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Scottish Parliament

Thursday 6 February 2025

[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:40]

General Question Time

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Good morning. The first item of business is general questions.

Health and Social Care Reform

1. **Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how reform across health and social care will progress, following the decision not to proceed with part 1 of the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. (S6O-04298)

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd): Last week, the First Minister announced plans to drive down waiting times and reduce pressure on front-line services, and our draft budget sets out almost £2.2 billion of investment in social care and integration.

We have revised our approach to the national care service. Parts 2 and 3 of the bill will go ahead, reforming information records and standards and introducing Anne's law and the right to a break for unpaid carers. We will establish a non-statutory advisory board to drive improvement and ensure that services are consistent, fair and of high quality across Scotland.

Sue Webber: The Edinburgh integration joint board is facing another budget gap in the financial year ahead, requiring gross savings of £51 million. The previous chief officer indicated that integration has not been functioning properly in Edinburgh, with issues dating back to when the Scottish Government established the Edinburgh IJB in 2015. In November 2023, the City of Edinburgh Council unanimously agreed a cross-party motion to review the integration scheme, but more than a year later, it has been alleged that NHS Lothian is pushing back against that review as the current scheme sees the council being required to continually bail out the IJB in Edinburgh. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that the integration scheme is working fairly for the city of Edinburgh and NHS Lothian?

Maree Todd: As the member will be aware, decisions on funding the integration joint board when it was set up and annual decisions on funding, which comes from both the local authority and NHS Lothian, were and are for local leaders, and those leaders are democratically accountable to the local population. I am more than happy to

look at how the integration scheme works; whether it is delivering for NHS Lothian; and, as the member has asked me to, whether it is working well for others. Efforts to look at that are in our programme for work, and I would be happy to pick that up.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): Change in social care is needed, and we must all work to secure improvement. I understand from the minister's statement that was delivered earlier this month that a new non-statutory advisory board will be established to drive improvement in the sector. Will the minister advise when that board is expected to meet and how quickly it will be able to deliver vital reform?

Maree Todd: We are moving quickly to establish a non-statutory advisory board that has lived experience at its heart. We expect the board to meet for the first time in March 2025, and it will be critical to the national care service's efforts to drive improvement and ensure that services are consistent, fair and of high quality.

Strengthening national support and oversight of the system remains our core intention. Membership of the advisory board will include people with lived experience of accessing care services, unpaid carers, members of the workforce, care providers, trade unions, the national health service and local government. As I have set out a path forward that I believe that everybody is able to get behind, I expect the board to have an impact rapidly.

The Presiding Officer: Question 2 was not lodged.

National Health Service (Dumfries and Galloway)

3. **Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to improve NHS services in Dumfries and Galloway. (S6O-04300)

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): It is for health boards and their planning partners to plan and provide services that best meet the needs of local people, including those in rural areas, in a way that is consistent with clinical best practice, national policies and frameworks. One example that Oliver Mundell might be interested in is that NHS Dumfries and Galloway was one of two boards to implement the new digital dermatology pathway last year, allowing patients to benefit from faster diagnostics and assessment of skin conditions. Once fully rolled out, the programme will impact 400,000 patients in Scotland over three years and reduce waiting lists by 36,000 hours.

Oliver Mundell: It is always good to hear positive examples but, clearly, services are under

pressure, with a crisis in dental provision, challenges in the provision of primary care and worrying delays to hospital discharge. One patient in Dumfries and Galloway has been stuck in hospital for 916 days.

Although I accept that such cases can be complicated, surely the cabinet secretary agrees that that is unacceptable and that it drives growing fears among elderly constituents that if they go into hospital, they might not get back out again. What is the Scottish Government doing to investigate such cases, which are prevalent across Scotland? What is it doing to address the growing challenges around delayed discharge?

Neil Gray: I do not know the detail of the case that the member raises, but on the face of it, I agree that it is unacceptable. With longer-term cases, such as the one that he has referenced, there is often complexity, but I am very clear that the current level of delayed discharge, particularly the considerable variation across different areas, is not acceptable.

As a result, the Government has been working with local health and social care partnerships and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to identify key challenges and barriers to hospital discharge, as well as identifying shared good practice to support improvements. The work includes the provision of more direct whole-system support to areas such as the Highlands and Dumfries and Galloway, which face the biggest challenges with delays.

I am confident that our collaborative work in that space will deliver improvement, but I know that more needs to be done to support it. That is why the 2025-26 budget includes a commitment of an additional £100 million in funding to tackle delayed discharge by, for example, further expanding the hospital at home service. If approved by the Parliament, that funding will support our ambition to grow the hospital at home service to 2,000 beds by December 2026. That would make it the biggest hospital in the country, and would help address hospital occupancy and delayed discharge issues.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): Last week, the First Minister outlined that a greater proportion of new NHS funding will go towards primary and community care, and the cabinet secretary has just outlined greater collaboration and the hospital at home service as examples of that. Will the cabinet secretary say something more about how the 2025-26 budget will ensure that general practitioners and services in communities across D and G will have the resources that they need to play a greater role in our health system, including helping with delayed discharge?

Neil Gray: Absolutely. Scottish Government officials are currently determining how best to allocate the additional funding for primary care to ensure that we realise the maximum benefit from that investment. The investment will be used for a range of initiatives, including to increase capacity in general practice and to make it more consistent across Scotland. It will deliver a new acute anterior eye condition service during 2025, which, with the community glaucoma service, will free up to 40,000 hospital appointments a year. We will also be expanding the pharmacy first service, so that more clinical conditions can be treated by pharmacists, and targeted investment in the dental workforce will improve capacity and patient access, with a review of existing incentives for rural practices.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): The rate of patients being seen within four hours at accident and emergency departments in Dumfries and Galloway is the worst on record. Although we understand the immense pressure that NHS staff are under, lack of capacity has led to treatment taking place in areas that are unsafe, inappropriate and undignified. Last week, I asked the cabinet secretary whether the Government would commit to publishing regular data on the care that is taking place in inappropriate settings, but he failed to address the issue of data altogether. I ask him again: does the Government intend to publish regular data on corridor care?

Neil Gray: I accept the situation that Carol Mochan has set out with regard to the four-hour standard. We have rehearsed and discussed some of the issues that are driving that, including the hospital occupancy and delayed discharge issues that Oliver Mundell and Emma Harper have referenced. This morning, I met Colin Pullman, the executive director of the Royal College of Nursing, to discuss the RCN's report on corridor care, and I committed to exploring further how we can, consistently, have a greater sense of what the picture looks like and, therefore, how we can address it.

Budget 2025-26 (Hospice Care)

4. **Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to invest in the hospice care sector, in light of the £4 million referred to in the draft budget 2025-26. (S6O-04301)

The Minister for Public Health and Women's Health (Jenni Minto): The draft budget for 2025-26 now includes £5 million of investment to support independent hospices to provide pay parity with national health service agenda for change levels. The aim of that is to support hospices to retain staff who deliver essential end-of-life and palliative care services. My officials are

already undertaking work to explore the mechanisms for providing that funding, while respecting the roles of integration joint boards and local commissioning arrangements.

Michelle Thomson: I thank the minister for putting on the record that the draft budget includes £5 million for that. I note that that increase came about during budget negotiations.

On a recent visit to Strathcarron hospice, which provides invaluable end-of-life care for almost 500 patients and families in central Scotland, I was fortunate to speak to staff and learn more about the quite incredible work that they do. However, the chief executive told me that one of the challenges that it faces is Labour's employer national insurance increase. That will put additional pressure on its budget, which is largely funded by donations. Although the increased budget commitment is hugely welcome, what update can the Scottish Government provide on a new national funding framework for hospice care in Scotland to help mitigate the longer-term impacts of Labour's damaging policy?

Jenni Minto: Like Michelle Thomson, I have had the privilege of seeing the incredible work that independent hospices do—both personally and as a minister. I also recognise that Labour's decision to increase employer national insurance has created huge pressure across the whole of the public and third sectors, including Scottish hospices. If that is not fully funded by the United Kingdom Government, it will pose risks to service delivery.

We remain committed to working with the hospice sector and IJBs to develop a new national funding framework that will support IJBs and independent hospices to agree sustainable funding, planning and commissioning arrangements to meet their local populations' needs. We will be creating a partnership group to drive that work.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): The fact is that the hospice sector is facing a double whammy of national insurance increases and meeting the agenda for change. The £5 million announced in the budget is welcome, but the sector is calling for £15 million to stand still. We know that £350 million is available in contingency funds in the Scottish Government's NHS budget for the current financial year. If the issue is not addressed, hospices across Scotland—which are setting their budgets now—will see the disparity increase even further. Is the Scottish Government looking to provide the £15 million that the sector needs, and not just the £5 million that is currently in the budget?

Jenni Minto: I thank Miles Briggs for his question and recognise the work that he does in

supporting hospices in his region and across Scotland. As I referenced in my previous response, we have been working closely with hospices to address the situation that has arisen—the double whammy, as Miles Briggs called it. We are creating a partnership group to drive that work, and I meet hospices regularly.

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD): I welcome the additional funding, which was secured through the budget partnership and negotiations with the Scottish Liberal Democrats. However, the minister will be aware that the debate on my Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill has shone a light on gaps in access to palliative care. What assurances can she give that, through the palliative care strategy and additional funding, some of those access issues can be addressed?

Jenni Minto: I recognise the role that the Liberal Democrats played in ensuring that the hospices received additional funding. I agree that, in the light of the bill that Liam McArthur is taking through Parliament, it cannot be one or the other, which is why I am very pleased that we had our palliative care consultation, which closed in January. That is an important way of working to ensure that people in Scotland get the right options on end-of-life and palliative care.

Rape Crisis Scotland Guidance

6. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the reported guidance issued by Rape Crisis Scotland, and its definition of the word "woman". (S6O-04303)

The Minister for Equalities (Kaukab Stewart): The Scottish Government is clear that the needs of survivors of rape and sexual assault must be the utmost priority of support services.

Although we cannot intervene in the running of independent organisations, we are clear that access to separate or single-sex provision for survivors is a legitimate and proportionate response when providing support to rape survivors. We therefore welcome the fact that Rape Crisis Scotland is currently consulting member groups and survivors to agree a clear approach to the matter within the terms of the Equality Act 2010.

Pam Gosal: It was recently reported that Rape Crisis Scotland has dropped its pledge to define the word "woman", after a series of scandals over the service's embracing of gender ideology. That does not give reassurance to survivors of rape and sexual assault that the charity will be a safe, single-sex space for them. Does the minister agree that "adult human female" is the only appropriate definition of the word "woman"?

Kaukab Stewart: A woman is an adult female—that is clear. However, it is simply a fact that trans people also exist and have always done so. That is not new.

Bereavement Education (Schools)

7. **Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con):** I remind members that I am the convener of the cross-party group on funerals and bereavement.

To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to making bereavement education a formal part of the school syllabus. (S6O-04304)

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): The curriculum for excellence includes health and wellbeing as one of three core areas that are the responsibility of all schools. Schools develop the curriculum to suit their local context and meet the needs of their pupils, which includes delivering learning on bereavement.

Education Scotland has developed teaching resources to raise awareness of childhood bereavement and the impact of adversity and trauma while helping to mitigate the effect of those experiences. Young Scot has also developed advice and resources for children who are dealing with bereavement. That work aligns with recommendations to improve support for children who are experiencing bereavement.

Jeremy Balfour: Whether of a beloved relative or a pet guinea pig, all of us will face bereavement at some point. However, Cruse Scotland and other organisations have pointed out that there is still a lack of a core curriculum to help children learn how to deal with it. Will the minister meet me, Cruse and other organisations to discuss how we can take that forward to benefit children across Scotland?

Natalie Don-Innes: All children and young people who have experienced bereavement should be supported. As I have alluded to, and as Mr Balfour is aware, the curriculum for excellence is not a statutory curriculum but more a broad framework that is designed to give schools the flexibility that they require.

That being said, programmes are delivered in Scotland to support children and young people through grief and loss, such as the Seasons for Growth programme, whose core element is the promotion of social and emotional wellbeing after a loss.

We continue to work with Education Scotland to build on the work to date and to identify any gaps. I am aware of Cruse Scotland's work in supporting children and young people, and I am happy to meet Mr Balfour to explore that further.

Police Scotland (Non-criminal Complaints)

8. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what the current average timescale is for non-criminal complaints against the police to be allocated for investigation by Police Scotland. (S6O-04305)

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): The Dame Elish Angiolini review recommended that the complaints and conduct committee of the Scottish Police Authority should hold Police Scotland to account for delays in investigations into complaints and misconduct.

Police Scotland reports on the average timescales for completion of complaints and the proportion of complaints that are completed within 56 days. It does not break those figures down to measure the time that is taken for the allocation of a complaint.

The Police Scotland professional standards department provides a quarterly report to the complaints and conduct committee and Mr Smyth can access a full breakdown of its performance on the Scottish Police Authority website.

Colin Smyth: It is now routine that, when I write to Police Scotland on behalf of a growing number of constituents who have made complaints about Police Scotland but have heard little or nothing about that complaint—often after months and, in some cases, more than a year—the response is not only that there is no timescale for dealing with the complaint, but that Police Scotland cannot give a timescale for when a complaint will even be allocated for investigation.

When will that growing level of unacceptable waits be tackled? How can the public have confidence in the police if, when something goes wrong, the police do not seem interested in investigating that on time?

Angela Constance: The statutory guidance is very clear that complaint inquiries need to be completed with a letter explaining the outcome. That has to be done within 56 days. I have listened very carefully to the member's comments. I have also given a commitment to other MSP colleagues that I will raise the issue with the chair of the SPA when we next meet, as the SPA has responsibility for holding Police Scotland to account on such matters.

The most recent data that went to the SPA has shown a decrease in complaints year to year and in the five-year average. I will pick up the specific issues that the member has raised when I next meet the chair of the SPA.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes general question time.

First Minister's Question Time

12:00

HMP Glasgow

1. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): The Scottish National Party Government previously told the public that it would cost £100 million to build the new HMP Glasgow. Yesterday, however, the SNP Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs dropped a bombshell on Scotland's taxpayers—she admitted that it would now cost £998,400,000. That is just shy of £1 billion, and I will place a bet with John Swinney right now that it will only go even higher. Does a £1 billion Barlinnie really represent good value for Scotland's taxpayers?

The First Minister (John Swinney): It is essential that we replace HMP Barlinnie. We have numerous reports from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland that encourage us to do so. The Parliament has pressed us to undertake the project, and we recognise that it has to be done.

Of course, the full rigour of cost analysis has been applied to the project, which is different from the original project that led to the estimate that Mr Findlay set out. I assure him that the Government will monitor and control the costs carefully as the project takes its course.

Russell Findlay: I think that the First Minister's undertaking is causing some anxiety among taxpayers, because it is they who are paying the price for this SNP incompetence and its perverse priorities. Instead of building a high-security prison to lock up rapists and murderers, John Swinney thinks that he is building either a luxury resort or a nature reserve. *[Interruption.]*

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

Russell Findlay: The justice secretary says that it will be

“based around small communities living together and supporting each other.”

There will be an orchard of fruit trees, beautiful landscaped gardens, planting beds, polytunnels and amphitheatre-like steps. I am not making this up—there will be wee boxes for owls and bats to live in and special bricks for the birds.

The SNP expects hard-working Scottish taxpayers to pay for its nonsense. Surely we need some common sense by building a prison at minimum cost to taxpayers and not for maximum benefit to prisoners.

The First Minister: The tone of Mr Findlay's question is absolutely reprehensible and despicable. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you!

The First Minister: If Russell Findlay wants to have a dividing line in politics on this type of stuff, I will happily be on the other side of the argument from him and all the cohorts that he is courting with his question.

I want to make sure that there is a replacement prison so that those who are sentenced to prison can be held safely and securely and that staff are safe and secure in undertaking their responsibilities. That is my duty as First Minister, and that is what the Government will concentrate on delivering.

Russell Findlay: The cohort that I am talking to is hard-working Scots. It is taxpayers who want every single pound to be spent on the best possible schools and hospitals, not on the best possible prisons. This is baffling to people in the real world. They expect the Government to build functional prisons at a sensible price and to be kept safe from dangerous criminals, but they are getting neither from the SNP.

As a result of the SNP's failure to build prisons on time and within budget, it will release thousands of criminals before they have done their time. Police Scotland officers and victims groups say that that will result in more crime in Scotland's streets. One billion pounds and more crime—does that really sound like a good deal to John Swinney?

The First Minister: This project is different from the one that was originally discussed about a decade ago. The original proposition was based on estimates for a 700-place prison. In fact, the new prison will accommodate more than 1,340 prisoners, so it will be almost double that size.

The Scottish Prison Service has looked at the comparative costs. A recent report by the National Audit Office shows that, in England and Wales, the expected cost per prison place has increased by up to 259 per cent since the initial business case. The price per place has risen to between £610,000 and £840,000 in England and Wales. The price per place for His Majesty's Prison Glasgow sits in the middle of that range, at £740,000.

Mr Findlay can say all the things that he wants to say, and he can play to all the sentiments that he is very visibly playing to. However, as First Minister of Scotland, I expect my ministers to take rational decisions to protect the public purse and to protect the public by ensuring that those who are sentenced to prison can be accommodated. I

will not play games with the type of rhetoric that Mr Findlay has put to the Parliament today.

Russell Findlay: John Swinney is protecting the public purse, apparently. The prison has doubled in size but will cost 10 times as much—that is SNP economics right there. It is squandering more on a five-star prison than it spent on Scotland's flagship Queen Elizabeth university hospital, and it is releasing thousands of prisoners early. At the same time, it is building a prison with boxes for bats and bricks for birds.

That illustrates how detached the Holyrood bubble has become from the real world, and it is why so many people are disillusioned with politics. The John Swinney Government is neglecting what really matters to people. As a matter of urgency, will he commit to cutting those outrageous costs, or will he just expect taxpayers to pipe down and pay up?

The First Minister: All of us can see what Mr Findlay is up to today. *[Interruption.]* All of us can see it. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear one another.

The First Minister: It is very visible what Mr Findlay is up to today. He is absolutely terrified of his party being consumed by Reform, as all the polls suggest, and he is playing into its hands with every bit of obnoxious rhetoric that he comes out with. *[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Thank you!

The First Minister: I will reassure taxpayers, as they have—*[Interruption.]*

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: Mr Findlay has not balanced a single budget in his life for the public finances. I have balanced 10 budgets in this country and delivered value for money, and I will continue to do so.

I encourage Mr Findlay to go away and do his research. I have set out to the Parliament the issues that have arisen because of the significant inflation in construction costs with which we are wrestling. Why are we wrestling with those costs? We are wrestling with them because of the fiscal mismanagement of the Conservatives, including the Liz Truss budget and the higher interest rates that she bequeathed to us all, and Mr Findlay was right behind the mess that she created.

Nuclear Energy

2. **Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab):** Today, the United Kingdom Government has announced plans to speed up the development of new nuclear

power. It is obvious that the plan has the potential to bring billions of pounds of investment to communities, to jump-start growth and to create high-skill jobs, all while ending our reliance on dictators such as Vladimir Putin to meet our energy demands. Will John Swinney end the Scottish Government's ideological block on nuclear energy to ensure that Scots also can benefit from that opportunity?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The best thing that we can do is to power on with our plans for renewable energy development and ensure that Scotland can realise the extraordinary natural resources that we have. I saw that being developed at the Methil yard in Fife yesterday in a collaboration between the United Kingdom Government and the Scottish Government in securing investment from Navantia and securing the future of the workforce at Methil.

We should power on with renewables. That should be the clear policy signal from the Scottish Government.

Anas Sarwar: It is not an either/or. At 10 o'clock this morning, National Grid's live data showed that 23.9 per cent of the electricity being consumed in Scotland was from nuclear energy. The transition to net zero is a chance to create decent, high-skill jobs for the future, drive investment into Scotland and secure our national energy security. The First Minister should just ask communities in East Lothian or North Ayrshire, which have seen the benefits, about that.

For almost 20 years, the Scottish National Party has vetoed nuclear energy projects in Scotland, leaving jobs, growth and skills to go elsewhere. However, the next generation of small nuclear reactors could revolutionise our energy market. China is constructing 29 reactors and the European Union has 12 at planning stage. That is a huge advantage in the global race to harness new technologies to deliver cleaner, affordable and independent energy. Why is John Swinney determined to let Scotland fall behind?

The First Minister: I spend a lot of my time, as I did on Tuesday, engaging with the Scottish energy advisory board and other energy interests in Scotland. One of the pleas that the energy advisory board has made to me, which I acknowledge is important and which I faithfully try to deliver, is to provide absolute policy certainty so that investors can invest in the technologies that come forward.

In 2023, 70 per cent of electricity generated in Scotland was from renewable sources. That is a marked increase compared to the 32 per cent in 2013. Mr Sarwar should be careful not to create the impression that renewable energy is not delivering formidably for Scotland, because it is.

I think that investors will be really worried by Mr Sarwar's language. Investors tell me that they know exactly where the Scottish Government stands today. We are right behind the renewable energy revolution and we are delivering that. In his pursuit of the new direction, Mr Sarwar wants to muddy the waters. He wants to add uncertainty. He wants to scare off investment from the renewable energy industry. I will not do that. I will give a clear green light to the green energy revolution in Scotland and I will be proud of what Scotland can deliver.

Anas Sarwar: I am talking about more investment in Scotland. John Swinney has the power to unleash billions of pounds of investment and new jobs with the stroke of a pen but, instead, he is trapped in the politics of the 1970s, wanting thousands of jobs—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear Mr Sarwar.

Anas Sarwar: The First Minister wants thousands of jobs and billions in investment to go to England and Wales rather than come to Scotland, all while weakening Scotland's energy security. What kind of nationalist is he?

Let me set out a new direction that a Scottish Labour Government will take. We will end the ideological block to zero-carbon nuclear energy. We will kick-start economic growth and bring billions in investment into Scotland. [*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Members!

Anas Sarwar: We will deliver thousands of high-skill, well-paid jobs for the future and boost Scotland's energy security, all while delivering on Scotland's ambitious climate change commitments. In the face of that huge opportunity, why are John Swinney and the SNP holding Scotland back?

The First Minister: I do not think that that is in any way, shape or form correct. The Deputy First Minister and I spent the evening yesterday with a number of investors who are investing in the renewables energy revolution in Scotland with the support of the Scottish National Investment Bank.

In my friend Mr Gibson's constituency in North Ayrshire—Mr Sarwar mentioned North Ayrshire—we have just secured significant investment by XLCC in cable manufacturing, which will be absolutely critical for offshore renewables. That activity will be assisted by the investment by Sumitomo at Nigg that we have landed.

I encourage Mr Sarwar to go away and look at the cost issues in relation to nuclear power. If he thinks that the increase in costs in relation to HMP Barlinnie is one thing, his eyes will water when he sees the increase in costs in relation to nuclear plants that are taking their course in England.

Given the question that Mr Sarwar has put to me and the primacy that I attach to policy certainty, let me use this opportunity to make it absolutely crystal clear that the Scottish Government will continue with our support for the development of green renewables and that we will not give the green light to nuclear power stations in Scotland.

Temporary Rent Protections (Extension)

3. **Lorna Slater (Lothian) (Green):** Rents across Scotland are skyrocketing. Tenants are paying the price while private landlords are lining their pockets. Although the Housing (Scotland) Bill will finally deliver the promise of permanent rent controls to fix the system, the provisions will not come into force until 2027. Right now, tenants are protected by temporary controls that were introduced while the Greens were in government, but those protections are set to expire in two months, which will expose tenants to extortionate rent increases. Despite having the powers to extend those protections, the Scottish Government has pledged not to do so. First Minister, will you do the right thing to protect tenants and ensure that those temporary protections are extended until permanent rent controls are in place?

The Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair.

The First Minister (John Swinney): I understand the significance of the point that Lorna Slater puts to me. The temporary changes to rent adjudication come to an end on 31 March, when the arrangements will revert back to the existing legal requirements, which are based on market rent.

I am aware of the concerns that have been raised. We know that a longer-term approach is required on rental policy, which is why the Government has introduced provisions in the Housing (Scotland) Bill to support the introduction of longer-term rent controls when that is needed and justifiable. The Government will focus on ensuring that we get that legislation correct as we bring it through Parliament.

