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Scottish Parliament

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[The Presiding Officer opened the meeting at 11:41]

Christina McKelvie

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): Colleagues, I am so deeply saddened by the death of our dear parliamentary colleague Christina McKelvie MSP. On behalf of all at the Scottish Parliament, I offer my most sincere condolences to Christina's partner, our friend and colleague Keith Brown MSP. To Christina's family and many friends, I say that our entire Parliament—members, staff and all who work in this building—grieves with you.

Christina was a determined and passionate campaigner for social justice and an engaging parliamentarian. I remember her warm welcome when I arrived as a newly elected MSP in 2011. It meant a lot.

Christina served the Parliament as a committee convener and the Government as a minister under three First Ministers. She sponsored the wear it pink campaign in Parliament for many years and said how privileged she felt to be able to use her platform as an MSP to boost the work of others. She expressed her gratitude to all the organisations that provided her with invaluable support as she went through her own treatment for breast cancer.

The flags at Holyrood fly at half mast today as a mark of respect for Christina. A book of condolence for members to sign will be available after First Minister's question time.

We will honour Christina fully in Parliament in the days to come.

The First Minister (John Swinney): Today is an unbearably sad day as we all come to terms with the loss of our generous, kind, loyal and fun-loving colleague Christina McKelvie. Members across the chamber all feel that loss, but my party is aching at the news today.

Christina was a parliamentarian of the highest motivation and the finest nature. I was proud that she was a member of my Government, giving her all to make life better for others, which was always her motivation. She served her constituents, her party and her country with the greatest amount of devotion that was imaginable.

Today, I express to her partner, and my deputy, Keith Brown—one of my dearest friends—and to her sons, Jack and Lewis, my profound sympathy

at their loss and my gratitude for the benefit of having known such a magnificent woman.

The Presiding Officer: I invite members to sit with me in a moment of quiet reflection.

Thank you, colleagues. I suspend the meeting until First Minister's question time at 12 noon.

11:45

Meeting suspended.

12:00

On resuming—

First Minister's Question Time

General Practice Care

1. Russell Findlay (West Scotland) (Con): I begin by paying tribute to Christina McKelvie, who was a respected colleague and a dedicated public servant. My thoughts and those of my party are with her family, friends and colleagues, and I know that her passing this morning, at the age of 57, will be difficult for many who are here today. I note that you, Presiding Officer, have indicated that members will, rightly, have an opportunity to pay full tribute to Christina in due course.

An Audit Scotland report that was published today lays bare serious problems with general practice care in Scotland. The report makes multiple explicit recommendations, including five that should be completed by the Scottish Government within a year. Will the First Minister guarantee that he will deliver the report's recommendations?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I thank Russell Findlay for his kind remarks about my dear colleague Christina McKelvie. I appreciate his condolences to all on the sad news.

The Government will consider the recommendations that are contained in the Audit Scotland report. We are taking forward a series of investments to strengthen access to healthcare in Scotland. General practice is one of the areas in which access is most critical. The Government's investment through the primary care improvement fund, for example, and other steps that have been taken to expand the workforce in general practice are among the practical steps that we are taking to address the issues in the Audit Scotland report.

Russell Findlay: Those commitments should be delivered so that patients can get a face-to-face general practitioner appointment when they need one.

The independent Auditor General's report states that the Government has not met previous pledges, which should have been delivered by 2021. The report calls for

"a clear delivery plan for general practice by the end of 2025 that includes specific actions, timescales and costs."

Will the First Minister confirm that he will bring forward that plan by the end of the year, for the benefit of patients across Scotland?

The First Minister: As I set out in my speech on the national health service in late January, the Government will make a number of different interventions to improve access to healthcare

services. At the heart of that will be access to GP services, as I said in my first answer. The Government has set out our intention to explain the specific interventions that we will make in that respect. That information will be shared publicly very soon.

We start from a high platform, in the sense that Scotland has the highest number of GPs per head of population in the United Kingdom. We are determined to build on that.

We are also determined to expand the workforce in general practice. For example, we have employed more than 3,500 whole-time-equivalent staff in other primary care teams. That is designed to boost access to healthcare. We have also employed an additional 1,300 whole-time-equivalent staff to support general practice through health boards.

Issues about the manner in which members of the public are able to access general practice—which I accept are important—are being responded to by the investments that the Government is making.

Russell Findlay: Another publication that was released today, by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, details serious concerns at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde accident and emergency units. Those problems are consistent with what is happening at hospital emergency departments across Scotland. The regulator says that it has become routine for ambulances to queue up outside the Queen Elizabeth university hospital and for patients to be treated in corridors. The HIS report says that patient safety is being "seriously compromised". Does the First Minister agree that that is unacceptable? Will he explain what steps he will take to put patient safety first?

The First Minister: Patient safety is a fundamental prerequisite of our healthcare system. Healthcare Improvement Scotland's report was designed to address the legitimate concerns that have been raised by representatives of staff in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde emergency departments. I expect the board to implement and address the findings of the report, and I am confident that it will do so. There has been an entire change of leadership in NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, with a new chair, a new chief executive and a new medical director in place. As the chief executive of the health board has made clear publicly, the board is taking forward the necessary reforms at pace and at scale.

On the wider question, I understand the concerns about access to accident and emergency services. I reassure members of the public that, for some weeks, the performance of A and E units against the four-hour standard has been improving as we recover from the significant

disruption as a consequence of the flu outbreak that dominated over the Christmas and new year period and well into January. The position in A and E departments is strengthening.

On the substance of Russell Findlay's question about Healthcare Improvement Scotland's report, I expect the recommendations to be addressed by the board.

Russell Findlay: For its report, Healthcare Improvement Scotland surveyed NHS doctors and nurses who were working in three separate hospitals. Shockingly, the majority of those who were surveyed said that patients rarely receive care that is either appropriate or timely. The report makes a number of suggestions for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde as well as national recommendations for the Scottish Government. The report advises the Government to define new standards and introduce new guidance to improve the quality and safety of patient care. Those are sensible suggestions that could improve patient experiences and reduce NHS Scotland waiting times. Will John Swinney take the necessary and decisive action to make those changes? If so, by when?

The First Minister: Those are urgent priorities for me, because they go to the heart of what I think is the key issue that is affecting the performance of our healthcare system in a number of respects, which is our ability to manage flow within healthcare settings. For example, if a hospital is at full occupancy and congested, it is difficult for staff in an emergency department to admit individuals into the hospital, and if we do not have enough social care provision in the community, we will have delayed discharges from our hospitals. There is an integrated link between emergency departments, hospital occupancy and delayed discharge. I assure Mr Findlay that all three of those elements relating to flow within the healthcare system are priorities for the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and me as we undertake weekly scrutiny of the health system's performance and the work to reduce waiting times.

We also want to strengthen access to general practice, which was the point that Mr Findlay made in his first question, so that individuals with healthcare requirements can get appropriate treatment and support at the earliest possible opportunity. Of course, a wide variety of treatments and support are available through pharmacies, general practice and other allied health professionals to whom we wish to improve access.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (Healthcare Improvement Scotland Report)

2. Anas Sarwar (Glasgow) (Lab): I am so sorry to hear of the passing of Christina McKelvie. I know that the pain of her loss will be felt most deeply in the Scottish National Party, but it will also be felt across the Parliament. My thoughts and those of the entire Scottish Labour Party are with Keith Brown, Christina's wider family, her friends and all her colleagues across the Parliament. She was a dedicated local MSP, and her campaigning on women's health, particularly as she battled breast cancer herself, brought many of the issues that are too often ignored into the public eye. Although she could be fierce politically, she was also great fun. Across the chamber and, I assure members, across all parties, many have lost a friend. Our deepest condolences go to all her family, friends and colleagues at this difficult time.

The chamber will know of my long-standing concerns about the leadership and culture at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Today's Healthcare Improvement Scotland report into emergency departments across Greater Glasgow and Clyde is devastating. Corridor care was normalised, and repeated concerns from front-line accident and emergency staff were ignored. Worse still, staff were bullied and silenced, and patient care was compromised, often with devastating consequences. Does John Swinney think that that is acceptable?

The First Minister (John Swinney): First, I thank Anas Sarwar for his generous remarks. I appreciate his words about our dear colleague.

In relation to the Healthcare Improvement Scotland report on NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, I do not think that the practice that Mr Sarwar recounts is acceptable. That is why Healthcare Improvement Scotland has responded to the concerns that were expressed by the clinicians.

I acknowledge the sustained questioning that Mr Sarwar has led on the leadership of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. As he will know, new leadership is in place that is committed to addressing all the questions that are raised in the report. Professor Jann Gardner, the new chief executive of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, has publicly indicated her commitment to addressing the recommendations "at pace and scale" to ensure that the issues are properly addressed.

Anas Sarwar: I have been raising concerns for years with successive Scottish National Party health secretaries and First Ministers, but here we are again. This is just the latest report, after 29 doctors raised concerns almost two years ago.

The report exposes serious issues around the culture of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and follows the same pattern: patient safety is being compromised; staff are being ignored, bullied and silenced; and when staff blow the whistle, management denies their claims, intimidates them and attempts a cover-up. Staff describe the working environment as “brutal” and “inhumane”, and they talk of “moral distress” or of being “haunted” by some patient experiences, leading to harm. They say that

“It’s a constant battle to keep patients and staff safe”

and that

“there is no support from management”.

After years of warnings and hollow claims of lessons learned, why is the SNP Government allowing that rotten—and, at times, fatal—culture to continue?

The First Minister: We do not accept it. We do not see it as acceptable in any way, nor are we resigned to it. That is why Healthcare Improvement Scotland went in and undertook that investigation. It is why the leadership of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said today that those issues will be addressed “at pace” and with urgency.

Let me use this platform to make it abundantly clear to every health board in the country that the culture that is referred to by Healthcare Improvement Scotland is completely and utterly unacceptable. In general, Scotland has a formidable record on improvements to patient safety. Indeed, our patient safety programme is very highly regarded internationally because of the work that it involves. However, the quality and strength of that patient safety programme will be undermined if there is not a culture of accepting the need to tackle the behaviour that the Healthcare Improvement Scotland report highlights. Mr Sarwar has my assurance that, in my communication and that of the health secretary to health boards, we are making it clear that the contents of that report are unacceptable and must be addressed by health boards around the country.

Anas Sarwar: The problem is that patients and staff have heard that before, and the culture continues. The report highlights the “unacceptable normalisation” of corridor care and the patients stuck in ambulances outside accident and emergency departments. Two thirds of staff who were surveyed

“felt patients ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ received appropriate and timely care.”

The Queen Elizabeth hospital has been plagued by issues for years, often with deadly consequences. The most stark is the infection

scandal that cost lives. At every turn, patients, parents and staff have fought for answers but have been frustrated by a rotten culture of cover-up. In 2019, the holding of a public inquiry was agreed, but the culture continues. The board was put into special measures, but the culture continues. It was the first NHS board in Scotland to be investigated for corporate homicide, but the culture continues.

As the latest report shows, patients are still being put at risk by a failing health board that has been empowered time and time again by the SNP Government. It appears that the SNP Government is more interested in protecting managers and institutions than in protecting patients and staff. What will it take for that to change?

The First Minister: I do not accept that characterisation of the Government’s approach. If that were the case, there would not be an inquiry into Scottish hospitals’ performance, and there would not have been a Healthcare Improvement Scotland analysis of NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde. Those are two examples of the Government being prepared to honestly confront acute difficulties in our health service. I would expect that to be the case, and I give Mr Sarwar and the Parliament the assurance that that will always be the case under my leadership. We will confront difficulties openly and honestly to improve the experience of patients.

Mr Sarwar said that there has been a normalisation of corridor care. Let me make it clear to the Parliament that I do not accept that—rather, I will not tolerate it. I will not normalise corridor care. I do not think that it is a good idea to have corridor care. As I referred to in my final answer to Russell Findlay, we have to address issues such as improving the flow of patients through hospitals so that we avoid corridor care.

Mr Sarwar also said that patients are routinely denied appropriate and timely care. I accept that there will be failings in the health service, but I do not think that that is a fair characterisation of the NHS. Many people experience formidably high-quality, professional and loving care from the NHS, and I want to make sure that that is everybody’s experience.

Christina McKelvie

3. **Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green):** This Parliament has lost one of our very best today. I offer my deepest sympathies and those of my party to everyone who knew and loved Christina McKelvie.

Today is a moment of pain and sadness, but Christina’s life and her extraordinary spirit deserve to be celebrated, as well. In her first speech, she said that she

“would rather be a citizen of a nation that looks to persuade and co-operate than bully and cajole”.—[*Official Report*, 14 June 2007; c 718.]

She might have been talking about Scotland as a nation, but I think that those words also captured the kind of person she was and the kind of politician she was.

Lots of people in politics start out with those kinds of values and ideals. Christina was someone who held fast to them. Compassion and kindness were at her core. As Christina’s partner and our colleague Keith Brown said today, she

“lit up every room she was in”.

That was certainly true of this room—our Parliament. She brightened it in every sense.

The only question that I would like to ask the First Minister today is how he thinks that we can all bring kindness and compassion into our work, as Christina did. [*Applause.*]

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am very grateful to Patrick Harvie for his kind words and all that he has said about Christina McKelvie, which I entirely endorse.

It is at moments such as this that some of the conflict that goes on in this Parliament, in politics in general and in the wider political debate is put into sharp relief by the points that Patrick Harvie has put to me. I am no shrinking violet when it comes to defending my position and promoting the position of the Government, so I am not going to say that I am perfect and that everybody else is at fault, because that would just not be the way that it is.

However, there are lessons to be learned from the magnificent generosity of spirit of Christina McKelvie, who, despite the fact that she might have defended the Government’s position vigorously here, from the Government benches, or defended my party’s position from the back benches when she was on the back benches, would also wander out of the chamber with warmth and affection. If anyone—anyone—was facing a moment of difficulty, the first person at their side would be Christina McKelvie. Perhaps we could all take this moment to rebalance and recalibrate how we act and react in our politics, reminded by the astonishing example of Christina McKelvie.

Spring Statement

4. Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I wish to convey my profound sadness at the untimely death of our brave and much-loved colleague Christina McKelvie. I send my heartfelt condolences to Keith and the family. She was truly a force of nature.

To ask the First Minister what the Scottish Government’s response is to the United Kingdom Government’s spring statement. (S6F-03941)

The First Minister (John Swinney): The Government is concerned by a number of details in the UK Government’s spring statement, not least of which is the assessment, which has emerged from the Department for Work and Pensions, that the measures contained in the spring statement are likely to drive 250,000 more people, including 50,000 children, into relative poverty. Those cuts to welfare will have a direct impact on Scotland’s budget. The Fraser of Allander Institute has estimated that it will see a block grant adjustment to our budget that removes £455 million in 2039-40.

Kenneth Gibson: Since Labour came to power, we have seen a shameful litany of broken manifesto promises, from rising household energy bills and the denial of justice for the women against state pension inequality to imposing benefit cuts on disabled people and slashing public services. It is hardly surprising that long-standing Labour members have resigned, denouncing Labour’s betrayal of their own voters. Will the First Minister confirm that, although Labour’s Holyrood branch office meekly and embarrassingly chooses a policy of omertà in the face of UK Labour cuts, the Scottish National Party Government will always stand up for the most vulnerable people in our communities?

The First Minister: The Scottish Government has legislated—for example, when we have acquired new powers on social security—to implement a social security system that is based on dignity and respect. That will always be the approach that we take. We legislated for that in order to ensure that such an approach would be taken in the future.

Mr Gibson has my assurance that those values will always be at the heart of the decisions that the Scottish Government takes. I want to ensure that we put our focus into the necessary work to eradicate child poverty. That will become more challenging as a consequence of the spring statement, because, as we found with the previous Conservative Government, we are once again swimming against a tide of rising poverty levels as a consequence of UK Government decision making. Our data, which was released today, demonstrates that we are seeing reducing levels of child poverty in Scotland, but that pattern will be challenged by the prevailing decisions that have been taken in the spring statement.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): I add my expression of sympathy and condolence to the family and friends of Christina McKelvie and, in particular, to our colleague Keith Brown.

Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that were released yesterday revealed that, by the end of the decade, tax receipts from North Sea oil and gas will slump from £5.4 billion to just £2.3 billion as a result of declining production. How can that be described as a just transition?

The First Minister: Over many years, I have listened to lots of debate—certainly during the 2014 referendum campaign—that have indicated that oil revenues are not going to be a source of strength for Scotland in the future. Mr Hoy is alighting on the challenges that exist as a consequence of a declining oil basin. We have to adjust to that and put in place measures to tackle those issues, and that is what the Government is doing.

Autism and ADHD Diagnosis (Waiting Times)

5. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to reduce waiting times for children and adolescents for the diagnosis of autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. (S6F-03944)

The First Minister (John Swinney): Long waits for support are unacceptable, which is why we are working closely with health boards and local authorities to ensure that they are tackled. As part of that work, we have allocated £123 million to health boards this year to support improvements across a range of mental health services, including neurodevelopmental services.

Murdo Fraser: As I am sure the First Minister will be aware, last week NHS Tayside announced that it would no longer accept referrals for diagnosis of autism and ADHD in children or adolescents unless they have other mental health conditions—a decision that the National Autistic Society has described as “beyond comprehension”. Elsewhere in Scotland, we see similar issues with long waiting times of five years or more arising from a severe shortage of qualified professionals and, therefore, an inability for health services to meet the rising level of demand. What action is the Scottish Government taking to address the concern of many young people and their parents that they will not now be able to access the help that they desperately need?

The First Minister: I have considerable sympathy with the points that Mr Fraser has made. I am very concerned by the manner in which the proposals that have been set out by NHS Tayside have been communicated, because they are likely to have caused alarm. Indeed, as the member of the Scottish Parliament for Perthshire North, I have seen evidence of that in my inbox. I accept that the proposals have not been well communicated.

What NHS Tayside is trying to do is recognise that early intervention support can be available in the community to assist young people who present with mental wellbeing challenges. If we provide such early intervention, that will eventually reduce pressure on child and adolescent mental health services, so that they can focus support on those children who have a more acute clinical requirement for such support. That is what is proposed, but I do not think that that has been particularly well communicated to members of the public.

I give Mr Fraser an assurance that the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care is working very closely with NHS Tayside and other boards to ensure that the model that I have just explained to Parliament is the one that people feel and experience, because that model has the potential to better meet the needs of young people in Scotland.

By way of reassurance, I say to Mr Fraser and to Parliament that, for the first time ever, national performance has met the 18-week CAMHS standard, with 90.6 per cent of children and young people starting treatment within 18 weeks of referral. That progress has been made because, in the past decade, we have increased CAMHS staffing levels by 63 per cent.

However, if we are truly to meet the challenges with mental wellbeing that young people are experiencing today, which I think have been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic and other factors in our society, we must put in place the early intervention services that were somewhat missing from the NHS Tayside announcement.

Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP): This is a difficult day for us all, and I send my heartfelt condolences to our dear friend and colleague Keith Brown MSP and to Christina’s family.

I have a constituent whose daughter is awaiting an ADHD assessment. She sees a counsellor once a week in school while she awaits an appointment with a neurodevelopmental service. The service has said that it wants to wait until she is in primary 7 before seeing her, but, even then, there is still a 26-month waiting list. That is unacceptable. What support can be given to the health services in my Greenock and Inverclyde constituency to help to reduce those waiting times?

The First Minister: I will not repeat all the details that I gave in my earlier answer to Mr Fraser, but I acknowledge the seriousness of the point that Mr McMillan has put to me on behalf of his constituent.

The Government’s budget includes substantial new investment in health boards. In my earlier

answer, I indicated that we are making progress on the achievement of the CAMHS performance standard. The combination of early intervention and enabling the service to focus on those children with the most acute needs will help us to address the substance of the point that Mr McMillan has put to me. I would be happy for the health secretary to address the specific points that he has raised on behalf of his constituent.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): I add my condolences to the family and friends of our colleague Christina McKelvie. She was a kind person and a cheerful and helpful minister who often went out of her way to assist colleagues in resolving many issues that they were dealing with in their constituencies.

Earlier this week, families and patients who attend the Notre Dame children's centre in Glasgow were shocked by the announced closure of the centre, which provides invaluable treatment for children who have experienced trauma through abuse, neglect or bereavement. The centre's closure is unacceptable, and it is linked directly to the proposal by the integration joint board in Glasgow to cut psychological trauma services by 22 per cent. Will the First Minister please give families and patients who are affected the reassurance that the Government will intervene in that case and will not allow such a devastating cut to mental health services to take place?

The First Minister: I am grateful to Mr Sweeney for his kind remarks about Christina McKelvie. He is absolutely right to say that she went out of her way to help members on all questions.

I am concerned to hear the news about the Notre Dame Centre. I have asked Government officials to liaise with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow City Council, which are the partners in the IJB, to address the concerns and to provide the reassurance that we all need to hear, that the demand on the services that would have been provided by Notre Dame is able to be met in the future, because it is vital that individuals who require those services are able to access them.

Water Scarcity

6. Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, offer my condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Christina McKelvie at this tragic time.

To ask the First Minister what action the Scottish Government is taking to prevent instances of water scarcity in 2025. (S6F-03968)

The First Minister (John Swinney): Climate change is driving more extreme weather conditions in Scotland. This month, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency reported that Scotland has had a drier than average winter.

Scotland's national water scarcity plan sets out how water resources will be managed during periods of prolonged dry weather. As part of that plan, the Scottish Government, SEPA and Scottish Water have established rigorous processes to monitor the situation and to support those affected.

Summer is usually a crucial time of the year for water demand and, potentially, for water shortages. It is important that water users and abstractors are aware of the risk of water scarcity, so that we can all help to reduce the pressure on the water environment. From May, SEPA will provide weekly water scarcity reports to update key sectors and stakeholders on the position.

I thank Mercedes Villalba for her kind remarks about Christina McKelvie.

Mercedes Villalba: I thank the First Minister for that response. Any commitment from the Scottish Government to improve the resilience of our water system is welcome.

Upgrading our water infrastructure will be crucial to preventing water scarcity, flash flooding and wildfires. However, according to the outgoing chief executive of Scottish Water, the company is investing only 40 per cent of what is required to upgrade our water infrastructure, while, at the same time, we are seeing it becoming increasingly reliant on outsourcing services, maintenance and upgrades to private interests.

