why I have said that I will join the Gray & Adams driver in the cab. Perhaps, when closing the debate, the cabinet secretary will let us know whether she is brave enough to join me.

18:16

Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Douglas Lumsden for lodging his motion and for the opportunity to highlight the chronic neglect of our rural roads infrastructure. Like all members, I find that my inbox is regularly full of angry motorists, cyclists and pedestrians who are frustrated at the plague of potholes on our roads and crumbling pavements.

The cause is clear: there has been a double whammy of cuts to our councils. First, there has been a cumulative cut of more than £6 billion from the Scottish Government to local government since 2013-14. The proportion of the Scottish Government budget going to local government has fallen from 34 per cent in 2013-14 to 28 per cent in 2022-23. The Scottish Government has made proportionately deeper reductions in local budgets than in any central Government budget.

Secondly, because so many areas of local budgets are ring fenced by central Government, when it comes to making cuts, investment infrastructure often takes a bigger hit because it is not ring fenced.

We can see the consequences. Data that was obtained by Scottish Labour reveals that the roads repair backlog bill across Scotland is an eye-watering £2.6 billion—

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): Will Colin Smyth give way?

Colin Smyth: I will give way on that point.

Finlay Carson: I very much appreciate the member giving way, and I echo his concerns about council funding. However, does he recognise that, under the previous Labour-SNP Dumfries and Galloway Council administration, there were cuts to road improvements? Does he welcome the £30 million that the current Scottish Conservative-led council is putting into the roads, which is resulting in tangible improvements?

Colin Smyth: That budget of £30 million extra was supported by every group on the council. However, with regard to Dumfries and Galloway Council, we have had Conservative administrations for an awful lot longer than we have had Labour, or other party, administrations. The consequence of that is a staggering £250 million in the backlog for repairs in Dumfries and Galloway alone. That is not a legacy of which Finlay Carson should be particularly proud.

In Conservative-run Scottish Borders Council, the roads repair bill is about £123 million, which is a leap from £97 million the previous year. In South Ayrshire, the backlog bill has also risen, to nearly £51 million—again, that is a Conservative-led administration. That is not a legacy that we should be celebrating.

However, it is not just on local roads that rural communities see the consequences of cuts. Often, important trunk roads that cut across rural areas—no matter how strategically important they are—have suffered from chronic underinvestment, which makes them dangerous, hampers economic progress and actually slows efforts to improve the environment.

For example, we can take the A75 and the A77, which are key routes to the ferry terminal at Cairnryan—the fifth busiest port in the UK. It is the hub from which businesses not just in South Scotland, but in central Scotland and northern England, trade into Northern Ireland and then south into the European Union.

The need to upgrade the A75 and the A77 is, at its heart, about saving lives, but it is about improving them, too. Bypassing the towns and villages through which the roads currently run would cut congestion and emissions, from Springholm and Crocketford to Girvan and Kirkoswald.

However, two years after the much-delayed second strategic transport projects review was published, there is still no delivery plan from the Scottish Government, even for the very modest and inadequate improvements that are proposed to both roads, and there is not a single penny of the investment that was promised for upgrading, either.

The only investment that has been proposed in relation to the A75 is the £5 million that was announced in the recent UK Government budget to complete a feasibility study into possible upgrades. I hope that, in her closing comments, the cabinet secretary will say when that study will be carried out.

I also urge the cabinet secretary, when she meets members of the A77 action group later this month, to listen to their call for a task force to bring together local stakeholders, Transport Scotland and Amey Highways to explore what more can be done to better manage road closures on both roads when maintenance is being carried out.

Everyone understands that some closures are needed for road safety reasons. However, when the closure is in a rural location, the diversion is often lengthy and drives traffic on to small rural roads, which are simply not built for HGVs, causing damage and disruption to communities.

Above all else, I hope that the cabinet secretary will set out when we will see a clear delivery and investment plan for those two key rural roads, which will save lives, grow our economy and improve the environment in the towns and villages across the south-west.

18:21

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I congratulate my colleague Douglas Lumsden on bringing this debate on the importance of rural roads infrastructure to the chamber.