Lorna Slater: The cost of living crisis for tenants has not gone away. Over the past 10 years, monthly rent for a two-bedroom flat in Edinburgh has more than doubled. Some tenants are already reporting spending more than 70 per cent of their income on rent. We agree on the need to provide for permanent rent controls in the Housing (Scotland) Bill, but the Government's decision to scrap the vital bridging rent controls will give landlords free rein to hike rents for two years. It is absolutely no surprise that the Scottish Association of Landlords has called it "a very welcome announcement". What does the First

Minister have to say to renters who will be facing that cliff edge in just a few weeks' time?

John Swinney: Most private tenants still have a right to seek a review of a rent increase if they consider it too high. I would, of course, encourage tenants who are concerned about a rent increase to apply for a review. In relation to other messages that I would share with tenants, I would indicate that the Government is investing more than £90 million in discretionary housing payments, which is an increase of £6 million on 2023-24 that has been facilitated by the welcome support from the Scottish Green Party—which I appreciate—for the Government's budget. Those discretionary housing payments are in place to support tenants and to assist them in managing the costs that they face.

I assure Lorna Slater of the Government's determination to make progress on the issue of rent controls. That is why we are legislating through the Housing (Scotland) Bill. With the welcome support of the Scottish Green Party for the budget, we are able to put in place the support through discretionary housing payments, which will be an essential part of our commitment to tenants.

The Promise

4. Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): To ask the First Minister whether he will provide an update on the Scottish Government's work to keep the Promise, in light of the fifth anniversary of it being made. (S6F-03794)

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am grateful to Rona Mackay for raising that important question on the fifth anniversary of the Promise. The Parliament made the Promise unanimously and we all have a duty to keep it.

Yesterday, I spoke with care-experienced young people at the University of Glasgow. I heard about the challenges that they have faced and about their hopes for the future.

We are making progress to deliver the Promise. We have seen a 15.6 per cent reduction, since 2020, in the number of children in care and more than £110 million of investment in whole family support, and nobody under 18 is now admitted to a young offenders institution.

I assure Rona Mackay and the Parliament that I am absolutely committed to delivering the improvements needed. I welcome the report by the oversight board, which is clear that, although there is more to be done, the Promise can be kept by 2030.

Rona Mackay: That is a significant announcement and welcome news on the anniversary of the Promise. What does the

Scottish Government hope and expect will be achieved through the £6 million increase in the whole family wellbeing fund that is being provided to children's services planning partnerships? What improvements can we expect to see as a result of that funding increase from the Scottish National Party Scottish Government?

The First Minister: As I indicated in my earlier answer, we have already invested more than £110 million through the whole family wellbeing fund programme. The funding transforms how families are supported so that they can get the right help at the right time for as long as they need it.

The additional £6 million of funding that Rona Mackay referred to is for children's services planning partnerships and will be used to improve local support in a way that best meets the needs of the families and communities and that ensures that Scotland can keep the Promise. Examples of that work include the provision of community-based family support hubs, services to support pregnant women, holistic support for parents with mental health or substance issues, and welfare rights advice.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The whole family wellbeing fund has underspends right across the country. However, the oversight board's report, published yesterday, was clear that the

"Explicit leadership and drive from Scottish Government and scrutiny bodies to articulate a clear set of principles, outcomes and milestones"

to ensure that the Promise is kept by 2030 has been severely lacking. The report included more than 10 critical shortcomings that needed urgent attention, including workforce shortages, financial instability for care leavers, inadequate focus, fragmented services, lack of co-ordination—the list goes on. Is it not the case that the Scottish Government simply lacks the courageous leadership needed to take the decisive actions to meet the Promise by 2030?

The First Minister: I assure Roz McCall that I have every intention, working closely with my minister Natalie Don-Innes, to provide all the necessary focus, leadership and impetus. In the programme for government that was published in September, the concept of whole family support was absolutely pivotal to the achievement of the Government's highest priorities related to the eradication of child poverty. I want to make sure that the work that we undertake to improve the experience of care-experienced individuals is right at the heart of our agenda on eradicating child poverty and providing the best start in life for children and young people. I assure Roz McCall of the Government's absolute determination to ensure that that is the case.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): The Promise oversight board's report said that we are halfway between when we made the Promise and when we must keep it. However, we are not halfway to delivering on the Promise. One particular area of concern is the absence of a stable home, which, as the report highlights,

"increases the pressures on families and increases the likelihood of children in those families being taken into care."

This week, a devastating report revealed that the number of children in temporary accommodation is at a record high. We, in this country, are in a dire situation in regard to that. What action is the Scottish Government going to take in relation to the number of children in temporary accommodation, which is a breach of the Promise and also a breach of children's human right to accommodation?

The First Minister: I accept the importance of the point that Mr Whitfield puts to me. The Government is taking steps to reduce the number of children who are living in temporary accommodation. Indeed, in the statistics to which Mr Whitfield refers, across 20 local authority areas, councils have reduced the number of children in temporary accommodation.

However, it is not enough. That is why the Government has committed £768 million to invest in housing in Scotland in the forthcoming financial year. Increasingly, more of those resources are being applied to tackle void properties, for example, to make sure that those properties are available for families to occupy. In many local authority areas, that change in priority is already delivering better outcomes in which families have long-term accommodation.

There is a deadly serious point at the heart of Mr Whitfield's question, which is that I can take the action that he wants me to take on housing only if the Parliament approves the budget. We all—every one of us—are committed, as a Parliament, to the Promise. Therefore, we have to take the necessary steps to make it happen, and we can take those steps only if we have the financial investment to do so.

I leave the point with Mr Whitfield to reflect on over the week-long recess that lies ahead that, if he wants to turn his rhetoric into reality, he should support the Government's budget at stage 3 and ensure that the investment is made in housing. If he does not do that, it is just empty rhetoric from the Labour Party.

Rosebank and Jackdaw Oil Fields

5. Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government's response is to the Court of

Session's decision regarding the Rosebank oil field and the Jackdaw gas field. (S6F-03781)

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Government is considering carefully the court rulings that were announced last week. Decisions on offshore oil and gas licensing and consenting are currently reserved to the United Kingdom Government. We have been consistently clear that the UK Government should approach those decisions case by case on a rigorously evidence-led basis, with robust climate compatibility and energy security being key considerations.

Douglas Lumsden: Our North Sea workers are being failed by the Labour Government and by this devolved Scottish National Party Government. The decision on Rosebank and Jackdaw is a hammer blow to the north-east. We will import more oil and gas instead of using our own resources and supporting our own workers.

A poll by True North shows that nearly three quarters of Scots back the North Sea oil and gas industry. Will the First Minister also back the industry and drop his disastrous presumption against new oil and gas production before more jobs are lost?

The First Minister: What I will do is everything in my power to secure a just transition for everybody involved. We all realise that we will have to make a transition from dependence on fossil fuels, unless, of course, we are going to deny the climate crisis that we are facing. I, for one, am not going to deny the climate crisis.

I want to do everything that I can to support the transition for the workforce in the north-east of Scotland, just as I would like us to be in a position to do more to support the workers at Grangemouth who have been served with redundancy notices. I am deeply concerned by the lack of impetus that we have been able to secure, particularly in projects such as carbon capture and storage, which would provide such opportunities for the future of Grangemouth.

The Government will consider the court's judgments. We will work with the oil and gas sector to manage the transition that lies ahead, because I want to ensure that we have a strong and prosperous future for those who are involved in oil and gas in Scotland and that we have a strong and prosperous future for the Scottish economy.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): We are in a time of huge international tension and an ever-increasing risk of trade tariffs. The First Minister mentioned energy security. Is not the best way to protect energy security here and in Europe to produce as much oil and gas as we possibly can—not least because, as I hope the First Minister will know, the Equinor plan for the

development of the Rosebank field states that the carbon footprint will be half the level of the existing North Sea average? Given that it will be electrification ready, the carbon footprint could reduce to 3kg of carbon per barrel, which is 25 times less than the carbon footprint of fracked gas from the USA or Qatar. Which is better for the environment: producing our own oil and gas or helping Donald Trump?

The First Minister: What I am interested in doing is ensuring that we manage the transition to net zero, because we cannot deny the climate crisis that we face. That will be the position that I adopt and observe, because the science tells me that that is the rational position for us to take. It will also dictate the approach that I take on energy policy and encouraging the move to sustainable energy security by the investments that we make in offshore renewables. Again, that is supported by the Government's budget, which passed stage 1 on Tuesday, and is facilitated by outstanding interventions such as that from SGN in Methil, where there is a pilot project on using hydrogen as a replacement for gas in domestic power systems.

Scotland is leading the world on such innovation, and I am immensely proud of what our academic institutions and companies are doing to take forward that agenda. They will have the full support of the Scottish Government.

Clinical Radiologists

6. Jackie Baillie (Dumbarton) (Lab): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to address the reported shortage in clinical radiologists, which is projected to rise to 263 fewer posts than needed by 2028. (S6F-03787)

The First Minister (John Swinney): The work of radiologists is absolutely crucial in effective delivery of a wide range of services, including cancer diagnostics. I take this opportunity to thank the radiologist community across the country for their commitment on our behalf.

Our investment in the radiologist workforce over the past 10 years is evidenced by an almost 25 per cent increase in consultant radiologist numbers. We continue to invest heavily in radiology training, funding 192 speciality training places in clinical radiology, including 78 extra places that we have added since 2014, based on modelling of future workforce need.

Clinical radiology training programmes, which have been filled at 100 per cent in Scotland every year since 2013, enable doctors to train, and to enter the workforce following completion of training, which takes a minimum of five years.

Jackie Baillie: We know that outsourcing scans is a sticking-plaster approach that is favoured by

the Scottish Government, but the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Radiologists say that there is a real need to train and recruit more radiologists if we are to have a sustainable service in the long term. The First Minister knows that the lack of radiologists results in increased waiting times for cancer diagnosis and treatment. The last quarter's performance shows that the 31-day and 62-day targets were both missed yet again, which is worse than the previous quarter. The First Minister has been at the heart of this Government for the past 18 years, so can he explain to the people of Scotland why cancer waiting times are worse on his watch?

The First Minister: Again, it is turning out to be my obligation to try to put some of Jackie Baillie's comments into their proper context. We are treating more patients with cancer on time, within both standards, compared with the same quarter 10 years ago—12 per cent more within the 31-day standard and 6 per cent more within the 62-day standard.

Jackie Baillie talked about the fact that the 31-day standard had been missed. The target is 95 per cent and the performance was 94.3 per cent. I accept that that is a missed target—[*Interruption.*]

The Presiding Officer: Let us hear the First Minister.

The First Minister: If anyone is remotely interested in hearing my answers, I am happy to give them.

I accept that we missed the 95 per cent target, but I want to reassure the public that the overwhelming majority of patients have been treated within the 31-day target. It is important that Jackie Baillie does not come here every week and spread alarm among the public when our staff are doing their level best to protect the public.

The Presiding Officer: We move to general and constituency supplementary questions.

Grangemouth Refinery (Redundancies)

Michelle Thomson (Falkirk East) (SNP): Yesterday, 435 workers at the Grangemouth refinery in my Falkirk East constituency were given redundancy notices, and refining will cease at the end of June. Despite statements from the Prime Minister, and from the leader of the Labour Party in Scotland, who promised to

“step in to save the jobs at the refinery”

and

“put hundreds of millions of pounds behind it”,

the UK Government has instead prioritised eight sites—none of which are in Scotland—for the likes of sustainable aviation fuel.

I understand the need to transition, but the “just” in just transition has turned into “just wait” for the workers, the wider cluster and the community. Will the First Minister join me in condemning the United Kingdom Government for its lack of action? Will he set out what specific steps the Scottish Government is taking right now to support the workers and ensure that there remains a skills cluster from which to transition?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I understand entirely the concerns of Michelle Thomson, who has tenaciously spoken on behalf of her constituents in Grangemouth. I pay tribute to her for what she has contributed to the debate on their behalf. I understand her frustration at the lack of an immediate solution, which the Labour Party promised at the election. Indeed, Anas Sarwar stood beside me in an STV debate and made that very promise, and it has not been fulfilled.

When I last met the Prime Minister, I was clear with him on the need to support and retain the highly skilled workforce at Grangemouth. I am becoming increasingly impatient about the fact that no decision has been taken to award the Acorn carbon capture and storage project to Grangemouth. I was assured by the most recent Conservative Government that it would be the case that such a decision would be taken. The matter has not been taken forward by the Labour Government.

If there is an interest in trying to fulfil the United Kingdom Government’s commitment that it would intervene to act in Grangemouth, I urge the UK Government, as a matter of priority, to authorise the Acorn carbon capture project and to give certainty to the workers in Grangemouth.

Flotation Energy (Contract Award)

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): The Scottish National Party’s Westminster leader, Stephen Flynn, lobbied the Scottish Government on behalf of the renewables company Flotation Energy, which was awarded consent for a project. Thirty days later, Stephen Flynn received a £30,000 donation from a director of that company.

Today, we find out that, behind closed doors, SNP ministers had “real concerns” about the process for the awarding of the contract and questioned whether the assessment had been rigorous enough. The Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy was given the final 217-page document at just before 2 o’clock in the morning, and she signed off on it at just after 9 o’clock in the morning.

The secrecy and the lack of transparency are shocking, and something at the heart of the

process stinks. Does John Swinney not realise how dodgy this looks?

The Presiding Officer: The First Minister can answer on matters for which he has general responsibility.

The First Minister (John Swinney): The concerns that the cabinet secretary raised were about the time taken for the decision-making process as a consequence of Government scrutiny. The minister expressed her concern that the Government had to speed up its decision-making processes in that respect. That has happened as a consequence of the actions that ministers have taken in the intervening period.

I am struck by the fact that, on 23 April 2024, one of Mr Hoy’s colleagues said that consent times were

“a huge issue”

for offshore wind farms, and he called on the Scottish Government

“to streamline the necessary regulatory and administrative processes, to expedite the approval and implementation of offshore wind programmes”.—[*Official Report*, 23 April 2024; c 6.]

Those were the words of Douglas Lumsden MSP as they appear in the *Official Report* of the Scottish Parliament.

I suggest that the Scottish Conservatives decide whether they want to have projects delivered timeously or whether they want to get in the road. Either way, the Conservatives look as though they are in their usual muddle today.

Community Right to Buy (North Queensferry)

Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016, which was passed overwhelmingly by this Parliament, helped to extend the community right to buy to the compulsory purchase of land or a building for the purposes of sustainable development.

In Fife, a group of local residents is struggling to get a ministerial decision on its part 5 right to buy application of 31 October 2023. The building that the group is trying to purchase, which is a 200-year-old building at the heart of North Queensferry, is in an increasingly derelict state, and the delay is causing it further harm. The recent storm has made that much worse. The residents wish to restore the building to serve the local community, but they are struggling to get a response from the community land team. Will the First Minister agree to look into the matter and find out why, to date, there has been no progress?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am not familiar with the case, but I understand that Shirley-Anne Somerville, as the local member, has

met the responsible minister, Mairi Gougeon, to discuss the issue.

Let me take away the point that Mr Rowley has put to me. I understand the community's aspiration to acquire the asset and to be able to utilise it for community benefit. I know from my constituents' experience that such things sometimes take longer than they should. Indeed, I have just been wrestling with the issue of things sometimes taking too long.

Let me do what I can to help Mr Rowley, because I understand the significance of the point that he has raised. I will write to him with an update as a consequence of my inquiries.

Jacqueline McQuillan (Fatal Accident Inquiry)

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): The First Minister will be aware of the news this week that a fatal accident inquiry is to be held into the death of Coatbridge resident Jacqueline McQuillan at Monklands hospital in 2018. Since that time, my office team and I have been supporting the family, and Jacqueline's sister, Lynne, in particular. They are my constituents, and I know how important the announcement is for them in their on-going search for answers.

I know that the First Minister cannot comment on the specifics of the case, but will he join me in acknowledging the difficult time that the family has been through and in calling on the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service to keep the family fully up to date as the case progresses?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I welcome Mr MacGregor's point. He acknowledges that I cannot comment on the substance of the case, because it is live, but I assure him that the Crown Office has made significant improvements in its engagement with families in recent years, as is reflected in its family liaison charter. I fully expect that the family involved in this tragic case will get the support that they require. If there are any concerns about that, I know that Mr MacGregor will faithfully raise them with the Lord Advocate on behalf of his constituents.

Violence in Schools

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): I have spoken time and time again in this chamber about the horrors of violence and abuse in our schools. Yesterday, staff at Kirkintilloch high school, in East Dunbartonshire in my region, went on strike because of a culture of abuse and violence from pupils. Violence against pupils and school staff has got out of hand and our schools are no longer safe. That shocking situation is a direct result of the Scottish National Party's weakening of Scotland's justice system and failure to protect

pupils and teachers. When will the First Minister's Government finally get a grip of the situation?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Everyone who goes to school, whether they are a member of staff or a pupil, should be safe, and it is incumbent on every local authority in the country to ensure that our schools are safe. For some children, school will be the safest place they can go to because of the challenges that they face elsewhere in society.

This is a vital priority. As Pam Gosal will know, I hosted a cross-party summit on 13 January, which involved her colleague Sharon Dowey, to explore some of the issues around youth violence. I will always take such questions seriously, but I do not want the impression to be created that our schools are anything other than safe. I also do not want any impression to be created other than that the vast majority of young people across Scotland do not engage in violence and that they attend safe and stable schools.

If there is an issue in a particular school, let us address that, but let us not characterise every single school in the country in the fashion that Pam Gosal has done, because that does not serve anyone's interests, and it certainly does not serve the young people of our country.

Cumbernauld Theatre (Funding)

Mark Griffin (Central Scotland) (Lab): On 30 January, Cumbernauld theatre staff, the theatre's supporters and the wider community were relieved when it was announced that all organisations currently funded by Creative Scotland would secure significant additional multiyear funding. However, that relief turned to heartbreak when they were told that that would not be the case for the theatre, that they had missed out on core funding and that the theatre was the only arts organisation that had been funded previously but was now losing support. I am told that that is due to a technical issue—the supporting evidence that they provided was too extensive.

To add insult to injury, the theatre also failed to receive any support from the newly created development stream, with Creative Scotland deciding that Cumbernauld theatre is not of strategic importance, despite its fantastic new facilities and despite the fact that Creative Scotland itself has praised those facilities and the work done by the theatre for decades.

Does the First Minister agree with Creative Scotland that Cumbernauld theatre is not of strategic importance? Will his Government urgently review that devastating funding decision?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am well aware of the case and have discussed it with

Jamie Hepburn, the local member, in the course of this week.

Such decisions are taken by Creative Scotland, which works independently of Government, as the law requires. Creative Scotland makes those decisions in line with the criteria that it has set out. I understand that there is to be a meeting next week between the chief executive of Creative Scotland and Cumbernauld theatre to consider the issues.

I recognise the enormous disappointment that will be experienced in Cumbernauld. However, Mr Griffin must accept that there is not parliamentary support for the Government to intervene in Creative Scotland's decision making, because Parliament has determined that Creative Scotland should be able to take those decisions for itself.

I hope that there is a constructive conversation that can find some way of resolving the issue. Among all the other decisions that have been taken, the content of the Government's budget has given an absolutely colossal boost to culture and the arts in Scotland. There is a real improvement in the funding that is available, and I am glad that that has been able to be felt across communities the length and breadth of our country.

Robot-assisted Surgery

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): The latest figures show Scotland reaching a major milestone with more than 10,000 patients across Scotland benefiting from da Vinci robot-assisted surgery since 2021. I was introduced to robotic surgery, including early da Vinci models, when I worked in an operating theatre in Los Angeles in the early 2000s. What assessment has the Scottish Government made of the impact of surgical robots on national health service productivity? Can the First Minister say any more about the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to support the delivery of robot-assisted surgery in Scotland?

The First Minister (John Swinney): The approach is obviously having a beneficial effect given the number of procedures that are being delivered through it. To ensure that we have robust data and to allow us to better identify how robot-assisted surgery can be used across the national health service, we have commissioned Public Health Scotland to audit the experience. That data will be vital in ensuring that we can continue to scale up, drive equitable access and maximise patient benefit.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Can you advise the Parliament whether Scottish ministers have approached you and asked to make an urgent statement on the developing situation at the

Grangemouth refinery? Frankly, it is just not good enough that Scottish ministers sit in this chamber and engage in a blame game when there is serious work to be done to secure jobs and the local economy in Grangemouth.

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Kerr. I confirm that I have not been approached, but you will be aware that you can raise the issue with your business manager and that such matters can be addressed by the Parliamentary Bureau.

That concludes First Minister's question time. There will be a short suspension to allow those who are leaving the chamber and the public gallery to do so.

12:47

Meeting suspended.

12:48

On resuming—

Alcohol Use Disorder in the Justice System

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-15657, in the name of Elena Whitham, on a report on alcohol use disorder in the justice system. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the publication of the Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems' paper, *Alcohol (In)justice: Position on people with an alcohol use disorder in the justice system*; is concerned that it is estimated that almost two-thirds, 63%, of people in prison have an alcohol use disorder, with almost half of those, 31%, possibly dependent on alcohol; is further concerned that the risk of death from alcohol causes is three times higher in men and nine times higher for women who have been in prison than for the general population; understands that the paper sets out why and how people with alcohol use disorders who come into contact with the justice system should have the best opportunities to access treatment and support, and that this could reduce reoffending and pressures on the justice system, tackle inequalities, improve the health and lives of the people concerned and the lives of their families and wider communities; believes that there are examples of innovative practice across Scotland, including Glasgow's Alcohol Court; acknowledges that the paper further sets out several potential standards that could be implemented across the justice system, and understands that accountability for such standards is required in order to make a difference to the health and lives of people in Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and across Scotland with alcohol problems who are being dealt with by the justice system.

12:48

Elena Whitham (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP): I thank colleagues from across the Parliament for supporting my motion, which has enabled me to bring to the Parliament's attention the recent report "Alcohol (In)justice—Position on people with an alcohol use disorder in the justice system" by Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems. I welcome representatives from SHAAP to the chamber.

The play on words in the title of this critical report is in itself a lightning rod that we should all be coalescing around. Alcohol is a recurring feature in our justice system and the link between alcohol and crime is well understood. That, in turn, highlights the injustice that is faced by many when alcohol use disorder impacts on the individual, the family and their community.

Inequality is at the heart of the issue, and the human cost is staggering, but it goes wider than that—it impacts on all public services, and the cost to the public purse is considerable. Repeated

interaction with the criminal justice system, driven and exacerbated by alcohol use, creates impacts that ripple through every area of life, such as repeated contact with police and courts, repeat periods of incarceration, repeat homelessness, social work interventions, loss of employment or employment opportunities and poor health that results in increased need for national health service interventions, including costly unscheduled care.

I believe that the case for change that is set out in the report is clear. The number of people with alcohol use disorders in our Scottish justice system is disproportionately high compared with the figure for the population at large and, although we are working hard on our imprisonment rate, we still have the highest rate in western Europe. We know that 63 per cent of people in prison have an alcohol use disorder, with 31 per cent of those individuals possibly being alcohol dependent. The risk of death from alcohol causes is three times higher in men who have been in prison, and a staggering nine times higher for women who have been in prison, than it is for the rest of the general population.

If we consider adverse childhood experiences and trauma, we find that 25 per cent of people in Scottish prisons are care experienced, 47 per cent have experienced physical abuse in childhood, and around a third lived with someone who was a problematic drinker during childhood. Inequality and disadvantage are pervasive in the justice system. I saw that over and over again when I worked in front-line homelessness services.

If we think in resourcing terms, we find that the overall estimate for the yearly cost to public services of alcohol-specific and alcohol-related offences is between £462.5 million and £991.7 million, with a midpoint of £721.1 million. It is important to note that those figures have not been re-estimated since 2007-08 and that the true figure is likely to be much higher.

The SHAAP report calls for a system that truly integrates health and justice; that provides treatment options and community disposals instead of incarceration, where appropriate; and that offers support at every stage of an individual's journey, from arrest to sentencing and beyond. That is not just a humane approach—it is an effective one.

We know that addressing the root cause of problematic alcohol use through targeted interventions can reduce offending and lead to better outcomes for individuals and for society as a whole. However, the reality is that the 2019 Scottish prisoners survey showed that

"only 22% of participants reported that they had been given the chance to receive treatment for an alcohol use disorder during their sentence."

The survey also revealed that

“40% of prisoners involved reported being drunk at the time of their offence”

and that nearly

“one fifth ... of prisoners who took part in the survey were worried alcohol would be a problem ... when they got out.”