Does the First Minister agree that the people of Scotland deserve public services that reinvest profits in-house, rather than outsourcing and privatising public goods by the back door? Does he support that principle?

The First Minister: I very much support the principle of water being owned in the public sector and managed in the interests of the public sector. That is exactly what Scottish Water does, and that is certainly different from water management systems in England, which are privatised and are of poorer quality, less resilient and more expensive and do not operate as firmly in the public interest as Scottish Water does. The model that Mercedes Villalba talks about is the model that I believe is in place in Scotland.

Obviously, Scottish Water will procure external construction support to enhance water infrastructure, and I think that we would all accept that that is necessary to ensure value for money for the public purse. Scottish Water invested more than £1 billion in 2023-24 and plans to invest a total of £6 billion across the current regulatory period of 2021 to 2027.

I cannot overstate the importance of that, given the fact that we are experiencing—as was made clear by a question last week—wildfires in

Scotland in March. I leave that sentence for Parliament to think about. We are having wildfires in Scotland in March when the weather should be significantly wetter, so we now have to cope with such circumstances. That is an illustration of the challenges that we are facing, and I very much endorse the approach that Mercedes Villalba set out.

Community Safety (Edinburgh Eastern)

7. Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): I extend the deep condolences of all in the Alba Party to the friends and family of Christina McKelvie at this very sad time.

To ask the First Minister, in light of reports of an escalation in gang-related violence in Edinburgh, with recent shootings in Niddrie and West Pilton, what immediate action can be taken to support the emergency services in ensuring the safety and reassurance of communities in the Edinburgh Eastern constituency. (S6F-03970)

The First Minister (John Swinney): I am grateful to Ash Regan for her comments on my dear colleague.

I am deeply concerned by recent incidents in Edinburgh and am fully supportive of Police Scotland's efforts to apprehend those responsible. Although it would be inappropriate to comment on the investigation itself, I reassure members that significant resource is being put into the scrutiny of closed-circuit television footage and that door-to-door inquiries and increased patrols are being deployed in the area.

I encourage anyone who has information to report it directly to Police Scotland. There are, of course, a range of other measures that are being taken in relation to the work of the serious organised crime task force and its key partners to disrupt, deter and detect serious organised crime. That remains an absolute priority for all partners.

Ash Regan: The very serious concerns that were raised at the Scottish Police Federation conference over issues such as officer burnout and underresourcing leading to reactive policing must be urgently addressed to support our police, who, in turn, support our communities' safety. Edinburgh residents have the right to reassurance from visible, proactive policing and the right to not be left at the risk of being caught up in gang warfare. Will the First Minister commit today to reviewing the allocation formula for police funding for Edinburgh and consider targeted support for policing in areas of rising gang activity?

The First Minister: Those issues and judgments are a matter for the chief constable in the exercise of her operational responsibility for control of policing. It would be inappropriate for me to specify where police officers should be located,

other than to reassure communities that, where the intelligence that is actively scrutinised by Police Scotland identifies the potential for violence to emerge in our society, that will be responded to by Police Scotland and resources will be allocated accordingly.

In the budget, the Government has allocated £1.62 billion to support police capacity and capability, which represents an increase of £57 million in resource funding to enable our police to undertake the roles that we expect them to undertake. There is now capital funding in place that is assisting with the renewal of the estate, technology and fleet activities, and investment in body-worn video camera equipment has been rolled out for the first area of the country in the past few days.

Sue Webber (Lothian) (Con): These events should concentrate the minds of the Scottish Government regarding the on-going underresourcing of policing in the capital. Three years ago, Edinburgh had 120 fewer officers than its population needed, and by March last year there were 22 fewer than in the year before. I press the First Minister on the matter. Will the Scottish Government commit to resourcing Edinburgh's police force in a manner that reflects the growing population, the additional complexities and what is needed to police a capital city?

The First Minister: I give the reassurance that the chief constable will address these issues. The chief constable is responsible for the operational deployment of police officers around the country. I believe that the financial settlement that we have put in place for policing is adequate for the challenges that we face in our country, given that we know that recorded crime is down by 40 per cent since 2006-07 and that there has been a 54 per cent fall in the rates of attempted murder and serious assault.

We have, comparatively speaking, lower levels of crime in our society, but we continue to invest in policing. I know that the chief constable will be very attentive to the need for effective deployment of resources around the country to meet the needs of communities that are facing challenges.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We move to constituency and general supplementaries.

Notre Dame Centre

Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP): I, too, offer my heartfelt condolences to Keith, Jack and Lewis on the sad and untimely passing of our friend and colleague Christina McKelvie.

The First Minister mentioned earlier the Notre Dame Centre in my constituency. It has supported

young people and families with complex trauma right across Glasgow since 1931, but it now faces imminent closure following NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and partners pulling funding, despite the centre having an outstanding record and meeting all required outcomes and no concerns having been raised. This appalling decision has created great anxiety and uncertainty for the 100 children and their families who are currently being supported and those who are on waiting lists. This is no strategic redesign of services, which would surely have involved working with the Notre Dame Centre and not blindsiding it.

The decision must be reversed. Will the First Minister urgently meet me and the Notre Dame Centre to hear our deep concerns? Will the Scottish Government, as I have done, raise its concerns directly with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and partners?

The First Minister (John Swinney): Those concerns have been raised with NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow City Council, but I would be happy to meet Mr Doris to discuss those questions. I understand his long-standing connection with the Notre Dame Centre and his appreciation of its work, and I would be happy to meet him and the centre to hear the concerns that he has raised in Parliament today.

St Joseph's Primary School

Jackson Carlaw (Eastwood) (Con): I have been appalled by an unprecedented series of sectarian attacks targeting St Joseph's primary school in Busby, which is in my Eastwood constituency, in the past few weeks. The buildings were sprayed with offensive and sectarian discriminatory graffiti and the outdoor play area was set on fire. This past weekend, there was a further arson attack on a children's area. The school community has been left stupefied and, naturally, distressed, but I pay tribute to Police Scotland and East Renfrewshire Council for the decisive way in which they have intervened to seek to make the community feel safe.

Earlier this month, St Joseph's received a glowing report from Education Scotland for the exemplary standard of education that the school is providing. Today, of all days, when all of us here are reminded that we live, learn, work and play together, will the First Minister join me in offering a show of solidarity with the St Joseph's community and make clear that, here in Scotland, faith will not be used as a force for division but that, together, all faiths and those of none must work and come together in order to create the community in which we all want Scotland to live? *[Applause.]*

The First Minister (John Swinney): Not for the first time in my life, I find myself in huge agreement with Mr Carlaw's comments. I

appreciate the way in which he has expressed that point. The contrast of the material that Mr Carlaw has put on the record could not make his point more strongly. The education provision by the school has been acknowledged by Education Scotland and His Majesty's chief inspector of education to be outstanding, and the outside of the school has been targeted by utterly unacceptable behaviour, which never had any place in Scottish society and certainly does not have any place in Scottish society in 2025.

I endorse entirely Mr Carlaw's comments. Perhaps the best way through this is if Mr Carlaw and I visit St Joseph's school. We could have a question-and-answer session to see how we both get on at the school in front of the pupils. The visit would be an indication of my warm appreciation of the strength of the school and what it does for the children of that community. *[Applause.]*

Supported Living Service (Glasgow)

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I start by thanking Christina McKelvie for the warmth and kindness that she showed me as a newbie in my early days in the Parliament. I will be forever grateful for her kindness and warmth. I, too, offer my condolences to Keith Brown and to all those who loved Christina.

Glasgow's integration joint board is planning to axe its supported living service as part of efforts to plug its £42.5 million funding gap. The service is used by nearly 40 people across the city, including people living with dementia. The decision will reportedly save £2.8 million, but staff have warned that mainstream provision will simply not meet the complex needs of those affected. One woman said that she will no longer be able to live the life that she has now if the support is taken away. Will the First Minister step in and help to protect that vital service, to ensure that those who rely on it are not abandoned?

The First Minister (John Swinney): In the recent budget that Parliament passed, the Government did two things that potentially help to address the issues that Pam Duncan-Glancy puts to me. First, we increased the health and social care budget to more than £21 billion to ensure that there was an uplift that would enable investment in local services. We also delivered a real-terms increase in local authority funding for core services to enable local authorities, which are the other contributors to integration joint boards.

Clearly, I have had questions from Mr Doris and Mr Sweeney on the Notre Dame Centre, and a question from Pam Duncan-Glancy on the care-at-home service, all of which relate to the integration joint board in Glasgow. There will need to be a wider conversation between the Government and the integration joint board to address the concerns

that have been properly put to me by members today.

Community Policing

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I associate myself with all the tributes to Christina McKelvie. I know how deeply she will be missed, and my thoughts and prayers are with Keith Brown and her whole family.

Yesterday, community councils across my constituency received a notification from Police Scotland that officers will no longer attend their meetings, given the rising and competing demands and challenges on policing. That move will negatively impact local democracy and, worryingly, the decision has been taken without any community consultation. It follows a similar move when local event organisers were told that long-standing police involvement in community events was no longer guaranteed, due to pressure on police resources.

Does the First Minister share my concern that vital links between the police and the communities that they serve are being eroded under the Police Scotland model? Does he recognise that the imposition of a Police Scotland central-belt policing culture is increasingly damaging public confidence and the good work of dedicated local police officers?

The First Minister (John Swinney): I stress the importance of there being effective dialogue between Police Scotland and local communities. That dialogue is one channel through which we will establish an understanding and awareness of some of the challenges that exist in local areas. I hope that Mr Mundell and I can agree that such understanding and awareness does not necessarily always have to be through attendance at community council meetings, because there are a lot of community councils across Scotland.

However, there has to be good, engaged local dialogue, which I know will take place with the local authority in Dumfries and Galloway. Such dialogue must be satisfactory in ensuring that Police Scotland is aware of the issues in and aspirations of local areas. I will seek the view of the chief constable on that point and will write to Mr Mundell with further details.

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

12:46

Meeting suspended.

12:48

On resuming—

Black Watch (300th Anniversary)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-16128, in the name of Liz Smith, on 300 years of the Black Watch. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament marks the tercentenary of the origins of The Black Watch; understands that, in 1725, six companies were raised by General George Wade, comprising of "loyal" clans, including the Campbells, Grants, Frasers and Munros, and formed the Highland watches to police the Highlands following the 1715 Jacobite rebellion; notes that a further four companies were raised in 1739 to form the Regiment of the Line, which first mustered at Aberfeldy; understands that, throughout this period, the companies began being referred to as Am Freiceadan Dubh or The Black Watch; believes that this term was likely due to the dark tartan uniform that was worn by its soldiers; recognises what it sees as the significance of the regiment's involvement throughout the UK's most important and consequential military campaigns, ranging from, but not limited to, the Seven Years' War, the American War of Independence, the Napoleonic wars, the Crimean War, the Boer War, the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the Gulf Wars; acknowledges what it sees as the fearless and renowned reputation that The Black Watch established and reinforced over the course of these conflicts, as well as the countless stories of individual gallantry, particularly the 14 soldiers who received the UK's highest military decoration, the Victoria Cross; commemorates all who have served and died in the historic regiment, who have predominately come from across Perth and Kinross, Fife, Dundee and Angus, but also the rest of Scotland and beyond, and offers its full support to the veterans, and their families, who are alive today.

12:49

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I thank all colleagues who signed the motion, and I also thank the First Minister for his presence—I know that he has deep connections with the Black Watch. I extend a warm welcome to the members of the Black Watch Association, with their famous red hackles, who are in the public gallery.

We are, of course, celebrating the tercentenary of the origins of the Black Watch, which is a momentous event that provides us with the opportunity to reflect on the impact of that proud regiment over the course of its long history. We know that that impact was greatly treasured by the late Queen Mother, who was the regiment's longest-serving colonel in chief.

The Black Watch formed in a unique way, during a period of instability in the Scottish Highlands. As we all know, Jacobitism—the desire of some clans to return the house of Stuart to the

British throne—precipitated several rebellions in the early 18th century and, in 1725, six independent companies, later called the Black Watch, were raised by General George Wade, comprising clans deemed loyal to the Crown, including the Campbells, Grants, Munros and, indeed, the esteemed clan Fraser, who we will no doubt hear from later in the debate.

The Highland watches, as they were collectively known, were tasked with policing the Highlands and enforcing the Disarming Act 1715, gaining distinction from regular soldiers as *am Freiceadan Dubh*, because of their dark tartan kilts, which, of course, remain a staple of the uniform today.

King George II authorised the raising of a further four companies, which, together, would form a regiment of the line, first parading in Aberfeldy in 1740. Two years later, the regiment was sent to Flanders to fight the French, leaving much historical speculation as to whether the Jacobite rebellion in 1745—culminating in the final large-scale battle on British soil, the battle of Culloden—could have been possible had the Black Watch remained stationed in the Highlands. The subsequent defeat of Charles Edward Stuart's forces ended decades of civil unrest in the British Isles, creating stability at home and enabling global colonial expansion.

It did not take long for the Black Watch to gain its worldwide reputation for fearlessness in the face of the enemy. In the regiment's very first engagement, at the battle of Fontenoy in 1745, a French officer described the Black Watch as

"Highland Furies who rushed in on us with more violence than ever did the sea driven by tempest".

Despite British defeat, the regiment's valiant conduct was noticed by the Duke of Cumberland, who was greatly impressed by its Highland style of fighting.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the Black Watch was heavily involved in every major British campaign across the globe, starting with the seven years war, in the North American continent. During the subsequent American war of independence, the Black Watch helped to inflict a crushing defeat on George Washington's forces at the battle of Long Island in 1776. Further, of course, the Black Watch was in the thick of the fighting during the 1815 battle of Waterloo, which saw the final defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte, paving the way for *pax Britannica* and Britain's rise to global dominance.

Throughout that period, the Black Watch was active across the globe—in the Crimea, India, Egypt, Sudan and South Africa—and I look forward to other members' speeches, which may delve deeper into some of the gallantry across the

world, which shaped the international reputation of this proud regiment.

The Black Watch was, of course, involved in some of our country's darkest moments. In the first world war, the regiment was seriously depleted, suffering more than 8,000 fatalities in costly battles such as Loos, the Somme and Passchendaele. Among those members of the regiment who were killed was Fergus Bowes-Lyon, the brother of the late Queen Mother.

In the second world war, soldiers of the Black Watch were victims of the German blitzkrieg in France, but the regiment rebounded, contributing to the defeat of Erwin Rommel's forces at the battle of El Alamein—one of the major turning points of the war—and participating in the invasions of Sicily and Normandy, and also of Burma, when Field Marshal Wavell, or Earl Wavell, the most distinguished Black Watch officer, was commander-in-chief and viceroy of India.

Throughout the post-war era, the Black Watch largely returned to its original roots as a police force, engaging in peacekeeping and counterinsurgency roles once again, in Kenya, Cyprus, the troubles in Northern Ireland and Iraq.

In 1963, the Black Watch pipes and drums and military band toured the USA and were invited to play at the White House. Nine days later, President Kennedy was assassinated and Jacqueline Kennedy requested that the Black Watch pipe major and eight pipers play at the funeral—they led the cortege from the White House to Washington cathedral.

Just as they had been active during the rapid expansion of empire, soldiers from the Black Watch were also the last troops to leave the Hong Kong garrison during the handover of 1997, marking the end of the British empire.

Many changes and reforms have impacted on the Black Watch over the centuries, including what was at the time the highly controversial merger in 2006 of the distinct Scottish regiments into the Royal Regiment of Scotland. During my early days of election campaigning, along with the First Minister at the time, that was a very emotive issue, not least because the regiment was on active duty in Iraq. What has never changed is the exceptionally high regard in which the regiment is held, not just in Britain but across the world. One has only to look across the Atlantic to the Canadian Black Watch, with its own Highland heritage of tartan, bagpipes and a distinct red hackle, to appreciate some of the far-reaching legacy.

I will finish by honouring all those who have served and died in this historic Highland regiment, and to pledge our support to the veterans and their

families, some of whom are with us today. The Black Watch continues to instil an enormous sense of pride in those of us who live in Perth and Kinross, Fife, Angus and Dundee. It is truly a pillar of our regional identity. I also thank all the volunteers at Balhousie castle in Perth, who maintain an excellent establishment to keep the history of this proud regiment alive.

I have the immense pleasure of knowing many Black Watch veterans, some of whom are here today. Their unyielding loyalty and dedication to duty and public service are always evident. Reaching 300 years is strong testament to the commitment and tenacity of the exemplary Black Watch individuals who have dedicated their lives to the service of this country. Long may that story continue.

12:56

Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands)

(Con): I thank Liz Smith for bringing this members' business debate to the chamber today.

I am slightly nervous standing here, because my ex-brigade commander, Brigadier Garry Barnett, is sitting up in the public gallery. I would just like to say to him that I have spent time in the Parliament trying to convince everyone that I was a good soldier. Brigadier, your memories of all the good things that happened in your brigade were, of course, down to me—I do not know who was responsible for the bad things. It is delightful to see you all here today and to look back on the Black Watch.

It is probably quite odd for a Household Cavalry man and for somebody who represents the Highlands to be standing here paying tribute to the Black Watch. We are now joined as one, but maybe there is a certain amount of rivalry, as there was before. There is no doubt that, as an ex-soldier, I have a huge amount of respect for all the work that the Black Watch has done during our long history, including our recent history, especially in Korea, Kenya, Northern Ireland, Afghanistan and Iraq. Huge areas of our history have relied on the Black Watch.

I would like to talk about one particular member of the Black Watch who I find quite interesting. I am sure that I am going to get this story wrong, but I did as much research as I could on William Speakman-Pitt, who served in Korea in 1951. He was a Victoria cross winner and, I think, a worthy one. Let us look at his history.

On 4 November 1951, when things were particularly difficult, he filled his pockets with grenades and charged the Chinese, hurling his grenades until they ran out. He then ran back to his lines, collected more grenades and some of his colleagues, and charged back to the Chinese

lines, throwing more hand grenades to break up their charge. Sadly, that did not work, so they had to resort to throwing anything they had, which appeared to be mess tins, cans and a large amount of beer bottles. I am reliably informed by the record that those beer bottles came to be in the Black Watch lines purely to be filled with water so that they could cool the machine guns—how they were emptied was not actually clear in the dispatches. William was obviously a worthy VC winner.

I have seen other acts of bravery in the Black Watch history, and that is one that I like. I have heard that William was represented as beer-bottle Bill, the VC winner. I do not know whether that is right, but I am sure that the brigadier will correct me afterwards. He was a worthy winner. People like him typify the valiant soldiers who have served in the Black Watch. When I was a soldier in the British Army, which I was for 12 years, I would have liked to have had the Black Watch at my side, but not always to have had a brigade commander from the Black Watch in charge of me.

13:00

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): It is a privilege to participate in this members' business debate, and I congratulate my colleague, Ms Smith, on securing it. She did a fine job of adumbrating the illustrious and gallant history of one of Scotland's famous line infantry regiments. It pains me to say that, as a Glaswegian and as someone with a close association to the Royal Highland Fusiliers of Glasgow.

It is, however, welcome that, even under the new regime of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, the Black Watch, or 3 SCOTS, and the Royal Highland Fusiliers, or 2 SCOTS, are the only two line infantry battalions in the Royal Regiment of Scotland to retain their pipes and drums, which is perhaps a sad indication of the decline of the line infantry in Scotland in recent years. Nonetheless, it is a tangible thread through the illustrious history of the regiment. In the Edinburgh military tattoo, more often than not, it is the Black Watch and the Royal Highland Fusiliers that keep the residual traditions of those cap badges alive.

Ms Smith outlined the great gamut of the Black Watch's history up to this tercentenary. In recent years, the Black Watch has not been without its challenges. There have been a number of tragic losses in recent operations. Many young people lost their lives in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. I think back to just over 20 years ago, to the very fraught period of the deployment to camp Dogwood in central Iraq, in the so-called triangle of death, where, sadly, three members of the battalion lost their lives—Sergeant Stuart

Gray, who was 31 years old, Private Paul Lowe, who was 19 years old, and Private Scott McArdle, who was 22 years old.

I am struck by the youth of many of the young soldiers who put themselves in harm's way for the interests of our country. There are many others, including one of my own friends, Private Robert Hetherington, who was in the reserves with 7 SCOTS—the 7th battalion—and who sadly lost his life in Afghanistan on 30 April 2013. It seems strange, now that it is so long ago, but the loss of such a close friend is a very real and visceral memory.

Such real losses are felt keenly by all members of a regimental family. That is why it is such a close-knit organisation. I commend the members of the Black Watch Association for carrying on the fine traditions of the regiment, particularly through the regimental museum, which is a fine establishment in Perth.

Ms Smith also mentioned the battalion's role in the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. Funnily enough, I realised that the commanding officer in my company, Major Nick Ord, carried the Queen's colour out of Hong Kong on that parade. I found out very late in the day that he had done that early in his career, as a young officer in the Black Watch. He was a fine officer and a brilliant mentor to me as a young soldier, as a reservist in 6 SCOTS in the Royal Regiment of Scotland. The traditions and spirit of the Black Watch carry on today through the Royal Regiment of Scotland, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary in this month next year.

As we look back over the traditions, the ethos and the great history of the Black Watch, we see that 14 Victoria crosses and many other awards for gallantry have been awarded over its three centuries, and that it has been involved in every major conflict in which this country has been engaged. We also note the gallantry of young men from Forfar, Angus, Dundee and Perthshire in their contribution to this country's martial traditions. That is important and worthy of commemoration today.

The late President John F Kennedy, on meeting the regiment on the lawn of the White House, asked for the motto of the regiment, and the commanding officer said that it was "Nemo me impune lacessit"—no one strikes me with impunity. The President rather jokingly remarked that that is probably a good motto for the rest of us. Indeed, it is probably a good motto in the combat and back and forth of politics.

The Black Watch is a fine regiment with a great tradition, which is carried on today as part of the Royal Regiment of Scotland. As we look towards the next era for the line infantry in Scotland, let us

hope that we can continue to support the efforts to build the regiment and to maintain its traditions.

13:05

Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I am delighted to contribute to this important debate celebrating 300 years of the Black Watch, and I thank my friend and colleague Liz Smith for bringing it to the chamber.

Seven generations of my family have been born and raised in Perthshire, and some of them have served in the ranks of the Black Watch during its history. Growing up in Perthshire, I was aware of the Black Watch from an early age and recognised the regiment's cultural significance across many areas of Scotland. That awareness only grew stronger with age, as many local families had a connection and, often, lifelong involvement with the regiment.