It feels a bit like *déjà vu*, because I seem to have spoken on the topic ever since I came into the Parliament, nearly nine years ago. The reality is that we have a crisis in our rural communities. We have migration from rural communities to urban ones, which is an issue that the Scottish Government does not really want to talk about. The Scottish Government's continual abandonment of rural constituents no longer leaves areas such as the south-west simply as a forgotten part of Scotland; given the many times that the issue has been raised by my colleagues and I in the chamber, the south-west and other rural communities are now the ignored part of Scotland.

As my colleagues and I have said many times, over the past decade, the amount of money that has been spent on south-west rural infrastructure has been a mere 0.4 per cent of the total transport budget. If we want businesses to come into rural areas, they need to be able to get their goods in and out.

As Colin Smyth mentioned, one of the busiest ports in Britain, at Cairnryan, is serviced by the A77 and the A75, which have been promised an upgrade for many years. First, when he opened the port at Cairnryan, Alex Salmond said that one of the things that he would do urgently was upgrade those roads. In 2011, Alex Neil said that it was a disgrace that the previous Labour Government had not upgraded the roads. Subsequent transport ministers, including Humza Yousaf, Jenny Gilruth and Michael Matheson, came down to the south-west and listened. In fact, I remember that, when Michael Matheson came down, he was late to the meeting because there had been an accident on the A77 and there was a delay—I think that Mr Carson will remember that, too.

Like my colleague Liam Kerr, I have taken the opportunity to get into one of those 44-tonne lorries and drive down the A77—rather, I have been driven down it; it would have been scary had I been driving—and it was quite frightening. It is hard enough to go down those roads in a car. When we have £1.2 billion-worth of goods going

through the port of Cairnryan in those 44-tonne vehicles, that is a significant amount of traffic.

That situation is replicated across all of Scotland's rural communities. Without new businesses, services, schools, education and community facilities, migration out of our rural communities is hurried along. Why would the next generation stay in rural communities when there are fewer and fewer jobs available and fewer and fewer services and activities to participate in?

Supporting our rural communities means enabling them to attract people to jobs in their area. To get goods in and out, we need good-quality roads—and, to be fair, an upgrade to our rail services. We are waiting for STPR2, which has been kicking around for seven years or so now. Even though it gets diluted every time that it comes out, we still do not have a plan to deliver on STPR2. We have a rail link down to Stranraer, which, if there was a spur-off into Cairnryan, could take some goods off the roads. That would have a positive impact on the A77, but, although that is in STPR2, nothing has been said about it.

The Scottish Government does not seem to understand rural issues. If it did, it would not keep making and breaking transport infrastructure promises. It is time to recognise the issues that our rural communities face and the solutions that are required. Once again, I thank Douglas Lumsden for giving me the opportunity to speak about the issue in the chamber.

18:25

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Like all the other colleagues, I congratulate Douglas Lumsden on securing the debate. As Mr Lumsden's motion states,

"driving is an essential part of daily life for those living in rural communities".

The motion continues by saying that the Parliament

"believes that those communities deserve the infrastructure to allow connectivity that is safe and enables access to vital services".

I absolutely agree with that. I care about rural communities. It might not be a surprise to colleagues that I will focus my contribution on rural road infrastructure in the south-west of Scotland. As many have said previously, we have raised debates on the matter, we have raised questions for the Government and we have talked about the need for improvements to the main arterial routes, the A75 and A77. We have also raised the fact that both routes are crucial arterial routes for the south-west, and we are hearing that again this evening. Fundamentally, it is time to see much needed upgrades on both those main roads and, of course, on the other roads that serve our south-

west area—the A711 through the A714 and the A701 and A709.

Safety has been a key concern for me since coming to this place in 2016. I recognise that road safety week is next week, from 17 November to 23 November. There have been too many fatalities, too many families affected and too many loved ones lost. I thank the A75 and A77 action groups, whose continued campaigning efforts cannot be underplayed.

There is consensus from the Scottish and UK Governments that both the A77 and the A75 must be improved. We have commitments from both Governments, but now the focus must be on transforming those commitments into action as quickly as possible.

Finlay Carson: I put on record my support for the A77 and A75 campaigns, but surely, given the number of years that we have been waiting for improvements, you must share that frustration at the Scottish Government not stepping up to the mark and delivering.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

Emma Harper: I thank Finlay Carson for that intervention. I am on my feet here the night—does that not demonstrate that I am concerned about what my constituents in my whole region are thinking about? I understand that there are a lot of frustrations out there.