Encouragingly, however,

“Forty one percent of participants said that if they were offered help for their alcohol use disorder (both inside and outside of prison) ... they would take it.”

The key recommendations from SHAAP that are outlined in the report are that, at each stage of a person’s interaction with the justice system, alcohol issues should be recognised, properly assessed and acted on, with key agencies having accountability. Accountability is key. In police custody centres,

“There should be a standard in place for the identification and treatment of people with an alcohol use disorder ... for the police and NHS ... staff.”

That would include referral to healthcare or addiction services, appropriate tools being used for alcohol use screening and appropriate actions being taken, including alcohol brief interventions or arrest referral for alcohol treatment and support.

The report says that, for alcohol brief interventions in justice settings,

“delivery sits at about 29% in prison and 3% in police custody”.

Those figures urgently need to rise. Those who are identified as needing support should be flagged so that their support needs are known throughout their journey in the criminal justice system. If fulsome information was provided on the standard prosecution report, that would also help to support the procurator fiscal when looking at suitability for diversion from prosecution.

We know that referrals to drug and alcohol specialist treatment have fallen in Scottish prisons in recent years, and work is under way by Public Health Scotland to understand why that is the case. That is part of wider work on overall reductions in referrals to alcohol services in general. The Scottish Government is also working on a national service specification for alcohol and drugs. That represents an ideal opportunity to publish a clear specification for justice settings, as well as to develop standards for alcohol treatment and support at each stage of the justice system, which will help to embed treatment and recovery communities across the justice sector.

Recent broader approaches to justice, such as Public Health Scotland’s health and justice programme strategy and the Bail and Release from Custody (Scotland) Act 2023 demonstrate that there is a will to change, but the separation of

powers and the independence of decision making between the organisations and bodies that are involved in the justice system can pose a challenge for the overall co-ordination of care and support. We need enforceable standards with clear lines of accountability so that those recommendations can be implemented and so that people do not continue to fall through the cracks.

Planning for release should happen when someone arrives in custody, so that we can ensure that they have been linked with recovery services and support as well as housing and welfare provision well ahead of their release. We should also seek to maximise the role of recovery communities and Alcoholics Anonymous, which can help people to work through those issues. Reports suggest that, with consistent access to AA meetings, attendees have reduced cravings, stronger coping strategies and improved engagement with other rehabilitative programmes. Participants who continue with AA after release credit it with helping them to secure employment, rebuild family relationships and remain sober in the community.

The same can be said when people are proactively linked into recovery communities once they have returned home. When I was a minister, I was privileged to visit the Glasgow drug and alcohol courts and watch them in action. I was mightily impressed by the problem-solving attitudes of those sheriffs and their shared desire to drive systems change. I also spoke to other sheriffs right across Scotland who shared the problem-solving ethos and a desire to understand what drives offending and what interventions, diversions and community justice disposals could deliver better outcomes.

That attitude must become the default if we want to sever the link between alcohol and crime. It is not soft justice—it is smart justice. I look forward to hearing from colleagues across the chamber and from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, who I know is as passionate about the issue as I am.

12:56

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I am pleased to speak in this important debate, and I thank my colleague Elena Whitham for securing it. I congratulate her on her long-standing commitment to tackling the problem of alcohol and drug abuse and thank her for her customary informative and inspirational opening speech.

Alcohol abuse and addiction is a significant and pressing issue in the justice system in Scotland—indeed, the rate is disproportionately high. Almost two thirds—63 per cent—of people in prison have

an alcohol use disorder, with almost half of those possibly dependent on alcohol. The risk of death from alcohol causes is three times higher for men who have been in prison and nine times higher for women who have been in prison than for the general population, as Elena Whitham articulated. All deaths due to alcohol are a tragedy but, as convener of the cross-party group on women, families and justice, that statistic really concerns me.

It is estimated that as many as 90 per cent of women in custody in Scotland have addiction problems, whether that involves alcohol or drugs. It is further estimated that 80 per cent of women in prison have brain damage due to head injuries that have been caused by domestic violence, and that a similar number suffer from mental illness to some degree. Whether those women should be in prison at all is for another debate, although I am certain that we should have that debate soon. I submit that prison is entirely the wrong place for women whose addiction and chaotic life experience have led them down the wrong path.

I am grateful to SHAAP for its research, which shows that, of the 12,000 people who had community payback orders imposed in 2021-22, only 1 per cent received alcohol treatment as part of their order. I know that there can be complex reasons for that but, on the face of it, we must do better. Forty per cent of prisoners reported that they were drunk at the time of their offence, and almost one fifth were worried that alcohol misuse would be a problem for them on their release. However, 41 per cent said that, if offered help for their alcohol use, inside or outside prison, they would take it.

In addition, people with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which is an entirely preventable condition, are overrepresented in the justice system. Turning Point Scotland, which is an excellent third sector organisation, delivers a range of harm reduction approaches in relation to problematic alcohol use across our services. It believes that its programme of harm reduction should be incorporated into the justice system to help identify and act on a risk of alcohol-related harm. Time does not allow me to detail the organisation's initiatives, but it is well worth having a look at its excellent website.

To an extent, people coming into the justice system provide an opportunity to recognise and, crucially, address alcohol use disorders by offering treatment and support. Alcohol brief interventions, which Elena Whitham mentioned, are a good example of that approach, but that could be strengthened through more consistent delivery and by improving options for diversion to appropriate services.

It is abundantly clear that alcohol misuse disorders in the justice system are a significant problem that has been overlooked for too long. Our prisons are overcrowded, and hard-working prison staff are dealing with a multitude of problems. A targeted programme of support and of treatment for alcohol abuse—of course, that should include prevention in wider society, where Scotland's drinking culture has been a long-standing problem—should be available to reduce the pressure on our justice system.

13:00

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife)
(Con): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this afternoon's important debate, and I thank Elena Whitham for bringing it to the chamber.

How alcohol use disorders interact with the Scottish justice system is still not very well understood. Elena Whitham's motion lays out the key statistics, including the fact that nearly two thirds of people in prison have an alcohol use disorder. However, this issue goes beyond mere numbers. Far too much of the current legislation on the problem focuses entirely on alcohol use in prisons. In reality, alcohol use disorders affect individuals who are at all stages of the justice system. That includes during initial police contact, in custody centres and court settings and during liaison and diversion and throughcare.

It is clear that the current approach to alcohol and drug use is not working in prison settings. At His Majesty's Prison Glenochil in Clackmannanshire in my region, 35 inmates were found to be under the influence of drugs on Christmas day. Although prison staff reportedly seized the articles that were causing the problem, the indication is that the issue is far reaching, so it is only fair that drugs and alcohol be considered when we are dealing with situations in our prisons.

The Scottish Prison Service was forced to introduce a policy to deal with influences on individuals as a result of that incident, but it is only one example of the disruption that can be caused in prisons and to the wider system. The Scottish prison healthcare network previously published guidance on the misuse of drugs in prisons and in custody settings; unfortunately, that guidance is no longer in use, and our prisons are often worse off as result.

As members from across the chamber will agree, further action is needed to tackle the attitude to alcohol in the wider justice system. Today's motion mentions the solutions that are being created to support individuals who require treatment in the justice system, but it is disappointing that some approaches are not being considered. More guidance might need to be

ascertained from the cabinet secretary in that respect, and I look forward to hearing about that in her summing up.

The Scottish Government is in the process of creating a national service specification for alcohol and drugs services, following the publication of UK-wide alcohol treatment guidelines. That could provide an opportunity to ensure that effective standards are in place in the justice system as a whole. I hope that, in summing up, the cabinet secretary will give an update on the Scottish Government's progress on that, because it is a complex issue that requires bold solutions.

We have heard about the number of individuals—men, in particular—who were drunk during their offending, about the number of women who have suffered as a result of alcohol-related domestic abuse and violence and about the number of individuals in our custody and our systems who are suffering. That should have an impact on what we do.

I hope that, in tackling the issue, the Scottish Government will follow the advice and evidence from other areas on how to manage it. The justice system needs to be equipped to support hard-working staff with the tools that they need to do their job effectively, to support themselves and to support those going through the justice system.

13:04

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I thank Elena Whitham for securing this important debate and congratulate her on her speech, which sets out the direction that we should all support in Scotland. I am very supportive of the motion, and I welcome SHAAP to the public gallery.

Excessive drinking of alcohol poses a significant public health challenge globally. However, the Scottish culture of high alcohol consumption levels and binge drinking has created what can only be described as a crisis. We need to be honest about that if we hope to reverse the current trajectory and help people, families and communities. It is our responsibility in this Parliament to do what we can to support those communities.

Office for National Statistics figures released only yesterday reveal that alcohol-specific deaths in Scotland have reached a 15-year high and that our country continues to have the highest rate of alcohol deaths in the United Kingdom. As we have heard from Elena Whitham, inequality is embedded in Scotland, so some of the problems with alcohol feel almost built into the lives that people are going to have. We have to be honest about that and seek to change that direction.

Although rates have remained steady compared with 2022, Scotland still has some of the highest

rates of alcohol-related harm in Europe. Not only does harmful drinking impact people's physical and mental health, but, as we have heard, it has a profound antisocial impact and can be detrimental to individual and societal wellbeing. It affects us all, so it is the responsibility of all of us to do something.

We are here today because, as we have heard, there is a strong link between alcohol and criminal behaviour. The "Alcohol (In)justice" report, which we are discussing today, expertly highlights that and provides crucial insight into the extent to which alcohol can fuel violence and criminality, and how we can respond to that.

As we have heard, the number of people with alcohol use disorders is disproportionately high in the Scottish justice system, compared with the rest of the population. A reported 63 per cent of people in prison have an alcohol use disorder, and almost half of those people are possibly dependent on alcohol. The report also highlights findings from the 2019 Scottish prison survey, which found that 40 per cent of prisoners who were surveyed

"reported being drunk at the time of their offence".

The link between harmful drinking and criminal behaviour is clear. I emphasise that we must work together not only to provide better support for those who are suffering from alcohol problems, but to tackle the root causes of alcohol dependency and alcohol use disorders. It is important that we take that public health approach. By offering treatment and support to people who come into contact with the criminal justice system, we can do some of that work and provide individuals with the opportunity to recognise and address alcohol use disorder.

I have heard a little about the Glasgow alcohol court, which I hope to visit at some point. I hope that the cabinet secretary will agree that some of its positive approaches, which we have heard about, are useful. Intervening in that way would not only improve the health and lives of the individuals affected; it has the potential to reduce reoffending rates, thus helping to alleviate the immense pressures that we feel across Scotland and in the justice system.

Economic and social disparities are also prevalent factors in an individual's choice with regard to alcohol, as I and others have mentioned. We know that the risk of alcohol-related harm is greater for those who are most disadvantaged in our society. It is important to make the point that they are often the people who are very hard to support; they do not readily come forward to services, and therefore we have a responsibility to go to them and see what we can provide.

I welcome the steps, such as minimum unit pricing, that the Government has taken to address

alcohol harm. However, does the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs agree that we need to do some cross-portfolio work on this matter? I have asked the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health for an update on the delivery of alcohol market reform. If we work together on those issues, we might see beneficial outcomes.

I am aware of the time, so I will close there. I thank members for their contributions, and I particularly thank Elena Whitham for securing this important debate today.

13:09

Emma Roddick (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I, too, thank Elena Whitham for raising this report in the Parliament. I know how important the issue is to her and how much work she has done to tackle harmful alcohol and drug use. The Parliament will be poorer for losing her insightful and empathetic contributions.

The statistics in the report speak for themselves: almost two thirds of people in prison have an alcohol disorder and the best part of a third are possibly dependent. However, many of them are willing to take help. That is the important point, because, as we have just heard from Carol Mochan, that is not always the case. A huge opportunity has been presented to us to support those people.

There is undoubtedly an issue with stigma that will drive not only addiction but the severity of addiction in those who are in prison or who are reintegrating into society afterwards. Some of the rhetoric that we heard during First Minister's question time is unlikely to help matters. Trying to make prison as punitive as possible will not reduce prison numbers or crime, and it will not make the lives of victims, families or anyone else any better. As Elena Whitham put it,

"It is not soft justice—it is smart justice."

It serves absolutely nobody to keep people stuck in a cycle of addiction and crime, when we know what is causing it.

We have a lot to learn yet about addictions and about the societal impact both ways—in other words, how the negative impacts of the treatment of people with addictions are felt not only by that person but by all of us. Failing to support people costs us money and time, and it costs us fellow members of society who could be more functioning, happier and active contributors to our communities, rather than likely to return to prison after they are released.

On my recent visit to HMP Inverness, I was struck by comments from prison officers, who said that they really get to know a lot of their prisoners; they get to build trust, and they understand and

see the cycle that many people are caught in. They see how the poor treatment and judgment that those whom they have supported inside often go on to receive outside, even from those who should be offering them support, make them far more likely to return to the behaviours and the people who led them to their convictions in the first place. Unable to get the support that they really need, they return to the harmful support networks that they are used to, and they return to alcohol and drugs and to committing more crime.

We heard from Elena Whitham that people's experiences, disadvantage and trauma often seem to write their future for them. It is clear from the report that people are suffering something that they have no control or influence over. When people are in the justice system, we have the opportunity to recognise the high likelihood of their developing illness and to give them preventative treatment inside. There is no excuse for somebody who is dependent on alcohol and who is in the justice system not to have that dependency addressed.

13:12

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): I pay tribute to Elena Whitham for securing this important debate. She brings to every debate that she participates in or leads her insight, her experience and her eloquence in advocating for the causes that she champions. She is quite correct to talk about the pervasiveness of inequality in our justice system and for the people whom we seek to serve and rehabilitate for the safety of our communities.

We should remember that, although we must have a real focus on every step and stage of the justice system and on what we can do differently to divert people and to support them to turn their lives around, we must also focus on what happens upstream in health, education and other public services. As Carol Mochan said, it must be cross-portfolio work.

I am grateful to all members who have participated in the debate. It has been a measured and thoughtful debate, and I hope that we can take its spirit forward as we continue to wrestle with our high prison population, for example.

Emma Roddick spoke powerfully about how we need to have a different debate—a mature debate that, ultimately, focuses on what will work to help people to turn their lives around and to make our communities safer.

Rona Mackay asked the fundamental question on our use of custody, in respect of which we have a lot of questions to ask as well as to answer.

Alexander Stewart spoke about the importance of standards and of those standards being applied consistently across the system.

I am grateful to Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems for what I consider to be a very well-thought-out position paper, and I welcome the SHAAP representatives who are in the public gallery. I would be happy to meet Ms Whitham along with SHAAP, as well as Ms Minto, if that would be of assistance.

It is worth repeating the core statistics that Ms Whitham and others have narrated from the important SHAAP report, including that two thirds of people in prison have an alcohol use disorder. That certainly gives me, as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs, a mandate for action. When we read that the Scottish prisoner survey, as others have outlined, found that 41 per cent of prisoners said that they would accept help for their alcohol disorder but that only 22 per cent said that they had been offered help, it is clear that action is required across portfolios.

The inequality in the prisoner population—men who have been in prison are three times more likely, and women who have been in prison are nine times more likely, than those in the general population are to die as a result of their use of alcohol—speaks to the need for the strength of the actions that we have taken through the women in custody strategy. Those actions include the establishment of community custody units—one in Glasgow and one in Dundee—and the additional investment in health to support the opening of HMP Stirling.

Alexander Stewart: As Carol Mochan mentioned, the number of such deaths is at a 15-year high. Even with minimum unit pricing having been introduced seven years ago, it is clear that we still have an emergency and that individuals are slipping through the net. What do we need to do with regard to treatment and rehabilitation for individuals? The report found that individuals said that they would accept support in custody, but it does not seem to be being provided.

Angela Constance: I will come on to speak in more detail about the action that the justice system is taking on that matter. Mr Stewart and others have made the point that there is no silver bullet. I am a great advocate for minimum unit pricing and would never detract from it, but there is never just one solution—there are always many solutions. That is particularly so for the work that my colleagues are taking in pursuing a public health approach to the issue.

Ms Minto and other health ministers are waiting on further work that is being done on what we can do, within our devolved competence, in relation to

the advertisement of alcohol. There is no easy solution to that issue.

I convey to Mr Stewart and others that everyone, irrespective of their abode—whether that is in the community or at His Majesty's pleasure—has the same right to access treatment. Our national health service does not and should not discriminate against people on the basis of their past life, what they have or have not done or, indeed, where they are housed—whether they are at liberty or in custody. I have understood that to my very core since I was a prison social worker quite a few decades ago.

On the action that is under way, I am proud that one of my last actions before I left drugs policy to become the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs was to update the prison-to-rehab pathway. Through that work, some important learning was undertaken on how we can prepare people who are leaving custody to go into rehabilitation. We also removed the 12-week limit on the rehabilitation period. Although the renewed focus on residential rehab came as a result of our drug deaths crisis, the investment in residential rehab actually benefits more people with an alcohol disorder. I was very pleased to do that work.

One of the cultural and operational changes is the presence of the recovery movement in our prisons. The Scottish Recovery Consortium's work has grown. It started in 2021 with 10 residents in HMP Perth, where I used to work a number of years ago. That grew to HMPs Edinburgh, Addiewell, Glenochil, Polmont and Cornton Vale. Now, there is a recovery presence in all prisons, with the option of prisoners accessing mutual aid groups.

That speaks to the creation and building of relationships that serve people well in custody and prepare them for liberation. However, it is important that all that work aligns with the medication assisted treatment standards. Access to treatment, medicine and interventions is crucial, but so is broader holistic support, including financial, welfare and psychological support.

On consistency and the cross-Government angle, I chair a cross-Government ministerial oversight group on prisoner healthcare, which has been considering, for example, the Scottish Prison Service alcohol and drug strategy and the recruitment and retention of band 5 and 6 nurses in the prison system. The group has also been looking at a target operating model for prisoner healthcare. That might sound technical and not the most exciting aspect of policy, but we have to get into the nuts and bolts if we want to see standards, access and consistency. I also pay tribute to the national prison care network.

The arrest referral work is expanding. It is about contactable moments. Groups have been established across most local authority areas.

On alcohol and drug courts, I am very supportive of problem-solving courts, which are tailored to change and monitor individual behaviour. There is strong evidence that supports them. Ultimately, it is the decision of the judiciary and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service whether to create specialist divisions in the system. I will certainly discuss the matter further with the new chief executive of the service and the new Lord President.

The core of the SHAAP report was about a standard approach. Others spoke about the importance of the national treatment specification for alcohol and drug treatment in Scotland and the need for it to connect to MAT standards. We will use the national service specification to promote the good practice that exists in some areas of Scotland and ensure that that work is incorporated into standard practice.

My final point—it is, I promise, my final point, Presiding Officer—is about accountability. I speak about that often in the chamber, because we are accountable to ourselves and to one another as parliamentarians. Services are also accountable to themselves and other services. Accountability is not about blame. It is about answers, actions, people working together and proactively seeking to make a difference to prevent crises from becoming a catastrophe. It is about always seeking to take a preventative approach as well as responding when life goes terribly wrong. I am sure that everybody who has participated in the debate wants that different debate and different outcomes.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate. I suspend the meeting until 2.30 pm.

13:24

Meeting suspended.

14:30

On resuming—

Portfolio Question Time

Net Zero and Energy, and Transport

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): Good afternoon. The first item of business is portfolio questions on net zero, energy and transport. I advise members that there is a lot of interest in supplementaries, so I ask that we please have questions with limited preamble and answers that are as brief as possible.

Bus Patronage (South Lanarkshire)

1. **Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to increase bus patronage in South Lanarkshire. (S6O-04306)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): Our commitment to bus travel includes the investment of almost £465 million to support concessionary bus travel and to help to ensure that bus operators can continue to provide access to affordable transport through the network support grant in the deregulated market right across Scotland.

The concessionary travel scheme is instilling the habit of choosing the bus as a principal form of transport among young people, helping to sustain services while supporting our net zero ambitions. In December alone, 140,000 card holders from South Lanarkshire made more than 600,000 journeys under the national concessionary travel scheme.

Clare Haughey: I know that members will have welcomed the recent announcement from the Scottish Government that, as part of the budget, a £2 bus fare cap pilot will be introduced in one regional transport area. At the moment, more than 2.3 million people—everyone under the age of 22 or over 65, and disabled people and carers—benefit from free bus travel, and the £2 cap could build on that good work.

As the scheme is set to be introduced from January 2026, will the minister outline the criteria on how the pilot will be measured? I take this opportunity to encourage the minister to consider introducing the pilot across South Lanarkshire and Glasgow, to benefit my Rutherglen constituents.

Jim Fairlie: I congratulate Clare Haughey on that straightforward pitch to the minister. She is absolutely right to highlight how many people are benefiting from free travel, thanks to the Government, and I very much welcome her interest in the £2 flat fare.

Although we are at the early stages of the fare cap pilot development, we are committed to delivering it on time and ensuring that travelling by bus is as attractive and affordable as possible. The work on the proposals will continue this year and will include continued dialogue with stakeholders, including local transport authorities and bus operators. As part of that process, we will determine suitable criteria for the pilot location.

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con): The minister knows that I think that the £2 bus fare should be a national thing and that there is no need for a pilot. However, if we are to have one, clearly the best place for it is where most people live—the Strathclyde region. That is where it should be. What does the minister need to have happen? Does he need to have a formal bid from Strathclyde Partnership for Transport in order for Strathclyde to win that pilot?

Jim Fairlie: I say well done to Graham Simpson for making his pitch for the pilot scheme. I am delighted that the scheme is getting so much coverage from members. However, I repeat that we are going through the process of working out what the pilot needs to do and what the criteria will be, and that we will announce that in due course.

Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): One aspect of increasing bus patronage is ensuring that buses and bus stations are places where people, including the staff, feel safe. Following the cross-party meeting and the Labour debate on antisocial behaviour on buses, how is the minister progressing work to improve safety on buses for passengers and drivers?

Jim Fairlie: The member is absolutely right to bring up that on-going issue. We are continuing to consider it. We are still looking at the things that we need to do in order to progress some of the issues that we talked about in the past, and I will update the chamber and the member as we come to some conclusions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 2 has been withdrawn.

A96 Dualling (Compensation)

3. Fergus Ewing (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP): I apologise to members, as I may have to leave before the end of question time. I am grateful for permission to do so from your good self, Deputy Presiding Officer.

To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on how much it estimates will be paid in compensation for the properties to be compulsorily purchased to further the progress of the dualling of the A96 between Inverness and Auldearn, including the Nairn bypass, and when that process will be completed. (S6O-04308)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): Completion last year of the statutory process for the A96 dualling from Inverness to Nairn, including the Nairn bypass, clears the way for the Scottish ministers to take forward the final stage of the process to acquire the land that is required to construct the scheme, and Transport Scotland is pressing ahead with the procedural steps to make that happen.

It is currently expected that the process to take title to the land will be completed in the coming months. The current estimate of compensation for land to be acquired for the scheme is approximately £12 million.

Fergus Ewing: Scotland was promised in 2016 that the made orders for that project would be published in that year. They were published last year—eight years later. Even now, there is no timetable, no plan and no indication of when the Nairn bypass will be completed.

Will the cabinet secretary, at last, give a statement to Parliament setting out such a plan? If she will not, does she not think that an apology is due?

Fiona Hyslop: First as the Minister for Transport and now, as Cabinet Secretary for Transport, I have progressed the A96 Inverness to Nairn project, including the Nairn bypass. I have ensured that we have made progress on completing the made orders and acquiring the land. We are acquiring the land because we intend to dual that part of the A96 first. That is what is happening.

As I explained to the public meeting in Nairn last summer, the timetable for dualling will be determined by two things. The first is the method of procurement, whether it is capital procurement or through a mutual investment model. We are considering the mutual investment model for the A96 part of the road—which we have just been discussing—and for the A9. On completion of that consideration, we will be in a position to determine the timetable, which I will be happy to share with the Parliament.

The other consideration is whether one procurement process will be completed for the whole project or whether the contracts will be separated for different parts. A strong argument was put to me at the public meeting in Nairn that the Nairn bypass might be done separately and differently. All those things will impact on the timetable, and we will consider them. When we have managed to assess all those points, I will come back to the Parliament.

A737 (Assessment)

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what

assessment it has made of the importance of the A737 to North Ayrshire. (S6O-04309)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): We appreciate fully the importance of the A737 to North Ayrshire and, indeed, to Scotland. That is why the Government has invested approximately £14 million in the construction of the Dalry bypass and the Den realignment project.