Liz Smith spoke about the regiment's reputation for fearlessness in many conflicts, which is renowned. Those sentiments are shared among all Black Watch families from many areas across Perthshire, Fife, Dundee and Angus. Each family has a strong story to tell about the bravery and dedication of individuals who served in the regiment.

Liz Smith also spoke about the Black Watch museum at Balhousie castle. I pay tribute to all the volunteers who keep that venue open. I am a regular attendee at Balhousie castle, and I was pleased that the museum marked its 10th anniversary in 2023. More than a million people have visited the museum since it opened, and the site has received multiple industry awards since the £3.5 million development was completed in 2013. I was privileged to serve as a councillor on Perth and Kinross Council when the museum was being developed, which I supported. The museum's trustees and success remind us of the importance of showcasing local history. That legacy is alive, and we must ensure that it remains for future generations. The Black Watch certainly plays its role in that regard.

Many individuals visit the facility through the education programme that it provides. Our military history is vital and plays a huge part in maintaining our Scottish traditions. We should all ensure that there are opportunities for young people to learn about the hard work and the sacrifice of regiments such as the Black Watch, including in our classrooms.

In the four minutes that I have for my speech, I cannot even scratch the surface of the Black Watch's history. Many members will impart their views, opinions and stories throughout the debate, and I look forward to hearing them.

It is important to reflect on the spirit, honour and dedication that have been fundamental to the regiment. A Black Watch historian once said:

“In a Highland Regiment every individual feels that his conduct is the subject of observation ... independently of his duty”.

I pay tribute to each and every individual who has served, has given their time and talent and has made sacrifices, including those who have lost their lives for the regiment. The Black Watch continues its historic legacy, and I wish it continued success. The regiment’s dedication and past reputation are still very relevant today, as they will be in the future.

13:08

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): I thank Liz Smith for securing the debate and for highlighting the role that the Black Watch has played down the years—300 years now—in communities across Scotland. I, too, welcome the members of the Black Watch who are in the gallery today.

I will start with words that I took directly from the Black Watch website:

“In a Highland regiment every individual feels that his conduct is the subject of observation and that, independently of his duty, as one member of a systematic whole, he has a separate and individual reputation to sustain, that will be reflected on his family and district or glen.”

It adds that those words

“are as relevant today as when they were written by a 19th century Black Watch historian. They lucidly illustrate that The Black Watch boasts a history of honour, gallantry and devoted service to King, Queen and country. The battles which have contributed most to The Black Watch history have been those in which the odds have been most formidable. From Fontenoy to Fallujah with Ticonderoga, Waterloo, Alamein and two World Wars in between the Black Watch has been there when the world’s history has been shaped.”

As Liz Smith has referred to, the Black Watch is now part of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, which was formed of not only the Black Watch but the Royal Scots, the Royal Highland Fusiliers, the Highlanders, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the King’s Own Scottish Borderers. As an MSP, I am from not Perthshire but the South Scotland region, so it is only appropriate that I talk a wee bit about what was until recently the Royal Scots Borderers but was for decades the King’s Own Scottish Borderers and the King’s Own Borderers, with a lineage dating back to the 17th century.

During the first world war, members of the KOSB were sent to Mons, Ypres, the Somme and Arras, among other places, as well as Gallipoli, where casualty rates were recorded as 100 per

cent. That is a staggering figure. That war involved four members of the KOSB being awarded the Victoria cross—in three cases, posthumously. The surviving recipient was Piper Laidlaw, who struck out from the trenches playing his pipes. That links to the piping history that Liz Smith highlighted in her speech. The horrendous loss of life in, and the justification for, the first world war have been debated and discussed ever since, but what cannot be doubted is the bravery that was shown by those who served in the KOSB and who suffered hugely over the course of the war.

Less than three decades later, the KOSB was part of the effort against the evil of Hitlerism and axis aggression. Servicemen were at Dunkirk as the British expeditionary force was evacuated and, four years later, they were part of the Normandy landings as the allies returned to the European continent to defeat the axis powers and restore democracy to that continent’s peoples.

In December 2021, the Royal Scots Borderers were again reorganised—this time, they were incorporated into the Ranger Regiment headquarters in Belfast. However, the history of the KOSB is not forgotten. It lives on at the Berwick-upon-Tweed barracks, whose museum, which is being redeveloped and refurbished, is due to reopen next year for future generations to learn about the history of the KOSB.

The regiment’s history also lives on through work in the community that is undertaken by projects such as the veterans garden in the Crichton campus, in Dumfries, which has been led by my constituent Mark Harper—he is no relation—and his massively hard-working team. Over recent years, they have not only grown the support and services that operate from the garden to help armed forces veterans and their families, but worked with the wider community to put on activities for everyone in Dumfries and surrounding areas. That work has been recognised multiple times, with award after award for the garden and the team behind it.

Although the Black Watch is 300 years old and the King’s Own Scottish Borderers has had a long and distinguished past, the service that has characterised both regiments over the decades is very much with us today, right across Perthshire and the south of Scotland. I pay tribute to all the veterans who have served over the years.

13:13

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I congratulate my friend Liz Smith on securing this timely and important debate. As others have done, I welcome the Black Watch veterans to the gallery this afternoon. I say to Brigadier Garry Barnett that I sympathise with his having to keep in order my

friend Edward Mountain, but his experience has nothing on what the Conservative whips in the Parliament have had to put up with over the past number of years.

As Liz Smith said, the origins of the Black Watch date back to a turbulent time in our country's past. In the wake of the Jacobite rising of 1715, six companies of loyal Highlanders were assembled in 1725 to patrol the Highlands of Scotland, disarm the clans and restore order. Those men were not outsiders but Highlanders policing Highlanders, tasked with preserving peace in their own lands. As Liz Smith mentioned, that included the Fraser clan—a clan that was not always loyal to the Crown, although it was on that occasion.

To set themselves apart from the existing regiments of the British Army and to drum home their independent identity, those Highland soldiers ditched the traditional red coat and donned the now-famous dark green, blue and black tartan. Those companies became known, in both fear and respect, as *am Freiceadan Dubh* in Gaelic or, as we know them, the Black Watch—a name that could be derived either from the 12-yard dark green military tartan or, possibly, the sombre nature of their duties.

In 1739, King George I ordered the formation of four additional companies, bringing the total to 10, which were all to be recognised as a regiment of the line of the British Army. Crucially, the King stipulated that those soldiers were to be natives of that country and that none other were to be taken—a declaration that solidified the regiment's unique Scottish identity.

The first official muster of the new regiment took place the following year, in 1740, on the banks of the River Tay in Aberfeldy. Since then, as we have heard from others, the Black Watch has gained a reputation for bravery, discipline and direction on the battlefield, and it has played a part in every major conflict involving Britain, including the battles of Fontenoy and Culloden; the national Napoleonic wars; the American war of independence, where the regiment famously defeated forces under George Washington; both world wars; and, more recently, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, where the regiment served with honour.

It is testament to the courage and sacrifice shown by soldiers of the Black Watch that they have been awarded no fewer than 14 Victoria crosses—Britain's highest military decoration for valour. Notwithstanding their indisputable loyalty, many members of the Black Watch have always considered themselves, as one of their commanders described, as men who felt a responsibility towards the country for which they cherished a devoted affection—notably Scotland.

The connection that Alexander Stewart referred to between the Black Watch and Perthshire is not just symbolic but tangible and on-going. In 1947, the regiment was granted the freedom of the city of Perth. For decades, the Queen's Barracks in Perth served as a depot for the regiment, housing training soldiers and acting as the main point for regimental life. Following an army reorganisation in the early 1960s, the barracks closed, but the Black Watch found a new and permanent home at Balhousie castle nearby. The historic castle has become a symbol for the regiment's legacy, with a public campaign in 2008 raising a remarkable £3.5 million to transform the site into a five-star, award-winning visitor attraction, with a new museum and archive. The site has been a brilliant success and has welcomed nearly a million visitors from around the world over the past 10 years.

Last June, the streets of Perth came alive once more as veterans marched in the freedom of Perth parade, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the regiment's final deployment to Iraq.

In Aberfeldy, a striking monument was unveiled in 1887 as a tribute to the first mustering of the regiment there in 1740, and there are plans for a new memorial in Dundee in the future.

The Black Watch continues to this day as 3 SCOTS, the third battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland. It is currently based at Fort George near Inverness, but there are very welcome plans afoot to relocate the battalion to Leuchars in Fife, which would be closer to the traditional recruiting grounds across Perthshire, Angus, Dundee and Fife and would physically reconnect the regiment with the communities from which it draws its support. That would be a very welcome move for the future of the Black Watch. I join all members taking part in the debate in wishing members of the battalion the greatest success in the future.

13:18

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): First, I congratulate my friend and colleague Liz Smith on securing the motion for debate in the chamber. It gives me great pleasure to be speaking in it. I welcome members of the Black Watch, along with many others, to the gallery.

Three hundred years is a fantastic milestone for the Black Watch, and it is only right and proper that we highlight its achievements in the Scottish Parliament. The Black Watch, founded in the Jacobite rebellion, has been a stalwart of Perthshire, Fife, Angus and Dundee for centuries. Its ancestral home is at Balhousie castle in Perth, which, as we heard from my friend Murdo Fraser, is now also the home of the Black Watch museum.

I am not unique in quoting a line from the regiment's website that embodies its ethos,

because Alexander Stewart and Emma Harper have used the same quote, but I will say it anyway.

“In a Highland regiment every individual feels that his conduct is the subject of observation and that, independently of his duty, as one member of a systemic whole he has a separate and individual reputation to sustain, which will be reflected on his family and district or glen.”

It goes on to say that those words

“are as relevant today as when they were written by a 19th century Black Watch historian. They lucidly illustrate that The Black Watch boasts a history of honour, gallantry and devoted service to King, Queen and country.”

It is that devotion to country and community that I will highlight today.

It would not be a contribution from me if I did not focus on the perspective of the younger generation and the Black Watch’s links with young people. While other members have mentioned the many laudable accomplishments and historical background of the Black Watch, I would like to bring us right up to date and applaud the work that it has done to empower the young people of Scotland.

The Black Watch has a long and proud association with the young people in the area through utilising the Army cadet force. It has two affiliations: one is with the Angus and Dundee Battalion, which covers the county of Angus and the city of Dundee, and one is with the Black Watch Battalion, which covers Perth and Kinross and Fife. Boys and girls can join as cadets from 12 years old.

While I do not wish to encroach too much on the subject of the second of Ms Smith’s debates today, I note that the range of outdoor pursuits and lifelong skills that our young people can gain from joining the cadets is exceptional. Each battalion provides instruction on many subjects, including first aid, map and compass work, orienteering and fieldcraft, adventurous training and leadership. Those skills are invaluable in boosting a child’s confidence and self-belief. Cadets can take part in on-site experiences and in the Duke of Edinburgh’s award scheme. They have opportunities to travel abroad, play sport and take part in a range of other activities that support their mental wellbeing and physical agility.

If music is their thing, young people can join one of two pipe bands—one for each battalion—or the regimental wind and brass band. The opportunities that the Black Watch affords to young people are testament to how the regiment views its communities and its neighbours. If any adult fancies joining as an instructor, they can give a little back and join the children.

Paul Sweeney: The member is making an excellent speech about the value of our Army cadet forces, in particular those that are affiliated with the Black Watch. Would she also recognise the important contribution that the Army reserve forces make in the area, in particular as they maintain the traditional regimental footprint through the 51st Highland 7th Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, which has succeeded to the custodianship of the Queen’s Barracks in Perth?

Roz McCall: Yes—I thank Paul Sweeney for that intervention, and if I had longer to speak today, I would have raised that as my second point.

In conclusion, we like to look back at the history of this esteemed regiment and recount its past achievements, but I want to applaud the work that it does for the youth of Scotland and in looking to the future.

13:22

Stephen Kerr (Central Scotland) (Con): I thank Liz Smith for lodging the motion and, as a proud son of Forfar and Angus, I am privileged to speak in support of it.

I join members on all sides of the chamber in recognising the extraordinary legacy of one of Scotland’s most distinguished regiments. Like other members, I acknowledge the presence of veterans and supporters of the Black Watch who have joined us in the public gallery today. Their service, commitment and continuing efforts to uphold the traditions and memory of the regiment are deeply valued, not only by the Parliament but by the people of Scotland, and I thank them.

Today, we mark a significant anniversary for the Black Watch, as Liz Smith’s motion mentions. Since its formation in 1725, it has been synonymous with fierce courage, discipline and a sense of duty to Crown and country. It stands proudly among the pantheon of great British regiments and great Scottish regiments, including—from my new part of the world for 40 years, Stirlingshire—the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Those regiments share a proud common history of service in the darkest hours of war, and in peacekeeping, in lands far and near, from Waterloo—as has been mentioned—to the western front, and from the hills of Korea to the streets of Basra.

However, those regiments were, and are, not just military units—they were, and are, families. More than 20 years ago, when the then Labour Government announced its plans to amalgamate Scotland’s historic regiments of the line, it struck at something far deeper than structure—it struck at heritage. The save the Scottish regiments

campaign was born, which has been referenced by a couple of members who spoke before me.

If I may be personal for a moment, although the campaign did not succeed in stopping the changes, it gave me one of the great honours—if not the greatest honour—of my political life. In one of her final public interventions, Margaret Thatcher came to Stirling to support me as the Conservative candidate and to back the campaign. Her support spoke volumes about what she and so many of the rest of us realised was at stake: the defence not only of regimental history but of the values that built our nation.

The Argylls, which were deeply rooted in Stirling and the surrounding districts, twice faced the existential threat of extinction. The communities rallied twice to defend them—sadly, not successfully on the last occasion. However, that same spirit lives on in the Black Watch and in all who wear and have worn the cap badge and the famous red hackle. The work of the regimental museums and the veterans associations ensures that those traditions are not forgotten.

Through Liz Smith's motion and this debate, let us pledge that this heritage, these great names and the values that they embody shall never fade from our national story. We honour the Black Watch and, through it, we honour the very best of Scotland.

13:26

The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture (Angus Robertson): I begin with the many kind words about our dear colleague Christina McKelvie. She was a friend and a first-class ministerial colleague. We were a team working to promote Scotland internationally, promoting Scottish culture and international development. My condolences, as those of others, are with Keith Brown and Christina's family.

In reflecting on military service today, it is worth recalling that Keith Brown is the only member of the Parliament who served in front-line combat during the Falklands conflict. Our thoughts are with him today.

I am delighted to close this debate on behalf of the Scottish Government. I thank Liz Smith for bringing forward the motion and members for their contributions. However, I speak with some personal trepidation, as those who know their Jacobite and Perthshire history will know where clan Robertson came from—in highland Perthshire. They might also be able to guess on which side it fought in the 45. I will not be dwelling on any family connections.

However, regimental campaigners will know how involved I was as the Scottish National Party's defence spokesman in the House of Commons during the campaign to protect and sustain the regimental traditions of the Black Watch in 2006.

The Scottish Government—primarily through its excellent Minister for Veterans, Graeme Dey—has continued to be clear in its support for our entire armed forces community. That includes serving personnel—regular and reserve—veterans, their families and the wider sector, including our outstanding partners in the third sector.

Members will have heard Graeme Dey and others reiterate the Government's commitment to ensuring that our veterans, service personnel and their families are not disadvantaged as a result of their service and that Scotland is a destination of choice when they leave the armed forces. I do not think that I will be speaking out of turn when I say that that commitment and dedication to our entire armed forces community is shared by members across the chamber.

We have heard excellent speeches by speakers from all corners of the chamber. We were joined at the start by the First Minister, John Swinney, who, as we know, has long represented the recruiting heartland of the Black Watch. He also comes from a military family; his uncle was posthumously awarded the Victoria cross.

I am sure that all members who spoke in the debate, and those who did not, will support me in welcoming members of the Black Watch Association and other veterans to our proceedings. They are very welcome here today. It is important to stress that there is cross-party support for our Scottish military, regimental traditions and everybody who has served.

In preparing my closing remarks today, I anticipated that little would be left for me to say about the Black Watch and its tercentenary, which we have come together to debate today. Members have already reflected sensitively and considerably on the honour, gallantry and devoted service of the Black Watch, including its extensive involvement in military campaigns throughout history. I reiterate this Parliament's recognition of all the soldiers of the Black Watch who lost their lives in those conflicts, including the 14 who received the Victoria cross.

The Scottish Government recognises not only the sacrifices made by the soldiers of the Black Watch but those made by all our armed forces men and women, many of whom have made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the freedoms that, sadly, we so often take for granted today. When we remember those sacrifices, we are not seeking to glorify war but to recognise the hardships

endured and the courage displayed in the face of extraordinary adversity. When we reflect on the impact of conflict, we must also remember the suffering of families at home facing the uncertainty of the future and being unsure what would become of their loved ones serving elsewhere. It should go without saying that for those whose loved ones did not return home, that suffering never ends.

Members will know that Fort George, home of the Black Watch since 2007, is still expected to be closed by the Ministry of Defence within the next decade. That move will end the Army's association with the Fort George area, which is a relationship that has existed for more than 250 years. The Scottish Government has significant concerns over the potential impact of the proposed cuts to the defence estate, and we caution against any further proposals to close bases in Scotland due to the negative impact on local communities and economies.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): I have had the opportunity to be a guest of the Black Watch at some mess dinners at Fort George. While it is an impressive historic estate, it is clear that the facilities and accommodation are far from suitable for the modern soldier. With that in mind, will the cabinet secretary consider how we can maintain the Army's footprint in Scotland while upgrading facilities and moving away from antiquated estates such as Fort George?

Angus Robertson: The member is aware that, as the member of Parliament for Moray between 2001 and 2017, I had the good fortune to represent a constituency that had the most significant military footprint of anywhere in Scotland. I am very well aware of the role that accommodation plays in the viability of military bases, as in the cases of the two Royal Air Force bases—there is now one—the Army engineering base and Fort George, which is absolutely an historic site.

We need our armed forces to be provided with appropriate base facilities and accommodation, but I observe that the armed forces' footprint in Scotland is now the smallest that it has been since the Napoleonic wars. Unfortunately, we are living in times in which there is a conflict in Europe and a requirement for us all to get behind appropriate defence spending in order to make sure that our armed forces are properly supported.

Today's motion gives us the opportunity to underline how important it is that we support our veterans and their families. Members will know that the Scottish Government offers its full support and commitment to our veterans and their families, primarily through our veterans strategy action plan and our role in responding to—and supporting the

delivery of—the Scottish veterans commissioner's recommendations.

In December last year, Graeme Dey delivered his latest annual update to Parliament, in which he outlined how the Government had supported the entire armed forces community throughout the previous year. As ever, that was accompanied by a published report, which fully detailed what the Government and its partners had done in the preceding 12 months. He made particular reference to successes such as the Government's support for veterans' physical and mental health; its encouragement of collaboration throughout the sector to best support veterans and their families; its obtaining detailed veterans data, from the census in particular; and its continued funding of projects through the Scottish veterans fund.

The Scottish Government remains committed to providing the very best support for our veterans, their families and service families. I give my personal thanks to all the individuals and organisations who continue to support our veterans and armed forces community and who work hard every day to do so. I thank Liz Smith for bringing forward the motion today and members for their contributions and reflections on the Black Watch's decorated history throughout the past three centuries.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That concludes the debate.

13:34

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 this afternoon is portfolio question time. The portfolio on this occasion is net zero and energy, and transport. I remind members who wish to ask a supplementary question to press their request-to-speak button during the relevant question.

Housing (Upgrades)

1. Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to upgrade older housing stock to make it suitable for modern-day heating systems. (S6O-04504)

The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan): The Scottish Government continues to work with key partners, including Historic Environment Scotland, to enable the best solutions to transition Scotland's traditional buildings to be more energy efficient and to use clean heating systems while being sympathetic to their character and features.

In 2025-26, we are investing more than £300 million in heat and energy efficiency programmes, including for traditional properties. We are considering how we can provide for more bespoke assessment of the technically suitable energy efficiency and clean heating measures that are available for owners of traditional buildings.

Rhoda Grant: The minister will be aware that the level of fuel poverty is highest in rural and island communities, where most of the housing stock is old croft houses. To address that fuel poverty, those houses need to be insulated. It is more expensive to do that in rural and island communities, because materials are more expensive and labour costs are higher, due to a lot of that not being locally available. What is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that rural and island homes are upgraded to cut carbon and tackle fuel poverty?

Alasdair Allan: I concur with what Rhoda Grant says about the particular problem in the Highlands and Islands. I am aware of that from my constituency.

There is a recognition of rurality in the grant and loan scheme. There are also area-based schemes and many other schemes that have made a valuable contribution to addressing fuel poverty in the housing type that Rhoda Grant refers to. I am

very acquainted with the situation, because I live in one of those properties.

Beatrice Wishart (Shetland Islands) (LD): Upgrading older housing stock will be a critical step in reaching our net zero goals. The barriers to achieving that include not having the skills to renovate and insulate properties and to install modern heating solutions. How is the Scottish Government ensuring that we have the expertise and skills in the workforce to do that?

Alasdair Allan: I agree on the need to ensure that the skills are there, and it is relevant to island constituencies, such as the one that Beatrice Wishart represents, that we ensure that there are opportunities for training and retraining. For instance, we have invested in a mobile centre for heat pump installation training, to ensure that training opportunities are more equally available across Scotland. I visited that van when it was in Shetland, and I know that it has been appreciated by small businesses there. There are probably similar examples that can be replicated across the rest of the country.

Marine Energy Industry

2. Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to support the marine energy industry. (S6O-04505)

The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan): Over the past 10 years, the Scottish Government has invested around £50 million in marine technology development through the funding of Wave Energy Scotland. The growth of a world-leading marine renewables industry in this country has resulted in Scotland being internationally recognised as a global frontrunner in wave energy and home to the world's first and largest tidal stream array and the largest tidal energy converter. However, the main levers for enabling the commercialisation of emerging pre-commercial technologies lie with the United Kingdom Government, including through the contracts for difference scheme, which is the primary way of supporting new low-carbon power infrastructure.

Audrey Nicoll: Scotland is already home to the biggest and most powerful tidal stream projects in the world, and it is a leader in wave energy development. Indeed, the European Marine Energy Centre has contributed more than £263 million in gross value added to the Scottish economy since 2003, instigating more than 630 high-value jobs across Scotland and the world's most powerful tidal stream turbine, the O2, in Orkney.