There is a focus on support and the need to look at what we can do to make improvements. There is a focus right now with the South West Scotland Transport Alliance, which had a summit in Stranraer on 29 January. A fortnight ago, I was in Stranraer at a meeting about the issues on the A77 and A75. At the summit, the South Scotland elected members, as well as representatives from Stena Line, P&O Ferries, the national health service, Dumfries and Galloway Council and business, all agreed on the absolute need for road upgrades.

The Scottish Government published the second strategic transport projects review—STPR2—in 2022. The document states that the A77 and A75 will benefit from improving junctions, enhancing overtaking opportunities and creating climbing lanes at appropriate locations where slow-moving traffic leads to risky overtaking manoeuvres. The Government is also committing to widening and realigning carriageways to alleviate pinchpoints. Those recommendations, once enacted, will bring about real and meaningful change for constituents.

There is a challenge, though, with the funding. The Scottish Government continues to operate within a tight economic situation without the ability to commit to huge infrastructure spending, which

means that it is necessary for the UK Government to come forward with funding to ensure that the upgrades that are needed for the roads take place. I know that the cabinet secretary has been working well with the UK Government, and that is welcome. I also welcome the fact that Labour has affirmed that the £8 million commitment to look at feasibility for bypassing Springholm and Crocketford will proceed.

I will finish there. I repeat my ask of the minister that the economic importance of the A75 and the A77 must be acknowledged because of how they support the central belt, given that, as Colin Smyth has said, Cairnryan is the fifth-busiest port for access to Ireland and the rest of Europe.

I am conscious of time, so I will conclude at that.

18:30

Tim Eagle (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I congratulate Douglas Lumsden on securing the debate on what is a very important issue, and I echo his comments, and those of Liam Kerr, on the A96. I am sure that my regional colleague Douglas Ross will pick up on that, too.

I am frustrated that no member of the Green Party is here, given how often they go in the papers to slate road development across Scotland. Nothing makes my blood boil more than picking up a national paper to find an inner-city member of the Green Party telling me that I am not allowed the dualling of the A96 in the north-east. Before I move on to the Rest and Be Thankful, I remind members that, if they lived up in Moray, in the north-east, and saw the amount of near misses on that road every day, they would become aware of why that road has to be dualled. People might hear about the deaths, as tragic as they are, but we experience problems on that road every day.

I turn my attention to the A83. I was delighted to meet John Gurr and the rest of the Rest and Be Thankful campaign group last week, to hear direct the views of residents and businesses. To be honest, that group is, sadly, at its wits' end.

That has not been helped by a series of revelations, due to parliamentary questions that I have asked: £16 million has been paid to consultancy firms; £2.3 million has been paid to the landowner of the old military diversion route; and almost £5 million has been spent on replacing netting along the rest of that road. All the while, a spade has yet to go in the ground on either the medium or long-term solutions, yet that road is absolutely critical for the Argyll and Bute region. Residents and businesses could live with those costs if work was happening to upgrade the road, but more time has been spent in talking about the

route than in ensuring that it meets the needs of residents and businesses.

I cannot stress enough the impact of the closure of that road. One haulage company told me that it is into the millions of pounds, at a time when the whole region wants to expand—particularly, for example, in the Scotch whisky industry. I realise that the A83 task force meetings give some information, but the community remains worried. I am sure that the cabinet secretary is aware of that, but that worry remains. A clear timeline is needed so that communities know when that work will begin. There is a commitment, but we need a timeline.

Not just large infrastructure projects are impacted by a lack of action; smaller routes are, too. I was in the Western Isles a couple of weeks ago, and I visited the blackhouse village near Carloway—a historic site that is growing in popularity with tourists. Its small, single-track road struggles to cope with the tourism buses in the peak season, and needs to be widened. After years of cuts to local government budgets, Western Isles Council has said that it simply cannot afford the repairs. The local community has managed to get little passing places put in for parents who walk down the road with their buggies. However, that is not good enough.

The Scottish Government has passed the buck to the council on that, which has resulted in effect in a stalemate. Local residents, as well as those who manage the blackhouses, are deeply worried that there may be an accident at some point, especially if the volume of traffic continues to increase.