Through the second strategic transport projects review, we have assessed the future needs of the Ayrshire and Arran region. That has resulted in a number of recommendations, including to focus on maintaining the trunk roads in the area—including the A737—so that they remain safe, resilient and adapted to deal with the impacts of climate change.

Kenneth Gibson: Despite having levels of traffic comparable to those on the busiest sections of the A9 and despite serving some of Scotland's most deprived communities, the mostly single-carriageway A737 will receive a fraction of the investment made in dualling the A9, which is forecast to total £3.7 billion.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that enhanced safety and improved connectivity boosts economic growth? Will she commit to ensuring that the new Head Street and Barmill Road junctions in Beith, which are essential for public safety—and have been promised for many years—are progressed to completion?

Fiona Hyslop: The Scottish Government is committed to taking forward the design of the traffic signalisation of the A737 Head Street and Wardrop Street junctions. The member is correct to identify the impact on the economy of good transport connections.

As part of the detailed design for the scheme, further geotechnical investigation is required to accommodate the upgraded traffic signal junction on the A737 at Head Street and Wardrop Street. That investigation is programmed to commence later in 2025 and will inform the design and construction of the signalised junction. Construction is currently programmed for the 2026-27 financial year, subject to available funding and completion of the design.

Grangemouth Refinery

5. Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): To ask the Scottish Government what recent discussions it has had with the United Kingdom Government regarding Ineos proceeding with the closure of Scotland's only refinery at Grangemouth, in light of the UK Government's reported £600 million loan to the company for a project in Belgium. (S6O-04310)

The Acting Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy (Gillian Martin): I continue to engage very regularly about the closure of the refinery. I met UK Government ministers on that aspect last week. I am disappointed that that loan has been made to Ineos, while the Chancellor of the Exchequer offered nothing in her speech that would avoid an abrupt and unnecessary closure of the refinery or that would support Grangemouth's transition to play its part in Scotland's green economy in the future.

We need the Labour Government to start doing what it said before the election that it would do and to bring forward real investment to save Grangemouth and the jobs, businesses and livelihoods that depend on it.

Ash Regan: This is a sorry situation. Hundreds of highly skilled jobs will be lost, probably for ever, and there will be no refinery capability in Scotland, which is a top 25 oil-producing nation. The results will be worse for the environment, because imports have a higher environmental cost.

Minister, this has been coming for months. We have warned and warned about the situation. The Scottish Government might be happy to sit round pontificating about a just transition, but, to everyone outside the Parliament, it looks passive and pointless. Will the latest UK Government betrayal finally push the Scottish Government to urgently use its devolved powers creatively?

Gillian Martin: I assure Ash Regan that I am not sitting round passively. Since my tenure as Minister for Energy, I have done nothing but engage on this issue with the previous UK Government, with Petroineos and with the current UK Government. I have engaged in good faith with the UK Government on our joint efforts to fund work on the future of the site. I am doing what I can with our enterprise agencies, my officials and partners in the Cabinet to encourage investment in the site.

I am particularly distressed that the UK chancellor announced last week that money for sustainable aviation fuel is going to places that are not Grangemouth, when both the UK Government and the Scottish Government have invested in a study that has shown that the Grangemouth refinery is ripe to be transformed into a sustainable aviation fuel hub.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a number of supplementary questions. I hope to take them all.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): Both the UK and Scottish Governments have failed to make any decisive intervention to support Grangemouth. People in Central Scotland will not be impressed with the blame game that we hear in

the chamber today. They want real answers and they want action.

I will ask the minister some very simple questions to which she will surely know the answers. Who is writing the project willow report? When is it due? She must know when it is due. Will Petroineos see the report before the UK and Scottish Governments see it?

Gillian Martin: I have answers to all those questions. The project willow report is being written by Ernst & Young, which has been brought in as consultant on the issue. The report is backed by both Governments and will be available by the end of this month, more or less. We will ensure that both Governments and Petroineos get sight of the full report—more than that, we are teeing up potential investors to see the report.

I have been working very hard on the issue with my colleagues in Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Development International. We have had considerable interest in what project willow will bring up. Although I would like the refinery to continue, with Petroineos and its shareholders making a different decision about its closure, I am feeling hopeful that, through project willow, we can get investors involved in the future of the site.

Those are the answers to the questions that Stephen Kerr has put to me. I am happy to give him any more details that I can.

Richard Leonard (Central Scotland) (Lab): I remind members of my entry in the register of members' interests with regard to trade unions.

Many people are angry about the Petroineos decision, the way that the company has gone about it and the fact that redundancy notices have been issued this week. They are also angry about governmental failure—the failure of both Governments. Does the cabinet secretary understand that anger? Does she accept that this is not over, that this is not the last word and that the fight to save these jobs carries on?

Gillian Martin: I accept that the fight is not over. The First Minister has written to the Prime Minister and, this morning, to Sir Jim Ratcliffe about the issue. I continue to work with partners in the UK Government to ask Petroineos to make a different decision. We have had almost weekly meetings with them on progress, and we are making sure that Petroineos is doing the right thing by its workers. Where it is not doing the right thing, I want those workers to know that I have an open ear to any of their concerns, so that I can put them directly to Petroineos.

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): It is very clear that the UK Government has abandoned the workers at Grangemouth. The workers are rightly angry that both Governments

have left them to the will of a billionaire who would rather play fantasy football than look after his workers. The decision has the potential to devastate the town that I grew up in, and I am angry on behalf of all of those workers. With the greatest of respect to the cabinet secretary, I note that anything that might be generated by project willow, and by others, is potentially too far down the road to solve the immediate and urgent issue facing us.

I have not yet lost hope that the Scottish Government will meaningfully step in, save the jobs and ensure a sustainable future for the site. Will the cabinet secretary now step in to address this increasingly urgent situation?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Members, we listened to all the other questioners with courtesy. We should do the same for Ms Mackay.

Gillian Martin: The Government has already stepped in to get reassurances about the redundancy payments for the workers and the level of compulsory redundancies. I have in front of me details of a substantial number of voluntary redundancies having been asked for. The member will forgive me if I do not give the detail of that in the chamber, because I need to check whether it can go into the public domain. People have also been redeployed across the site.

It is still our position that we would like refining to continue, to allow project willow to bear fruit and attract investment. The refinery could be a going concern for anyone out there who wanted to invest in it. If the UK Government were to give the refinery track status for carbon capture and storage, it would make it eminently more investable and might even change the mind of the current owners.

Speed Limits (Mid Scotland and Fife)

6. Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what consideration it has given to the potential impact on travel times in Mid Scotland and Fife of the proposed speed limit changes contained in the national speed management review consultation. (S6O-04311)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): As part of the Scottish Government's record £36 million investment in road safety, a national speed management review is under way. The review aims to ensure that speed limits across Scotland are effective and help to reduce the number of people killed and injured on our roads, including in Mid Scotland and Fife. Proposed changes contained in the review have been rigorously assessed and are expected to reduce casualties and fatalities.

International evidence, including France's successful 2018 speed limit changes, shows how measures can lower speeds and reduce casualties. The assessment indicates that the changes will have a minimal impact on journey times, because reduced speeds contribute to smoother traffic flow, which reduces congestion, serious collisions and diversions, and improves journey reliability. A public consultation is under way and I encourage the member to share her views before it closes on 5 March.

Roz McCall: I will do so.

The proposed arbitrary reduction in speed limits on 60mph roads will add to journey times and, undoubtedly, to the frustration that motorists are feeling. Many businesses across the region depend on the movement of goods and materials, and single carriageway roads are the backbone of the transport infrastructure in the area. Workers who live in rural areas often have no viable alternative to using their cars, and reducing speed limits on single carriageways could significantly increase commute times, thereby creating more challenges for employees and businesses alike. The disproportionate impact that the proposals will have on my constituents and on businesses should not be taken lightly. Will the cabinet secretary carefully consider the consequences for my region and scrap the proposals as soon as possible?

Fiona Hyslop: We will listen to the consultation, which closes on 5 March. I remind Roz McCall that, in 2023, 754 people were killed or seriously injured on single-carriageway roads. In France, the Government implemented a national speed limit reduction in July 2018, which led to a reduction in the average speed of vehicles, a 10 per cent decrease in fatalities and a minimal impact on journey times, of less than one minute in a 50km journey.

Union Bridge (Petition)

7. Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the petition, reportedly signed by hundreds of Keith residents and businesses, regarding the disruption caused on the A96 by the on-going works at Union bridge, including the calls for businesses to be compensated for any significant losses during these works. (S6O-04312)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): We recognise the on-going impact that those vital and complex repair works are having on the local community and businesses in Keith, following a landslide that resulted in the failure of the wing wall at Union bridge. The operating company that conducts the repairs and road management discussed that with representatives

of local elected members, Keith community council and the local traders association in September, and it plans to meet them again shortly to provide an update, once the repair contract is awarded in the coming weeks.

The temporary traffic lights and safety barrier were installed to prevent any further risks to pedestrians and road users, with "business as usual" signage added to continue to direct traffic into Keith and its businesses.

Douglas Ross will be aware that compensation is not payable to any businesses for disruption arising from road works on any trunk road and the motorway network that are required to keep them in a safe condition. Unfortunately, such work can sometimes result in disruption to local communities, but every effort is being made to mitigate impacts.

Douglas Ross: I do not think that residents and businesses in Keith feel that every effort is being made to mitigate the impacts, because the work has been on-going since last summer.

The cabinet secretary did not mention the petition. What is her response to the hundreds of business owners who have written to her, who have still not received a reply? I handed the petition over to the Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity in December last year. We are now in February, and we do not know what Fiona Hyslop and the Scottish Government think. Will she look at alternative measures to compensate the businesses in question, if it is not possible to provide compensation for work on a trunk road? Those businesses are losing hundreds of thousands of pounds as a result of the works, and they deserve to be compensated.

Fiona Hyslop: I have set out the policy on compensation—or, rather, the fact that no compensation is payable in relation to work on trunk roads. I recognised the on-going nature of the problems: it is a complex issue to resolve. The contracting started before Christmas, but it has been delayed as a result of emergency work by utilities companies in proximity to the slope failure. That emergency work required a further review of the proposed design solution that is to be undertaken, so that any additional implications could be considered. The most up-to-date position can be provided to those who have petitioned the Government, although I do not think that we have the contact details for everyone who signed the petition.

On journey times, I understand from our operators that the maximum delay is 12 minutes. I know that a delay of 12 minutes can cause an issue. If Douglas Ross is able to provide information that shows that people are regularly waiting longer than 12 minutes, I invite him to do

so, but the information that I have been provided with is that the delay is less than 12 minutes.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): As a frequent traveller on the A96, I understand that it was a slope failure as a result of heavy rain that caused the damage to the bridge. What challenges exist in relation to the required remedial work? Given the complexities, is it not crucial that the work be carried out with the utmost care, which will, regrettably, inevitably lead to the work taking longer?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Be as brief as possible, cabinet secretary.

Fiona Hyslop: The work is a complex operation that needs to be done safely. The bridge wing wall failed due to a damaged drainage pipe that saturated the soil behind it. It is in an urban location and is next to a watercourse. The levels in the River Isla and the groundwater levels all have to be considered to ensure that the work is done properly and safely for all concerned.

Storm Éowyn

8. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government what lessons have been learned following the travel disruption and other impacts as a result of storm Éowyn. (S6O-04313)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): Storm Éowyn caused major disruption. The immediate lesson learned is that the early issuing of the red weather warning for wind by the Met Office on Thursday 23 January, combined with the convening of the multi-agency response team, empowered Police Scotland to promptly issue early advice to road users to avoid any form of travel during the period of the red weather warning, which enabled the public, businesses, councils and schools to communicate clearly.

The sharing of proactive messaging at local, regional and national levels helped to bring about a huge reduction in traffic levels, of 80 to 90 per cent, across key trunk roads during the red warning.

The messaging also enabled specialist teams across the transport and energy sectors to be mobilised in advance of the storm. Intense co-operation between Network Rail and ScotRail supported recovery from unprecedented damage. I thank everyone for limiting their travel during the storm.

There will also be a more formal lessons-learned exercise, which will be closely considered by the Cabinet.

Finlay Carson: The cabinet secretary will be well aware that the south of Scotland—Dumfries and Galloway, in particular—was affected more

than many communities, with the A75 being closed for some time.

Another lesson that can be learned is in relation to people in Dumfries and Galloway whose power was off for almost a week. One of the main issues was a failure to connect generators. Scottish Power was very reactive and responsive in ensuring that people on the priority list had generators, but some had to wait three or four days for electricians to connect the generators.

Will the cabinet secretary, given her remit, work with her colleagues to look at a potential scheme, whereby sockets could be provided in warm hubs and vulnerable people's homes to allow generators to be connected as a matter of urgency, instead of the process taking three or four days?

Fiona Hyslop: I will discuss that suggestion with my Cabinet colleagues. We can always learn lessons—those that have been learned from storm Arwen helped to improve the response this time round. Lessons are learned from every storm, so I will take Finlay Carson's suggestion to the relevant minister and ask them to respond on how that might be taken forward, if the energy companies think that it would be helpful.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There are a couple of supplementary questions and I will try to get them both in, but they will have to be brief, as will the responses.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Flood prevention schemes announced in 2015 have not been finished. Extreme weather is hitting people's homes and our transport infrastructure increasingly hard, so what is the Scottish Government doing to accelerate investment now?

Fiona Hyslop: Regarding transport, which is my direct responsibility, the Scottish Government has produced a climate adaptation plan to try to tackle a number of the issues affecting the transport network. Flood defence schemes are the responsibility of one of my ministerial colleagues. I understand that extensive funding for that is available in this year's budget. I do not know whether Sarah Boyack has decided to support that budget, but flood funding is part of the budget offer.

We know increasingly that adaptation, mitigation, flood prevention in general and tackling the implications of climate change for our road and rail networks all need action and investment. I am working with cabinet secretary Gillian Martin and others to ensure that investment can be brought forward to realise that. I hope that the member will support the budget and support flood prevention.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): One of the United Kingdom's largest food distributors,

Bidfood, chose to ignore the warning of danger to life during storm Éowyn and told its workers that it would be a normal working day. Does the cabinet secretary agree that that was completely unacceptable, and will she review the legislative obligations to ensure that companies such as Bidfood ensure their workers' safety in red weather warning situations, and are held to account if they do not do so?

Fiona Hyslop: I have seen those reports and think that that action was unacceptable. Workers and others were put in jeopardy, and overturned heavy goods vehicles prevented energy companies from getting to the very people whom we heard about in the previous question.

On the issue of workers being expected to travel in such conditions, some essential workers will, unfortunately, be required to support the emergency response. Paul Sweeney will know that the issue is part of employment legislation. I know that his party does not want this Parliament to have responsibility for employment legislation, but his request could be usefully pursued with the UK Government.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes portfolio questions. There will be a brief pause to allow those on the front benches to change places, before we move to the next item of business.

Post-school Education and Skills Funding Body Landscape

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by Graeme Dey on simplifying the post-school education and skills funding body landscape in Scotland. The minister will take questions after his statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:58

The Minister for Higher and Further Education; and Minister for Veterans (Graeme Dey): A fortnight ago, we announced progress on our plans to reform the post-school education and skills system. We announced that the Scottish Funding Council would assume responsibility for all apprenticeships, and that the Student Awards Agency Scotland would take on responsibility for further education student support. Therefore, one body, the SFC, will be responsible for funding provision for teaching, training and related activities, while another body, SAAS, will be responsible for student support. That decision was informed by what stakeholders told us through our public consultation.

Our approach is designed to put the learner at the centre. It aims to ensure that our whole education and skills system works as a single system that is easy to navigate and in which everyone takes responsibility to deliver excellence for all.

Reform is, of course, about more than the individual parts of the system; it is about the whole system working together. Yesterday, the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) Bill was introduced in the Scottish Parliament. First and foremost, the bill will consolidate the SFC's responsibilities for securing the provision of national training programmes, apprenticeships and work-based learning. The bill will establish, for the first time, a statutory framework for apprenticeships in Scotland, recognising the value that we place on apprenticeships and on the delivery of the First Minister's mission to drive economic growth. It will also give ministers the power to commission the SFC to deliver new national training programmes and will mean that we can address training needs that might not otherwise be met, making it easier to ensure that programmes are aligned to the Government's four priorities.

Furthermore, the bill will improve the SFC's governance and how it oversees tertiary education, including by creating a greater focus on the needs and interests of learners. It will also knit together the SFC's existing responsibilities and its

new responsibilities for apprenticeships and work-based learning in a coherent way, which we hope employers will welcome.

Today is a significant milestone for tertiary education and training. The bill will enable us to move from three funding bodies to two. In our programme for government, we said that we would

“Reform the education and skills funding system so it is easier to navigate and responsive to learners and skills priorities—breaking down silos and reducing bureaucracy”.

The bill moves us closer to that.

The other half of funding body simplification is the movement of further education student support from the SFC to SAAS. That change does not require legislation, which means that we can progress at pace, and we are doing so. I make it clear that there will be no immediate change to funding arrangements for college or university students, but bringing student support responsibilities together will unlock opportunities. The change will enable new ways of administering student support, collecting data and providing coherent information and guidance to learners and institutions.

Before I go on, I thank our three public bodies—the SFC, SAAS and Skills Development Scotland—and their staff for their help in getting us to this point. I am also grateful for the input from colleges, universities, employers, training providers and others whose insights have absolutely informed our decisions.

I know that change can be unsettling. If the bill is passed, the SFC will need to evolve to encompass its expanded remit. Responsibilities for apprenticeships and national training programmes will move from SDS to the SFC. The work that SDS has done on apprenticeships has given us firm foundations on which to build, and the skills and experience of SDS staff will be invaluable in establishing the new arrangements and shaping an improved offering. A refocused SDS will continue to play a vital role in skills planning, careers advice and support for employers.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the influence on our reforms of James Withers and his review, and I thank him once again for his important work.

I want to be clear about why we are doing this. First and foremost, we want to deliver the best service that we can for learners and employers. Secondly, we want to make things simpler for colleges, universities, training providers and employers. Last but not least, we have to get maximum value from every pound that we invest.

The bill makes provision for Scottish apprenticeships and work-based learning, laying

the foundations for apprenticeship reform. We can take the best of what works now and change what does not. The bill will enable improvement but leave room to develop future apprenticeship policy with stakeholders.

Employer engagement is critical to all of this work, so we are building a dedicated employer network to guide it. We will sharpen the focus of the apprenticeship approvals group and the standards and frameworks group to ensure that they play a vital role in the transition process, and we will broaden employer participation at every stage across the reform landscape. The bill also includes provision for a new apprenticeship committee of the SFC and provision for apprenticeship certificates to help apprentices to demonstrate that they have gained the relevant training, experience and qualifications.

That leads me on to qualifications reform. We must have up-to-date, accessible qualifications that are fit for learners at all stages of their lives. Work is under way to fully understand the qualifications landscape in tertiary education. The qualifications must be valued by employers and learners, they must clearly signal the skills and knowledge that individuals have acquired and, crucially, they must be flexible enough to adapt to the ever-changing demands of the modern economy.

Tertiary education and training must deliver the skills that employers need and, importantly, meet our skills requirements in 21st century Scotland so that we can address net zero, support our national health service and grow a thriving Scottish economy. I have engaged extensively with ministerial colleagues across the Government and with our key stakeholders to develop our approach to skills planning, which is rooted in evidence of what works and what is needed. Tertiary education and training must be responsive to both regional and national skills needs.

A few weeks ago, I met the regional economic partnership network again, and we had a good discussion about skills planning across regions. We still have work to do, but I am pleased with the progress that we are making and the co-design approach that we are taking.

High-quality careers advice is essential to getting the right people into the right jobs, tackling poverty and growing the economy. It is vital to have that advice in schools in order to help young people to realise their potential.

We will shortly be announcing new arrangements for the career services collaborative. The outgoing interim chair Grahame Smith, the secretariat and all members of the collaborative have achieved much since its formation. Their work forms a great base for

progressing to the next phase, which is, importantly, focusing on improving careers advice and support.

I have spent a good deal of time meeting stakeholders, especially employers and training providers that are engaged in apprenticeship delivery, and listening to their views as we developed our thinking. I have also engaged with a number of MSP colleagues along the way, and I am grateful for that engagement. With the bill beginning its formal processes today, I am committing to ramping up that engagement over the coming months to ensure that, if the Parliament supports the bill, we will be ready to implement the outcomes in a way that best serves the interests of our future apprentices and employers and the needs of Scotland's economy.

Lastly, I want to work with members from all parties in the Scottish Parliament to lay the foundations for lasting reform of the kind that I think that we generally recognise is needed.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in his statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. As ever, I would be grateful if members who wish to ask a question pressed their request-to-speak buttons if they have not already done so.

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I thank the minister for advance sight of his statement and for his engagement with members on the bill to date. There are some welcome reforms in the bill, which the Scottish Conservatives agree with, but we also want to see the Scottish Government move further. Yesterday, the Education, Children and Young People Committee heard from college leaders on the impact that the loss of both the skills boost fund and the flexible workforce development fund has had on upskilling and supporting key employers as well as on skill shortages, especially around social care. I hope that there is an opportunity to correct that with what the minister has announced. It is clear that we also need to see more business involvement in regional skills development work. The Scottish Conservatives would like to see additional reforms to make more private sector funding available to the college sector in the delivery of key sector courses.

I have two questions for the minister. First, how does he envisage the employer network helping businesses to influence, secure and embed funded courses of the type that many employers are telling us are not currently being provided to upskill the workforce? Secondly, as employers in England can access support from the apprenticeship levy not only for training but for apprenticeship pay, is that a reform that ministers

will look to introduce to help significantly increase the number of apprenticeships that small and medium-sized enterprises can deliver in communities across our country?

Graeme Dey: There is a lot to unpack there. Securing non-public money for colleges is an area that we are actively engaging with the college sector on, because there is a great opportunity there. Some colleges do very well in that space and others do much less so. There is an appetite from both national and local businesses for that sort of access.

With regard to the influence that colleges can bring, we have to be careful. It is about ensuring that the employer voice is heard so that colleges and other training providers can understand what employers require colleges and other institutions to produce. That already happens in some localities but not so much in others, so we are trying to bring in a bit of standardisation on that.

I do not necessarily agree with the approach to the use of the apprenticeship levy that Miles Briggs has articulated, but, on his point about SMEs, there is undoubtedly more to be done. We repeatedly hear that one of the issues that puts SMEs off taking on an apprentice is the bureaucracy around it. We have been exploring whether there is an opportunity to do something on that to take some of the load off SMEs, because they are the bedrock of the Scottish economy.

I look forward to continuing to engage with Miles Briggs on those matters.

Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab): Although I note the minister's attempt to strike a collegiate tone, I will repeat what I said to him in private: my fear is that the Government is moving too slowly and putting structural change ahead of functional reform. It has been many months since he has met any members of the Labour front bench, and his statement falls short of what we understood the Government's direction to be, and it begs some serious questions. Although it was imperfect, the previous system with the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board and SDS had a very clear role for employers and trade unions in the governance structures. The proposals for an employers network have no such formal governance structure, so how can industry have confidence that it will be at the forefront in shaping the future skills landscape when it appears that its role is being diluted?

Furthermore, it appears that the Scottish Government has taken inspiration from the Monty Python dead parrot sketch on its approach to SDS. It appears to be an ex-agency that no longer has a function. I am surprised that the minister did not describe it as being the Norwegian blue of

agencies. A bit like Michael Palin's pet shop owner, the minister is claiming that it still has a function—but what is its function if it is no longer even providing careers advice, which we understood would be its primary function?

Graeme Dey: I will start with the end of Mr Johnson's question. My speech made very clear what SDS will continue to do, including providing careers advice. Far from diminishing SDS's role in that space, I talked about an expanded role for the careers collaborative and SDS's continuing role in employer engagement and in skills. On the point about diluting the employers' voice, I have been very clear in the Parliament and with employers that we are expanding that role, which is why I think employers will take confidence from what we are doing. We are trying to weave the employers' voice into absolutely everything that we do, because that is vital.