Given the vast potential of our natural resources and the wealth of energy expertise in Scotland,

especially in my constituency of Aberdeen South and North Kincardine, will the minister say more about Scotland's future in the marine energy market and how we can further build momentum and attract investment into the sector?

Alasdair Allan: As the member has recognised, our abundant natural resources, the sector's expertise and experience, and the significant investment of the Scottish Government and our enterprise agencies, to date, in wave and tidal energy development have positioned Scotland as a global leader in that sector. However, there is now an opportunity for the UK Government to further build on that success and support the commercialisation and expansion of those nascent technologies, including, as I mentioned, through contracts for difference, which is the primary means of supporting new low-carbon power infrastructure.

Mercedes Villalba (North East Scotland (Lab): The minister will be aware of the complex regulatory landscape offshore, with multiple regulators and landlords being responsible for overseeing wind, oil and gas, fishing and marine protection, all of which leads to congestion and overlap. I would be interested to hear what consideration the minister or the Government has given to the creation of an umbrella regulatory body to align that space and whether the Government believes that that would fall within the Scottish Government's purview or whether that would be for the UK Government or cross-Government working. I appreciate that he might not have the answers today, but if he could write to me, that would be appreciated.

Alasdair Allan: I do not think that we are talking about the creation of new bodies. The member makes an important point about the need to ensure that the competing interests in those areas are brought together as much as possible, that we think about spatial planning and that we bring interested parties to the table. The Scottish Government will continue to do that in the areas within our powers.

Ben Macpherson (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP): The Scottish Government is aware of Nova Innovation, a world-leading Scottish marine energy company that manufactures in Leith, in my constituency. It has secured £100 million of investment for a tidal array in Orkney, is planning floating solar arrays across the UK and is considering a manufacturing base in Grangemouth. Considering all of that, will the minister agree to meet me and that remarkable home-grown company to discuss its projects and next steps?

Alasdair Allan: I recognise the contribution of Nova Innovation and its pioneering projects in the development and deployment of tidal energy and

the benefits that go with that, both economically and environmentally, across the country. The Scottish Government would certainly welcome a meeting. I am very happy to arrange such a meeting and to be part of it, and I can confirm that officials also met Simon Forrest, the chief executive of Nova Innovation, recently.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 3 has been withdrawn.

Lothian Buses (Meetings)

4. Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): To ask the Scottish Government when it last met with representatives from Lothian Buses. (S6O-04507)

The Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity (Jim Fairlie): Lothian Buses joined other bus operators, as well as the Confederation of Passenger Transport, for a meeting that I held in Parliament on 5 February. Officials from Transport Scotland also meet bus operators, including Lothian Buses, regularly.

Craig Hoy: Lothian Buses has withdrawn key services from communities including Stenton, Macmerry, Tranent, Prestonpans and Penicuik. Macmerry is losing all but peak services into Edinburgh, which is, frankly, a disgrace. Following the announcement, and before some of the adverse effects on commuters were fully reported to us by our constituents, local MSPs met Lothian Buses separately. However, a request for a second and urgent meeting involving all local MSPs this week has been turned down by bus bosses, who high-handedly say that they cannot meet until May at the earliest, which will be weeks after service cuts come into force.

Will the minister join me in reminding Lothian Buses, which is ultimately owned by local councils, of the need to fully engage with elected members? Will the minister also consider changing the regulations so that bus companies have to consult local communities, such as that in Macmerry, before they strip them of their bus services?

Jim Fairlie: I fully understand the member's frustration. It is really disheartening when services are cut. However, I remind him that this is a deregulated service and it is up to the bus companies to make the decisions. I take his point about who own Lothian Buses. The conversation has to be between Lothian Buses and the local authorities, because they are the people who will ultimately make the decision.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): Will the minister or the cabinet secretary agree to meet Lothian Buses to discuss the issue of enabling bus operators to withdraw the under-22 bus pass when the cardholder has been involved in antisocial behaviour? My understanding is that the pass can be removed only when there has been fraudulent

activity. The inability to remove the pass is creating a big problem for people in the Lothians at the moment.

Jim Fairlie: As the member knows, we are well aware of the issue that she has raised. Indeed, the cabinet secretary discussed it yesterday with the Confederation of Passenger Transport. That conversation is on-going—we are not ignoring the issue. Work is being done behind the scenes to allow the conversation to continue, and we will continue to look at the matter until we find some solutions.

House Coal (Ban)

5. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its commitment to ban house coal, as set out in its strategy, cleaner air for Scotland 2. (S6O-04508)

The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan): We are committed to securing warmer, greener and cheaper heating for everyone in Scotland. A move towards cleaner fuels must take place as part of a just transition, to ensure that no one is left in fuel poverty. We will review the evidence on the potential impacts of taking forward a ban on the sale of house coal on fuel supplies and costs in rural and islands communities, where many people still rely on coal for heating their homes.

Colin Smyth: As part of its strategy, the Scottish Government set an ambitious target to have the best air quality in Europe. I am sure that the minister agrees that, if we are to meet that target, the most polluting fuels must be banned to protect the environment and human health. Can the minister give us a timescale for when further consideration will be given to phasing out the use of house coal? Will he commit to holding a consultation at the earliest opportunity, so that we can get on with action that other parts of the United Kingdom have already taken?

Alasdair Allan: In comparison with much of Europe, Scotland enjoys good air quality, and emissions of the main air pollutants, which Colin Smyth referred to, have declined significantly over the past three decades. That has been achieved through tighter regulation, improved fuel quality, cleaner vehicles and many other factors.

As I mentioned, I am open to looking at such matters as we move forward, but we must do so in a way that takes account of the evidence from particular parts of Scotland.

CalMac Ferries (Construction)

6. **Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it or its

agencies next plan to build CalMac ferries in Scotland. (S6O-04509)

The Cabinet Secretary for Transport (Fiona Hyslop): We intend to invest more than £530 million in ferry services, vessels and infrastructure as part of the budget for 2025-26, and we are looking to complete procurement of a further three major vessels within the next year. That is in addition to the seven small vessels on which we expect Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd to move to contract award very shortly.

Under the procurement rules that were set by the Conservative United Kingdom Government through the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and the Procurement Act 2023, the direct award of public contracts is possible only in strictly limited circumstances. Ministers will consider future vessel contracts from public agencies on a case-by-case basis to determine whether any might legally be open to direct award.

Jamie Greene: I thank the cabinet secretary for that response, and I convey my thoughts to members of the front bench for carrying on their business as normal. I know that it must be a difficult day for the cabinet secretary and her colleagues, and I want to express that personally.

I also want to convey my thanks to Ferguson Marine's new chief executive, Graeme Thomson, and the outgoing chief executive, John Petticrew, who I know was a passionate advocate for ferry building and shipyards on the Clyde. Of course, the news about the small vessel replacement programme is disappointing, but we all have a shared ambition to see the yard flourish in the future. Can we look forward to some good news for Ferguson's and its workers, and to seeing more CalMac ferries being built in Port Glasgow and on the Clyde, which is a shared ambition of all of us?

Fiona Hyslop: I very much appreciate the concern for us that the member expressed. Christina McKelvie was a beautiful and compassionate force of nature.

I agree with the member's thanks to the outgoing chief executive and his welcome for the new chief executive, who was also welcomed by the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Gaelic when the announcement was made.

The role of Government in that space is to continue to support and invest in Ferguson's, as has been announced. As the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, my role lies in the procurement space. Given that investment has been secured for a further three major vessels and that SVRP 2 will come on stream, it is clear that there is a firm future for the procurement of ships and vessels for our island communities.

Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab): In structuring the tendering procedure for phase 2 of the small vessel replacement programme, would the cabinet secretary consider ensuring that there is a minimum social value weighting of at least 10 per cent, in line with procurement practices in other parts of the United Kingdom? If so, would that weighting be likely to include a UK work share in the contract? Will the cabinet secretary also think about whether we can structure shipyards or shipbuilding facilities in Scotland as common user facilities, so that any tenderer, anywhere in the world, can include in their bid an intention to use a UK or Scottish shipyard for the purpose of fulfilling the contract?

Fiona Hyslop: I listened carefully to the member when he made similar remarks in the chamber recently.

We are guided by the existing procurement rules and I will take advice from CMAL, as appropriate, at each phase. The positive news is the level of investment that we have to take forward the procurement. I am cognisant of the remarks that the member has made not only today but previously.

Offshore Wind Industry

7. Colin Beattie (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP): To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on its work to grow the offshore wind industry. (S6O-04510)

The Acting Minister for Climate Action (Alasdair Allan): The success of Scotland's offshore wind industry is a priority for this Government. Our investment forum last week underlined our commitment to attracting investment and demonstrated the approach that we are taking across the public sector by addressing areas such as investment, consenting, skills and grid.

We are working closely with the sector to align our approach to the challenges that it faces. This year, we have tripled our capital investment in the sector to £150 million to support the ports, manufacturing and supply chain facilities required, which is helping to secure jobs and economic benefits at scale in Scotland.

Colin Beattie: We are all aware of the urgent need to tackle the climate emergency and to achieve net zero. However, it is also crucial to unlock the economic potential of the energy transition to create jobs and boost economic growth for our communities. Will the minister advise what steps the Scottish Government is taking to establish manufacturing capabilities in Scotland in order to keep skilled jobs in our communities?

Alasdair Allan: The member is right to say that environmental and economic benefits go together. We will ensure co-ordinated action across the green industry strategic priority areas to maximise positive economic outcomes. We have invested significantly in Scotland's manufacturing support infrastructure, including an investment of just under £75 million in the National Manufacturing Institute Scotland and the development of regional and sectoral facilities that are focused on improving the knowledge and skill sets that will be needed by the workforce.

Our "Offshore Wind Focus" paper identifies the priority areas for supply chain and infrastructure investment in Scotland's offshore wind sector and underpins the Government's approach to delivering a strategic investment of up to £500 million over five years.

Sarah Boyack (Lothian) (Lab): The minister was at a very positive Scottish Offshore Wind Energy Council event in Parliament this week, where many people raised with me the issue of supply chains in manufacturing. My question follows on from the minister's answer to the previous question. Will he focus on providing certainty by speeding up decisions? Supply chains are a major issue that Lothian region faces, and we need to be able to get the investment that we need.

Alasdair Allan: I concur with what the member said and thank her for sponsoring that event. I also highlight the importance of the Scottish supply chain. As I said, we are investing up to £500 million over five years and we hope and expect that that will leverage in additional private investment of up to £1.5 billion in the infrastructure and manufacturing facilities that are critical to growing the sector. That work by the Scottish Government to engage and attract the interest of the private sector will ultimately lead to the development at scale that the member alludes to.

I can also point to specific things, including strategic projects such as Sumitomo's new cable factory, which is under construction at Nigg, or the planned manufacturing facility at Hunterston, as well as projects at Ardersier, Scapa, Nigg and Montrose.

Craig Hoy (South Scotland) (Con): The minister will be well aware that, in many instances, it is the profits from companies' oil and gas interests that are funding investment in renewables. Does he therefore share my concern about the data that the Office for Budget Responsibility released yesterday that shows that tax receipts from North Sea oil and gas will slump from £5.4 billion to £2.3 billion by the end of the decade? Surely that will impact on profits and impede investment in renewables.

Alasdair Allan: As was discussed earlier today, the long-term trajectory around the income that the UK Government derives from the North Sea is determined by the long-term trajectory of the maturing of the North Sea basin. That does not mean that the Scottish Government does not think that oil and gas are important—clearly, they are. However, the trends that the member refers to are outwith the control of any Government. We have to ensure that there is a genuinely just transition for the parts of the country that have invested so heavily and have so many skills in the oil and gas sector, and to ensure that the many people in those industries who are seeking new opportunities get the skills that they need to do that.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Question 8 has been withdrawn. That concludes portfolio questions. Before we move to the next item of business, there will be a brief pause to allow the front-bench teams to change positions.

Fatal Accident Inquiries (Deaths in Custody)

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur): The next item of business is a statement by Angela Constance on the response to fatal accident inquiries—deaths in custody. The cabinet secretary will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

14:51

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs (Angela Constance): In January, I set out a range of actions to address the systemic failures that were identified by Sheriff Collins's fatal accident inquiry determination relating to the tragic deaths of Katie Allan and William Lindsay, also known as William Brown. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to meet their families once again today.

The commitments that I made in January form part of a new approach in relation to all deaths in custody. Official statistics that were published on Tuesday link data on deaths in custody with death records that are held by National Records of Scotland for the first time, and they show that around 30 per cent of deaths in custody in the decade to 2022-23 were classed as probable suicides. While every single suicide is a tragedy, the data takes us a step forward in improving transparency and understanding the causes of deaths in prison custody. That progress is crucial as we work to address the issues surrounding the safety and wellbeing of those in custody.

The formal response from the Scottish ministers and the Scottish Prison Service to the sheriff's FAI determination was published on 13 March. All the recommendations were accepted, with specific responses to each recommendation referencing completed work to date and setting out where further work is required and when that will take place. I expect that work to be delivered at pace, and I will be closely monitoring progress.

The SPS has initiated a dedicated operational task force, which is chaired by the chief executive and involves national health service partners, to ensure that all recommendations are actioned. That will be underpinned by a delivery framework with biannual updates.

In January, I emphasised the critical importance of independent scrutiny, and I am pleased to report that terms of reference have now been agreed with His Majesty's chief inspector of prisons for Scotland. The chief inspector shares my view on the need for rigour and transparency in that work, as well as the need to involve

families, prisoners, SPS staff and expert advice. She expects to provide me with an initial report on progress by the summer.

On the introduction of a national oversight mechanism, I am grateful for the early engagement that we have had with a wide range of stakeholders on the options that are available. That will continue as we finalise the model and establish a plan to implement it.

At its core, the national oversight mechanism will provide accountability and transparency, and it will drive systemic improvement. It will be informed by evidence and analysis, and, crucially, will be independent of Government. Consideration will be given to widen the scope to include all deaths that occur in the care of the state, not just custody. Key functions will include annual reporting and the ability to audit existing FAI recommendations, for example.

I am pleased to be able to report that progress has been made regarding the broader package of measures. Last week, I visited Polmont to see at first hand a team that is committed to action at pace and applying learning. The SPS has removed all bunk beds from accommodation that might be used to house a young person at Polmont. In addition, an instruction has been issued to governors to ensure that all establishments that accommodate young prisoners conform to the same standard. All rectangular door stops of the type that were identified in the FAI process have been removed from Polmont.

The policy on possession of items that can be used as ligatures is being revised, and a pilot of the ligature audit toolkit has started. In addition, signs-of-life technology will be piloted with Polmont and, where the evidence shows that it works, we will support the Scottish Prison Service to ensure that it is implemented.

At the centre of Sheriff Collins's recommendations was the need to overhaul the SPS's suicide prevention strategy, talk to me. Professors Graham Towl and David Crighton have been appointed to lead the evidence phase of that crucial work. Both professors are forensic psychologists with a specialty in suicide prevention in prisons. They have both held senior roles with the Ministry of Justice, and Professor Towl was called on as an expert witness at the FAI of Katie and William. That work represents a commitment to real and lasting change, and their initial work will be completed by the end of the summer. The SPS will overhaul its strategy in tandem with the evidence review, so it will be ready to publish at the end of this year, with a full training package to be implemented in 2026.

For some, the first 72 hours in custody is the most challenging. Sheriff Collins recognised that in recommending that the talk to me programme be applied to all young people during that period. That will be a key part of the revised strategy. I was able to discuss in detail with the governor at Polmont the enhanced measures and additional staff resources that have been put in place in the meantime to ensure that any new admission will be placed in dedicated observation cells for the first 72 hours and will not be removed from observation thereafter until it is safe to do so.

On the issue of bullying, I am clear that prisons must be safe and rehabilitative. The SPS must address harmful behaviour and foster a culture of respect and safety. It has accepted that its anti-bullying policy, think twice, has not been effective, and it will draw on relevant external expertise to develop a new strategy this year.

Particular to William Lindsay's case, the FAI heard that information available to the court was not shared with the SPS. That was unacceptable, and the inconsistent practice around the transfer of information from courts to custody needs immediate resolution. The Scottish Government is therefore leading work with relevant partners to ensure the consistent transfer of relevant information between courts and the Prison Service. Once concluded, justice partners will be required to fully integrate the revised processes to ensure a seamless transition of information between court and custody.

In January, I set out a commitment that all death in prison learning and audit reviews would be chaired independently. I confirm that a non-executive member of the SPS board will now chair all reviews on an interim arrangement. That ensures that those reviews are independent of governors and prison staff while maintaining continuity and momentum. However, the SPS will undertake an open and formal recruitment process over the summer to appoint a formal chair.

In consultation with the Lord Advocate, I have commissioned an independent review of the FAI system to focus on improving the efficiency, effectiveness and trauma-informed nature of investigations into deaths in prison custody. It will also identify the specific barriers that families face in engaging with the process and propose concrete solutions to shortened timescales. I will provide the Parliament with an update on the appointment of a chair, which I expect to be able to announce shortly. We have made good progress in developing our draft remit and ensuring that the review is well resourced so that it can start work immediately.

On legal aid, I committed to making legal aid free and non-means tested for families involved in deaths in custody FAIs. That will ultimately require

primary legislation, which, given where we are in the parliamentary session, will be for a new session of Parliament. However, I do not want families to wait for that important support, so I will be using existing ministerial powers to ensure that, from Monday 7 April, close family members who are involved in deaths in custody FAIs will have access to non-means-tested legal aid. We will also put in place additional support services for families and introduce a new family advocacy role. Engagement has already begun with families to ensure that our approach is shaped by them. That will ensure that families have independent trauma-informed support and guidance following the death of their loved one.

We have made progress since January. I assure the Parliament that we will continue to drive forward change and strengthen accountability. This work is about changing the system and the culture that underpins it.

In closing, I extend my deepest condolences to the families of Katie Allan, William Lindsay and all those affected by a death in custody. It is through on-going and decisive action that we will create the lasting change that they rightly demand and deserve.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for that, after which we will need to move to the next item of business.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): I thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of her statement. I acknowledge and welcome that all of Sheriff Collins's 25 recommendations relating to the tragic and preventable deaths of Katie Allan and William Lindsay have been accepted. However, there is clearly a desperate need for action without delay to prevent further tragedies. I recognise the progress that the cabinet secretary has just reported, but will she make a commitment today, on the record, that all the recommendations will be implemented urgently and within the timescales that are set out in the report?

Furthermore, I recall from her statement in January that the cabinet secretary committed to pursuing with the United Kingdom Government the removal of Crown immunity. Will the cabinet secretary provide us with an update on any discussions that she has had with the UK Government since that statement?

Finally, the cabinet secretary gave a very welcome commitment to make legal aid free, from 7 April, to close family members in tragic cases such as these, but we all know that the legal aid system is in crisis—it lacks funding and, indeed, legal representatives. How will the cabinet

secretary ensure that she urgently addresses those issues so that families who find themselves in such tragic circumstances not only get legal aid but get the representation that they deserve?

Angela Constance: I thank Mr Kerr for his acknowledgement that we have accepted all the recommendations. I have always been clear to Parliament that accountability starts with me. I will pursue everyone—not just within the justice portfolio but across Government—to the very best of my abilities, because we desperately need action, and we cannot have any more delay. It is fair to say that, given the depth of the work, some of our aspirations and some of the recommendations will not all be completed by a week on Tuesday and will require sustained endeavours over the next year.

On Crown immunity, I wrote to the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice in the UK Government in mid-January and have not had a response. I want to have a meeting with the UK Government and will consider other means to pursue such a meeting. Sheriff Collins's narration of the issues on Crown immunity and its history was powerful.

On legal aid, I have committed to introducing primary legislation that would provide for non-means-tested legal aid for families participating in deaths in custody FAIs. That would include non-means-tested advice and assistance from day 1. That is what requires primary legislation. I cannot deliver that right now, but I am conscious that ministers will have to provide support for the implementation of recommendations through the provision of finance or personnel.

The ministerial direction that will become live from 7 April will enable families to get civil legal aid from the point that they are notified that there will be a fatal accident inquiry.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): I wholeheartedly welcome the commitment that the cabinet secretary has made on non-means-tested legal aid for close family members who are involved in deaths in custody FAIs. I called for that when the cabinet secretary made her previous statement on the issue, and I am delighted that the Government will use the powers that are available to it to make that happen as soon as possible, and note that additional powers will be needed at a later stage.

I also welcome the transparency that we are trying to achieve in relation to deaths in custody, and the appointment of chairs of FAIs relating to deaths in custody who can be independent of the Scottish Prison Service.

The removal of bunk beds at Polmont and the progress towards the removal of ligatures are really important for preventing more deaths in

custody. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the state has a responsibility to keep prisoners safe while they are serving a sentence? In too many cases, it has not done so. Does she have concerns about Addiewell prison? There have been 14 deaths there since the tragic deaths of Jordan Burns, who took his own life, and Lewis Spence, whose family have expressed concerns about the running of the prison. Families must be given full and unfettered access, as was promised by HMIPS. Will the cabinet secretary look into those matters?

Angela Constance: Ms McNeill is quite correct to state the importance of transparency. Transparency leads to accountability; accountability leads to action; and action leads to change. I unequivocally state that the state has a responsibility to keep those in our custody safe and well.

On Ms McNeill's point about HMP Addiewell, colleagues will be aware that the SPS manages the contract, and, when things do not go well or additional assistance or support is required, it is the SPS that will ultimately step in.

Ms McNeill's point about families having appropriate access, whether that is to services or personnel in HMP Addiewell or to HMIPS, is important, and I will take that away and address it directly.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): I wrote to the cabinet secretary earlier this month and last year about Jordan Burns, so I know that she will be aware of the case of that 22-year-old who had a history of significant self-harming during his 10 months as a remand prisoner at HMP Addiewell. Sadly, on 23 November last year, Jordan was found dead in his cell, having suffered an overdose. Jordan's mum, who has experienced unimaginable grief, is a constituent of mine, and my office and I have had on-going contact with her. Does the cabinet secretary agree that the fatal accident inquiry should be expedited so that the family can be given the answers that they need? With a case such as that, what steps is the Scottish Government taking to ensure that there is confidence that adequate systems are in place to protect prisoners in such circumstances and reduce the likelihood of similar instances occurring in the future?