Given that rural depopulation is on the rise, I ask the cabinet secretary to look at different ways in which the Scottish Government can help with upgrades on locally managed roads that are required for local tourism and economic benefit.

The roads that I have referred to, as well as those that have been discussed by others across the regions in Scotland, vary in size, use and location, but all of them have a profound impact on the communities around them. I do not suggest that we can build out all those roads overnight, but communities need to know that the Scottish Government is committed to the works on those roads and has produced definite timelines of when they will be delivered.

18:34

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, too, congratulate Douglas Lumsden on securing the debate and on his excellent opening speech, in which he looked at both trunk roads and smaller rural roads. I will do the same.

First, I will look at my home area of Moray. Moray Council is responsible for approximately 1,000 miles of roads throughout the county. The budget for that is always under pressure—as council budgets are, after years of cuts from the SNP Scottish Government. That means that, when issues are raised, sometimes we do not have the funding to make changes immediately to improve the safety on some of those roads. Ahead of the budget later this year, we have to consider the allocation of funding to councils to make improvements to roads with potholes, as we heard earlier, and to improve safety. A number of serious accidents occurred on the A941 between Lossie and Elgin this year alone, with fatalities—tragically, young lives were lost on that road earlier this year.

Another issue that has not been spoken about much tonight, but which affects all our communities, is speeding on many of those roads. Every time I go to my surgery in Roseisle, I raise issues with the police, the council and others, as I have constituents who end up with cars literally in their garden because of the speed at which traffic goes through the town. There has been an increase in the number of speeding vehicles going through Thomshill, too, which is very close to where I stay. We need action from the local authority and the police to try to deal with the problem.

I want to focus on the A96. I raised the issue with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport recently, as it continues to be at the top of the agenda politically, with businesses and individual constituents in Moray, the Highlands and the north-east.

On Monday, the *Inverness Courier* launched a petition, which I signed—and I urge constituents to do the same—that asks the Scottish Government to set out

“a clear timeline for the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Nairn and the construction of a bypass for Nairn”

by the end of this year. I hope that, in summing up, the minister will outline how she plans to respond to that petition, which has already gathered hundreds of supporters, and which I expect to gather more. The petition asks for a “clear timeline” by the end of this year, so that we can know for sure when that part of the A96 will be dualled and the bypass for Nairn constructed. That is crucial.

I know that Fergus Ewing is not here, but he states in his support—I hope that he does not mind me saying this on his behalf—that it is absolutely vital that the petition is understood and accepted by the Scottish Government, so that it does not try to kick the project into the long grass

“for another year and a half until the next Holyrood election.”

Fergus Ewing is absolutely right on that point, and I would be grateful to hear the cabinet secretary's response to the *Inverness Courier* petition.

I want to look at the rest of the A96, because, also on Monday, another tragedy happened on the A96. A 27-year-old woman lost her life in a collision with a lorry between Brodie and Forres, and my sympathies go to her, her family and her friends. It is yet another fatality on that road. When speaking about the A96, the cabinet secretary—I have heard the First Minister do it as well—always speaks about the road from Inverness to Nairn. That is important, but the A96 goes far further: it goes through Moray—we have never had that bypass for Elgin or Keith—and then through Aberdeenshire, all the way to Aberdeen.

We need a commitment from the Scottish Government to finally do what it promised and what it asked people to vote for, which is to fully dual the A96 in its entirety from Aberdeen to Inverness. I hope that fatalities on that road, such as the one that happened on Monday, become a thing of the past, because too many lives have been lost already.

18:38

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): I thank my colleague Douglas Lumsden for bringing this important debate to the chamber. I will take a bit of a risk. I have a four-minute speech prepared, but I will go completely off piste, because when it comes to knowing a subject inside out in the Parliament, I know that of the A75 like the back of my hand.

I declare an interest in that I have been living next to that road for nearly every day of my 57 years of life—I know that most members will be surprised that I am as old as that. I declare an interest, because three of my family members have been killed on the A75 over the years. Indeed, my great auntie was the first person to be killed by a motor car in Scotland. She was killed literally a yard from my front door, when she was only six, by a car driven by the local doctor; that was more than 100 years ago.