I met SAAB a few months ago. In our most recent conversation, when we talked about the future role for employers, it said that it was not precious about a structure or forum, but it wanted to be assured that the employers' voice would continue to be heard—we intend to continue to ensure that. If the member was listening to the start of my speech, he will know that I made the point that SAAB has two committees that will continue through the process—certainly through the transition and perhaps beyond that. I anticipate that its members will be heavily involved in the work that will be taken forward.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): The outline business case for reform talks about building on the best of what we have. Can the minister speak to the strong foundations of Scotland's post-school education and skills system and about how simplifying the funding body landscape can unlock further potential in the sector?

Graeme Dey: We are trying to create a more transparent and agile system. There is no doubt that the system as it is currently configured, as well as being quite complex and confusing, does not make best use of public money—I do not think that anyone believes that it does. The bill provides an opportunity to take forward a series of reforms. I am not going to stand here and pretend that it is the endgame—it is far from that. Essentially, it will be an enabling power that will allow us to make the changes in conjunction with employers and other stakeholders to get it right for the future. That is what we intend to do.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Scotland's apprenticeship system is essential for skills development, which needs sustained investment. With on-going labour market challenges, it is crucial that funding structures are better aligned to support apprenticeships and the

economy. Given the recommendations in the Withers review, which highlights the need for better co-ordination between the Scottish Government, the Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland, can the minister confirm that the transfer of funding responsibilities from SDS to the SFC will ensure that apprenticeships will finally be properly funded and will be aligned with Scotland's needs? How many additional apprenticeship places does the minister think the proposed changes will create?

Graeme Dey: The member makes a good point about the nature of the landscape. There is no doubt that, as it is currently configured, we do not get the best value or the best return, partly because the system is fragmented and two different bodies are funding the same provision, in some respects. As I said before, we believe that making the changes that we have alluded to will give us the opportunity to get a hold of this and to shape the offering in a way that will be more transparent and more responsive to the needs of the economy.

Everyone says to me, "We would like more apprentices and more money for them." That is the nature of it. No one ever says, "Minister, we've got enough money." I am not going to stand here and say that we have forecast that we will be able to create X more apprentices as a result of the changes. Assuming that the Parliament agrees to the reforms, we need to use them to develop the offering in parallel, so that we will have an offering that is much better aligned to what employers are looking for and what our young people deserve. At the heart of this, we need an approach that shows that we want to give our young people long-term, sustainable and well-paid employment. If we take that alongside the point about the economy, we will make progress.

George Adam (Paisley) (SNP): I am interested in what the minister said in his statement and in what he said in response to the last question. How will consolidating funding streams for post-school education and skills development contribute to the Scottish Government's mission to grow the economy?

Graeme Dey: The issue, if one understands the landscape, is that, at the moment, the funding mechanism for apprenticeships sees very obvious funding provided by SDS through the SFC but additional funding provided in some instances through the SFC by way of college credits. It is not a transparent system. We need more transparency and agility so that we have the opportunity to better align what we are offering and providing with the needs of the economy. If we pull that together, we will get to the place that we are looking to get to.

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): Yesterday, Colleges Scotland told the Education, Children and Young People Committee that

“Colleges are vital anchor institutions that are dedicated to delivering skills training and providing education at all stages of life and in our communities.”

I think that that is vital to our future. It also said:

“To keep doing that, colleges need their Government to deliver reform to deliver the agile and flexible system that their learners need and that employers want, to improve collaborations with both schools and industry.”

The bill proposes structural reform, but what will the minister do to deliver the real reform that colleges need?

Graeme Dey: I think that I am right in saying that Colleges Scotland welcomes the reforms because it sees the opportunity that arises from them to produce a system that may well benefit the colleges in some instances but, more than anything, because the reforms will benefit learners.

I have to be clear that we will have a continuing mixed apprenticeship offer that will involve the private training providers. Colleges Scotland welcomes what we propose, and I am committed to working with it and with others to sharpen up the model. There is an opportunity for colleges to step forward, because, although they do not currently occupy the apprenticeship landscape, they can provide the holistic wraparound support that our apprentices are entitled to expect from the system.

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I welcome the minister’s statement. He is aware of skills shortages in many traditional areas, such as engineering and construction—shortages that impact on economic growth. How will the reset help to deliver the key skills that Scotland requires, and will the Government redouble its efforts to encourage more women and girls to study and seek apprenticeships and employment in those vital sectors?

Graeme Dey: Work is under way across the Government with key stakeholders to develop our approach to skills planning. For example, we are in the process of developing an advanced manufacturing skills action plan, and we will engage with the sector to assess options and agree a package of interventions aimed at increasing skills supply. We are progressing with the apprenticeship reform that we have heard about today.

As part of that work, we will look to see whether we can break down any barriers—perceived or actual—to the participation of women and girls in occupations where they are underrepresented. The changes also provide the opportunity to ensure that education and training, including

apprenticeships, are readily accessible to young people with disabilities.

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Over the past decade, a number of colleges and universities have reneged on the fair work agreements that they have come to with their campus trade unions. When asked about that last year, the then chief executive of the Scottish Funding Council explained that it lacked the powers to intervene effectively in such situations, but that she had proposed such powers to the Scottish Government ahead of the bill. Have those proposals been reflected in the bill? Will the SFC have the power to intervene where a college or university management breaches a fair work agreement?

Graeme Dey: The bill contains a power that strengthens the ability of the SFC to require universities and colleges to do certain things, particularly in relation to the provision of information, and it specifically requires secondary legislation to allow ministers to list what those areas could be. At the moment, it is sufficiently open for those things to be explored, and I am happy to discuss that with Ross Greer, because it is imperative that fair work is at the heart of what all our institutions are delivering.

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I support the bill. The single source of funding and the careers reforms are welcome, but there is clearly a nervousness, including from the chambers of commerce, about the employer voice. There is clearly nervousness about moving the funding from an employer-based body—SDS—to an education-based body—the Funding Council. In particular, as we heard yesterday in the Education, Children and Young People Committee, there is concern that the funding model for further education is not necessarily flexible enough to meet the needs of employers. I invite the minister to have a meeting with me and the chambers of commerce to see whether we can find a solution to that nervousness.

Graeme Dey: I met representatives from the chambers of commerce some time ago, but I am happy to take Willie Rennie up on his invitation.

I reassure members that the bill requires ministers to have regard to the desirability of including in the membership of the SFC persons who

“have experience of, and have shown capacity in, the provision of ... apprenticeships or work-based learning”.

That is one of the changes that the bill allows us to make. I am keen to take the opportunity that this year affords us, with changes in the membership of the SFC, to ensure that that experience is on the board. That is essential.

I have already highlighted the work that will be done around the committee experience, but I am disappointed if the chambers of commerce have paid attention to what has been going on over the past year and are still nervous. We have engaged extensively with employers and gained a lot of positive feedback from them. If there is that nervousness, I am happy to do something to address it.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Now is the time to significantly ramp up investment in green skills, and reforming the post-school learning system is key to that investment in Scotland's economic future. I therefore welcome the Scottish Government's recent announcement on funding for colleges to support the offshore wind skills pipeline. Can the minister comment on how simplifying the skills funding body landscape will further help colleges and universities to deliver the green skills agenda?

Graeme Dey: The post-school education and skills system is already supporting the transition to net zero, but we can and must go further. The system must be able to respond at greater pace and with greater impact to meet the challenges and opportunities that the transition to net zero is placing on it. That is one reason why reform is a must and the changes are important.

Our proposals will help to make the system more responsive to the Government's four priorities, including tackling the climate emergency. Taken together with the work on skills planning, the changes can help to deliver more green skills. For example, the bill will establish for the first time a statutory framework for apprenticeships in Scotland. That is anticipated to facilitate different and more transparent ways of funding apprenticeships. It could be used, for example, to shift the emphasis on to more or different apprenticeships that have a focus on achieving net zero.

Kevin Stewart rightly referenced colleges and universities, but I reiterate that we will have a mixed apprenticeship offering, in which private training providers will have a role.

Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con): Earlier this week, I visited West College Scotland in West Dunbartonshire in my region. I witnessed the excellent work that it does in training apprentices in various fields, such as engineering, nursing, construction and building. As the minister knows, apprenticeships play an important role in Scotland's economy. However, college officials expressed concern about uncertainty when it comes to funding.

The minister has just said that there will be no immediate change to funding arrangements of college or university students. Therefore, can he

guarantee that further education institutions will get the funding that they deserve?

Graeme Dey: We all know where this is going, but it is a bit rich for a Conservative member to rock up here today and talk about more money for colleges and universities when her party wants money for tax cuts. As I keep saying, we cannot square that circle. If Ms Gosal wants to go to a college and sympathise with officials about more funding, I hope that she would be good enough to be honest with them and say, "By the way, if we had got our way, there would be even less money available."

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): As we have heard, there will be a shift from three post-school education and skills funding bodies down to two. Some might ask why the Scottish Government did not take the opportunity to reduce that to a single funding body. I would like to hear the benefits of consolidation and having those two funding bodies.

Graeme Dey: The option was chosen because it simplifies the tertiary education system by providing clear and separate remits for our public bodies. It means that the SFC has responsibility for funding all teaching and learning provision, and SAAS has responsibility for all student support funding. It is less disruptive than moving to a single funding body, but it still takes us in the direction of what James Withers rightly called for.

The decision to proceed with the two-body approach was also based on consultation with stakeholders and the findings of the outline business case.

I will make a point that goes to some of the comments that we have heard today: changing structures alone will not deliver the reform that we all know needs to happen here. This is an enabling process that will allow us to make the changes that we require to make.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The minister generously did not take up his full allocation of 10 minutes, so I can take the two colleagues who still want to ask a question.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): I am very grateful, Deputy Presiding Officer. I refer the minister to his comments about careers advice. In his statement, he talked of a "refocused SDS" having a "vital role" in careers advice. In response to one of the questions, he said that SDS will "play a part". However, in another part of the statement that dealt with the career services collaborative, he talked about announcing shortly new arrangements for that.

The CSC exists in part as a mechanism for the Scottish Government and other policy makers to consult and engage with careers services. Going

forward, who will have responsibility for giving expert, tailored careers advice to our young people at school?

Graeme Dey: The role of SDS, as the national career service, will continue. Its role in the career services collaborative will change. The career services collaborative, with co-chairs, will report to ministers and deliver to a vision that ministers will set. It is quite a simple and straightforward vision.

I am looking for the component parts of the career services collaborative to all take responsibility for the delivery of careers advice. SDS delivers in schools—that is its responsibility, although it has a degree of wider responsibility—but we need to see careers advice delivered through the developing the young workforce programme, and in our colleges and universities. The challenge that will be set for all the participating members is to take forward that responsibility, delivering to a clear and agreed message.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): The minister is a good chap, but he has to accept that he has dismembered SDS and yet, somehow, it lives on. Perhaps he can elucidate on how the changes will ensure that apprenticeships and college places are held in equal esteem with university degrees, because that is a critical issue. Will he also reflect on my previous suggestion to rename graduate apprenticeships as degree apprenticeships?

Graeme Dey: I took that suggestion away and tested it with university colleagues, and they were split roughly 50:50. The critical point about graduate apprenticeships is not their name but the place that they hold in the landscape. Stephen Kerr touched, rightly, on parity of esteem, but I want to see the graduate apprenticeship model improved. We currently have a group, led by Steve Decent, the principal at Glasgow Caledonian University, looking at how we further develop the graduate apprenticeship model and how we expand that offering as part of the overall package.

Stephen Kerr makes a very good point about parity of esteem. The issue is also about read-across. We need to ensure that there is a cohesion to the offering of foundation apprenticeships, modern apprenticeships and graduate apprenticeships, so that we capture the maximum number of young people who want to go down those pathways and that we ensure that it is the right pathway for them.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes this item of business. There will be a brief pause before we move to the next item of business to allow front benches to change over.

Miscarriage Care

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16353, in the name of Jenni Minto, on improving miscarriage care.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): On a point of order, Deputy Presiding Officer. It has just been drawn to my attention that, although the motion says that the Parliament

“welcomes the publication of the *Delivery Framework for Miscarriage Care in Scotland and the Progesterone Pathway*”,

members did not have the opportunity to see those publications until twenty-five past three. They were sent to certain members—business managers and so on—but not to the speakers in the debate. It is very difficult to comment on a framework and a pathway when we do not have clear information in front of us from the Government. I want to make you aware of that, and I seek your advice on the matter.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Hamilton. It is generally accepted that as much notice as possible should be given to members, although I appreciate that there will be occasions when that is more difficult than it is on others. I am not aware of the circumstances to which you have referred, Ms Hamilton, but we will look into them. If a more detailed response is required, we will come back to you.

I call the minister.

15:30

The Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health (Jenni Minto): During my time as the Minister for Public Health and Women’s Health—and, indeed, during my life—I have heard many devastating stories from people who have been affected by miscarriage and baby loss. The charity Tommy’s has said that one in two adults have experienced or know someone who has experienced miscarriage or baby loss, so I know that many people in the chamber and those who are watching us today will have been affected by such issues. I extend my heartfelt condolences to all those who have experienced miscarriage or baby loss. I know that the pain does not go away. However, I hope that, by speaking out about miscarriage and stillbirth, we can help to break the associated stigma and ensure that women and families feel empowered to find their voice and access the right care and support for them.

I am pleased to bring forward a debate on this very important topic. I hope that it serves as an opportunity to reflect on progress that has been

made and to discuss the next steps for improving miscarriage care in Scotland.

Today, we became the first country in the United Kingdom to publish a Government delivery framework for miscarriage care, alongside a new progesterone pathway, since the publication of *The Lancet* report, which was a pivotal moment in the campaign for better miscarriage care. Those documents will make a real difference in ensuring that those who experience miscarriage receive a good standard of care and support wherever they live in Scotland.

Key to that is ensuring that women do not have to wait until they have had a third miscarriage before receiving tailored support, that they can access care in dedicated early pregnancy units or services and that separate spaces are provided in hospitals for those who experience pregnancy or baby loss, whether a miscarriage or a stillbirth. We also remain resolute in our commitment to expand access to progesterone for women who need it.

We have made progress on all those commitments, but we believe that the delivery framework will be key to driving progress and to focusing on areas in which improvement is still required.

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I did not want to interrupt the minister while she was explaining those important documents. The delivery framework is 54 pages long and the national progesterone pathway is 13 pages long. Was there any reason why the Government could not have shared those documents with members in advance of the debate? An hour is not enough time for us to scrutinise them. Clearly, the Government was aware of them on Tuesday, when it lodged its motion for the debate. No one has tried to amend the motion, because this will be a consensual debate, but it would have helped us to have a good debate if Opposition members had had the same insight as the Government.

Jenni Minto: I understand where Douglas Ross is coming from. What is important is that this is the start of a process. I will go on to talk more about the framework and its importance to Scotland. I am offering to have a meeting, at some point after the debate, with members who are interested in learning more about the issue. I thank him for his intervention, which allowed me to say that.

Although the framework focuses on miscarriage care in the first trimester, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the women and families who go through baby loss and stillbirth at later stages. It is vital that they receive excellent care and support at such an incredibly difficult time, and I know that improvements continue to be made by NHS boards and through the stillbirth national bereavement care pathway.

In developing the framework, we carried out a scoping exercise across all NHS boards into the availability of services for miscarriage and unexpected pregnancy complications. Although the “Miscarriage Care and Facilities in Scotland: Scoping Report National Overview” sets out that all NHS boards have

“dedicated facilities for women experiencing unexpected pregnancy complications”

and

“services available for women experiencing miscarriage”,

there is variation in how those services are delivered.

For example, 10 boards have a dedicated early pregnancy unit, with the rest delivering early pregnancy services through existing services. Eleven boards have a separate room, ward or area away from the labour ward for women experiencing miscarriage. Boards without a separate space are aware that that must be addressed as a priority and are working on providing that space.

Although elements of the graded approach to miscarriage, as recommended by *The Lancet's* report, can be accessed in 13 out of 14 boards, none consistently deliver all elements, in particular after the first or second miscarriage.

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): We will approach the debate in good faith, because we have not yet read the framework. However, on the point about the territorial boards that have yet to make progress, can the minister give a timeline for when that work will be completed?

Jenni Minto: I recognise the very important work that Monica Lennon has done in women's health and for her constituents. I cannot give a timeframe just now, but my team of officials is working closely with NHS boards to ensure that those separate spaces are created as soon as possible. In some cases, it might be down to the financing of the building of the hospital, or there might be issues with trying to find a specific space. There are a number of reasons, but we are working closely with health boards.

In developing the framework, an expert miscarriage group and a writing group were established, and I am deeply grateful to everyone who has been involved. The expert group was co-chaired by Colin Duncan, a professor of reproductive medicine and science at the University of Edinburgh, and Professor Justine Craig, Scotland's chief midwifery officer, and it had wide representation from across the NHS, the royal colleges and third sector organisations.

The expert group has set out timescales for delivery of the framework and its 34 deliverables

and actions. I acknowledge that this is a difficult time for boards and that there will be some challenges to implementation, which is why I am pleased to announce £1.5 million of funding for boards in the next financial year to support that very important work.

Kath Abrahams, the chief executive officer of Tommy's national centre for miscarriage research, has today described the framework as

"a real milestone on the path to excellent care for women and families in Scotland".

As well as Tommy's, the organisations Held In Our Hearts, the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Charity and the Miscarriage Association have been at the heart of the work, and I thank them for their crucial input.

Thankfully, for most women, a first miscarriage is also their last, but that does not mean that it is not a devastating experience that is full of questions that often just cannot be answered, such as "Why did it happen to me?", "Did I do something wrong?" and "Can I help to prevent it from happening again?"

Although there are often no answers, we can provide women with as much information as possible. I am aware that the documents that have been published today are dense and are aimed specifically at senior management and health professionals involved in miscarriage care. However, I know from speaking to women and partners who have experienced miscarriage that there is a real need to provide more clear and accessible information to those who are going through the experience.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): Will the minister take an intervention on that point?

Jenni Minto: I would like to make some progress.

That is why we have been working with the charity Tommy's and a group of professionals and third sector organisations to develop patient leaflets. There are three leaflets, which are entitled "I think I'm having a miscarriage", "After a miscarriage" and "Miscarriage: dads and partners". All three leaflets are available digitally from today and will link to the newly published, vastly expanded and improved NHS Inform miscarriage pages. We also have a leaflet on reducing the risk of stillbirth, a copy of which is given to every pregnant woman in Scotland.

Following the publication of the framework, we will work closely with Tommy's and Held In Our Hearts to develop a patients charter that sets out clearly the care and support to which women are entitled and how they can access it. I will ensure that people with lived experience and health

professionals are involved in the development of the charter.

To ensure that all women and their partners receive the support and care that they need, we must have a more accurate picture of the number of miscarriages in Scotland. We commissioned Public Health Scotland to collect that data, initially concentrating on establishing data collection for miscarriages in which women present to early pregnancy units and services. I am pleased to announce that a data set has been agreed and that Public Health Scotland is now testing it in boards.

We know that miscarriage can be devastating for partners, who often feel a great sense of helplessness. We also know that many dads and partners believe that they need to put their feelings to one side to support their partner. That is just one example of why tackling stigma is so important. We need to break the silence that too often goes alongside miscarriage and stillbirth to ensure that everyone who needs support receives it. I am pleased that we in the Parliament are playing our part in speaking out today.

One of my first engagements as a minister was to the Sands and Scottish Government national bereavement care pathway conference. The powerful speeches and atmosphere of that event will stay with me always. There was a real warmth in the room, which might seem to be a strange thing to say, but it was clear that everyone there, no matter their personal circumstances, wanted to support others and share experiences to improve things for others.

We continue to work closely with Sands. As well as funding and supporting the development of the national bereavement care pathway programme, we continue to fund Sands to support boards with implementation of all five pathways for pregnancy and baby loss. Last year, I attended a round-table meeting that was hosted by Held In Our Hearts and Bob Doris to hear about the innovative hospital-to-home project. I then had the privilege of visiting its premises to chat again with its chief executive, Nicola Welsh, staff members and bereaved parents, and I was pleased to confirm £60,000 of funding for the project for this year and the next. We have also launched a memorial book of pregnancy and baby loss prior to 24 weeks, because we know that, for many people, recognition of their loss provides some comfort and validation during an incredibly painful time.

I have said many times previously how immensely proud I am to hold the position of Minister for Public Health and Women's Health. Today, as I open this important debate, is no exception. I hope that, in coming together today and speaking openly about miscarriage in our national Parliament, we can help to break down

the stigma, send a message to people that they are not alone and, importantly, drive improvement for those who access miscarriage care.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the devastating impact that miscarriage and stillbirth can have on women and their families, and extends its condolences to all those who have been affected; acknowledges the importance of good stillbirth care and that improvements continue to be made by NHS boards and through the stillbirth national bereavement care pathway; notes that, although miscarriage care in Scotland is generally considered to be of high quality, there is still more to do to standardise and end the variation in the care and support delivered across Scotland; welcomes efforts from NHS boards to further improve miscarriage care following recommendations in *The Lancet* series, *Miscarriage Matters*, and Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and NICE guidelines around the use of progesterone; thanks hardworking NHS staff and all those who have contributed to the progress to date for their care and professionalism when caring for women experiencing miscarriage; welcomes the publication of the *Delivery Framework for Miscarriage Care in Scotland and the Progesterone Pathway* as key steps in implementing a graded model of care that will ensure that women receive tailored support from their first miscarriage; supports the provision of dedicated facilities for women experiencing unexpected pregnancy complications, miscarriage or still birth, and believes that it is vital that everyone in society, including employers, works together to break the stigma surrounding miscarriage and stillbirth to ensure that women and their families can access the information, care and support that is right for them.

15:42

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): I remind members that I have a daughter who is a midwife in the Scottish NHS.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to open the debate on behalf of the Scottish Conservatives. Miscarriage or stillbirth has such a profound and traumatic impact, predominantly and rightly on the mother. However, as the minister has recognised, there is also trauma for those around the mother who support her through that time.

I say that because I have been in that situation myself. Even though it was more than 30 years ago, the strength of those emotions took me by surprise when they surfaced, knowing that I was going to give a speech and remembering what my wife had to go through that night.

For many, it is a big surprise to learn how many people go through a similar experience. One in four women lose a pregnancy, along with their families and friends. When that happens to you, you think that you are the only one going through the trauma. That is why, as the minister said, in such debates, it is so important to get the message out that there is help to be sought. I was therefore glad that the minister mentioned the organisation Sands, which does incredible work,

and there are many others that work along those lines.

Many members will know of my constituent Fraser Morton, whose partner gave birth to Lucas, who was initially diagnosed as stillborn. As a result of a campaign that included a BBC documentary and an investigation by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, he got that diagnosis changed to death during birth and managed to get his son registered on a birth certificate. Not many people know that many stillborn children do not get the opportunity to have a birth certificate. We need to consider that, because it seems to me that that is an important anchor for the people whom I have met previously.

That was one of the first constituency cases that I was involved in, and I have remained in contact with Fraser and his partner ever since. As an outcome of the investigation, they managed to highlight that Crosshouse hospital was 24 neonatal staff short. He and his wife, June, have campaigned and raised money for others who are suffering a similar loss. In my view, they are two very special human beings.

Women in Scotland struggle to access mental health support after a miscarriage. Across all health board areas, there does not appear to be a clear process, in every site that provides miscarriage care, for routine assessment or for referral to support services for mental health bereavement or counselling support. Screening for mental health issues is not provided by all health boards.

In 2020, Imperial College London found that miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy may trigger long-term post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression. Following the publication of that research, the Miscarriage Association gathered online responses, which echoed the research and focused on the serious and long-term impact on mental health. Many people shared personal experiences of the gap between their needs and the services and support that were available.

Key issues that were mentioned were not exclusive to Scotland, but if anyone has confided in you about their miscarriage experience, the comments will not be surprising. The issues included lack of support at the time of loss and later on; lack of recognition of pregnancy loss as a significant event, including in the language used by medical staff; women experiencing loss being seen in the same place as expectant mothers or those who have given birth; high levels of anxiety when thinking about another pregnancy and during future pregnancies; and little access to, or even mention of, counselling or other therapies—and, often, long waiting lists if they were referred to them.

When we look holistically at the impact of miscarriage, we need to recognise that the woman's partner and family are often the first line of support for that woman. However, all too often, they also feel the loss of the pregnancy deeply. Making sure that partners and families get the right support means that they will be able to process that trauma and support the woman in their lives while she processes her own trauma. Although all that is recognised in current NHS pathways, there is a lack of bespoke support for partners—especially men—and families to help them to process their distinctly different emotions.