Angela Constance: I acknowledge the correspondence that I have received from Mr MacGregor on behalf of his constituent. My thoughts continue to be with the family of Jordan. Every death, whether in custody or in our communities, is a tragedy for all those who know that person.

Mr MacGregor might wish to raise the issue of the timing of the FAI with the Lord Advocate directly. What I can speak to is the action that was set out in our response to Sheriff Collins's fatal accident inquiry, which I hope shows a commitment by the SPS and the Scottish Government to learn lessons and make improvements, and to do so at pace. I point to the fact that the talk to me strategy is being overhauled, and that suicide prevention technology is being developed. That work is being accelerated, and all national health service boards have given assurances that prison referrals to the mental health team are immediately reviewed and acted on without delay. Of course, we all want to scrutinise those actions to ensure that they are implemented.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I recognise the extreme sensitivity of the issue that we are debating, but if I am to get in every member who wants to ask a question, the questions will have to be briefer, as will the responses.

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The worrying finding of the FAI was that information that was available to the court was not shared with the SPS. Given the shift towards placing young people in secure accommodation, what assurances can the cabinet secretary give the Parliament that the same information-sharing issues will not arise in those secure settings, so that our young people stay protected in that environment?

Angela Constance: In many cases, the sharing of information is probably the single most crucial issue, because people cannot act without full knowledge and information. I therefore have to make a call on the NHS, colleagues in the community and the Scottish Prison Service that we must find better ways to share information, and to do so timeously.

The Scottish Government is leading on work on that. All the problems and gaps have been identified. The problem is well and truly on the table, but we need to crack on and get it solved once and for all.

Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP): It is clear from the cabinet secretary's statement that the Scottish Prison Service's talk to me strategy needs an overhaul. I very much welcome the update that has been provided, indicating that the strategy will be reviewed. Will the cabinet secretary provide more information on the review, particularly about the experts who have been appointed to carry it out?

Angela Constance: As I said in my statement, Professor Graham Towl is leading the evidential stage of the overhaul. He is a prominent academic expert in forensic psychology. He will be

supported by Professor Crighton, a consultant forensic psychologist. Both professors have held senior forensic psychologist roles in the Ministry of Justice and they are experienced in working in custodial settings. They have published some of their work and they will independently review the talk to me strategy and make formal recommendations to the Scottish Prison Service, based on wider stakeholder engagement, including with those in custody and their families. The new policy will be based on the best available evidence.

Paul O’Kane (West Scotland) (Lab): The acknowledgement that the anti-bullying policy, think twice, has not been effective was clearly outlined in the FAI—the cabinet secretary has referred to that. A new strategy is welcome, but will she say more about exactly who will be involved in shaping it? How will families who want to be involved in the process be included and heard? What assurances can she give right now that families’ loved ones are safe when they are in custody?

Angela Constance: I hope that it is of some reassurance that there is an acknowledgement that the anti-bullying strategy also needs to be overhauled. I can say that there will be a new strategy this year and that it will be informed by independent expert advice.

The point that Paul O’Kane makes about the involvement of families is crucial, and I am deeply mindful of it.

On Paul O’Kane’s third point—I am sorry, can he remind me what it was?

Paul O’Kane: It was about families’ concerns.

Angela Constance: I point to the installation of a 24-hour concern line for families to be able to contact the Prison Service, and the work to explore and expand the use of in-cell telephony and the ways in which that can enable loved ones to contact external agencies or other support within the prison.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That was an acceptable intervention from a sedentary position, Mr O’Kane.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): Can the cabinet secretary advise what technology there is on signs of life that has already been considered and assessed by the Scottish Prison Service?

Angela Constance: There is a short-life working group on the technology. The SPS is looking at the commercial companies that have undertaken some work on the new HMP Highland and HMP Glasgow projects. It has also engaged with Heriot-Watt University, which is actively exploring research opportunities in the area and

seeking funding from research bodies to further develop its work.

Given the unique challenges of the prison environment, there is not a single solution, but I make the point that we should grasp the opportunities that are available to us with new and emergent technologies. However, technology will never replace human-to-human contact.

Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green): I extend my sincere condolences to the families of Katie Allan and William Lindsay and to all those affected by death in custody.

The cabinet secretary spoke of the enhanced measures and resources that have been put in place for the first 72 hours in custody, acknowledging that that is often the most challenging time. She mentioned observation cells and the overhaul of the talk to me suicide prevention strategy. While the overhaul of talk to me is happening, what will be done to help and support those in the observation cells, other than observing them? Are there any other recommendations about talk to me that can be implemented immediately?

Angela Constance: There is a commitment from me and from the Scottish Prison Service that all the recommendations in the fatal accident inquiry determination around talk to me will be implemented. In terms of the here and now, I outlined the actions that are in place to care for young people in those first 72 hours in custody or beyond. Additional staff resource is now in place, and there are enhanced measures to ensure that those new admissions can be looked after in dedicated observation cells and will not be removed from those arrangements until it is safe to do so and there has been a case conference.

Alex Cole-Hamilton (Edinburgh Western) (LD): Family after family have been let down by the Crown Office. I pay tribute to those who are represented in the gallery today, and I thank them for their bravery and persistence. Year after year, we have been told that things will improve and that changes will be made, but there are still unforgivable and agonisingly long waits for those families, adding to the torment that they are suffering.

Why not ask the independent review of the FAI system to consider removing the responsibility from the Crown Office altogether and moving it into a separate system, learning from the coroners elsewhere in the UK? Surely the cabinet secretary can see that the Crown Office has shown itself to be incapable of handling the issue.

Angela Constance: I appreciate that Mr Cole-Hamilton has very specific and strong views on the matter. There are aspects that he would narrate that I would share. Families are undoubtedly

waiting too long for fatal accident inquiries. That is why, in response to the trauma that is associated with delays, I have commissioned an independent review of fatal accident inquiries that is focused on deaths in prison custody. I hope to be in a position to announce the chair very soon.

I hope that that demonstrates my commitment to families that are impacted by a death in custody to move this on—and that we will move it on. I appreciate that there are wider issues around fatal accident inquiries, but my focus right now is to deliver better efficiency and better trauma-informed care for families that are impacted by a death in custody.

Clare Haughey (Rutherglen) (SNP): According to statistics published by the chief statistician this week, there were 345 deaths in prison custody over the period from 2012-13 to 2022-23. What work is being done to ensure that deaths in custody are prevented in the overall prison estate?

Angela Constance: That is an important point. The work that is commencing is about developing detailed pathways from the point of admission to liberation and throughcare that ensure that individuals have access to the right interventions that support their wellbeing.

Ms Haughey might be interested to know that the SPS and Public Health Scotland are collaborating to gain a better understanding of the prevalence of long-term health conditions in prison, which are more common among the prison population when compared with the wider community. Combining that work with the implementation of the FAI recommendations will help to ensure that individuals have access to targeted preventative health and wellbeing interventions.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): Recommendation 7, which is the only one that is addressed directly to ministers, is about the fundamental issue of ensuring that the SPS has access to all information about a young person, including mental health assessments. The Government admits in its response that there have been systemic failures across agencies in that respect. It is setting up a working group to look into the matter, but there is no information on when it will report or what it will do. Will the cabinet secretary make a commitment on when it will report?

Also, in her previous statement, the cabinet secretary committed to speaking to the new chief inspector of prisons for Scotland about ensuring that more unannounced inspections take place. Can she provide an update on that and on what action has been taken?

Angela Constance: I have met the new chief inspector of prisons, and I will meet her again.

There is a well-made point about unexpected inspections.

I will not repeat what I said to Ms Dowey's colleague Roz McCall on information sharing. However, one example of where we are actively improving information sharing relates to the improvement of healthcare information technology, which is very important for clinical purposes when it comes to providing access to the right information at the right time.

Clare Adamson (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I offer my condolences to the families and friends of Katie Allan, William Brown and Jordan Burns, who have been mentioned this afternoon, on the tragic loss of those young people.

The cabinet secretary spoke about the detailed conversations and assurances that she has had on enhanced measures in those first crucial 72 hours in custody. Can she provide more detail on how recent actions address some of the recommendations in Sheriff Collins's determination?

Angela Constance: Presiding Officer, I do not want to incur your wrath, so I will not repeat what I have said in previous answers about our work to overhaul the talk to me strategy or some of the work to enhance self-safety through the anti-ligature risk assessment tool that is being developed and will be rolled out.

I expect all stakeholders who are involved in this journey to provide me with regular updates, and I give Parliament a commitment in that regard—in whatever shape or form Parliament wishes.

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): The cabinet secretary mentioned the sharing of information between the courts, the NHS and the SPS at the time of a person's admission to prison. Will she also confirm that the sharing of data will take place at the release of a person from prison? Such sharing of information could have saved the life of my constituent Alan Geddes, who was murdered by someone who had been released from prison just hours earlier.

Angela Constance: I very much appreciate Mr Lumsden's engagement on that issue. I had the privilege of meeting his constituent Ms Sandra Geddes with respect to the death—the murder—of her beloved brother. I will keep Mr Lumsden updated on the progress on release planning and throughcare support. The point that he makes about the sharing of information when people come into custody is equally applicable to when people are liberated.

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

Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing): The next item of business is a debate on motion S6M-16789, in the name of Liz Smith, on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

I note that a Scottish Government minister does not appear to be in the chamber. We will nonetheless need to continue, because this is follow-on business.

15:24

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Before I move the motion in my name, I intimate that I will spend my opening speech talking about the principles of the bill and that, throughout the debate and in my summing-up speech, I will deal with the concerns that have been raised by the Education, Children and Young People Committee and by other members.

On returning from Lagganlia outdoor centre, Nevis—who has cerebral palsy, is a full-time wheelchair user and needs support with feeding and an adult carer with him at all times—said:

“Rock climbing was awesome and I got to sail round an island with my friends in a storm—things I can’t usually do and what you think you will see only in films. I felt so brave. Everyone should get the chance to do this.”

Throughout my 16 years as a secondary school teacher and my subsequent two decades as a parliamentarian, I have been firmly of the view that outdoor education is one of the most valuable and rewarding learning experiences that any young person can have. Residential outdoor education, through which young people experience an environment that is far removed from their everyday situations, is often life changing, as it was for Nevis.

Adventurous new experiences in the outdoors allow young people to develop lifelong connections to the natural environment. They build self-esteem, self-reliance, confidence and, most important, resilience. They also help young people to learn leadership skills, the importance of valuing friendship and what it means to be part of a team. Those skills not only enrich our lives as individuals but benefit society and the economy.

The evidence that illustrates the benefits of residential outdoor education, both at home and abroad, is well documented, and it is so compelling that I do not believe that anyone should miss out on such an opportunity. Indeed, listening to young people whose lives have been changed as a result of residential education has

been one of the most rewarding aspects of my entire parliamentary career.

I will address the very important question that Willie Rennie asked me in the committee, about why the bill is a priority. First, I believe that, in the post-Covid era, we have to work even harder to build resilience and confidence in our young people, especially those from the most disadvantaged communities. I do not need to recount to members the current problems in our schools that relate to mental health and anxiety, attendance, attainment and the increasing need for provision for additional support needs, as identified by recent statistics. The evidence that has been provided to the Education, Children and Young People Committee was overwhelmingly positive in showing that residential experiences can do so much to help in that regard.

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): Will Liz Smith articulate why the bill proposes opportunities—which are perhaps needed in Scotland even more than they are in other areas of the United Kingdom, given the curriculum for excellence and skills development—that are unavailable within the confines of a classroom?

Liz Smith: Absolutely. Martin Whitfield has made a very good point. I will come to the curriculum for excellence a little later.

It is about what not just young people but their teachers are saying, no matter the social background of their primary school pupils. Alex Stark, the headteacher of Tinto primary school, said:

“We strongly believe that at least one residential experience should be the right of every child. That’s because we see our pupils grow in such different ways and especially in confidence, resilience and independence and all of that helps so much when we get back to school.”

Secondly, the current set-up is not delivering well enough when it comes to residential opportunities. Despite the moves that were made to improve matters when the Scottish Government’s vision for outdoor learning was produced in 2010, and the excellent job that has been done by some schools, significant gaps remain. There is considerable inequity across provision—most especially for pupils with special needs—and wide variation in resource provision across different local authorities. There is also inequity of provision between the independent school sector, in which residential outdoor education is embedded in the curriculum, and too many state schools, in which, despite very willing intent among many teachers, there is very little provision. That is simply not fair, especially given that the John Muir award has been paused for some months.

I turn to the Education, Children and Young People Committee's very helpful report and to the challenges that members want to have addressed. I will develop my ideas further in my closing speech.

First, on funding and the need to find a commitment of £40 million, I am told that there is no money. Of course, that is a matter of priority within the Scottish Government's spending commitments. I have pointed out to ministers that quite a high percentage of pupil equity funding—which I have supported and believe to have been generous—is used by headteachers to fund a variety of residential experiences. I consider that that reflects the recognition by schools of the importance of residential.

I also flag up the Scottish Parliament information centre's statistics on PEF, which show that, in 2020-21, there was an underspend of £43.4 million, with that money being carried over. In 2023-24, £30 million of pupil equity funding was reprofiled into the local government attainment grant and used for public sector pay increases, as was intimated to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. The minister might want to comment on that later.

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): Will the member take an intervention?

Liz Smith: I will not just now, if Mr Mason does not mind. He has asked some interesting and important questions about the bill, and I will come back to them.

I have suggested to ministers that they should look at alternative models of funding, such as public trust models, partnerships between the public and private sectors—which I know some ministers are keen to look at in other areas of policy development, including infrastructure funding—and models that are used by Rethink Ireland and Inspire Scotland.

The Parliament often debates and measures outcomes, so, on that basis, let me repeat the evidence that was collected by the Outward Bound Trust across eight countries, including the UK. It found that, for every £1 that is invested in outward bound programmes, there is a return of between £5 and £15 in societal value. For me, that is a very powerful finding that shows that such funding represents an important long-term investment.

I turn to the vital importance of ASN provision. I give huge credit to Pam Duncan-Glancy and several of our outdoor centres for the work that they have done to ensure that young people with special needs are properly catered for, because if the bill does not deliver for them, it will not deliver its intentions. The current provision is better than it has been in the past, but there is still an awful lot

of work to do. I will address many of those concerns in my closing speech.

A related point is the infrastructure of some centres, which will be an issue whether or not the bill passes. Broadly speaking, there are enough bed spaces, and we have a brand-new centre in Aberdeenshire, but the sector needs greater demand in order to boost its income.

It has been asserted that it is difficult to define residential outdoor education and to align it with the curriculum. I struggle with that view because—to pick up Martin Whitfield's point—I cannot think of anything that better aligns with the curriculum for excellence than experiences that demonstrably prove that youngsters become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens as a result.

I respect the opinions of representatives of the teaching unions and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, and I will come back to deal with many of their concerns, as well as those that Mr Greer raised, quite rightly, at the committee during the stage 1 process.

The bill is not about party politics. It is about what is in the best interests of our young people in the post-Covid age when so many indicators tell us that they face more challenges than ever before. I introduced the bill after many years of personal experience of watching and working with young people and teachers in the outdoor environment and after very lengthy examination of the evidence, for which I owe my staff and the bill team so much. I have spent most of my parliamentary career immersed in the world of education. If it is abundantly clear, over a long period of time and on a universal basis, that there is one aspect of the educational experience that returns the best results and outcomes, why on earth would we not make it happen?

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Douglas Ross to speak on behalf of the Education, Children and Young People Committee.

15:33

Douglas Ross (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I am speaking on behalf of the Education, Children and Young People Committee. I begin by speaking about one of our members, Keith Brown, who recently joined the committee. On behalf of the committee, I offer our support and sympathies to him following the terrible news that we heard this morning about Christina McKelvie, as well as to Christina's sons, Jack and Lewis, and her two

grandchildren, Maeve and Leo. Keith has been rightly missing from committee meetings in the past couple of weeks as he spent precious time with Christina. We wish him all the very best to get through these challenging times, and I hope that we will welcome him back in the near future.

I thank Liz Smith, as the member in charge, for introducing the bill, which has given the committee the opportunity to discuss the important issue of how to ensure equal access to residential outdoor education for pupils. I also thank my fellow committee colleagues for their diligent work on the bill and all the individuals and organisations who provided evidence, either in person or by responding to our calls for views, especially the numerous pupils who wrote in to share with the committee their positive experiences of outdoor education.

The committee would also like to thank Scottish Outdoor Education Centres and its team, who all generously gave their time and shared their insights when the committee visited Broomlee outdoor education centre. Lastly, the committee is grateful to the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee and the Finance and Public Administration Committee for their work in scrutinising the bill and sharing their conclusions in a timely manner so that we could reflect them when we were considering our report.

I say at the outset that the whole committee recognised the value of offering children and young people residential outdoor education. However, there was some divergence in views on how that should be funded.

Turning to the bill, as Liz Smith spoke passionately about, its main aim is to ensure that all pupils in state and grant-aided schools have the chance to experience at least four nights and five days of residential outdoor education during their school career. I should point out that the bill does not make it compulsory for pupils to attend residential outdoor education, but there must be an opportunity to do so.

During the committee sessions, many of us spoke about our experiences of going to residential outdoor centres as young people. I kept my story for today's debate, because I did not want to introduce it at committee stage. I went to Abernethy. I attended a small primary school in Moray called Alves primary school, which was so small that we had to join up with Dallas primary school to have enough pupils to go. Unfortunately, my twin sister, who was in the same class as me, fell and broke her collarbone. I used most of my time on that trip trying to get some sympathy, saying that I had referred pain because my twin was in hospital being treated for her broken collarbone. That is one memory that I have from my visit to a residential outdoor centre.

The interest and passion that Liz Smith has shown were replicated by all members of the committee, who have had their own experiences of attending outdoor centres and know of constituents' experiences of that. That has brought a lot to the debate. We saw that in our committee sessions and in the visits that the committee made as part of our scrutiny.

The stage 1 report makes it clear that the benefits for pupils and staff are considerable. They include building pupils' confidence and developing the teacher-pupil relationship—that happens while they are attending an outdoor residential centre, but continues back in the classroom, sometimes for the entirety of a pupil's time at school. We have also noted the improvements in attainment. Given those life-changing benefits, we said that all pupils should have the opportunity to experience residential outdoor education, which should be linked to the existing curriculum at some point in their school career. We welcome the inclusive approach that has been taken in the bill.

Martin Whitfield: As an add-on to my earlier intervention, was the committee satisfied that outdoor education fulfils many of the requirements of the curriculum for excellence, both in its original form and with the additional vision that was added in 2010?

Douglas Ross: We absolutely were. That came across in the evidence sessions that we held and in the information that we gathered during those sessions. I hope that our report reflects that.

However, we recognised the challenges in relation to the universality of the opportunity to experience residential outdoor education, including how it should be funded, the impact on teachers and the existing capacity of residential outdoor centres to accommodate pupils. We all acknowledged that more work needs to be done in assessing capacity across Scotland and the ability for existing outdoor centres to provide residential opportunities for all pupils—including, as Liz Smith said, to accommodate pupils with complex additional support needs. We all agreed that the additional costs of providing residential outdoor education for pupils with ASN should not fall disproportionately on those pupils' families.

I will move on to teachers and the concerns that we heard during our evidence sessions and our informal session with teachers. Currently, teachers facilitate residential outdoor education visits on a voluntary basis. Many of the teachers whom we spoke to spoke highly of the value of that experience to pupils and to them personally. However, representatives of education trade unions cautioned that placing such trips on a statutory footing, as proposed in the bill, would change the nature of the arrangements. We heard that that could potentially require teachers to

renegotiate their terms and conditions via the tripartite Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers, and we recommended that the Scottish Government provide its view on whether that would be required and an estimate of any resulting costs.

On funding, we all agreed that the national funding of residential outdoor education is a good example of preventative spend—its benefits are well documented. That said, parental contributions and fundraising are key sources of income for many schools that currently provide residential outdoor education. We have, therefore, asked the Scottish Government and the member in charge of the bill to consider whether the aim of universal provision of residential outdoor education can retain a place for parental contributions and local fundraising.

The costs that are associated with the bill mean that it cannot proceed to stage 2 unless a financial resolution is lodged. That cannot be done by the member in charge; it can be done only by the minister and the Scottish Government. I am slightly unsure about the notification that we received last night from the Scottish Government, in its response to the committee, that it

“will not stand in the way of the Bill but will not be lodging”

the financial resolution that is needed unless some progress is made. I ask that, when the minister speaks, she outlines the process that we must go through as a committee and as a Parliament to determine whether the Scottish Government will eventually lodge a financial resolution, which is clearly crucial.

We heard interesting evidence from the member in charge on other funding options that could supplement the central Government funding that will be required to implement the bill. That included a public trust model. Not only the education committee but the Finance and Public Administration Committee said that there was merit in exploring such alternative funding models, and we recommended that the Scottish Government liaise with Liz Smith to explore the options in a meaningful way.

The committee heard of concerns regarding capital funding for outdoor education centres. We were told that, rightly, current market prices for school residential do not include capital costs for the centres, to keep the costs of residential trips affordable. We also heard that some centres were built in the 1930s and were designed to be used for perhaps up to 25 years but are still in use now, with refurbishments done on a piecemeal basis when funding allows. All those issues were rightly highlighted and brought to the fore during one of our evidence sessions.

The Education, Children and Young People Committee supports the general principles of the bill. There are issues that need to be addressed in relation to costs and staffing, as I have set out, but the further parliamentary stages that will be afforded to Liz Smith, the Scottish Government and the Parliament as a whole provide us with an opportunity to resolve those.

15:42

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise (Natalie Don-Innes): I apologise for missing the very beginning of the debate.

Before I begin, I will take a moment to pay tribute to Christina McKelvie. She was a wonderful woman. She was kind-hearted, warm, brave and bold, and she had a fantastic sense of humour. Similar to many members who have spoken today, I found Christina to be extremely supportive. I remember how encouraging and helpful she was when I first entered the Parliament in 2021. I know that she will be terribly missed in this Parliament and across Scotland, and my deepest condolences go to Keith, Jack and Lewis and all her family and friends.

I thank the member in charge of the bill for her engagement so far. I also thank the lead committee and all the stakeholders who came forward during stage 1.

The Scottish Government believes that all children and young people should have the opportunity to engage in progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences. I have been consistent in stating that throughout my engagements on the bill.