The A75 is an everyday part of life, not just for me, as the member for Galloway and West Dumfries, but for nearly every single person who lives and works in the south of Scotland or Dumfries and Galloway. There is no way of avoiding it, for getting to work or school, as it is the main artery that runs through the region.

However, the A75 is important not just for the people who live in Dumfries and Galloway. The A77 and A75 carry a whopping £67 million-worth of goods every single day—close to £9 billion

annually—with 400,000 freight vehicles travelling along the 95-mile route between Gretna and the ports at Cairnryan.

We heard from Brian Whittle about the repeated commitments from the SNP Government, with Alex Salmond talking about the three Rs of rail, roads and regeneration—none of those has been delivered in Dumfries and Galloway. We have seen no rail or road improvements in that time. More recently, to back up Aileen McLeod's failed election campaign in 2016, the then Deputy First Minister—now the First Minister—pledged to improve journey times on the A75. That is one of many pledges that have been put to one side.

Emma Harper, Colin Smyth, Brian Whittle and I repeatedly stand here and ask for improvements. For years, we were promised that news on upgrades would be delivered through the strategic transport projects review 2, but that was much delayed. Although the A75 is mentioned, it is the only project in the STPR2 that does not have a timeline attached to it. It still does not have a timeline or a budget attached to it. Perhaps the cabinet secretary can tell us whether a timetable to start work on the A75 has been established.

Under the previous UK Conservative Government, the Sir Peter Hendy review highlighted the importance of the A75. Eventually, the SNP Government put its constitutional grievance to one side and sat around the table, because it appreciated the importance of the route. Sadly, the £8 million that was committed by the Tory Government has been reduced to £5 million. However, that should be enough money to do the feasibility study, and it puts a bit of pressure on the Scottish Government, which is responsible for investing the money that has been promised decade after decade for improvements on the road.

The people of Crocketford and Springholm are tired of the talk and hearing the commitments while they are still seeing HGVs pass within feet of their door. Recently, we have had, I think, nine complete road closures due to accidents, and there have also been complete road closures due to upgrades, because the carriageway is not wide enough to safely carry out maintenance. That is quite incredible, given that closures result, in many cases, in a 96-mile diversion on roads that are certainly not fit for those HGVs.

Safety is of paramount importance, and I would like to have seen a bit of movement on the use of average-speed cameras, rather than relying on speed vans that sit in predictable places on the road and that do not come out at night. As soon as the police activity has disappeared for the day, speeding continues right through the night.

I am delighted that the First Minister has accepted my invitation to come to the south-west to witness at first hand the problems, particularly in Crocketford and Springholm, and to meet concerned parties. Perhaps, if the investment had taken place earlier, we might not be inheriting the major safety and reliability issues that we have on the road today, which are putting strains on rural life.

18:43

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): I thank Douglas Lumsden for securing the debate. I will focus my remarks on the A90, as set out in his motion, although I acknowledge that the debate has provided an opportunity for members to talk about different rural roads, including both trunk and local authority roads.

I start by expressing my sincere sympathies to the families of anyone who has been killed or injured on our roads. Our thoughts are with the families and friends of those who have been involved in recent incidents, including the collision that fatally injured a pedestrian on 8 October on the A952 local authority road, close to the A90 at the Toll of Birness. Up to 7 September 2024, there had been three serious accidents at the junction in the previous five years.

Road safety remains of paramount importance to the Government. That is reflected in our ambition to have zero deaths or serious injuries on our roads by 2050, with an interim target to halve the number of people who are killed or seriously injured on the road by 2030.

I have listened closely to the discussion today, and I fully appreciate members' desire to see further action on improvements, specifically to the A90. The evidence-based transport appraisal that supported the first strategic transport projects review in 2008 and the second review in 2022 did not recommend the dualling of the A90 north of Ellon. Furthermore, I am not apprised of any commitment made in 2007 by this Government, nor are my officials. The SNP manifesto for the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections did not contain a commitment to dual the A90 north of Ellon.

This Government recognises that investment in our responsibility for trunk roads is crucial for rural connectivity and accessing essential services. That is why funding is prioritised, in line with the sustainable investment hierarchy, for maintaining and safely operating our trunk roads and motorways.