That brings me to healthcare professionals. Without the staff, the “Delivery Framework for Miscarriage Care in Scotland” and the progesterone pathway cannot be delivered. It is important to look after our staff, both mentally and through making sure that they are properly resourced. Proper resourcing means not only that they have the tools for the job but that they have the proper facilities, educational support and staffing to do their job effectively.

In the Scottish Government's programme for government for 2023-24, the Scottish National Party promised to improve miscarriage care and support, including by having secure separate spaces in hospital maternity wards for women who suffer a miscarriage. However, the recent report from the Royal College of Nursing includes eye-opening accounts of the lack of privacy and dignity for patients, with nurses having been left with no choice but to discuss miscarriages with couples in hospital corridors.

Midwives are often the first line of support for women experiencing miscarriage. However, the Royal College of Midwives has said that midwives simply do not have the time or education to provide high-quality, evidence-based and compassionate miscarriage care. The RCM advocates access to high-quality, evidence-based and compassionate miscarriage care, but we need a workforce with the time and education to provide that support. Although it welcomes the work on updating the predicted absence allowance, it is currently not adequate to meet the core mandatory training needs or the gap in speciality midwives to ensure that women and families receive the care and aftercare that they need. That includes the key role of midwives in supporting perinatal mental health for women with miscarriage.

The emotional toll of miscarriage can affect a person's mental health and their approach to future pregnancies, including their willingness to access care. It is important that women receive the right support from their very first miscarriage, for their mental and physical health, so that there is no loss of trust in medical professionals.

I know that there is a persistent and serious issue in the delivery of healthcare, let alone miscarriage support, in rural areas. My colleague Douglas Ross will touch on that in more detail. However, I note the travel time to access maternity services and mental health services; access to transport to get there; the fact that telehealth might not always be the most appropriate way to deliver care; the shortage of mental health professionals in rural health wards; and the fact that stigma around mental health can be more pronounced in rural communities, increasing the isolation that women and their families feel after miscarriage.

The debate is very welcome, and I thank the Scottish Government for providing time for it. I think that all members understand the suffering and trauma of miscarriage and stillbirth, but the evidence is clear that we are still falling well short of where we need to be. I look forward to getting the opportunity to read through the document that has been produced by the Scottish Government.

15:50

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I am pleased to open the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour to discuss an issue that touches the lives of many families across Scotland. It is vital that we look at what more can be done to improve miscarriage and stillbirth care, so that the next generation does not suffer the same dismissal that perhaps many women have suffered before.

I thank the minister and her officials for the collective way in which they formed the motion. We all want to support and progress the issue to ensure that the care that women receive only improves over the coming years.

At this stage, I welcome the framework, but I am sure that the minister will expect there to be scrutiny from members on how actions are delivered. It is fair to say that some elements of care are delayed, and we need to treat the situation with some urgency.

Let me, like other members, acknowledge the deep emotional toll that miscarriage and stillbirth take on individuals and their families. It is a grief that is often unspoken, and it is crucial that we recognise the profound impact that it has on the many women and families who, sadly, require access to such services.

Although I hope that stigma around miscarriage has reduced, let us not forget that it persists. To address that, we in the Parliament must do our part to talk about it, as the minister and Brian Whittle said, and to work out a way to rectify and improve the care pathway for women who have to travel it. Therefore, I thank all the members who will speak in the debate or who have stayed in the chamber to listen.

I express my gratitude to all NHS staff. We know that the kindness and expertise of staff is at the heart of our NHS. I am sure that, like me, other members from across the chamber hear from patients time and again about the care that they receive in the NHS. In the brief look that I have had at the document, I see actions around supporting staff, which is extremely welcome.

My party welcomes the recommendations from *The Lancet's* miscarriage matters series and supports the staff who continue to work on improving miscarriage care across Scotland following those publications. We welcome the progesterone pathway and, of course, support the graded model of care.

We must ensure that the “Delivery Framework for Miscarriage Care in Scotland” can be fully implemented across all NHS health boards to improve the pathway for women. I have seen the goals in the framework. However, we know from the scoping exercise that not all NHS boards routinely or equitably—even across individual boards—provide the same service for patients, which is an important point. Perhaps in the minister’s closing speech we could get an idea of how that might be monitored, so that we can progress it. We should keep a tight look at the framework as we go forward.

Every case of miscarriage or stillbirth is a devastating tragedy for the parents and the wider family. We know that people face many unfair and avoidable inequalities when attempting to access health services, due to financial or geographic differences, which can significantly impact on pregnancy and infant mortality. Inequalities are a barrier for many families, and it is our responsibility to ensure that services recognise that and have firm policies in place to ensure that all services are provided with that in mind. I will look at the framework in that regard. We know that people from our poorest communities access services less readily or much later than more affluent families. Addressing that must be part of any Government strategy.

Disparities due to geography remain far too prevalent; I do not think that it is unfair of me to say that. We talk in the chamber about the journeys that patients have to make, and I am sure that members recognise that issue. In Scotland, we have pockets of extreme rurality. We must seek to workforce plan and have the skills available to attend women, rather than the other way round. I will look at the framework to see how we ensure that that is embedded in what we do.

I am very aware of the time but, like Brian Whittle, I want to touch on the devastating psychological impact of miscarriage for women and the wider family. Psychological services should be available to ensure that people have

care right through afterwards. People will perhaps have seen the Engender briefing, which highlighted that such services were not available during the Covid period, which really affected people. There was definitely a link with women not having their family support around them at that time. Should there be any time in the future when we need to think about how we provide services, it is absolutely clear that women require that support.

I wanted to touch on the space that women have, although I do not have a lot of time left. My colleague Monica Lennon has done so much work on that, and she will possibly touch on it. I again thank everybody for coming along and speaking in the debate.

15:55

Gillian Mackay (Central Scotland) (Green): I begin, as others have done, by acknowledging the deep and often unspoken grief that miscarriage and stillbirth bring to women and their families. I thank midwives and their teams across Scotland.

Despite it being a relatively common experience, miscarriage can be profoundly isolating, especially for those without the support that they need. The emotional, physical and psychological toll can be immense yet, too often, those affected suffer in silence. There is a reluctance from many to talk about their loss, especially when that loss is early. I am sure that many members have spoken to family and friends who have had a throwaway comment such as, “At least it was early,” which definitely prevents people from being truly able to speak about their loss.

Good miscarriage care goes beyond medical treatment. It requires compassion, clear information and a shift in societal attitudes to ensure that no one faces the experience alone. I welcome the opportunity to discuss what Scotland is doing well and what we must do better to improve care and support for those affected. I thank the minister for securing the debate.

Scotland has taken important steps in improving miscarriage care, recognising that compassionate support is just as vital as clinical treatment. The national bereavement care pathway has provided much-needed guidance to healthcare professionals, helping to ensure that those experiencing pregnancy loss receive sensitive and appropriate care. That initiative has encouraged a more standardised approach in reducing disparities in how miscarriage care is delivered across the country. The pathways have been developed together with several pregnancy and baby-loss charities, royal colleges, a wide range of healthcare experts and an advisory group of women and men who have experienced loss.

The funding by the Scottish Government is vital, and it is delivered in partnership with Sands. The important role that Sands plays in supporting families affected by miscarriage and baby loss cannot be overstated. In my Central Scotland region, its local support groups cover the Forth Valley and Lanarkshire health boards and provide a safe and understanding space for bereaved parents to share their experiences and to receive comfort from those who truly understand their grief. Those groups, which are run by dedicated volunteers, offer peer support meetings, remembrance events and advice to help families to navigate the tricky situations that they are in. The presence of such compassionate support networks is invaluable in ensuring that no one feels alone in their grief.

Although it is undoubtable that progress has been and continues to be made, there is still much work to do. Too many women report feeling dismissed or unsupported when experiencing miscarriage, particularly in early pregnancy. We must do more to ensure that healthcare professionals receive adequate training to provide informed care. Access to miscarriage support remains inconsistent across Scotland. In some areas, women are left waiting for treatment or are forced to navigate a fragmented system. Steps have been taken to mitigate that, but we must double down on efforts to ensure that every woman, regardless of where she lives, can access timely and comprehensive care.

As has been mentioned, the psychological impact cannot be overstated. Although some support services exist, many women and families struggle to find the counselling and mental health support that they need. We must strengthen links between miscarriage care and mental health services. Without accurate and comprehensive data, it is difficult to identify gaps in care. I acknowledge what the minister has already said on that. We must continue to listen to those with lived experience and to ensure that their experiences shape improvements.

Although we have made significant strides in supporting those affected by miscarriage and stillbirth, the effort is far from over. It is imperative that we continue to work collectively with healthcare providers, policy makers, employers and society at large to break the stigma surrounding pregnancy loss. It is only by ensuring access to consistent, compassionate and high-quality care that we can provide solace to those families who grieve.

15:59

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this afternoon's debate on behalf of Scottish Liberal

Democrats, and I am grateful, too, for the time that the Parliament has been given to discuss the important topic of miscarriage care. I associate myself with the condolences extended by the minister and in the motion, which we will support.

In June 2021, I lodged an amendment to a motion on women's health—which was not selected for debate—that raised the question of the provision of dedicated facilities for perinatal loss. Former Shetland resident Louise Caldwell, who, I think, is in Parliament this afternoon, has bravely campaigned on the issue after her miscarriage experience, when she was required to deliver on a labour ward. As I indicated in 2021, it is difficult to imagine how hard it must be to be met with newborn baby photos on walls, thank you cards, baby cries and proud partners. Official guidance says that separate facilities should be provided, but women's experience shows that recognition of the issue does not always translate into reality.

Since that time, there has been improvement, which is due in no small part to Louise's campaign. Last November in Shetland, the northern star bereavement suite at the Gilbert Bain hospital marked its first anniversary. The suite is designed for parents who have suffered an early pregnancy loss, such as miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy. It was co-designed with the NHS team in Shetland and the baby loss charity Sands. I pay tribute to all who were involved in making that facility a reality. Feedback from patients has reportedly been very positive, despite the circumstances in which people use the service, and families have found comfort in placing their baby's name on the memorial wall.

Shetland Sands also played a key part in developing a private space in Shetland's Sumburgh airport for women who require to travel to Aberdeen on commercial flights when there are complications with their pregnancy. I do not think that people understand how difficult it must be for someone from a small community, who is travelling and is in the departure lounge—

The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care (Neil Gray): I thank Beatrice Wishart for mentioning the facility at the Gilbert Bain hospital, which I was able to see when I was in Shetland last year. I heard directly from people that it is important not only for patients but for staff that that separate space is available to ensure that mothers and families are treated with dignity and compassion at the most difficult time in all our lives.

Beatrice Wishart: I think that it is absolutely true that the facility is important for staff, too.

I was talking about the situation of women who have to travel to Aberdeen and how difficult it is,

as members of a small community, to have other people come up and ask whether they are going on holiday or whatever. Therefore, the private space at Sumburgh airport is important, and I pay tribute to Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd, which engaged with the request that such a space be provided. Nothing can take away the mix of emotions that are present, but anything that helps to blunt the sharp edges is worth while.

We should also consider what could be done for inhabitants of the far north of Scotland, for whom there is a lot of travel involved in accessing women's healthcare.

Across the UK, the national bereavement care pathway is implemented with varying degrees of success, although Scotland is considered to be ahead of the rest of the UK when it comes to the provision of care in that area. We do not have to look far for a model of mental health support that is considered to be excellent. NHS Tayside's mental health package for those who have experienced baby loss includes self-referral, open-ended care and support for both parents.

To help to improve services, we need to have a better understanding of the number of miscarriages, and work is well under way to establish routine miscarriage data collection in the maternity setting, while separate work is under way to secure access to data that is held in primary care for national analysis. The Sands charity has called for annual reporting on miscarriage rates, once we have a better understanding of the number of miscarriages, to enable the Government to monitor whether rates are decreasing or increasing. That will help with the introduction of an outcome-based target to reduce the miscarriage rate.

I take comfort in the knowledge that, in Shetland right now, there is a memorial wall that reflects the unforgotten in a suite named after the constant shining light in the night sky of the northern star, which is well famed for its guidance.

16:04

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Today's debate concerns the very difficult topics of miscarriage, stillbirth and pregnancy loss. I know that this Scottish Government is committed to reducing stigma, breaking the silence and normalising conversations about pregnancy loss, which can, in small part, be realised by having debates such as this one today.

Although it is hard to get exact figures, as the minister touched on already, it is believed that anything from 8 to 24 per cent of pregnancies end in miscarriage. In the spirit of being open and breaking down the silence, and as I think I have

said in the chamber before, my partner and I have experienced several miscarriages. We have three lovely children but have also had miscarriages at various points in that journey. The uncertainty around the figures stems from many miscarriages going unreported, with some women even being unaware that they were pregnant in the first place.

Whatever the true figures may be, each pregnancy loss has a devastating impact on those who suffer a miscarriage, as well as on their wider family and friends. That traumatic experience requires improved and supportive care that is conducted with dignity and respect.

I appreciate the tone of today's motion, which I think is highlighted by the fact that there are no amendments. I also acknowledge that there has been progress on the issue, but there is, of course, still much to be done. Taking forward the findings of *The Lancet's* report by supporting the development of individualised care plans after a woman's first miscarriage, ensuring that health boards and women's services have dedicated facilities for women who are experiencing unexpected pregnancy complications and even committing to introducing three days of paid leave for families who suffer miscarriages and stillbirths are all steps in the right direction.

Although I commend the work of the Scottish Government, I must also highlight the incredible work done outwith the public sector by charities such as Baby Loss Retreat, whose chief executive officer and founder is a constituent of mine. Baby Loss Retreat was founded in February 2018 by Julie and Bryan Morrison, who lost their daughter Erin in 2003. What began as a charity that offered bereaved parents a retreat free of charge has now grown into an organisation that also provides counselling, trauma therapy and music therapy for siblings affected by loss. It utilises bereavement counsellors and holds regular support groups for those who avail themselves of its services and I know that other members representing central Scotland are very much aware of that work. The charity's co-founder, Bryan Morrison, also does a lot of work with men who experience baby loss, a subject that has been touched on by a couple of speakers. He does fantastic work and I encourage everyone here to watch some of the videos that he has made.

As I said, I am aware of the significant progress that the Government has made on the issue, but there are still areas that need urgent attention. I spoke to Julie Morrison of Baby Loss Retreat ahead of the debate and she stressed the need for improved services in early miscarriage units. She made me aware of a case that I have been given permission to share, which I will do in Julie's own words, as I think that will be more apt to the situation:

"I had to deal with a parent 2 weeks ago who had experienced a miscarriage. She was sent to A & E due to early miscarriage unit being closed over the weekend depending on what area you live in.

She went to A & E bleeding and scared that she was losing her baby. She arrived in A & E and had to wait 8 hours for a gynaecologist to come and see her. For him to tell her she may be experiencing a miscarriage to go home and go back to the early miscarriage unit on the Wednesday to confirm if the baby's heart had stopped or if she'd had a miscarriage.

She messaged me scared as the bleeding was getting heavier and she was told to wait until Wednesday when the unit would be opened. She eventually had to pay for a private scan to confirm that she was actually having twins and that one twin had died."

That is a tragic set of circumstances and my condolences go to the family, but I think it is important to raise that. Baby Loss Retreat asked me to raise a question here in this debate: why are parents who are experiencing a miscarriage being sent to accident and emergency when we have functioning early miscarriage units for anyone who is experiencing a loss at an early stage in their pregnancy? If people who are experiencing pregnancy loss could be diverted away from the traumatic experience of attending A and E, that would have the double benefit of lessening the pressures on A and E as well.

I am heartened by the steps outlined by the Scottish Government today as it looks to improve miscarriage care. We must let people know that they are not alone and that conversations such as those that we are having today are necessary to normalise discussion of pregnancy loss. The work outlined by the Scottish Government is complemented by the excellent charities and third sector organisations that have done so much for bereaved parents throughout Scotland. Nevertheless, we must continue to increase healthcare funding so that those who need it most are treated with dignity and respect. In particular, we must invest in early miscarriage units so that there is constant support when that is needed.

16:09

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): I was a member of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee in 2022, when it took evidence on its inquiry into perinatal mental health, so I welcome the chance to speak in this debate. I was grateful at the time that the inquiry addressed the impact of baby loss, which is often a taboo subject, as we have heard, and is not spoken about until it affects us personally or those who are closest to us. Miscarriage and stillbirth have a devastating impact on women and their families. It is an important issue, and I extend my condolences to all those who have been impacted.

As we have heard, miscarriage care in Scotland still faces serious challenges. Women in Scotland are struggling to access mental health support post-miscarriage. Across all health boards, there appears to be no clear process that provides miscarriage care, routine assessment and referral to mental health and bereavement support services or counselling.

In 2023, the Scottish Government published "Miscarriage Care and Facilities in Scotland: Scoping Report National Overview", which evaluated miscarriage services across Scotland. That report acknowledged that not all health boards had a separate room for women who are miscarrying and that four health boards lacked dedicated early pregnancy units, forcing women to seek care in general emergency departments where specialised miscarriage support may not be available. Furthermore, the report said that the training and skills of healthcare staff who provided miscarriage care varied across health boards and that specialist training was often centralised in one or two units within a health board.

As we know, sadly, under the SNP, workforce planning always takes a back seat. I ask members to consider these words from a midwife who responded to a survey from the Royal College of Midwives:

"I cannot remember the last time we had safe staffing within our unit. On a daily basis, we are struggling to provide a decent standard of care to our women and their families."

Staff shortages are impacting not just on recruitment and retention, but on training, which is too often failing to take place because of staff shortages.

The inconsistencies across the different health boards in Scotland need to be fixed. The delivery framework, which was embargoed until this debate started, references 34 key actions that are needed and classifies them as N, meaning now, for things that need to be addressed within six months; S, meaning short term, for things that need to be implemented within 12 to 15 months; or M, meaning medium term, for things that need to be implemented within 15 to 24 months.

Eighteen of the actions are classified as needing to be looked at within six months, and they range from bereavement care to what needs to happen when women have had three miscarriages. I draw members' attention to action 27, which says:

"Where 3D ultrasound is not available, 2D ultrasound should be offered after a 3rd miscarriage. Where any abnormality is suspected, further imaging with 3D ultrasound, at a different site or with an agreement with another NHS Board, or MRI should be offered."

I really hope that there will be resources for the 18 things that are needed immediately, because we

will never make the change that is needed if there is not money to fix things.

The 10 actions that are classified as M, or medium-term requirements, include out-of-hours access to support, which previous speakers have discussed. The actions that are required within 15 to 24 months also include a series of steps with regard to what happens when a woman has a second miscarriage. Again, resources must follow those actions. I hope that the minister will provide us with a dashboard that shows progress at health board level so that we can see how each board is stepping up to the mark and delivering on the new framework.

I am glad that we now have the progesterone pathway. However, it is nothing new, and I do not understand why it has not been made available to us until today. It was in National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance that was published in 2019 and revised in 2023, which recommended offering

“vaginal micronised progesterone 400 mg twice daily to women with an intrauterine pregnancy confirmed by a scan, if they have vaginal bleeding and have previously had a miscarriage.”

There is nothing new in what you have presented to us this afternoon, minister. I do not understand why we could not have had sight of the framework earlier so that we could have really discussed it and celebrated something on which we might look forward to making Scotland the best in class.

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): I remind members to always speak through the chair.

16:14

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thought that that was a very disappointing tone in Sue Webber’s contribution.

Today, we are debating an emotive and heartbreaking issue, which is sadly very common.

Sue Webber: Will the member take an intervention?

Rona Mackay: No, I have just started.

The loss of a baby at any stage is tragic. It is a traumatic experience that can have a profound impact on families—going from the elation of being pregnant and the happiness that comes from planning to welcome another life into the world and to enhance your family, to suffering devastating heartache and disappointment.

Miscarriage is the loss of a pregnancy before viability, which is currently defined as 23 weeks and six days’ gestation. It may occur spontaneously or as a missed miscarriage, which may require medical or surgical management. It

affects around 8 to 24 per cent of pregnancies, although it is difficult to obtain an accurate figure, because it can often occur before a woman knows that she is pregnant.

Throughout it all, the Scottish Government expects all women who are receiving maternity care to be treated with dignity and respect. We have made clear progress on maternity care in the past five years, and we are committed to progressing that further. In 2023, we launched a memorial book and certificate for those who have experienced pregnancy or baby loss prior to 24 weeks.

Many hospitals already have separate spaces for women who suffer pregnancy or baby loss, and the Scottish Government will ensure that all major hospitals and NHS boards with maternity units do. It is a simple but humane and necessary measure to ease the pain of baby loss.

As has been mentioned by other speakers, breaking the silence and reducing the stigma and isolation associated with pregnancy loss and baby death are of the utmost importance. For too long—and certainly for my generation—it was an unspoken trauma, almost secretively guarded by families as they attempted to cope with their grief. People were often told by doctors, “At least it proves that you can get pregnant. Try again and everything will be fine.” Although that might be true, it gives no comfort to grieving parents at the time of such a tragic loss.

The Scottish Government believes that, by delivering good-quality, supportive and compassionate miscarriage and bereavement care, we can break the stigma and begin normalising conversations about miscarriage and stillbirth. Our Government-funded national bereavement care pathway for pregnancy and baby loss and accompanying care standards are clear that women and families who experience pregnancy or baby loss should be treated compassionately and that difficult news should be delivered in a quiet, private space.

We fully support taking forward the findings of the report by *The Lancet* and supporting the development of individualised care plans after a woman’s first miscarriage. That also includes ensuring that women’s services and health boards have dedicated facilities for women who are experiencing unexpected pregnancy complications. The SNP is also committed to emulating New Zealand, where families who experience miscarriage or stillbirth are entitled to three days of paid leave, by delivering that within the public sector.

As we have heard, the “Delivery Framework for Miscarriage Care in Scotland” ensures that work is improved and updated and that it will standardise

and bring an end to the variation in the care and support that is delivered across Scotland for women and families who experience miscarriage and pregnancy loss. The framework will outline a plan for the introduction of a graded model of miscarriage care in Scotland. It has been developed by an expert short-life working group, which included representation from health professionals and third sector organisations.

In conclusion, there is an abundance of support organisations out there, such as Sands. Miscarriage matters, and I hope that grieving families will take comfort from knowing that they can get help to get through it.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Monica Lennon, who will have up to five minutes, given how Labour has sought to allocate its speaking time today.

16:18

Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this important debate and am therefore grateful to the minister for bringing the motion to the Parliament. I associate myself with her remarks about sympathy for all those who have been affected and our collective efforts to smash the stigma. It is good to see the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care in the chamber, and I hope that that gives an indication of how important the issue is to the Government.

We all recognise that, for generations, miscarriage, stillbirth, baby loss and women's health have not been high on the agenda for policy makers or Governments anywhere. The issues that we are debating today are certainly not unique to Scotland, but we all have a responsibility to right that injustice. That is why today's debate is so important.

I am fortunate that I do not have the lived experience that many people have shared today, and I am grateful to hear from colleagues about their own experiences. As an MSP, I rely on my constituents to tell me about their experiences. It is a great privilege when they feel that they can open up and trust me with their trauma and loss.

Beatrice Wishart made an excellent contribution, and I am glad that she was able to take part. I know that she is claiming Louise Caldwell as a Shetlander, which she was briefly. I thank Beatrice Wishart for her genuine support and compassion for Louise Caldwell, who is one of my constituents in Central Scotland. Louise and her husband Craig are from East Kilbride and are in the public gallery and, true to form, I can see that they are sitting at the very back of it. Louise is incredibly modest about her campaigning work. I often use the word "changemaker" to describe Louise—I know that

she will be blushing at that, but it is thoroughly deserved. I will come on to speak about the award that she received from the *Sunday Mail*.

Louise does not want to be in that position. She is a campaigner because she has the lived experience. She knows what it is to have experienced miscarriage and to have to find yourself in the general labour ward of your local maternity hospital in a nightmare situation. The balloons, cards, elated parents and newborn babies are in juxtaposition with the mothers, partners, dads and other family members who are in utter shock, disbelief and so much pain. When Louise came to me for help, of course, I was going to listen and do whatever I could.

It has been a privilege to help Louise to have a platform in the Scottish Parliament. Louise attended a meeting of the cross-party group on women's health to share her experience, and I am glad that she was able to do that. This is the first time that Louise and Craig have ever been to the Scottish Parliament. I hope that their attendance reinforces the importance of opening up the Parliament to the people of Scotland. Rather than the Parliament just being a place where members come to talk among ourselves, it should be a place where people can feel seen and heard, can influence our policies and where investment goes, and can make change happen.