The Government values the incredibly important work that outdoor education centres do—indeed, I saw at first hand the positive impacts of that when I visited the Outward Bound Trust’s Loch Eil site last year. That is why we provided £4 million in emergency funding to the sector during the pandemic.

The Government will be abstaining in the vote today. Let me be clear why. We are of course supportive of the underpinning aims of the bill, but our initial significant reservations, which we set out to the committee last year, remain unresolved, as yet. I have reiterated that to Liz Smith, and I have been clear that those concerns must be fully considered and addressed if the bill passes at stage 1 today—I refer specifically to the concerns on affordability, equity of provision and workforce implications.

Liz Smith: I am grateful to the minister, because I think that the Scottish Government has moved its position. I am more than willing to engage on the challenges, as I always have

been—we have had good meetings about that. Can I ask about the timescale for engagement? It is very important that we have a relatively quick timescale to resolve the differences.

Natalie Don-Innes: Absolutely—I was going to set that out. I am willing to start the discussions right away. We have had good engagement to date, and I am willing to continue that to try to get this delivered.

Douglas Ross: Is the minister able to explain how the process will work? We have a period of only six months. If no action is taken and no financial resolution is lodged, the bill will automatically fall. Therefore, can she give a commitment to come back, either to the lead committee or to the Parliament, to tell us her determination on whether those issues have been addressed before the six-month period? Otherwise, the Parliament will not have an opportunity to give its view.

Natalie Don-Innes: I have been very clear that, as the process requires, I am willing to engage with the member in charge of the bill on those matters and will do so immediately and at pace.

I want to talk through some of the significant challenges that I have previously discussed with the member. Turning first to financing, the bill as introduced is unaffordable. We need to remember that the bill does two things: it places a duty on education authorities and the managers of grant-aided schools to secure the provision of outdoor learning opportunities, which many schools across the country already offer, and it places a duty on the Scottish Government to fund that. There are known gaps in the bill's financial modelling relating to the cost of staffing, the impact of inflation and the lack of modelling of additional costs to accommodate pupils with ASN, as well as other ancillary costs. Until more clarity can be provided, we cannot commit to financing a proposal for which the true costs are as yet unknown.

John Mason: Will the member take an intervention?

Natalie Don-Innes: I need to make a little progress.

Members across the chamber would rightly be critical if, in an alternative scenario, the Government were to sign up to a bill with unknown financial implications.

Ring fencing in excess of £40 million annually within the budget to secure provision of one form of outdoor learning would come at the detriment of other competing policy and public priorities. I heard what the member said about pupil equity funding, but that could not be guaranteed year on year. As I have said, a number of costs have not been considered in the proposal.

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

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): Will the member give way?

Natalie Don-Innes: I will take the intervention from Miles Briggs.

Miles Briggs: I thank the minister for taking the intervention. Does she recognise that the second-largest council in Scotland, the City of Edinburgh Council, provides outdoor education to our young people? That brings huge benefits, but it is not a foreign concept. It is about trying to get all schools in Scotland to deliver it.

Natalie Don-Innes: Absolutely, and I appreciate that lots of them do it. However, as I said, the bill would be unaffordable for the Scottish Government to fund. I ask members who support the bill as it currently stands from where they would seek to cut funding in education. Would it be from our teachers, our schools, our nurseries or our colleges?

For those reasons, the Scottish Government has not lodged a financial resolution at this time. I am aware that that might frustrate members, but I remind members that Scottish ministers have a unique responsibility and accountability for the appropriate management of the budget. The financial resolution exists as an important and legitimate mechanism for that. Scottish ministers will lodge a financial resolution if and when affordability of the provisions and other practical challenges can be assured, up to six months following the conclusion of stage 1.

I reassure members that, should the bill pass at stage 1, I will continue to work constructively with the member in charge of the bill. As recently as 13 March, we met to discuss the bill and touched on potential amendments. I am keen to fully explore how the overall financial burden of the provisions could be reduced.

My second point relates to equity. Through my conversations with stakeholders and further data gathering undertaken with the sector, I am aware that there is very limited capacity across centres in Scotland to host young people with complex additional support needs. In recent weeks, members have rightly raised their concerns about the need to support pupils with ASN, but if the bill is truly to deliver equitable opportunities for all our young people, and in a way that avoids any one learner with additional support needs being isolated, more time and more resources are required to deliver that universal provision.

My third concern is about the implications for the workforce, which have been touched on already. The bill presumes the delivery of residential outdoor education on a voluntary basis. However,

as the convener pointed out, evidence to the lead committee makes it clear that, should the bill pass, it is likely that there would need to be a change in teachers' contracts. It is also not for the Scottish Government to pre-empt any joint decision that would need to be made by the tripartite group, the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers, but it is certainly possible that the results of those negotiations could further increase the cost of delivery. Workforce capacity to respond to the bill would also need to be explored.

Overall, the Government absolutely recognises the positive aims behind the bill, and I hope that I have been very clear throughout our engagement that that is our view. It is on that basis that I wish to reaffirm my commitment to working with the member in charge to find a constructive and affordable way forward that delivers for all our children and young people.

15:49

Miles Briggs (Lothian) (Con): I begin by paying tribute to Christina McKelvie. We were all shocked when we heard the news, and I want to send my condolences at this difficult time to fellow member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee Keith Brown, to all Christina's family and friends, and to members across the chamber.

I pay tribute to my friend and colleague Liz Smith, not only for the power of work that she and her parliamentary office have put into her Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill, but for her lifelong advocacy—as a teacher and as a member of this Parliament—of the benefits of outdoor education for our young people.

As a member of the committee, I had the pleasure of taking part in its evidence taking on the proposal and of meeting and hearing from the fantastic and passionate people who work in the outdoor education sector across our great country. I have probably now heard too many stories from my colleague John Mason about seeing his teachers in their nightwear during his childhood outdoor educational experiences, but I am sure that we will have the pleasure of hearing more of that later.

We all agree that it is unquestionably the case that young people receive positive educational, personal, character and mental health benefits as a result of undertaking residential outdoor education, and the bill will make a positive difference to the outcomes of all our young people.

As I said in my intervention on the minister, as an Edinburgh MSP, I have first-hand knowledge of how incredibly lucky parents and guardians in the capital are in still being able to access residential outdoor education experiences for our young

people. I pay tribute to the City of Edinburgh Council for continuing to value and deliver residential outdoor education, given the huge financial pressures that the council faces. If the lowest-funded council in Scotland can deliver residential outdoor education, I am sure that we can get every other council in Scotland to deliver the policy and the benefits that it will bring.

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): The member makes a very good point. Does he agree that it might be possible for us to help local authorities to engage in shared activities to enable some of our constituents to access such provision?

Miles Briggs: Absolutely. The visits that the committee undertook showed that it is not the case that there is one facility for each council—we are talking about shared facilities. The economic potential that exists for such facilities to benefit from visits by university students and team-building exercises is such that we can make the proposal work and put in place some fantastic new facilities across our country.

Throughout my time in Parliament, I have always championed the need to invest in mental wellbeing. If we truly want to bring about greater resilience and more positive mental health in the next generation, we need to invest in that at school. I have always been struck by the findings of the 2016 report on scout and guide participation, which is now almost a decade old. It found that people who were scouts and guides in childhood had better mental health in later life. That report, which was put together by researchers at Edinburgh and Glasgow universities, looked at data from a lifelong study of more than 10,000 people who had had outdoor education experiences as scouts and guides, and it found that, as adults, they were 15 per cent less likely to suffer from anxiety or to have mental health complications or mood disorders.

Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con): Will Miles Briggs give way on that point?

Miles Briggs: If there is time in hand.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that we have very limited time.

Miles Briggs: I am sorry in that case—I cannot.

In the light of the lessons from that study, I believe that, as a Parliament, we need to understand that the proposed expenditure on the bill can be regarded as preventative spend that will help to build the resilience in our young people that is missing.

The most recent significant piece of legislation to have been passed on outdoor education is the Education Act 1944, which is known as the Butler act. After the second world war, the nation wanted

to give its children and young people—who had come through the traumatic and life-changing experiences of the war and were disconnected from society—hope and a positive outlook in life. Fast forward to today, and we know that many children are disconnected from their learning, having just come through the traumatic and life-changing experience of a global pandemic.

As Liz Smith has stated, the bill is about what is in the best interests of our young people in the post-Covid age, when so many indicators tell us that they are facing more challenges than ever before. As we continue to assess the negative impacts of the educational disruption that was caused by the pandemic and the consequences that that has had for our young people, especially those from lower-income backgrounds, I believe that the bill represents an opportunity to again give our young people hope and a positive outlook in their lives.

If we are to do that, we must do it as a country and Parliament must send our young people, parents, guardians and teachers the message that we will invest in and value them.

I have time to take the intervention from Brian Whittle now.

Brian Whittle: In listening to Miles Briggs, I was struck by a quote from the president of World Athletics and International Olympic Committee president-elect, Seb Coe, who said:

“Sport is the most potent social worker in all our communities.”

Does Mr Briggs agree that we have the opportunity to fund either prevention or the outcome of not funding prevention?

Miles Briggs: I absolutely agree.

All of us in this chamber are guilty of wanting to measure absolutely everything. Politicians always want to put benchmarks in place or to know which targets have been met, but some of the learning experiences found in outdoor education cannot be quantified, although many can. It is life changing for so many young people and the relationships that they build with their fellow pupils and with teachers sustain them in education. That is the value of outdoor education that we heard about in committee.

I support the motion and I support the bill in my colleague Liz Smith’s name.

15:56

Pam Duncan-Glancy (Glasgow) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity to speak on behalf of Scottish Labour and to offer our party’s support for the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. I thank Liz Smith for

introducing the bill and for the way in which she has engaged with others, including me. I and Scottish Labour agree with the widely held belief that residential outdoor education holds enormous value for young people, teachers and the communities that they come from. For that reason, we will support the bill today.

The truth is that, for too many young people and especially those who come from low-income backgrounds or have additional support needs, access to high-quality residential outdoor education is out of reach. It is, at best, patchy and can be totally unavailable. The bill tries to change that, and, for that reason, we welcome it.

Residential outdoor education has real and lasting benefits. Pupils who take part gain resilience, confidence and social and leadership skills. It offers learning that cannot be replicated in a classroom and that is, for many young people, genuinely transformative. The benefits of residential outdoor education are well evidenced and understood, and, as children themselves told the Education, Children and Young People Committee, those experiences matter. They told us that residential experiences help them to overcome fears, build friendships and develop independence. Teachers and school staff told us how those trips improve their relationships with pupils and give them an insight into young people’s potential. For some children, that is the moment when they begin to believe in themselves.

Children also told us that residential experiences feel fun and freeing but that it is not fair that some children can go when others cannot. That is the crux of what we are discussing today. Providing every pupil with the opportunity to benefit from the kind of learning and personal growth that outdoor residential education brings will need action on some challenges, including those of funding, staffing, accessibility and capacity. I have heard from the member in charge a willingness to engage seriously on those issues.

There is a question about equity of access and the need to ensure that children with additional support needs and those whose families are struggling financially are not left behind. There is also a question of how we can ensure there is the capacity to do that. We know that we will need the staff in schools, the teachers and the changes to infrastructure that we have heard about this afternoon.

At the moment, many staff volunteer their time to accompany trips, doing that unpaid, often during weekends or evenings, and on top of already difficult workloads. During committee scrutiny of the bill, the Educational Institute of Scotland warned that no teacher should be compelled to attend overnight stays away from home as part of their contracted hours. If that becomes a statutory

duty, expectations in that regard could change. So, as the bill goes through its next stages in Parliament, we must remember the context for schools and staff.

Carol Mochan: I value your point about teachers. Do you think that there is space to work with trade unions as the bill goes through stage 2?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Please remember always to speak through the chair.

Pam Duncan-Glancy: Not only is there space, but there must be space for us to work with trade unions as the bill proceeds to stage 2, so that we take teachers, staff and their representative organisations with us.

Scottish Labour will work with members at stage 2 on amendments to ensure that implementation is consistent with staff and teacher workloads and wellbeing and that the changes are delivered with them and not to them.

We are also keen to ensure that existing inequalities are addressed and not embedded, particularly for young people with additional support needs, who stand to benefit most if we get this right. Right now, too many pupils with additional support needs miss out on residential opportunities.

Natalie Don-Innes: I absolutely concur with Ms Duncan-Glancy. There is currently very limited capacity across outdoor education centres in Scotland to host young people with complex additional support needs. Of course, we want to see that capacity grow, but the bill as it stands does not solve that problem. What would the member say to that?

Pam Duncan-Glancy: I welcome the minister's intervention. I would encourage her to seek solutions to those problems using the levers that are at her and the Government's disposal, and to work with members across the chamber to amend the bill at stage 2 to make it work.

I agree with the EIS, which said that, for inclusion to be meaningful, adequate staffing and support must be in place. That is true both in and out of the classroom. Anything less locks young people out of sharing in vital experiences. Scottish Labour will therefore continue to work with Liz Smith and others to amend the bill at stage 2 to ensure that provisions are inclusive of all young people, including those with additional support needs. That could include ensuring that there are adequate accessible facilities and transport, that support staff are available to help and that there is time to plan the adaptations that are required to support pupils with additional support needs.

On funding, we agree with the committee that clearer commitments are needed, and we agree with the NASUWT that

“a substantial injection of cash”

will be required to make outdoor education genuinely accessible for pupils with ASN. We recognise COSLA's concerns about the availability of funding for local government. I am disappointed that we received the Government's response to the bill only yesterday, which has given us limited time to engage with it, but I encourage the Government to engage with Liz Smith on that matter, because it cannot ride two horses. It cannot, on the one hand, say that it supports outdoor education in principle, as it does in its response, while, on the other hand, saying that it is not prepared to engage meaningfully on what that will cost. I hope that the engagement between Liz Smith and the Government will continue. I agree with the committee and others that the funding will need careful consideration if the bill is to enable every pupil to access residential outdoor education.

I hope that, at stage 2, members across the Parliament will work to address the concerns that have been raised. Today, Scottish Labour will support the bill at stage 1.

16:03

Ross Greer (West Scotland) (Green): Like colleagues, I start by offering my condolences to our colleague and friend Keith Brown and by remembering and celebrating the outstanding elected representative and brilliant person that Christina McKelvie was. This morning, I reflected on a trip that she and I took, which was led by our then Deputy Presiding Officer, Linda Fabiani, to Sligo for the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. At one stage in the proceedings, Christina almost leapt over a couch to challenge a member of the House of Lords who had said something so outrageously racist that it stunned the rest of us into silence. Silence was a concept that Christina McKelvie was rarely familiar with, and she was always prepared to lead from the front in challenging those who were advocating for hatred. She was always willing to lead from the front in building a better, more caring and compassionate society, and I will miss her terribly.

I thank Liz Smith for introducing the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill, and I say at the outset that the Scottish Greens support its general principles and will vote for it at stage 1. Like colleagues, in the process of scrutinising the bill, I reflected on my experience of outdoor residential education, which was the classic primary 7 week-long trip that many of us experienced. Mine was to the Castle Toward centre in Dunoon, which my class was particularly excited by because, for children of my generation, Castle Toward was famous for being where CBBC filmed the “Raven” reality TV show that some

children in Scotland were lucky enough to participate in. The cameras were not rolling when we were there, but we were at least able to use the same equipment, and it was a hugely formative experience for us. For a start, for many of the children in my class, simply getting to that outdoor education centre was the first time they had ever been on a ferry. It was also the longest time that we had ever spent away from our families, and it broadened many of our horizons.

We will support the bill at stage 1 because its general principles align with what was in the Scottish Greens' manifesto at the last election. We proposed guaranteeing every pupil across primary and secondary at least a week of residential outdoor experiences, removing the financial barriers to those residential trips and expanding outdoor play and learning provision, and the bill aligns perfectly with those proposals.

As the convener said, there was absolute agreement across the committee, regardless of our positions on the specifics of the bill, on the immense benefits not just of outdoor education in general but of residential education. The teamwork skills and adaptability that are developed are incredible skills for life, and, as Liz Smith said, incredibly useful skills for the world of work once children reach adulthood. We, as employers, are all familiar with that. Certainly, when I am recruiting for posts in my team, I am looking for people who can demonstrate the kind of skills that outdoor education, particularly residential education, is key to developing.

Outdoor education massively broadens young people's horizons. For far too many young people, because of the levels of inequality in our society, the outdoor residential trip that they take towards the end of primary school might be the first time that they have left their own community. It might be the first opportunity that they have had to see the rest of this country. The mental health benefits are absolutely immense, as is the self-confidence that comes as a result. That really came through in the evidence that we took from young people in particular.

It aligns perfectly not just with curriculum for excellence as a whole, as Martin Whitfield correctly pointed out, but specifically with learning for sustainability and the new learning for sustainability action plan that was launched in the summer of 2023. The research that was used to develop that plan made it incredibly clear that young people in Scotland want more opportunities for outdoor learning and that it should be mainstreamed into all subject areas. Offering residential opportunities is not the only way to deliver on the ambitions in the learning for sustainability plan, but it is a key way to do so. The residential experience offers things that people

simply cannot get on a day trip, much as those are, of course, also essential. The deeper connections that can be formed—particularly through teamwork skills—mean that there is an opportunity to do so much more. I am familiar with that—as a youth worker, I know the incredible additional opportunities that the residential experience provides, though it is not without its challenges.

Brian Whittle: Will the member give way?

Ross Greer: Yes, if it is brief, if Mr Whittle does not mind.

Brian Whittle: Ross Greer highlights one of the Government's issues with this, which is that it is difficult to quantify what we do not spend. It is difficult to link outdoor activity to the actual savings that we make further down the line. The Government needs to take a leap of faith here.

Ross Greer: I am grateful for that intervention, and I absolutely agree, but I would say to the Scottish Government that we could quantify, to some extent, and recognise the skills that young people build up through these experiences by delivering on the recommendations of Professor Hayward, particularly those around a Scottish diploma, project learning and the personal pathway. That would give us the opportunity to recognise those skills more formally.

One thing that we need to reflect on, in this Parliament, is that we have spent a quarter of a century legislating for additional rights and entitlements for people in Scotland but, in many cases, we have legislated for rights that we knew fine well we were not in a position to deliver, particularly for our children and young people, and particularly for those with additional support needs. This is an opportunity for us to reflect on that approach. My support for the bill is not unequivocal. Of course, there are challenges, but I support it at this stage, and I hope that I will be able to support it at stage 3.

We need to ask ourselves what the alternative is. We all agree on the benefits of outdoor education and of residential education, but is it acceptable that, at the moment, as Miles Briggs highlighted, some young people in some local authority areas will definitely get those opportunities but others in other parts of the country will not? That comes back to the question of the level at which Scottish education should be governed. To what extent should it be delivered nationally and to what extent should it be delivered by local authorities?

In this case, there should be a consistent approach. There is such a consensus around the benefits of the opportunity that it is only right that we make sure that every young person in Scotland gets it. There are issues for us to work out in the

bill process, but, if the Government has an alternative to the bill—it has had three years to bring it forward—it has not said so.

On that basis, the Greens are content to support the general principles of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill.

16:09

Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD): I will always remember Christina McKelvie speaking from the front bench, when she would speak not just with her words but with her body language. She was punchy and full of emotion. You knew exactly where you stood when she had finished with you, and I will miss her. All our thoughts are with Keith Brown and the family today.

Our view about outdoor education was quite dramatically changed during Covid, when we simply could not get out and do the things that we wanted to do. I think that that is partly where the bill has emerged from. We had taken the outdoors for granted for so long, and then we were starkly reminded of it. We have learned, again, to remind ourselves about the confidence, leadership, self-reliance and team building that the outdoors brings. Just being away from our parents for the first time is a liberating experience. To be able to do things by ourselves, together with others, changes us.

We have experienced significant problems with mental health, behaviour and absence, all of which combine to create almost a suppression of activity in schools. It makes the case for outdoor education really compelling. At the start of the bill process, I was sceptical, simply because money is really tight just now. It is really hard to squeeze out any money to do the things that we really want to do. When the witnesses were before the committee, I was giving them a bit of a hard time, because I wanted to know what the real value of the bill was. Sometimes, people explained clearly the real value.

Over time, I was convinced and converted to the cause of the bill. First, many councils offer outdoor education already, so it is not outlandish or extravagant. Some councils are able to afford it, and they can prioritise it. The second thing that convinced me was the 27-page vision for outdoor learning, which was set up in 2010. We are 14 years on and hardly anything has been done since then. When I asked the minister when she was at the committee what the assessment of the impact of that vision was, there was nothing. I thought, “We can’t afford to stay as we are, drifting on.” It was only when Liz Smith’s bill came forward that a working group suddenly emerged. A working group is always the solution to everything.

Natalie Don-Innes *rose*—

Willie Rennie: Does the minister want to say something?

Natalie Don-Innes: It is unfair to say that there has been no progress. There may not have been an evaluation of the outcomes of the vision, but we can see, day in and day out, that outdoor learning has been embedded in the curriculum. We have already touched on the fact that many pupils are able to access outdoor learning. I appreciate that we have more progress to make, but it is unfair to say that there has been no progress.

Willie Rennie: The point that I made to the minister at committee was that that is all anecdotal. We had had no independent assessment of the real impact of the vision, so we were drifting. The minister may have had experiences that she is able to cite, but the evidence is just not there, which is an indication of the problem. There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of centres and beds. Children First put it well in its briefing when it said that outdoor education must not be the preserve of “the privileged few”—it must be available to everyone.

I have been confused and slightly irritated by the Government’s approach. It clearly does not want to state its position, which is that it does not really like the bill. It is abstaining today and not taking a position, but is blocking the financial resolution for up to six months. There was no response to the committee’s report until late last night. In fact, I am not even sure that the Government had intended to put out a response.

Most important of all, despite the concerns that I have expressed quite openly in the committee, there has been no reaching out. I am not saying that I am special—I am not saying that I should have special negotiations—but I do not think that the minister has reached out to anybody in the chamber. If there were a substantial offer, I might find that quite attractive, as it might mean that we could get around some of the problems that have been identified by the committee in relation to teacher time, affordability, parental contributions, additional support needs, the needs of people in remote and rural areas and so on.

The bill will pass stage 1 today, so, following this debate, I want the minister to reach out and offer something substantial, because the one thing that we cannot afford to do is to just to go back to the way that things were. There is no neutral position. If the bill falls, the message to the education world and the outdoor education centres across the country is that we do not value outdoor education and it is not a priority in our system.