Douglas Lumsden: Will the member take an intervention?

Fiona Hyslop: I will move on, if you do not mind, Presiding Officer.

That is clearly reflected in recommendations 30, 31 and 32 on our strategic infrastructure priorities in STRP2.

Our firm focus is on ensuring that our road network remains safe and resilient, and is adapted to address the evolving changes of climate change. I remain committed to improving road safety across Scotland and delivering the ambitious casualty reduction targets that are set out in "Scotland's Road Safety Framework to 2030". That commitment is demonstrated through the SNP Government's record investment in road safety in 2024-25 and the substantial uplift of 30 per cent in spending on trunk road maintenance this year, which contradicts the Conservatives' misplaced assertions.

Douglas Lumsden: The cabinet secretary mentioned reports coming in. One of the things that we are waiting for is the A96 corridor review. Will that corridor review be published this year?

Fiona Hyslop: Yes, it will.

This year, we have committed £14 million to supporting local road safety, with more than £2 million being invested in local authorities in the north-east of Scotland. My officials and I are in regular discussion with a range of operational partners. Just two weeks ago, I chaired the national road safety strategic partnership board and, tomorrow, a meeting of the local partnership forum for the north will take place. As a nation, we need to address driver behaviour, as a number of members have mentioned, which is consistently of concern in the context of collisions.

I am aware of, and have heard members speak about, their concerns regarding the Toll of Birness and Cortes junctions. I note that, in 2017, when Aberdeenshire Council consulted Transport Scotland on a planning application that would impact the Toll of Birness junction, it recommended that the junction be upgraded in order to mitigate the impact of future developments in Mintlaw. Aberdeenshire Council agreed with that recommendation and imposed an infrastructure capacity of 200 houses across the allocated sites in Mintlaw. The mechanism for delivering the necessary upgrade is a matter for the council and the developers. In that regard, they have entered into a planning agreement to secure a financial contribution towards the works. Neither the Government's infrastructure investment nor the road safety review process supersedes the need for the council and developers to mitigate the housing and development impacts on the trunk road network.

In relation to the Cortes junction, Transport Scotland continues to assess the safety performance of the link between Rathen and Cortes junction, and is planning a further study on

potential vehicle conflicts, to better understand any operational issues. We expect that by the end of the year.

Meeting closed at 18:51.

The Government appreciates the importance of ensuring that our roads are operationally safe and effective. Clearly, that involves addressing any defects in a timely manner. I remind members of the fiscal challenges that we currently face as a result of the previous Conservative Government. The Liz Truss-Kwasi Kwarteng budget decimated the budgeting of the UK Government and the Scottish Government and took a huge amount of capital out of investment. Despite that on-going legacy and problem, we are investing record amounts in essential road maintenance schemes, our bridge strengthening programme and increasing the resilience of the network to the effects of climate change.

Since 2007, more than £297 million has been invested in the maintenance of the A90 to ensure its safe and efficient operation. In the 2023-24 financial year, more than £27.8 million was invested in the maintenance of the route.

Investment in trunk roads in the north-east is not limited to maintaining the existing network or road safety improvements. It was the SNP Government that completed the opening of a new £49.5 million dual carriageway link road at Haudagain in the north-east in May 2022. That is in addition to the £745 million investment that the SNP Government has made in delivering the 58km of the A90 Aberdeen western peripheral route, which includes the 12km section of dual carriageway between Balmedie and Tipperty to the north of Aberdeen in the north-east of Scotland. We should not forget the £10.2 million spent on removing the pinch point at Inveramsay bridge.

In conclusion, the Government will continue to strive for all road deaths and serious injuries to be greatly reduced. I urge all members to assist in supporting the road safety campaigns to challenge driver behaviour and promote road safety. I understand that Douglas Lumsden has been invited—and has, I hope, accepted the invitation—to take part in the MSP road safety event here in the Parliament.

We will invest in the A90 and in all of Scotland's trunk roads. We have a firm plan for what to invest in and how, which is set out in STPR2, but our ambitions for investment are continually tempered by pressure on our budgets. I assure members that we are committed to investing in our rural trunk roads as part of Scotland's trunk road network, which connects communities and families, and—as many members have identified—supports our economy.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* for this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

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