Louise Caldwell was crowned the *Sunday Mail's* community champion in 2022, which is no mean feat and is a national recognition. Whether members represent Shetland, Central Scotland, the Borders or anywhere in between, the issues that we are debating affect every corner of Scotland. At the time, the *Sunday Mail's* editor said:

"Extraordinary people rarely think they have done anything out of the ordinary. The courage, dedication and sheer determination of these unsung heroes make them Scotland's champions."

That was said in direct reference to Louise Caldwell.

I know that I am running out of time, but I will mention a couple of other things. I am really grateful that the Government included recognition of stillbirth. I know that Tess White is not in the chamber, but she and I, along with other campaigners, visited Bute house in the summer to talk about the impact of stillbirth and to campaign for the placental growth factor test, which helps to identify the risk of pre-eclampsia. I was with my good friend Lynsey Hamilton and her husband Bradley, who were there because of the loss of their baby, Carys. The outcome of that meeting shows that we can be a listening Parliament and that we can have a listening Government. We rely on the courage of the changemakers, such as

Louise Caldwell and Lynsey Hamilton, to put pressure on us to ensure that we step up.

I asked the minister for an update on dedicated baby loss facilities. There is more work to do. Scottish Labour is entirely committed to playing our part to ensure that the words that we share in the Parliament turn into action.

16:24

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I took part in a similar debate on miscarriage in October 2020 that was led by Shona Robison. I said at the time that my wife Janet and I had had four miscarriages over the years, but that we were absolutely blessed to have our son Cameron in our lives who, at that time, was four years old. Now, we are also incredibly lucky to have a beautiful young daughter Isla, who is three. Cameron is now nine.

My short contribution to the debate, for which I have drawn in part from our family experience, is tempered by the reality that, despite the heartache and trauma that we went through, two beautiful and joyous children are now our lived reality. Others go through the pain and heartache of recurrent miscarriage and may never be as fortunate as we have been.

Today's debate must ask the question: have matters related to miscarriage improved since 2020? I am pleased that there has clearly been progress, but we need to take a step back and comprehend what that means in practice. For instance, a key recommendation that has been made over the years is to have dedicated facilities for women who are experiencing unexpected pregnancy complications. It is positive that that is happening increasingly in NHS boards across Scotland, with most providing early pregnancy units. However, although that is incredibly welcome, such facilities are often co-located with or in close proximity to maternity units. Although I understand the reasons for that, the emotional impact of it can be quite profound.

Imagine heading to an early pregnancy clinic and expecting not to find a heartbeat, anticipating that yet another pregnancy will not progress. You are not excited. You never get excited about a pregnancy when you have faced recurrent miscarriage; you are anxious the entire time. You are using the same shared space as mums-to-be who are almost full term, or family members of new mums who are excited to see a new baby in what is one of the happiest moments of a family's life. They should be happy and excited, and they should share that joy with anyone and in any way that they so wish. However, the impact on those on the way to have the most devastating news passed to them—that yet again they will not see

the birth of a child that they so desperately want, or that they will have to undergo a related clinical procedure—can be profoundly traumatic. The thoughts that people have at that time are not always rational, but they are very real. We have to think more not just about dedicated facilities but about the geography and co-location of those facilities.

I want to talk about the emotional support that is available to mums and families. Again, I can see that there has been progress, such as that in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, which has bereavement midwives and strong referral processes to valued partners. Indeed, Glasgow midwife Caroline Judge won the prestigious Mariposa award for the quality of service that she offers. However, I suspect that what often happens across Scotland—or in some parts of Scotland—is that information is made available through signposting or a soft referral process at a time when mum and dad are numb, not receptive, or unable to engage with such support. I have no idea what support me and Janet were offered; that time was a chaotic blur. That is why I have been championing Held in our Hearts' hospital to home model, which trains people, often those with lived experience, to reach out to families in their homes, and not just at the point of crisis but later, when that chaotic blur has died down and when mums might most need that support and be most receptive to it. I will engage further with Dr Mary Ross-Davie, who is leading miscarriage care in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, to see how it is getting on with the support that I believe is needed.

I have a tiny amount of time left. If I had more time, I would have said more about graded miscarriage support, links to assisted conception services and the lack of reliable information that is out there—for example, do natural killer cells cause miscarriages? Discuss, please. When you are a victim of recurrent miscarriage, you go through the internet forensically to work out why. No one knows why, and we need more research.

16:28

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): This has been a good, constructive and important debate. I want to echo the way in which the minister and other speakers opened their speeches and send my condolences and sympathies to every family who has gone through a miscarriage, and give my thanks to people like Louise and Craig Caldwell who, in moments of adversity, deal with their own trauma but want to improve things for others, too. It is great that Louise and Craig are able to join us in the gallery.

My health board area, NHS Grampian, took part in the national bereavement care pathway pilot,

and a lot of work is being done at our local hospital, Dr Gray's, which I will talk about in a moment. Fulton MacGregor was right to say that it is difficult to get precise numbers on this, but I remember reading a document a couple of years ago that said that NHS Grampian believes that each year it helps 15 to 20 women who are going through a stillbirth, 50 to 60 women who are experiencing loss after 13 weeks but before 24 weeks, and approximately 1,000 women who are going through a miscarriage. Given that we are talking about a rural area that is not as densely populated as other health board areas in this country, it means that a significant number of women and families are experiencing this on an annual basis. As we are seeing those numbers every year, it is right that we take time in our Parliament to discuss such important issues.

Gillian Mackay, and others, were right to talk about stigma. Ms Mackay made the point that some people say, "At least it happened early." That is partly the fault of men; I know that men do not speak about their own health very much, and certainly not about their wife's or partner's health. Sometimes they think that such comments can be helpful, but, because we have not broken down the stigma, they have not shared their experience with others, and they just add to the pain and suffering of their loved ones when they are simply trying to help.

Brian Whittle suggested that I would mention rural healthcare, and I will do so, because the issue affects women in every part of the country, as well as their families. I will not rehearse the comments that have been made about the late notice that we got of the report—it means that I have not read all 53 pages—but after doing a search of the document, I note that rural and island services are mentioned in only one paragraph in those 53 pages. That paragraph states:

"The model of care within rural and island services will be different".

However, we all know that.

I hope that, in the meeting that the minister has offered to the Parliament, there will be a discussion about this. After all, she represents rural and island communities in her constituency; the cabinet secretary has talked repeatedly about his own experience in Orkney; and I am thinking, too, of their fellow minister, Maree Todd. They all represent rural and island areas. We will need to tease out how the report's recommendations will affect people across Scotland; it might contain 34 recommendations or key actions, but rural and island services are not mentioned in any of them. We know that we will have to do something slightly different, as Beatrice Wishart said in her excellent speech. The circumstances in our island

communities are very different from those in our urban communities, and we have to recognise that.

It is right that, every time, we focus on the women and families who are affected by the issue, but, as members have done and will continue to do, we should also praise the staff for the incredible work that they do in such difficult circumstances.

I read a comment from Marcia Dean, who was a bereavement midwife at Dr Gray's hospital a couple of years ago. She said:

"I'll always remember one mum saying 'you're the midwife no-one wants to meet but I'm really glad I did.'"

That shows that in their darkest moments—the immediate moment of a miscarriage or stillbirth—a mum-to-be and a family are getting support and care from specialist midwives, care that can continue for months and years. It is therefore right that we recognise the incredible work of our NHS staff in that respect.

16:32

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): I welcome that the Scottish Government has brought forward this important debate. After all, many people in the Parliament or watching at home will have experienced the loss of a baby.

In Scotland, we pride ourselves on being a contemporary and open-minded society, but, for many, discussing the topic of loss can still feel somewhat off limits. We can still feel inhibited in being open about how we feel and the true impact of a miscarriage.

For those trying to comfort the bereaved, the words for expressing sympathy often do not come easy. If we are being honest, the fact is that, at the end of the day, no words can help. However, the sentiment can make all the difference, so we must reach out. If we cannot find the words, we can just hold their hand—or them. Just letting folk know that we care and are thinking about them can help a little.

This is a bittersweet debate because, although the data tells us that miscarriage is a relatively common occurrence, the loss of a baby, at no matter what stage of pregnancy, is traumatic and can have a profound impact on parents and families. There is a lot for parents to process as they grieve the often unexplained and unexpected loss of their precious baby. At the same time, they are honouring their baby, seeking and providing support, and setting out on what might well be a long journey of healing.

There is absolutely no doubt that there have been significant improvements in miscarriage care in Scotland, and I welcome the Scottish

Government's commitment to ensuring that everyone affected by pregnancy loss before 24 weeks gets the high-quality care and support that they need. I also welcome that the Scottish Government has mandated the national bereavement care pathway, which has meant that all health boards are currently working on implementing the standards and pathways associated with it. The positive impact is beginning to show for both bereaved parents and healthcare staff, with 82 per cent of healthcare professionals agreeing that it has helped raise the profile of effective bereavement care. Although that is positive, there is work still to be done.

I thank Sands and everyone else who has taken the trouble to get in touch with us before the debate. In its briefing, Sands said that it has heard of significant delays of up to three days between women being seen in A and E for a suspected miscarriage and being referred to early pregnancy assessment services. Health boards must consider what work they can do to reduce such delays and to offer more direct access to early pregnancy assessment services. I would be interested to hear from the minister in her closing speech whether an assessment has been made of the adequacy of access to early pregnancy assessment services for all those who need it, and what improvements can be made.

I take the opportunity to thank the Scottish Government for launching a memorial book and certificate in 2023, for all those who experience pregnancy or baby loss prior to 24 weeks. To those who have not suffered a loss, it probably does not have a significant meaning; to those who have, it means the world. The loss of their loved one, no matter how young, matters and is not forgotten.

I finish by expressing my sympathies to all those who have gone through such a tragic loss.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I must advise the chamber that we have used up the additional time in hand that we had earlier, and I now ask members to keep to their speaking times.

16:37

Gillian Mackay: Today's debate has highlighted the progress that we have made in Scotland, but it also underscores the urgent need to continue to improve miscarriage care. We have heard powerful contributions from colleagues, and I thank those who have shared their personal testimony. It has been hugely powerful, and I have a massive amount of respect for those who have done so. I, like Monica Lennon, have not experienced this horror—and I sincerely hope that we never do—but I thank the campaigners who

have been mentioned for the change that they have made.

One of the gaps that we need to address is how employers, in particular, treat miscarriage. We should be making that support consistent for everyone. Some employers might provide sick leave or bereavement leave, but very few provide dedicated miscarriage leave that accurately reflects the physical and psychological trauma that women are going through. Some employers are doing the right thing, but it is not a guarantee. We should be pushing for standardised miscarriage leave, based on what women need to recover properly.

I add my voice to Brian Whittle's ask with regard to ensuring that stillborn babies have the opportunity to have a birth certificate. It is hugely important for some in their grief journey that there is an official acknowledgement that their baby was here. We have recognised that through the memorial book of pregnancy and baby loss, and I think that that is another logical step.

Bob Doris's speech was hugely powerful, and his reflections on the chaos around miscarriage and the ability of families to take in information were really insightful. It is important to ensure that, as with other forms of bereavement, people can get support when they are ready, not just in the immediate aftermath of loss.

Psychological support for recurrent miscarriage is a must, both at the time of those miscarriages and for those who become pregnant again. The anxiety experienced in pregnancy is quite something. I originally wrote "in early pregnancy", but miscarriage covers up to 24 weeks, which for some will be more than halfway through their pregnancy. The anxiety does not go away beyond 12 weeks, and I would welcome some detail from the Government on how we ensure that those with recurrent losses are supported properly.

I welcome the early scan provision in the framework, along with other enhanced physical measures. However, we need to make sure that mum stays well, with appropriate mental wellbeing support. Providing early contact with a scan before 12 weeks means that those invaluable relationships between patients and midwives can be built. Beyond eight weeks, many women around Scotland will have access to their notes through the Badger Notes app. For those who have not seen the app, I can say that it provides women with the ability to see their blood test results, alongside other resources that are relevant to pregnancy.

I apologise if this is indeed in the framework—I have not managed to fully make my way through it yet—but I wonder whether the Government has given any consideration to what the app can do to

support those who have had recurrent miscarriages or who are going through a miscarriage. Moreover, the app lists all of a user's previous pregnancies, and I would be grateful if the minister could tell me whether she has considered giving those with a history of previous miscarriages the ability to ask for those pregnancies not to appear in it.

Those reflections reinforce the importance of ensuring that every woman and every family affected by pregnancy loss receives compassionate and high-quality care. The "Delivery Framework for Miscarriage Care in Scotland" represents a crucial opportunity to establish consistent, dignified and compassionate care for all. However, it will only be effective if we continue to push for real, tangible change to ensure that improved data collection, expanded specialist services and stronger psychological support become a reality, not just an ambition.

We must also continue to listen to the voices of those with lived experience, because their insights should shape our policies and the delivery of our services. This sort of work across Government, our healthcare system and support organisations will continue to make a real difference to the lives of so many.

16:41

Carol Mochan: I thank everyone in the chamber for their contribution to this crucial debate. I believe that we can have constructive debates to push for change where we are in agreement. It is important to acknowledge, as Sue Webber did, where we need to push further. We all understand that things can be delayed, but it is our responsibility as the Opposition to highlight those areas.

Some really important cross-party work has been spoken about. Monica Lennon mentioned her work with Tess White on the placental growth factor test for stillbirth. That work was thoroughly worth while, and I thank them for doing it. It shows how the Parliament can work best with Government.

Jackie Dunbar spoke about being there for people. An important part of what we are discussing is that people need support from family and friends, and we have a responsibility to ensure that that support is part of the framework.

I am keen to mention Brian Whittle, Fulton MacGregor and Bob Doris, who each made a point about breaking down stigma, and I thank them for sharing their stories. I think that everybody in the chamber appreciated that.

Douglas Ross made a suggestion about the meeting that the minister has offered. An important

part of the minister's speech was to say that we can work together, but we need to have space in the Parliament to do that. Douglas Ross and I are keen that the minister moves forward with that suggestion.

I will allow Monica Lennon and Beatrice Wishart to decide among themselves whose constituency Louise Caldwell is a part of. Louise's contribution cannot be overstated, and her efforts show that campaigning by people in their communities can have a real effect on us in the Scottish Parliament. Campaigning can move mountains; it can make such a difference to people. There is no denying the crucial work that is being done to have spaces for people who experience pregnancy loss so that they can recover and have the care and support that they so desperately need.

An important point was raised about funding for tailored support and training so that we can get tangible outcomes for people. I am sure that the minister understands that we will be looking for that in the framework as we go through it, now that it has been produced.

We all agree on the important point of the graded model of care, which provides a comprehensive pathway. As we go through the document, we will be able to pull out those individual bits.

We know from the scoping exercise national overview report that there are inconsistencies across health boards. I have had only a brief look at the documents, so I hope that that will be addressed in a way that ensures that we can identify outcomes.

Gillian Mackay spoke very well in her opening speech about the organisations that we know do such great work with the NHS. The one that springs to mind is Sands, which operates in her area.

In conclusion, we all need to work together on this issue. I thank the Scottish Government for bringing the debate to the chamber, and I hope that we can move forward in a way that ensures that people get the best outcomes in this area of care.

16:45

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): Today's debate has been valuable, although I give the Government another rap over the knuckles for not delivering the framework for members to read prior to the debate, because that should have happened. However, I think that the Government has taken that on board, and it is probably a lesson to learn in the context of such emotive debates.

I thank Louise Caldwell for her continuing campaigning and petitioning—she has won an award for her work, as Monica Lennon said—and the rest of the people in the gallery. I also thank the men in the chamber, as I thought that they—Fulton MacGregor, Brian Whittle, Bob Doris and Douglas Ross—delivered really good speeches today. It is important that we remember that men are partners in the whole process.

Bob Doris's speech in particular was very good. For the first time ever, I have felt confident today, 15 years later, to talk about a 12-week miscarriage that I experienced. I received incredible care at the Borders general hospital—the BGH, as we call it in the Borders. It did not have separate rooms, but the gynaecologist and the nursing staff were very caring and compassionate, and I had access to a quiet room, although it was in an area where there were heavily pregnant women.

Like Bob Doris, I was caught up in the chaos of the news; the staff did the best that they could, but I did not really understand what was going on around me. What has not been mentioned today is the whole process—you have to take on board a lot of information about what will happen next and the surgical procedure.

Beyond that, many members have talked knowledgeably about the aftermath of everything. I remember specifically not telling anybody other than my very close family. They then all decided that I should go to a family wedding. I felt different, with the hormones and the emotions, and coping with the changes and the recovery from the surgical procedure, and I just did not want to talk about it.

I thought that it was so clever of Gillian Mackay, Rona Mackay, Douglas Ross, Sue Webber and others to talk about the taboo and the stigma. I was not able to talk about it—I was not ready, and I probably have not been ready to do so until this day. When I was offered the opportunity to speak about miscarriage, I thought, “Yes, I'm ready now”. That is 15 years later, so one can imagine how raw it feels for so many other people.

Brian Whittle, Carol Mochan and other members talked about the mental health aspects, and support and training for the workforce of health professionals. That is so important. Members also talked about ensuring that services are accessible everywhere, including in rural areas. I know that the minister is from a rural area, so she gets those rural issues. It should not be a postcode lottery.

As I said, I did not feel as though I was being discriminated against because I did not have a separate space, because my mind—my head space—did not register it. Looking back, however, I think that that is important, particularly for women who have multiple miscarriages and who have

trouble conceiving; it must be so retraumatising to go back through that.

The framework that we are looking at is important in enabling us to understand where those separate spaces are not offered, and to gather the data that will allow the Scottish Government to deliver on its promises. However, I want to be frank with the minister that the timeframe—as my colleague Sue Webber said—will be quite challenging for the Scottish Government. There are reasons why NHS boards do not offer separate spaces, mental health support and workforce support, but I suppose that our ambition is for everyone to have access to deal with grieving and loss in those private spaces.

Brian Whittle talked about miscarriage being not just a medical event but a long-term emotional and psychological event. It is important that, as Jean Turner, executive director of the Scotland Patients Association stressed, we recognise that psychological support can be as much a priority as physical care for women who are experiencing miscarriage.

When I was considering what to cover in my speech, one of the things that I wanted to highlight was rural access. As many members know, I live and work in, and represent people from, a rural area. More than 90 per cent of women in Caithness are forced to make a 210-mile round trip to Inverness to access maternity services, and women in Dumfries and Galloway have to travel 70 miles because maternity services are centralised. As other members have said, I have not had time to read the report, but I hope that it will address the issues that women are having while travelling for care.

Finally, I want to summarise a number of areas that I believe are really important with regard to this issue. They are: consistent provision; separate spaces; better mental health and bereavement support; improved access to treatment in every region; and better data collection.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Jenni Minto to wind up on behalf of the Scottish Government. If the minister could take us up to 5 o'clock, that would be grand.

16:51

Jenni Minto: The debate this afternoon has again highlighted how vital it is to prioritise the healthcare needs of women. I thank every member who has shared their personal miscarriage or stillbirth story this afternoon and those who have shared their constituents' journeys. I have spoken to Monica Lennon about this previously. It is an absolute privilege to listen

to her constituents and to understand how she can make a difference.

Speaking personally, one of my constituents came to me and described the situation that she ended up in, having to travel to a hospital where she was in the same space as women who were about to give birth, and the impact that that had on her and her partner. That has stuck with me and has been my leading light, as Louise Caldwell has been for Monica Lennon and Beatrice Wishart.

It is a privilege to hear such stories and to know that we can try to make a difference. I hope and believe that the work that we have been doing to improve miscarriage support in Scotland will move in that direction. I therefore thank everyone in the chamber for the tone of the debate and for raising their points.

Brian Whittle and others raised mental health. I touched on the meetings that I have had with Held in Our Hearts and the help at home that it provides here in Lothian and in NHS Highland. That organisation recognises and understands that women and families need support at the appropriate time. The women whom I met who had received that support were clear that the personal phone call that they got from Held in Our Hearts staff or volunteers had helped their mental health and wellbeing and—if “coming to terms” is not quite the right phrase to use—their ability to find a path through their baby loss. That is why I was pleased to be able to agree funding for Held in Our Hearts in the current financial year and in the following year.

Bob Doris and Fulton MacGregor both referred to Shona Robison’s debate in the Parliament a couple of years ago. When I read the *Official Report* of that debate, I was struck by the frequent use of the word “stigma”. I agree with Rachael Hamilton that the men in the chamber today have shown their compassion and understanding of the situation. The fact that they have been able to talk about the situations that they have personally experienced or that they recognise from their constituents is incredibly important. I thank them very much for doing so.

Douglas Ross gave us the quote:

“you’re the midwife no-one wants to meet but I’m really glad I did.”

I am fairly sure that I heard that story when I was at Dr Gray’s hospital. It shows the compassion that we need from all our healthcare staff. I hope that the framework that we have released today gives health boards the structure to ensure that there is support for their staff.

Monica Lennon: I agree that the antidote to stigma is compassion, love and care. A trauma-informed approach does not happen by chance. I

have had a look at the framework and I am pleased that trauma-informed support is mentioned throughout it.

How can the minister reassure the Parliament that there will be investment in training and education, not just for the workforce in our maternity wards but for those working in primary care, and to ensure that, as others have mentioned, we reach workplaces, homes and communities?

Jenni Minto: I was about to move on to that. As I said earlier, I am delighted to announce that the Scottish Government has agreed £1.5 million of funding to support miscarriage care. I would like to go further than that—I am still arguing to go further—but I am so pleased that I have got that £1.5 million to allocate as appropriate.

We will ask NHS boards to assess what their services are delivering now and how we can progress that support. Very close work is happening between my officials and NHS boards on that. It is one of the conversations that we may have at a future meeting with officials and, I hope, with Professor Justine Craig, our chief midwifery officer.

Bob Doris raised a point about research. The Scottish Government works very closely with Tommy’s, which is a leader in miscarriage research. We meet regularly for discussions including on on-going research and clinical trials. The chief scientist in the Scottish Government also works to support and increase the level of high-quality research in Scotland. Those are other ways in which we are looking at improving knowledge across Scotland and, perhaps, finding some solutions.

Brian Whittle: One thing that strikes me, which was not discussed much during the debate, is that, after miscarriage, and especially after ectopic pregnancy, there can be a significant impact on fertility. Is there a way in which we can make sure that the physical impact on fertility of both of those can be linked to in vitro fertilisation? How do we make those part of the process?

Jenni Minto: That is quite a wide-ranging question. I recognise exactly the point that he makes about fertility and ectopic pregnancy. There is a pathway and a framework for that—I am very happy to get more information and come back to the member on that.

I am so pleased that Beatrice Wishart talked about the northern star ward at NHS Shetland’s Gilbert Bain hospital. It is a star. I hope that other health boards can see that, review it and work towards matching that standard.

I am grateful to everyone for their input to this important debate. I am also grateful for the hard

work that the chairs of the working groups have undertaken, for their leadership and for the time that they have given to ensure that the framework for miscarriage care in Scotland and the progesterone pathway are as strong as they can be. They will make a difference to the lives of women who go through miscarriage or threatened miscarriage in future.

I am deeply grateful to the professionals who take care of women and their families every day in Scotland following a miscarriage. That includes the professionals who break bad news, the staff who take care of women following a confirmed miscarriage and the third sector organisations that look after women and their families. I also thank the people with lived experience who have fought so hard to bring about the change.

Finally, I thank everyone in the chamber for their speeches. I look forward to continuing the discussion.

Great British Energy Bill

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16346, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on a legislative consent motion on the Great British Energy Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation. I invite members who wish to speak in the debate to press their request-to-speak button.

17:01

The Acting Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero and Energy (Gillian Martin): Thank you, Presiding Officer, for the opportunity to debate the motion to provide legislative consent to the UK Government's Great British Energy Bill. I look forward to the discussion ahead.

After extensive engagement with the UK Government on certain clauses, we now propose that the Scottish Parliament give consent to the bill. As members might be aware, three UK Government amendments were tabled only on Tuesday this week; we are currently considering the amendments and whether a further supplementary legislative consent memorandum is necessary. However, I stress that the Parliament's decision on legislative consent today will cover only the memorandum that was lodged on 8 August and the supplementary memorandum that was lodged on 28 January.