We must not go back to the way we were. That is why there needs to be an offer, or this bill. If the bill is what is needed, I will vote for it, but the Government needs to make much greater effort

and offer something that is much more substantial than what has been offered up to this point, because, so far, there seems to have just been silence.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We will now move to the open debate. Speeches from back-bench members may be up to six minutes, for the most part. I advise members that we do not really have any time in hand.

16:15

Jackie Dunbar (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP): This is a difficult day for us all. I offer my condolences to Keith Brown, Christina's sons and their families and friends. The bright shining light that was Christina McKelvie touched us all, and it will never dim, as she will be forever in our hearts.

So, to business. First, I pay tribute to Liz Smith for taking forward her member's bill and engaging with all committee members in a constructive manner. Many thanks go to all the people and organisations who provided evidence, either in person or by responding to the calls for views. I also thank the clerks and my colleagues for all their hard work.

As has previously been stated, the bill aims to provide every child in Scotland with the chance to have residential outdoor education, no matter where they live or who they are. I totally agree with the sentiment of what is trying to be achieved and with the idea behind the bill. On first glance, the aim seems to be quite an easy thing to achieve, and it is safe to say that, during the evidence sessions, no one disagreed with the idea.

However, the committee has outlined concerns in relation to a number of things in the bill, including the financial aspects and the impact on teachers' pay and conditions. When we started to dig down into what the proposal would actually mean, questions arose in relation to how it would be delivered, and I think that those questions need to be answered before we move forward.

For example, one of the three aims of the bill is to place a duty on education authorities and managers of grant-aided schools to secure the provision of at least one course of residential outdoor education for each pupil. That seems simple enough, but what happens if a child moves local authority before the authority that they are leaving has fulfilled that obligation, but after the local authority that they are moving to has already fulfilled it for the children that it is responsible for? Which local authority would be held account in providing that child with residential outdoor education?

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): Will the member take an intervention?

Jackie Dunbar: I am sorry, but I do not have the political fight in me today to take an intervention.

We heard from teachers who posed questions in respect of attending the outdoor experiences with their class. We were told that an additional teacher would be required if there was a child with additional needs, in case the child was unable to cope with a change of routine, for example, and needed to go home immediately. The additional teacher would then have to escort the child back to their parents, as the child could not travel alone, and that additional cost has not been addressed.

Leaving that aside, no consideration has been given to the fact that the teacher might have caring responsibilities in their own private life. That is not an issue in their normal working day, but what if they had to be away for a night or for the full week, which would add stress and potential financial burden to them? What happens if they are unable to procure childcare for their own families, including potential overnight childcare? Who would reimburse them, or would there be an expectation that they would need to meet that cost on their own? We were told during the evidence session that going on the residential trip could be voluntary, but we cannot expect all teachers to undertake that on a voluntary basis.

I agree with the folk who said that teachers' terms and conditions would need to be renegotiated. With no budget line being provided, where would that funding for that come from? I was one of the committee members who wanted that point added to the stage 1 report, but that proposal was defeated when it came to the casting vote.

Going back to teachers taking part on a voluntary basis, I was told by some teachers that, in some instances, they are voluntold rather than getting to volunteer freely. My fear is that, if that is the case, it could put our future generation of teachers off going into the profession.

I would like to see every child getting the same chance as the next, no matter who they are or where they are from, but we heard that it is more difficult to gain access to outdoor centres during the summer months because of their popularity. They do not just have schools booking but private companies for team-building and away days, so there is a lack of availability and the cost of booking at that time is much higher.

One witness who we heard from suggested that a potential solution could be that schools from less affluent areas could book in the winter months, when demand is less and costs are lower. However, in my view, that would not give an equal experience of the outdoors. Doing outdoor activities in the summer months is totally different

from doing those same activities in the dark mornings, on cold and frosty days, or in the rain or snow. I still remember my time from Auldearn primary school when I was on top of the Cairn Gorm in my T-shirt and jeans, trying to ski.

Teachers told us that, even when a booking is secured, the cost of the additional clothes that would be needed could be immense to some families. The answer that we heard from the outdoor centres was that specialist gear could be provided, but, as one teacher said, additional clothing does not necessarily mean specialist clothing. Some families could struggle with providing the essential day-to-day items, such as extra socks, underwear and pyjamas, or even with just having to purchase the bag to put them in. If we truly want children to have equal opportunities, we must ensure that no undue expense and financial drain are put on those who can least afford it.

That is just a small section of the concerns that were raised during the evidence sessions. As I said at the beginning, I agree with the general idea, but the concerns that were raised have to be addressed. We need to know how much budget would be needed, and I look forward to hearing some solutions as we move forward.

16:21

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): With just a year to go until dissolution and my own eyes fixed on the exit, I rise to speak in the debate with a slightly different mindset. I look back at the years spent in the chamber and question—not in a way that is disrespectful to colleagues—how much of what we have done has actually delivered a meaningful step change in the future lives of Scotland’s young people. What have we actually done to shift the dial? What will people reel off in future as the key successes of this parliamentary session?

When I hear the minister talk about affordability, I find it very frustrating, because I have lost track of how many times I have heard the First Minister say that we cannot just will the ends—we have to will the means. When we say that the provision is unaffordable and unworkable, when we fish around trying to find all the problems and none of the solutions, what are we telling young people?

Natalie Don-Innes: I clarify that I have at no point said that provision is unworkable. I have emphasised time and again that I am willing to work with Liz Smith to ensure that we can find solutions to many of the challenges that I have laid out clearly today.

Oliver Mundell: I thank the minister for that intervention, but when I hear her talking, what I hear is a dialling back of what Liz Smith is

proposing. Liz Smith is probably too polite and too focused on trying to get something done to say this, but what I hear is a talking down of the ambition that is at the heart of the proposals.

I have had the wise counsel of Liz Smith over many years. When we were both on the Education and Skills Committee, Iain Gray used to say that she was more like my headteacher than a colleague. I have not always been very good at finding common ground, but Liz Smith has always been searching for that, looking for solutions and looking to put party politics to one side. To be honest, given that she is someone who operates and works like that in this Parliament, it is pretty disgraceful that the best treatment was to receive an 11th-hour letter at 6 o’clock after decision time yesterday, and that there was no chance for the minister to have better engagement before that—particularly when she says that she has met the member in charge of the bill.

I find that frustrating because the bill speaks to a philosophy and a vision that is about making our country better and shaking up how we do things, rather than doing what is easy. I say that because, based on the debate so far, we are having a clash on how to make it happen. Liz Smith has not shied away from the fact that this is not an easy bill—it is not a secret. It is not a £40 million carriage clock that ticks a few boxes and gets the member some legislation in her name. Easier bills might have been available, but Liz Smith believes passionately in it and has convinced many people that it is worth doing.

In that context, we should look at why someone with an education background who is very passionate on the topic believes that this is the right way to spend such a sum of money and that the results will come.

Martin Whitfield: More than Liz Smith’s passion for it, outdoor learning is a proven pedagogical tool for teaching the experiences in the curriculum for excellence, which is the national curriculum that operates across Scotland. Does Oliver Mundell agree with that?

Oliver Mundell: I agree with that; I was going to come to it later. Personally, I have always been a sceptic when it comes to the curriculum for excellence—that is not a secret. I am a passionate believer in a knowledge-based curriculum, and I would like to see something that is more structured and more prescriptive. However, even I have been convinced that this is the right way to go and that there has to be some balance.

We cannot listen to the testimony of the young people—including the young person mentioned by Liz Smith—and not recognise that there is something transformational about outdoor education that goes beyond what can be done in

the classroom and goes right to the heart of social justice. I cannot believe that the Scottish National Party Government does not recognise what is at stake here. It is hard to accept the idea that accessing Scotland's great outdoors is something for privileged young people, whether through a postcode lottery or a lottery of birth, and to hear pushback that it should not be universal. That is really sad. That speaks to a narrowness, a smallness and a lack of determination, which probably also speaks to the wider failings in our education system.

What makes this initiative exciting is the intensity of the experience and the chance to take everyone out of their comfort zones. That is where the transformational and lasting effects come into their own.

We talk about outdoor learning, but in most education settings, people are just playing at outdoor learning. It is not serious and it is not real. To be honest, as a result, a lot of what is done ends up being a waste of valuable time and resources. We need specialist and quality provision, and we need it to be available for all.

As a member who represents a rural constituency, where the great outdoors is not that far away, I find it incredibly sad that, for many young people who go to school in my constituency, the chance of going on a residential trip or getting that experience feels beyond their reach. Because of change in society—whether that is looking at screens or changes to land-based occupations—their connections to the countryside and the outdoors in general are very limited.

We live in a great country. Why are we not determined to make sure that every young person in Scotland enjoys it and benefits from the experience? It is not good enough. Today, we have a chance to do something daring and different and—for once, unusually—to unite and do something that will make a tangible difference.

16:28

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP): I endorse every tribute to Christina McKelvie from across the chamber. She was a lovely and honest-to-goodness person. I send my condolences to Keith Brown and to her sons.

I congratulate Liz Smith on the bill. I know how much work goes into a member's bill and how much it depends on the drive and determination of the member. Such bills are very personal and are usually on an issue close to the member's heart—this one certainly is. Liz Smith's retiral next year will be a huge loss to the Conservative benches and, indeed, to Parliament.

I have visited Broomlee outdoor education centre on the edge of West Linton in my constituency on several occasions. It sits in some 30 acres of land, with a small river for raft building and some woodland, and it provides a range of activities. It is within easy reach of the Pentland hills, so it is a great base for walking and hiking, as well as for mountain biking up the Tweed valley. There are three accommodation blocks, with a capacity of up to 131.

It has an 85-year-old history of providing residential outdoor experiences for young people, which began when it took in evacuees during the blitz of the second world war. To this day it continues to provide life-changing experiences in the outdoors for children who are facing the pressures and anxiety of a post-lockdown world, coupled with the difficulties of a cost of living crisis. Most of those children are from less-well-off areas.

The Broomlee centre is part of a charity. The centre manager, Richard Gerrish, has written this to me about the bill:

"This issue is clearly very close to our hearts for all sorts of reasons, but mostly because we have witnessed firsthand the ever-increasing numbers of children from economically disadvantaged areas who are missing out on these valuable experiences as the financial burden is passed on to parents and the cost-of-living crisis bites harder and harder."

I start by speaking about Broomlee because so much of what it provides is reflected in the purposes of the bill—good stuff so far. I could see the Broomlee centre providing just such an experience. I had my own such experiences many moons ago, as a working-class child on my first time away, with the girl guides camping at North Berwick, and later as a teenager on a fortnight retreat at Iona. From my distant youth to Broomlee today, not much has changed, even with the internet and mobile phones. North Berwick and Iona were pretty spartan, but that was part of the fun.

Those experiences live with you always. I recall many details of mine, from being washed out from the bell tent at North Berwick to sunshine and early mornings in the abbey at Iona. Therefore, I am right behind the purpose of the bill, but—and it is a big "but"—although the committee agrees to the general principles at paragraph 248 of the report, at paragraph 249 it outlines, rightly, substantial concerns on the financial aspects of the bill.

I go back to Broomlee. The various cabins, which look like Nissen huts, were built 85 years ago and desperately need upgrading. Any heating that is in them goes through the roof and the walls. I emphasise that the staff are full of heart, enthusiasm and experience. Even now, though, they find that accessing funding is tough. Other

funding routes are not readily available. Although I fully support the principles of the bill, it is an understatement to say that there is a lot of work to be done on meeting the realistic costs for places such as Broomlee. That includes finding capital funding as well as facing the fact that many costs are recurring and will undoubtedly rise with the cost of living.

The member has suggested various funding routes, and I hope that they work. However, the member has to nail those down before a statutory duty is placed on the schools, and ultimately on the Government, to offer this provision from a fixed and allocated budget.

We all want to spend to save, but the funds have to be taken from all the firefighting that we have to do. That has been the dilemma across this Parliament for my 26 years here.

I hope that the member and the Scottish Government can find a way to progress this worthy proposal. It might require amendments. I had to substantially amend at least part of my Welfare of Dogs (Scotland) Bill in order for it to proceed, by removing financial obligations that could not be met in the current climate by local authorities.

With those caveats, unlike the Government, I will support the bill at stage 1. I congratulate the member and wish her and the Government well on the bill and hope that they can resolve the financial difficulties.

16:33

Carol Mochan (South Scotland) (Lab): I take this opportunity to say that my thoughts are with Christina McKelvie's family. She was incredibly kind to me in the early days of this parliamentary session.

Today, we are discussing a bill that seeks to improve the outdoor learning opportunities that are available to schoolchildren. I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I am not on the Education, Children and Young People Committee, so I have found the debate to be really helpful.

The bill's core aim is to ensure that all pupils in state and grant-aided schools can experience at least four nights and five days of residential outdoor education during their school career. As we have heard in the debate, we all recognise the value of residential outdoor education for a child's learning and development. Liz Smith's opening speech described that in a very visual way. It is welcome that the bill seeks to address the notable decline in the number of pupils who have the opportunity to attend residential outdoor education.

The committee's call for evidence highlighted the benefits that children stand to gain from residential stays, which have been well rehearsed in other members' speeches, when it comes to confidence, social skills, mental wellbeing and resilience. Respondents described the benefits as "life changing".

Through my role as Scottish Labour's public health spokesperson, I frequently hear about the value of the outdoors and outdoor learning for both physical and mental health.

Brian Whittle: Does Carol Mochan agree that, to tackle the attainment gap in schools, many of the tools that are required inside the classroom are better learned outside the classroom?

Carol Mochan: Absolutely. When somebody asked my primary school-aged son how school was, he said that there was a lot of sitting inside and sitting down. That came from the fact that, in his early years, he spent so much time outside—with his father, in particular.

Residential outdoor education represents a key milestone in a child's educational development, and schools should aim to include it as a core part of learning—which is what Brian Whittle was trying to say, I think. I do not think that that is disputed across the parties.

I support the general principles of the bill. There are concerns, but I think that the member in charge of the bill recognises those, and we can fine tune it at stage 2 if there is a willingness to do so. We need to think about costs, provision for pupils with additional support needs and the impacts on teachers. However, as we have discussed, there is a way of addressing those issues.

There must be a financial resolution for the bill, and I hope that we can work across the parties on that. I will certainly do so with my colleagues in Scottish Labour. I repeat Willie Rennie's point about the Government needing to make sure to seek out how we can get the bill through.

The bill seeks to address the fact that many schools do not currently provide residential outdoor education. On that, I pick up a point that I often raise in the chamber, which is about inequalities—particularly health inequalities. Those exist, and we know that they exist. The bill has definitely got to be part of the solution.

Costs and financial pressures represent a key barrier to families, and to children having the opportunity to go along to residential outdoor education. We know that disparities exist between pupils who live in the most and least deprived communities. The bill is an opportunity for the outdoors to be a part of everybody's life and for those who live in poverty not to be disadvantaged.

The bill must address the wider socioeconomic issues that impact on a child's ability to access and attend residential trips.

I agree that we need to look at the role of teaching staff and make sure that residential outdoor education is done in a way that supports teachers and is a core part of the curriculum, as has been mentioned.

The intention and aims behind the bill are welcome, and its principles are well intended—all of us have said that during the debate. Outdoor learning enhances education, improves mental and physical health and has many benefits for a child's development. It can break down barriers, particularly when it comes to inequality, and offer opportunities to the most disadvantaged children. We speak about that in the chamber every day. We need to have the will to ensure that it can happen, and I believe that that will is there, across the parties. Every pupil, no matter their background or individual need, should have the opportunity to attend a residential outdoor trip. I will play my part in making sure that we get the bill through.

16:38

Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP): As a member of the Education, Children and Young People Committee, I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. The bill represents an important step forward in the way in which we think about delivering education in Scotland, particularly when it comes to ensuring that every child has access to life-changing opportunities through residential outdoor education.

As we have heard throughout the debate, the bill aims to provide consistent access to residential outdoor education for all children in Scotland—in particular, those who might otherwise face barriers to participation. The bill seeks to provide young people with experiences that help them to build resilience, develop leadership skills, foster independence, and enhance their mental and physical wellbeing. Those experiences go far beyond academic learning and are crucial for young people's personal development.

The committee heard from multiple sources about the significant benefits of residential outdoor education. Time spent in nature has been shown to reduce anxiety, stress and symptoms of depression, while also improving mood and fostering a sense of wellbeing. Beyond the health benefits, those experiences help children to develop important life skills, such as communication, problem solving, teamwork and self-confidence.

Moreover, we heard from teachers that outdoor education helps to improve engagement in the

classroom, enhances social connections and provides children with the opportunity to step outside their comfort zones, build their independence and face challenges in a supportive, structured environment. That aligns with the growing recognition of the need for holistic approaches to education that address both academic and wellbeing outcomes for students.

Although the benefits of residential outdoor education are clear, we must also acknowledge the challenges to ensuring that all children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are able to access those potentially life-changing opportunities. The committee raised concerns about how to ensure that there is equitable access to outdoor education opportunities, and I am hopeful that, as the bill progresses, we can work together to ensure that the most vulnerable children are not left behind. That may include addressing financial barriers, ensuring that appropriate support is in place for children with additional needs, and making sure that experiences are inclusive of all children, regardless of their background or circumstances.

As we look to the future of the bill, it is essential that we also acknowledge the practical challenges that would be involved in its implementation. Although the benefits of outdoor education are clear, local authorities must be supported to ensure that opportunities are accessible for all children, particularly those in rural areas or those with additional support needs. It is crucial that we address concerns about staffing, capacity, and funding to ensure that the bill can deliver on its promises, and we must work with local authorities to ensure that that can be achieved.

One of the fundamental rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is the right to play, to participate in recreational activities, and to enjoy good physical and mental health. Residential outdoor education embodies those rights and it allows children to engage with nature, learn new skills and build confidence, which is crucial for their wellbeing. It is important that the principles of the UNCRC are fully integrated in the bill. As we move forward, it would be valuable to see how the bill can ensure that all children, regardless of their background or the challenges that they face, have access to those transformative experiences. Clear steps need to be in place in order to ensure that children's rights are fully realised through the bill and its implementation as it progresses.

I strongly support the broad aims of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill. The potential to provide transformative experiences for all children is significant, and we must ensure that the bill delivers its promise of equity and inclusivity. As the bill progresses, I urge

members to continue to refine it by addressing the challenges of accessibility and support for vulnerable children so that we can ensure that no child is left behind.

Outdoor education should not be a luxury—it should, I hope, be a right. It is a right that can help our young children to thrive, and we must work together to ensure that every child, regardless of their circumstances, has the opportunity to benefit from outdoor education experiences. I am pleased that Liz Smith and the minister are working together to try to iron out any difficulties, because there is a lot that all children can benefit from.

I finish by saying that Christina McKelvie was a great friend of mine, and I miss her.

16:44

Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con): Presiding Officer, I make a polite request that, at an appropriate time in the future, all back-bench MSPs are given the opportunity to put on record their thoughts about our colleague Christina McKelvie, should they wish to do so. I do not think that simply doing so in the opening remarks of a speech would do that justice. I thank the Presiding Officer in advance for her consideration of that.

I, too, congratulate Liz Smith for getting the bill to this point. Reaching a stage 1 debate might not sound like much, but I know how difficult that is, as does any member who has worked on a member's bill.

The consultation had more than 500 responses, of which 95 per cent were positive. That is an incredible achievement for any member of this Parliament. Of course, elements of the bill—some of which we have heard about today—need to be ironed out, should it go through to the next stage, but that is normal practice for any bill. No Government bill ever looks the same at the end of the process, and the same is true of a member's bill, which is entirely appropriate.

I am intrigued by the Government's key principle of—I will not say opposition—concern about the bill being the issue of affordability and deliverability. In her opening comments, the minister put front and centre those concerns, which were contained in her letter to the committee that was sent last night.

It is estimated that implementing the bill would cost around £40 million. Every policy has a cost—everything comes at a cost. It is right to scrutinise that in the due and proper way, but part of the cost analysis must also be in identifying savings and benefits. That is a key part of the formula that we are not so good at when we look at legislation in this place.

I pose a number of questions to the Government. How much money would we save if we implemented the bill? It is not just about how much it would cost. What do I mean by that? How much money would the national health service save if young people go on to lead better, healthier and happier lives? How much money would the justice system save if young people were less likely to interact with it, or with the police, courts or even prisons? How much money would social services or the third sector save if their interventions were enhanced or even replaced by residential learning experiences? Turning the issue of cost on its head, I simply ask, what will it cost the Government if we do not implement the right to outdoor learning?

I say to the Government: find the money. It is not impossible. There are different models to fund capital or resource investment. Look at the social bridging finance models that other outdoor learning models use. Look at business or commercial sponsorship. Look at philanthropy. I do not really care where we look. If we started up a crowdfunder, I am sure that we could find enough people in Scotland who feel passionately about the issue to fund it and do it properly. I simply ask the minister to work constructively with all parties to find the money to implement the bill. Cost should not be the barrier to introducing something that is much needed.

I remind the Government that the bill would help it to achieve its core policies on education. Whatever people's views are on the curriculum for excellence, and there are many, the bill would directly help to meet its objectives, as research by the Learning Away consortium shows. First, the aim to help learners become successful sits at the heart of the curriculum. The research shows that 61 per cent of students who attended residential experiences achieved a higher than predicted grade, compared with 21 per cent who did not attend.

Secondly, another key pillar of the curriculum is developing confident individuals. The research shows that 87 per cent of secondary students felt “more confident to try new things”

than they would have before their outdoor learning experiences.

Thirdly, I turn to responsible citizenship, which is another key pillar of our education. Eighty-two per cent of secondary school respondents said that their experience

“helped them realise they could get on with people from other classes or schools.”

My goodness, do we not need tolerance more than ever in Scotland?

Fourthly, another key principle is to help learners to become effective contributors. Forty per cent of respondents said that they feel that, after their outdoor learning experience, they could be a better role model to others. Is that not a key point? Positive role models are key, particularly in this modern digital age of influencers and so much negativity.

Martin Whitfield: Will the member take an intervention?

Jamie Greene: I really have a lot to get through in the two minutes that I have left.