Since the bill's introduction, my officials and I have worked with the UK Government to address issues in the bill that concern the constitutional position of the Parliament.

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): [*Made a request to intervene.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: There is an intervention from Edward Mountain, who joins us remotely.

Edward Mountain: Sorry, Presiding Officer—I did not want to make an intervention. I just wanted to indicate that I want to speak in the debate. I misread the instructions on the keypad.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Thank you, Mr Mountain. That is clear.

Gillian Martin: The discussions with the UK Government have centred around clause 5 of the bill, which requires the secretary of state to

“prepare a statement of strategic priorities for Great British Energy.”

Subsection (4) of that clause states:

“The Secretary of State must consult the Scottish Ministers before including in a statement under this section anything which concerns a subject matter provision about which would be within the legislative competence of the

Scottish Parliament, if contained in an Act of that Parliament.”

We were concerned that that subsection merely compels the UK ministers to consult the Scottish Government on Great British Energy’s strategic priorities. We feel that it is crucial that those priorities do not diverge from or conflict with Scottish objectives such that it is imperative that the UK Government should seek the consent of Scottish ministers in that area and not simply consult.

I am pleased to confirm that we have worked constructively with the UK Government on that and it has recognised the need for that to be very clear. UK Government ministers tabled an amendment to the bill on 23 January, stipulating that, without the consent of Scottish ministers, the secretary of state cannot include in a statement of strategic priorities anything that is within devolved legislative competence.

I also wrote to minister Michael Shanks about clause 6 of the bill, which enables the secretary of state to give directions to GB Energy and states that they must consult such persons as they consider appropriate. I requested assurance that, in practice, consultation with the Scottish Government would be included under the clause 6 provision. I am pleased to inform the Parliament that I received written assurance on 23 January that the Scottish Government will be consulted on directions that relate to a matter that is within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament.

These outcomes, which have come from open and constructive engagement between the two Governments, show the benefits of a positive working relationship between Administrations, and I am grateful to UK ministers and their officials for that approach.

In the past few months, in parallel with our legislative discussions, my officials and I have worked with the UK Government to establish how GB Energy may further help Scotland to seize the opportunity of the energy transition. We already have a very highly developed pipeline of renewables in Scotland, so, as the company develops, I want to see what additionality it can provide, particularly for communities and for nascent technologies.

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I wonder whether, in her discussions with UK ministers, the acting cabinet secretary has been able to discern exactly what the purpose of GB Energy is. Can she explain to the Parliament what it exists to do? We are at a complete loss at this end.

Gillian Martin: This does seem to be a hot topic. I have had those discussions not just with ministers but with Juergen Maier. Juergen Maier

clearly set out this week what GB Energy is and is not. It is really a matter for Labour members to answer the question whether what GB Energy was purported to be prior to the election has actually come to fruition. I am on record as having some concerns around that myself.

On the substance of the bill, however, we are in agreement that we want to work with the UK Government in ensuring that GB Energy provides additionality to what is already happening in the privately owned landscape. The UK Government has said that it is looking for GB Energy to crowd in investment, including by backing more nascent technologies in the sector, which will be critical to reaching net zero. We will be able to share extensive knowledge of the Scottish energy sector, to ensure support for clean energy production projects in Scotland at the earliest opportunity. I thank the UK Government for the constructive discussions on that.

Despite Scotland already having a strong pipeline of clean energy and growing supply-chain opportunities, there are many opportunities for Scotland still to grasp as we advance our position as one of the world’s leading countries in renewable energy.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees that all relevant provisions of the Great British Energy Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 25 July 2024 and subsequently amended, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): I call Edward Mountain to speak on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee.

17:07

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am pleased that I am now coming in at the right moment.

I am pleased to contribute to the debate on behalf of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. Before getting into the detail of the devolved elements of the bill, I wish to outline some serious concerns about the process that the legislative consent motion has brought to light. We are debating the motion barely 48 hours after our committee’s report was published, which has left little time for anyone to consider our findings.

I recognise that the issues that we experience in scrutinising legislative consent memorandums are often unavoidable. We are part of a process taking place not only in this Parliament but in another Parliament, with its own deadlines, with two Governments negotiating in a way that we cannot track. Parliamentary scrutiny too often falls victim

to unsatisfactory process that sidelines committees. I strongly believe that committees should never be bystanders, providing a last-minute rubber-stamp on inter-Government negotiations. We should be active participants. To that end, I urge the Governments to work harder together to ensure that the Parliament is given its proper constitutional role in the process.

Our report sets out a clear position. When the Scottish Government lodges a memorandum that sets out a holding position, it should lodge a more substantive memorandum as soon as possible. That should not wait until the final amendments are lodged. Committees need proper information at an early stage of their scrutiny, so that they can make an impact.

I will move on to the detail of the bill. Clauses 5 and 6 were the ones that raised issues. Clause 5 requires the secretary of state to

“prepare a statement of strategic priorities for Great British Energy.”

Initially, the bill required the Scottish Government to be consulted about that. The Scottish Government requested that that be changed to require its consent. Intergovernment negotiations went well, as we have heard, and the bill is to be amended in line with that request. The committee has often called for the Governments to work together, so we are pleased to see that co-operation, although I reiterate that we should have had a much clearer statement much sooner than we did about what the Government was pursuing.

Clause 6 of the bill grants the secretary of state the power to issue directions to GB Energy. The committee and the Scottish Government have received assurances that that power would be used only rarely, in limited circumstances—for example, in relation to national security—but the bill provides no such limitations.

We have been assured that the UK Government will consult the Scottish ministers before issuing directions that engage devolved interests. The Scottish Government says that it is content with those assurances, but the committee remains concerned. If both Governments agree that the Scottish Government should be consulted, we are unclear why such a provision has not been included in the bill. The inclusion of such a provision would provide a firm, permanent legal footing, as opposed to a non-binding assurance from the Government of the day. Our report calls on the Scottish Government to request that change in whatever time remains of the process.

With that one reservation, the committee agreed, by a majority, to recommend that consent be given. However, what we have seen underlines the importance of ensuring that committees are involved at an early stage so that their concerns

do not end up being sidelined because we have run out of time. I urge the Scottish Government and the UK Government to do what they can to improve the process in the future.

17:11

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): GB Energy is a sham. The Prime Minister is taking my constituents for fools. The structure of GB Energy is absurd, and it will take 20 years to deliver the promised 1,000 jobs. In the next five years, we can expect, at most, 200 jobs to be created. The UK Government’s plan is not a credible plan for economic growth. Instead, it represents 20 years of pain and decline for the north-east of Scotland. Tens of thousands of jobs will be lost as Labour shuts down the oil and gas sector without offering a meaningful replacement.

Labour is blatantly attempting to hoodwink the public. Before the general election, Ed Miliband promised to cut energy bills by £300 through Labour’s net zero policy. What rubbish. Where is that promise now? Why would the Scottish Government wave through the legislative consent motion? Maybe it does not have a plan of its own. The energy strategy and just transition plan is years late, and it is still nowhere to be seen. The devolved Scottish National Party Government seems content to agree to the motion even though the details of GB Energy are so thin on the ground.

We already have applications for developments in the North Sea that will provide 30GW of energy. GB Energy will have no impact on that investment, so I have to ask: what is the point? It is a political bung that is being provided in an attempt to placate the residents of Aberdeen.

How will all that energy be transported? It will be transported by destroying our countryside and communities with monster pylons. The Labour Party wants to carpet bomb the countryside with pylons and substations, and the SNP devolved Government is only too happy to supply the ammunition.

We need to drill more wells, issue more licences and extract more oil. The economically illiterate socialists on the other side of the chamber, supported by the extremist, unhinged Greens, have tried for years to destroy the livelihoods of my constituents. No one in Aberdeen is buying it. The pathetic and desperate attempts to throw the words “just transition” in front of everything that we do in relation to wind turbines and battery storage do not wash with my constituents in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.

Oil and gas from the North Sea are good for Britain, good for Scotland, good for the environment and good for jobs. The devolved SNP

Government likes to talk about how we are the Saudi Arabia of renewables. What a lot of hot air. Why do we not talk about using all the oil and gas infrastructure that has been built up over years and generated billions in tax profits?

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): Does my fellow committee member Douglas Lumsden intend to speak to the terms of the LCM at any point, rather than engaging in a party-political rant?

Douglas Lumsden: Bob Doris knows only too well that the LCM is about the creation of GB Energy, which will provide absolutely nothing for my constituents. Instead of supporting an industry that brings in money, Labour has made it clear through the establishment of GB Energy that it is doubling down on an industry that we subsidise through contracts for difference and constraint payments. I have nothing against building a renewable energy source, but why on earth are we not supporting oil and gas extraction?

GB Energy is a policy of national self-harm. Yet again, the nationalists and the socialists are doing what Putin and his cronies want. Perhaps if the Labour Party took less money from eco zealots and started talking to oil and gas workers, Anas Sarwar and Keir Starmer would know that and would understand the truly existential issue in Aberdeen. Just as Harold Wilson closed more coal mines than any other Prime Minister, Keir Starmer will be the Prime Minister who shuts down the North Sea oil and gas industry.

No one—and I mean no one—knows what GB Energy is going to do, but I can tell members what it will not do. It will not stand up for oil and gas workers, it will not support oil and gas extraction and it will not make bills cheaper. What makes bills cheaper? More domestic oil and gas production and drilling, which has the side effect of providing secure and well-paid employment for years to come. That is what my constituents need right now, not empty promises from the SNP or empty offices from Labour.

The Presiding Officer: Before I call Ms Boyack, I remind all members that language is important and that we should strive to be courteous and respectful to one another.

17:15

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Some constructive points have been made here thus far, particularly by the acting cabinet secretary and the committee convener, but Douglas Lumsden's utterly negative and inaccurate speech has not helped the work that political parties across this chamber need to do.

There has been constructive dialogue between Governments. It took a Labour Government in Westminster to actually take the decisive steps to start delivering.

Douglas Lumsden: We were promised 1,000 jobs in Aberdeen but have now been told that that is going to take 20 years. Were we misled?

Sarah Boyack: It is utterly inaccurate to ignore the work that is happening already. It has been just months since we got here. The election was in July and now here we are having practical discussions. We have already seen investment across the UK, a change in renewables and new green investment in industry, so we can see those jobs starting and there has been important progress.

Those who read the committee report will see—

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): Will the member give way?

Sarah Boyack: No, thank you. I am actually going to make a positive comment about one of the member's contributions.

When Michael Shanks spoke to the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee, he highlighted that this is a different way of doing things in this country and that it will ensure clean, secure power, with public ownership and investment being key to ensuring that all our communities have a stake in the future of our energy supply. That is surely something that this Parliament must support.

Making sure that we have energy security that will benefit our communities and tackle the climate crisis while creating new jobs is crucial. If members look at the *Official Report* of that meeting or at what Juergen Maier has said, they will see that GB Energy will incentivise new and emerging technologies such as marine renewables and floating offshore wind, so that we maximise the opportunities for a range of new clean energy and heat supplies and, critically, can support supply chains in Scotland and investment in green manufacturing.

We need a more joined-up approach, so it is not an exaggeration to say that GB Energy is absolutely essential to the future of the UK and Scotland, delivering new jobs in our communities and working for the planet.

I will go back to the work that is being done by the two Governments. It is important that our Governments are serious about creating new jobs and tackling the climate emergency, but our local authorities are absolutely critical too. If we look at our Nordic neighbours or at other European countries, we see many more municipal and co-operatively owned heat and power networks. We have not had those yet in Scotland and we need more leadership.

It is crucial to empower our communities and spread local knowledge. They are ready to go but we are not getting enough from the Scottish Government, so that constructive approach between Governments is critical. The £3.3 billion that is coming from the national wealth fund for community projects and investment is absolutely critical, but we need to see delivery on the ground.

Bob Doris: Will Sarah Boyack give way?

Sarah Boyack: I will take a brief comment from Bob Doris.

Bob Doris: I will be very brief. I wonder whether Sarah Boyack can understand why the majority of committee members would have preferred clause 6 of the bill to ensure that the Scottish Government is consulted and ideally would have to give its consent in relation to GB Energy and devolved matters? The UK Government has not conceded on that point, although it was clearly the committee's preference.

The Presiding Officer: Please conclude, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: I have looked at the committee's discussions. Intelligent questions were asked of the acting cabinet secretary and the energy minister, Michael Shanks. The fact that we are here today with what I hope will be future clarity about those issues is critical.

The points that Edward Mountain made are important. We need to make sure that we get effective accountability and scrutiny for any process that we put through this Parliament, but the constructive dialogue that we have seen so far is critical.

The whole Parliament should support the advent of GB Energy, given the difference that it will make. We live in an era in which we are seeing climate change denial, which is not acceptable. We need to work together. We do not have to agree on everything, but we need to support new investment in our country, because—

The Presiding Officer: Thank you, Ms Boyack.

Sarah Boyack: —our constituents need that, and they need it now.

17:20

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): Scottish Greens will back the legislative consent motion at decision time, but I want to sound a note of caution, because we have come through a period in which devolution in Scotland and Wales faced unprecedented attacks from the previous Westminster Government. Intergovernmental ways of working in the UK are still largely based on precedent and good will, rather than being codified in legislation as they are

in most other countries that have a devolved context. Ways of working that are based on principles of respect, such as the Sewel convention, have been seriously undermined and contested in recent years to a point where they have become almost meaningless.

In the context of the Great British Energy Bill, I welcome the changes that the Scottish Government has secured to embed a more consultative approach between the Administrations, but there is still a danger of overreach from a future Westminster Government. There will be a role for this Parliament to bring transparency to those relationships, and the convener of the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee made some important points about the role of the committees in that.

When we reflect on the evidence that the committee received, there is clearly a sense that the Labour Government is working more collaboratively with Scottish ministers, which is very welcome. However, despite all the bluster from Anas Sarwar at First Minister's question time today, when I asked Michael Shanks at committee about the role of GB Energy in promoting nuclear projects, he sounded pretty reasonable. He said:

"Clearly, we have a political difference on nuclear".

He went on:

"there are no plans and there will be no engagement on that issue, because it is clear that the Scottish Government would block those applications.

That is the legitimate position that the Scottish Government has taken on that planning matter, and I do not think that there is a confrontation or a conflict on that."—[*Official Report, Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee*, 21 January 2025; c 53.]

That was real clarity—no new nuclear in Scotland. That is what Labour head office says, and that is probably the best news that Labour back benchers have had all week.

However, Stephen Kerr raised a valid question, because it is still not really clear what GB Energy will do in Scotland, how many jobs it will create and how long it will take to do that. I take on board Sarah Boyack's point that it is early days, but I note for clarity that there is a huge record of success in the development of renewable energy in Scotland, which is bringing down bills and keeping the lights on across the UK. For example, the onshore wind sector deal, which the Greens were proud to work on with SNP ministers during our time in government, is now starting to help to double the generation capacity from onshore wind in Scotland by 2030. With that will come opportunities for community benefit and community ownership, and that is real energy security.

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

Mark Ruskell: I am just closing.

I hope that GB Energy will build on the success that we have had in Scotland and grow the economy in the right way to create the green jobs that are needed to meet our energy needs going forward. For those reasons, on balance, we will support the LCM at decision time.

17:23

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I have not been on the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee and I have not been immersed in the details of the legislative consent motion, but there is a striking contrast between the Scottish Government's relationship with the previous UK Government and its relationship with the current one. It is a step in the right direction, although it is still clunky, as the convener of the committee acknowledged. Mark Ruskell is right—we need to codify an awful lot of the relationships rather than relying on good will. Perhaps a federalist structure is, finally, the answer to the issue.

I want to talk about community benefit, which was an important subject in our discussions with the Scottish Government during the budget process. Those who are close observers will have noticed from our exchange of letters that we secured a commitment that the revenues from ScotWind will be used for day-to-day spending only in extreme circumstances. That was in severe doubt last year, when the Government was dipping into those resources to fund health and other services. That would be a concern in the long term, because we need to use those revenues for economic benefit in communities.

The change that is coming is significant. Look at the pump storage facilities that are coming in in Perth and Kinross, Dumfries and Galloway, and the Highlands; significant extra housing and improvements to roads, schools and health services will be required in areas where those services are already struggling to cope. We therefore need to have a debate about how we use the revenues from ScotWind and the community benefit revenues from many onshore and offshore wind and pump storage schemes, so that those communities can see a direct benefit now, in order to cope with the pressures that are being faced, and a lasting legacy. SSE has given an indication of the extra 1,000 houses that it will build to help with the construction of its facilities.

Sarah Boyack: Will the member take an intervention?

Willie Rennie: I have only four minutes, and I would like to get through a few other things.

That gives an indication of the pressure that is to come. We should not see a restriction on activities and development in those areas because of the lack of local services and infrastructure.

That brings us to the revenues themselves. There are two questions. How much do we secure from the schemes and what do we use it for? Until now, there has been significant investment in what we might call astroturf schemes—local facilities and halls. In communities that have already seen significant benefits, there are only so many astroturf pitches that can be put down, so what should we be using those resources for? I would argue that we should be using them for housing, schools, roads and so on, as leverage to get more resources into those communities.

That is something that Angus MacDonald, my colleague in the House of Commons, has been talking about. He has suggested that 5 per cent of the revenue of any particular renewable energy scheme should be ploughed back into that kind of community benefit. I do not know whether that figure is right—it might work for some and not for others—but we should be debating how we can best get and use resources from those schemes in order to ensure that we have lasting and immediate benefits for those areas. In communities such as Shetland, where there are great aspirations to build tunnels between the islands rather than relying on ferries, there is a significant desire to secure such investment in order to leave a lasting legacy.

I hope that the minister will respond to some of those remarks in her closing speech. I would like to see the Government go further to make sure that we ring fence, secure and invest greater resources in the right areas for a lasting legacy.

The Presiding Officer: I call the cabinet secretary to wind up. Cabinet secretary, you have up to three minutes.

Kevin Stewart: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. My understanding was that there would be time for a contribution from the SNP back benches within the time allocated for this debate on the LCM, but that does not seem to be the case, and I am wondering why it is not the case. I was going to be that speaker, and I wanted to highlight the fact that, this week, Juergen Maier, the chair of GB Energy, admitted that it would be 20 years before Aberdeen got 1,000 jobs and could not put a date on when Labour's pledge to cut energy—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, the points that you have just raised are not, in fact, a point of order, so I will ask that you refrain from making them.

Kevin Stewart: I am afraid that I have made a point of order—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart—

Kevin Stewart: And that I have the time to make a point of order—

The Presiding Officer: Mr Stewart, I am happy to address your query about timing, although it is not a point of order.

The Parliament voted for a business motion that allocated a specific amount of time to a specific item. That happened. The matter was proposed at the Parliamentary Bureau and agreed by the Parliamentary Bureau, and it came into the Parliament and was voted on and accepted by all members, including those here, I imagine. The issue has not been raised until this moment, and the Parliament has allotted 30 minutes to this item. We are taking up time, which is being taken away from the debate, so I would be grateful if we could proceed.

Stephen Kerr: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Recognising the genuine concern that Kevin Stewart has expressed about the importance of the debate and the time allocated to it, can I apply under the relevant standing order for the debate to be extended by 30 minutes?

The Presiding Officer: Thank you for your comments, Mr Kerr. At this point, I cannot agree to such a request. The business of the week is fully discussed at the Parliamentary Bureau. It is then brought to the chamber, where every member has an opportunity to speak against or to oppose a motion that they are not content with. Therefore, I will not allow this to continue, because that would be discourteous to the vast majority of members.

Stephen Kerr: On a point of order, Presiding Officer. May I seek your guidance?

The Presiding Officer: Briefly, Mr Kerr.

Stephen Kerr: In what circumstances would it be appropriate, as is done in other settings, to extend the time that is allocated for the debate by 30 minutes by virtue of a motion of the Parliament?

The Presiding Officer: Mr Kerr, we are currently conducting an item of parliamentary business. We are not in the chamber at this moment to discuss how we run parliamentary business. I am happy to do that with Mr Kerr or any other member in another setting. In this instance, it is not appropriate and I am not going to think of hypothetical situations that I might address by allowing an extension of business.

I call the cabinet secretary to wind up the debate.

17:32

Gillian Martin: I thank members for their contributions to the debate. I know that there is a great deal to be discussed in relation to what GB Energy is going to be and how it is going to be developed, and I want to be involved in those discussions, because I think that there is an issue with what was promised.

Kevin Stewart: I would like to be involved in those discussions, too. I want clarity from the UK Government on how many jobs there will be for Aberdeen. We were promised that there would be 1,000 jobs, but it is now saying that it will take 20 years before Aberdeen will get 1,000 jobs. It pledged to cut energy bills by £300, but Juergen Maier could not give us a timescale for that either. It seems that the UK Government and GB Energy are failing to invest in the north-east of Scotland and in Scotland's renewable industries, and are failing to reduce energy costs for the public and businesses. I wish the cabinet secretary well in her discussions with the UK Government and I hope that she can get answers to the questions that I and my constituents have.

Gillian Martin: I want to reiterate some of the comments that I made in response to Stephen Kerr. I think that it is for Labour members—those who were parliamentary candidates and those members who are sitting in the seats to my right—to answer why the promises that were made about what GB Energy would do will not come to fruition. I had my doubts about those promises from the start.

I hope that the Parliament votes to give consent to all the clauses in the bill, because I want us to work on the development of the project in good faith. I want GB Energy to work alongside the Scottish Government and Scottish public bodies to support community and local energy projects, which are vital for Scotland's economic growth and net zero ambitions.

I know that I do not have much time, but I want to mention community benefits, which Willie Rennie touched on, although he is not in his seat at the moment. I am doing a separate stream of work to encourage the UK Government to mandate community benefits for all projects. He is absolutely right that there must be legacy benefits and that we should look at the infrastructure that is required, but I do not see GB Energy being part of that work.

We want all Scottish consumers to be able to rely on affordable, sustainable and secure energy for years to come. I am hopeful that GB Energy can play a valuable part in pursuing that goal, but I will leave it there. I move that the Parliament backs the motion and grants legislative consent to the clauses that are in the bill.

Decision Time

17:33

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

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

The first question is, that motion S6M-16353, in the name of Jenni Minto, on improving miscarriage care, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament recognises the devastating impact that miscarriage and stillbirth can have on women and their families, and extends its condolences to all those who have been affected; acknowledges the importance of good stillbirth care and that improvements continue to be made by NHS boards and through the stillbirth national bereavement care pathway; notes that, although miscarriage care in Scotland is generally considered to be of high quality, there is still more to do to standardise and end the variation in the care and support delivered across Scotland; welcomes efforts from NHS boards to further improve miscarriage care following recommendations in *The Lancet* series, *Miscarriage Matters*, and Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and NICE guidelines around the use of progesterone; thanks hardworking NHS staff and all those who have contributed to the progress to date for their care and professionalism when caring for women experiencing miscarriage; welcomes the publication of the *Delivery Framework for Miscarriage Care in Scotland and the Progesterone Pathway* as key steps in implementing a graded model of care that will ensure that women receive tailored support from their first miscarriage; supports the provision of dedicated facilities for women experiencing unexpected pregnancy complications, miscarriage or still birth, and believes that it is vital that everyone in society, including employers, works together to break the stigma surrounding miscarriage and stillbirth to ensure that women and their families can access the information, care and support that is right for them.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S6M-16346, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on a legislative consent motion for the Great British Energy Bill, which is United Kingdom legislation, 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.

17:34

Meeting suspended.

17:38

On resuming—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come to the vote on motion S6M-16346, in the name of Alasdair Allan. Members should cast their votes now.

For

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)
 Choudhury, Foysol (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)
 Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 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)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green) [Proxy vote cast by Gillian Mackay]
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 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)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine)

(SNP)
 O’Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Thomson, Michelle (Falkirk East) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)
 Yousaf, Humza (Glasgow Pollok) (SNP)

Against

Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 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)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Simpson, Graham (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)

Abstentions

Regan, Ash (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-16346, in the name of Alasdair Allan, on a legislative consent motion for the Great British Energy Bill, which is UK legislation, is: For 88, Against 28, Abstentions 1.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees that all relevant provisions of the Great British Energy Bill, introduced in the House of Commons on 25 July 2024 and subsequently amended, so far as these matters fall within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament and alter the executive competence of the Scottish Ministers, should be considered by the UK Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:38.

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