We all have our own experiences of attending outdoor learning centres, and we can share stories about how meaningful and beneficial it was to us. I particularly hated it at the time, but I now look back and see the benefits. I remember the cold, damp dorm rooms; the cold running water; the outside toilets; and, of course, the famous midges of the west of Scotland—our national treasure.

However, I also learned about orienteering and about our native wildlife while sitting around the campfire roasting marshmallows—without an iPhone in sight. That all sounds predictably wholesome, but how many young inner-city people have never been outdoors and really enjoyed the outdoors properly in our beautiful country?

For people from difficult, broken or impoverished backgrounds, I cannot sell the benefits of the experience enough. Today's teens are simply not afforded that opportunity. Not every school is offering it, and they all should. This bill is asking for equity of access—nothing more and nothing less. If we truly want a model of getting it right for every child, which the Government has put its coins into, it should get it right for every child. The bill is one way to achieve that.

In my region, there are many examples of the year-on-year fight for funding. Arran outdoor education centre is a great example. Every year, it hits the same brick wall with the local council running out of cash. Every year, valiant campaigners have to make the same case in the same fight to keep its doors open. However, it is not just that centre. There is Blairvadach in Helensburgh, and there is Kilbowie in Oban, which tried and failed and had to close in 2020. There used to be 70 local authority-run outdoor learning centres in Scotland. There are now less than a dozen, and that is simply not good enough.

In closing, I will say three things about the bill. First, it supports the curriculum for excellence. Secondly, it will ensure that young people have equity of access to outdoor learning, which we should all agree on. Thirdly, it will protect the much-loved outdoor centres, and the entire sector, which I think is staring down the barrel of extinction. It is a no-brainer for me: this is exactly

the devolved decision making for which the Parliament was set up. This is what we should be legislating for, even if through a member's bill.

16:50

John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind): It is fair to say—we have heard this in the debate—that the whole Education, Children and Young People Committee was enthusiastic and totally convinced that residential outdoor education is hugely positive and extremely beneficial for almost all young people.

Several members on the committee referred to good residential experiences that they had had while at school—we have heard that again today—and the committee visited Broomlee in West Linton, which is operated by Scottish Outdoor Education Centres. I had previously stayed at SOEC's other centres at Dounans, near Aberfoyle, and Belmont, near Meigle. The buildings seem to have changed very little since the 1970s, highlighting one of the needs of those outdoor centres, which are operated by the third sector: several require a lot of capital investment.

As the Education, Children and Young People Committee's self-appointed accountant, my reservations about the bill are primarily financial. That is not peripheral to the bill; it is absolutely central. The bill is about finding £30 million to £40 million extra from already stretched budgets.

Some bills that come before us in Parliament, such as the Scottish Languages Bill, might seek to make major changes to structures or procedures, but cost is a relatively minor part of achieving that. However, in this case, meeting the general principles of the bill is all about the money. The key principle is that the public purse should pay the cost of sending virtually all young people on a residential experience.

As I understand it, a fair number of families currently fund the cost of their children attending such a residential experience. That is topped up or heavily subsidised by school fundraising, grants, PEF money and so on. However, the bill would do away with such parental contributions and wider school fundraising, which I note we heard in evidence can also be a beneficial experience for young people.

The bill would mean that we pay not only for young people who currently cannot afford to go on a residential trip but for the children of richer families who can afford it and who currently do pay.

Oliver Mundell: Will John Mason take an intervention?

John Mason: I am afraid that I cannot; I have only four minutes.

We have not been told what that would amount to, but it seems clear that a fair chunk of the £30 million to £40 million would not be spent on helping residential centres or benefiting children; it would, in effect, be spent on reimbursing better-off families. Much as I have a lot of respect for Liz Smith and her ideals, I find it a little bit ironic that the Conservatives, who want to means test university places, are arguing against means testing for school residential places and want them to be a universal benefit.

In addition, the committee heard evidence from the Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland.

Carol Mochan: Will John Mason give way?

John Mason: I have only four minutes—I am sorry.

The AHDS said that, if an extra £30 million to £40 million became available, it would want support for pupils with additional support needs to be prioritised. Another issue that witnesses brought to the committee was the question of whether teachers would continue to volunteer as readily for residential trips if such trips became a statutory requirement. We have heard about that already in the debate.

My suggestion would be for money to be targeted at those families or schools that really need it. It seems to me that even a smaller amount such as £5 million or £10 million in a central fund, a bit like the pupil equity fund, could enable quite a lot of school pupils to attend residential who currently cannot do so. Such a way forward would probably not require legislation and would be considerably cheaper than what is proposed in the bill.

Both the minister and Liz Smith have said that they are open to discussing the funding issue, yet, seven weeks after the committee report was published, I am not clear whether there have been any developments or a suggested compromise.

I will be reluctant to vote against the bill if I am the only MSP who disagrees with its general principles. As I have explained, I disagree because those principles are effectively all about money. As I trust that I have made clear, I have reservations. I stand by the alternative wording for paragraph 248 of the committee's stage 1 report on the bill, and I do not agree with the general principles of the bill.

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone): We move to winding-up speeches.

16:55

Ross Greer: The debate has been an excellent example of effective parliamentary scrutiny of a

bill, as has the whole stage 1 process. Excepting the point that John Mason just made about the general principles in relation to cost, in so far as those principles relate to policy outcome, there is complete unanimity across the Parliament. It is a question of implementation and what exactly we are trying to achieve.

I have said already that the Scottish Greens will support the bill at stage 1, but I want to address some of our concerns that I did not get to in my opening speech. The first is about the cost, which is a significant concern. From the outset, my most significant concern about that, as of today, is about what appears to be an element of brinkmanship from the Scottish Government on the financial resolution on the bill.

It is not only in the seven weeks since publication of the committee report that the Government has had time to grapple with the issue and engage with the member in charge; Liz Smith stated her intention to introduce the bill at the start of this parliamentary session. Years have passed during which those issues could have been worked through. I am concerned that setting the six-month timescale for the financial resolution involves an element of brinkmanship, given that, without it, the bill will fall. That is unwelcome in a process in which we are trying to achieve unanimity.

Liz Smith has already laid out options for the costs. It is quite right that they have been scrutinised by both the Education, Children and Young People Committee and the Finance and Public Administration Committee. Although there is a substantial and credible proposal, Liz Smith will appreciate that, if more money is required, I am never short of an additional tax proposal. I am more than happy to share mine if she wishes to take on one or two of them.

I take this opportunity, as I do with many other subjects, to say that much of the difficulty here relates to how we fund our local authorities. They are the ones who deliver education, and they will be primarily responsible for the delivery of this responsibility if we pass the bill into law. At the moment, the primary method of tax that our local authorities have is based on a valuation from before I was even born.

Christine Grahame: I fully accept the position about local authorities, but capital funding will be needed by some of the existing providers, such as Broomlee, which is a charity, and I am not sure where that will come from. I wish that it could be done, but I want to see that nailed down.

Ross Greer: The fact that we require not just the on-going cost of provision but the capital funding is an essential point. There are relevant models. Jamie Greene listed a number of them,

repeating Liz Smith's earlier points about trust models, philanthropy and so on.

As a socialist, I believe that the state should be able to provide much of the funding that is required for that. This goes back to Arran outdoor education centre, which Jamie Greene mentioned, and Blairvadach, which is operated by Glasgow City Council but is in my and Jamie Greene's region, in Argyll and Bute. I emphasise that, year after year, those council-run centres are slated for closure and, year after year, a few more of them close. We need to come to some kind of resolution to, at the very least, preserve the current estate.

Blairvadach is an interesting example that needs to be grappled with in relation to finances. My understanding of that centre is that Glasgow City Council maximises commercial bookings to cross-subsidise its traditional local authority class trips. The aim of the bill is to increase the number of children accessing residential outdoor education through schools. I would be a bit cautious if we were to displace the commercial activity that currently provides a valuable income stream. The solution to that is to increase capacity across the residential outdoor education estate, in which case we would not have any risk of displacement. However, that is an issue to be grappled with as we move forward.

As other members have also mentioned, throughout stage 1, I was particularly concerned about the impact not only on teachers but on school support staff, who are often expected to accompany children on such trips. Compelling teachers and other school staff is not the intention but, if we are compelling local authorities to provide such opportunities, there is the risk that they will compel teachers to do so. That would amount to a change in teachers' terms and conditions, so it was entirely legitimate for their union representatives to raise that concern.

That said, I should put on record the level of enthusiasm that was displayed by the individual teachers to whom the committee spoke and from whom it took evidence on the proposals. Teachers have seen the transformational impact that involvement in residential outdoor education has had not only on their pupils but on their professional development, and we should not lose sight of that.

On the wider concerns about teacher workload, I say to the Government that there are many other ways in which we could reduce that workload—in particular, tackling bureaucracy in the classroom would go a long way.

The issue of flexibility was raised and is well worth considering. That is particularly the case in relation to young people from more rural communities, who have much readier access to

outdoor education as things stand. The point was made that they might benefit more from spending a couple of days in a city centre accessing museums, galleries and so on, which they would not otherwise be able to do in their day-to-day lives. That is worth considering.

The minister was right to say that, in general, the quality of outdoor education has probably improved since 2010, but that does not address the issue of inconsistency, on which I will close my remarks. The committee's first recommendation in its stage 1 report is that we think that all young people in Scotland should have access to residential outdoor education. The Scottish Government's response does not address that directly. My reading of the response is that it implies—it does not say this outright—that the Government disagrees with the view that every pupil should have an opportunity to take part in residential outdoor education. The Government agrees on the value of outdoor education, but it does not directly address the residential aspect, which is key here.

If, as a Parliament, we believe that every young person in Scotland should have the opportunity to take part in residential outdoor education, the bill provides an opportunity to make that possible. If the Government also believes that but does not believe that the bill is the right vehicle, it still has a narrow window of time in which it could bring forward an alternative proposal. It has had the opportunity to do that, but it has not done so. On that basis, the Greens will vote for the bill at stage 1.

17:01

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab): As others have done, I extend my condolences and thoughts to Keith Brown and to the family and friends of Christina McKelvie. As the First Minister rightly said, she was "a force of nature".

It is a genuine pleasure to close the debate on behalf of Scottish Labour. In Liz Smith's Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill—I compliment her on introducing it—we see an opportunity to move education in Scotland forward. We see an opportunity to bring back to the centre of our education principles those principles on which the curriculum for excellence was founded. If nothing else, this debate has moved Oliver Mundell's thinking on the curriculum for excellence, and I absolutely and wholeheartedly welcome that.

The curriculum for excellence is a national responsibility, and we have had interesting discussions about whether the costs of meeting a national responsibility, through the bill, can be met. If we were to turn round and say that the

Government would not pay for the laptops, the desks or the chairs in schools, there would rightly be an outcry. The benefit of residential outdoor education has always been accepted by members across the Parliament. More importantly, its importance is understood across academia and the teaching profession, and, perhaps most importantly, it is understood by our young people themselves.

Residential outdoor education allows for the fulfilment of an aspect of the curriculum for excellence that we greatly struggle to fulfil within the confines of the classroom. Today, we have an opportunity to empower our schools and young people to take a different approach—an approach that suits them and allows them to show their true selves to their teachers, and which also allows the teachers, as observers, to make assessments of young people without having to be directly part of the learning process. Such observation is invaluable.

I still whole-heartedly agree with the principles of the curriculum for excellence, and I will continue to drag support for it out of Oliver Mundell, but if the curriculum for excellence is to work—if it is to be based on experiences and to create better adults as a result of their journey through childhood—we need to remember that, as Bill Kidd said, residential outdoor education ticks a human rights box as well.

Willie Rennie talked about the lack of evidence that progress has been made on outdoor education. In his closing speech, Ross Greer highlighted—albeit that it was not a deliberate attempt on his part—the need for a mix of outdoor education and the residential outdoor education that we are talking about today. That is important.

I very much welcomed some important and significant contributions to the debate but will selfishly pick on the one by my colleague Carol Mochan, because of something that she said that resonated with me, as someone who should declare an interest as a former teacher.

Residential outdoor education is frequently a key milestone in a child's journey through school. They do not remember the maths lesson and rarely remember the poetry one, though they might sometimes remember a visitor or a trip to the pantomime. However, all who have had the benefit of experiencing residential outdoor education think back to that moment when the teacher looked like an idiot because they could not do something, or to the moment when they were able to do something that no one else in the class could do.

People remember when they celebrated eating a deeply overbaked and burnt bit of sugar as they sat round a fire, watching the sparkles going up

into the evening and doing something that the curriculum for excellence asks our youngest children to do, which is to look up to the sky in amazement and perhaps, for the first time, to see stars without light pollution. Those are the experiences that live with young people for the whole of their lives, and the stories that we have heard today from members show that some of them stick very hard.

I wish that I did not have to do this, but I will spend the final part of my speech taking up Ross Greer's comment about brinkmanship. Nothing further can happen with this bill without a financial resolution. Under rule 9.12 of standing orders, the only entity that can bring that financial resolution is the Scottish Government, which has, for the past eight months, talked about reaching out, seeking consensus and working with other parties and whose First Minister has stood up on a significant number of occasions—which I have welcomed—and said that this is a Parliament where the Scottish Government no longer has a majority.

Any strategy that would prevent stage 2 from even starting or that would formally prevent members from lodging amendments to try to improve the bill because of the need for the sort of resolution that—with the exception of what happened at decision time last night—normally passes with unanimity across the chamber, is a disappointing strategy for a Scottish Government that represents Scotland.

17:07

Roz McCall (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I start by echoing comments that have been made by members from across the chamber about the passing of Christina McKelvie. I offer my condolences to everyone who is dealing with grief.

At 15, my youngest daughter went cliff jumping. She was petrified and talked herself out of, and back into, going on the trip countless times. When she returned from that excursion, she was elated and had a new-found confidence in herself and in her abilities, and it transpired that she had jumped off the cliff and into bitterly cold Scottish coastal waters more than once.

At 14 years old, my eldest daughter stood on the pizza box. Before members question the outdoor educational benefits of standing on a thin cardboard box with a residue of tomato sauce and melted cheese, I will explain that the pizza box is the colloquial name for a platform that is about the size of a pizza box—about 45cm square—and is situated on top of a 30-foot high, stand-alone telegraph pole. Individuals climb the pole, wearing a harness and holding a rope for safety, and pull themselves on to the platform. My daughter returned confident, resilient and proud.

Those were not one-off events, because my daughters, living in rural Perthshire, were lucky enough to experience residential outdoor education through the brownies, the John Muir award scheme, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and the Combined Cadet Force. I know that those experiences have been a massive part of making them who they are today. They believe that there is nothing that they cannot achieve, but it seems really unfair to me that my daughters have had that experience of fulfilling outdoor education only because they went to a school in rural Perthshire. Those opportunities should be available to every child in Scotland, as has been highlighted by Pam Duncan-Glancy, Bill Kidd, Carol Mochan and many others. The reasons for that have been well discussed in the debate.

I commend my colleague Liz Smith for her tenacity and her determination that all children should experience the benefits that residential outdoor education gives. That should not be an issue. The bill should go easily, step by step, through the three stages of the parliamentary process to become law, and it is absolutely shocking that it is being held up.

The Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise agreed when she said:

“The Scottish Government’s vision is that all children and young people should have the opportunity to engage in progressive and creative outdoor learning in all its forms, regularly, as part of the curriculum.”

The bill provides for exactly that. If that was not enough confirmation of the Scottish Government’s intent, the minister went on to say:

“The Government values the important work that residential outdoor centres do to support our young people’s mental and physical health, confidence, team-working skills, resilience, communication skills and personal development.”—[*Official Report, Education, Children and Young People Committee, 27 November 2024; c 15.*]

That seemed to be a glowing recommendation of the principles of the bill, so I assumed that they would be agreed to unanimously at stage 1.

Let me look at the bill in a little detail. Its three main provisions are worth highlighting. They are:

“placing a duty on education authorities and managers of grant-aided schools to secure the provision of at least one period of residential outdoor education for each pupil ... placing a duty on Scottish Ministers to prepare and publish guidance on the duty to secure the provision of residential outdoor education”

and

“providing that the Scottish Government”

must

“provide funding to local authorities and the managers of grant-aided schools to carry out the duty to secure the provision of residential outdoor education.”

As with all things, the stumbling block is the cost, as the minister forcefully highlighted in her opening remarks. However, so much of what we do involves spending money at the crisis point. Mental health issues, physical health issues, violence in our classrooms and disengagement with education are all at crisis points, but the bill will turn that round. It all comes down to priorities and what is considered to be important, and it is very disappointing to hear that the bill is not a priority for and is not considered to be important by the Scottish Government.

NASUWT put it best when it said:

“The proposals contained in the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill shine a welcome light on the inequality which currently exists in accessing this provision for all pupils in Scotland. There is no dispute that a disparity of access to outdoor education residential experiences currently exists and, further, that our most vulnerable children and young people are often unlikely to be able to participate.”

That feeds into the ethos behind the Promise. This should have been the easiest debate in the history of the Scottish Parliament.

I want to impart a final memory. This is one of mine from when I was a snowy owl. We went to Dalguise for a weekend residential outing with our brownies—a rather rambunctious group of young ladies, many of whom had never been away from home before. Along with the complaints that we all had about the standard of the food and the fact that somebody was sharing a bunk in a room with somebody they did not want to share a room with, there was a group of excited but nervous girls who were unsure not only of their surroundings but of themselves. Once they had experienced team-building pursuits such as climbing walls, Jacob’s ladder and the giant swing, we had an entirely different group, and it took only two days. The looks on their faces and their pride in their achievements will stay with me for ever. It is an absolute injustice that that is not afforded to every child in Scotland.

17:13

Natalie Don-Innes: I reiterate my thanks to a number of stakeholders who made important and constructive contributions throughout stage 1 scrutiny of the bill. In particular, I note the contribution of the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres and its members in working with my officials to inform our understanding of the sector’s current capacity.

As I have said, I recognise and value the positive and unique role of residential outdoor education in a young person’s education and development, and I wish to continue to see provision of such experiences for our learners as part of a mixed offer of regular outdoor learning. I

reiterate my thanks to Liz Smith for her work to raise the profile of and the public discussion on outdoor learning provision, which has been driven through the introduction of her member's bill.

In looking back at the journey that we have been on in Scotland since the publication of the 2010 vision document "Curriculum for Excellence Through Outdoor Learning" by Education Scotland's predecessor, I believe that there is much to celebrate. As I said to Mr Rennie, I feel that much progress has been made. For example, learning for sustainability, which includes provision of outdoor learning in all its forms, is now a recognised entitlement for children and young people across the three-to-18 curriculum.

Oliver Mundell: Does the minister see that there are fewer residential opportunities now than there were 10, 15 or 20 years ago? Despite what she is saying, residential opportunities in most parts of Scotland are diminishing.

Natalie Don-Innes: I recognise that. I understand that those decisions have been taken by local authorities, but, as I have said, I am keen on seeing such opportunities grow further, because I recognise the benefits that they can have.

Scotland has been a frontrunner and has been recognised internationally for our work in developing a whole-school approach to learning for sustainability. I was disappointed by the words of Mr Mundell in relation to our current outdoor education offering, and I think that what he said does a disservice to our nurseries, schools and staff, who are providing fantastic outdoor opportunities for children and young people on a daily basis. There are many examples of our children and young people experiencing progressive and impactful day-to-day outdoor learning activities across the country, including through residential outdoor education, and I will come on to some of those in a second.

Liz Smith: Nobody at all is saying that there is not really good work being done in outdoor learning, whether that is in nursery or primary or whatever. The bill complements that work—it is not an either/or. I ask the minister to accept that, because the whole point of the value of outdoor learning is that we are building an educational progression right through young people's careers at school.

Natalie Don-Innes: I concur with Ms Smith, but I would say that I did not feel that tone in Mr Mundell's contribution. However, I appreciate what Ms Smith says.

To turn to some of the examples, centres such as the city of Edinburgh's Lagganlia and Benmore work closely with schools to align activities with learning priorities. Blairvadach centre staff provide

city-wide support in Glasgow, including orienteering maps for every school and specialist programmes for care-experienced learners. In East Lothian, young people can access progressive residential outdoor education experiences, starting with a base camp on the school estate for primary 5 pupils and culminating in a full four-to-five-day residential for primary 6 pupils.

Those examples are to be commended, but I know that the evidence confirms that we need to make better progress, particularly in upper primary and in secondary schools. I acknowledged that in my letter to the Education, Children and Young People Committee in December last year.

I reassure members that Education Scotland continues to support the Scottish Advisory Panel for Outdoor Education and the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres to develop a quality improvement framework for the sector.

Douglas Ross: Will the minister take an intervention?

Natalie Don-Innes: I am sorry, but I have to make progress.

I look forward to the final report from our Scottish outdoor learning strategic working group, which I have asked to provide me with recommendations on the next steps to improve our overall support for inclusive outdoor learning across the curriculum.

As I made clear in committee, residential outdoor centres—the settings that the bill covers—play a crucial role in that wide range of experiences. To borrow a phrase from a previous joint Scottish Government and SAPOE publication, outdoor education centres have been part of the DNA of Scottish education for 75 years.

The Scottish Government values and supports the role of centres in supporting young people to develop their resilience, self-confidence, wellbeing and engagement with learning—many of the benefits that members have spoken about. However, it is clear that we still have some way to go before the Scottish Government could confidently lodge a motion for a financial resolution to enable the bill to proceed, should it pass stage 1 today.

Douglas Ross: Will the minister give way?

Natalie Don-Innes: Presiding Officer, is there any time in hand?

The Presiding Officer: There is very little time in hand.

Douglas Ross: My intervention is about the financial resolution. The only precedent that I can find is from Monica Lennon's Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Bill. It was agreed to at

stage 1, and the financial resolution was published, debated and voted on later.

If the Government chooses within the six-month period not to lodge a financial resolution on this bill, will the minister commit to lodging a motion to allow Parliament to debate and vote on that issue? At the moment, we would vote in the affirmative situation, if a financial resolution were going to be lodged. If the Government is not going to lodge that, can we have a debate and a vote on its position of not lodging a financial resolution?

Natalie Don-Innes: I can certainly discuss that with Liz Smith as I continue to engage with her on the bill.

The full potential costs of the bill remain unclear but, as introduced, it is unaffordable. It is of course the responsibility of Government and Parliament to scrutinise that, and we must make it clear to Parliament that our concerns have not yet been addressed. It is not clear how equity of provision of any new entitlement could be delivered by the sector, and associated costs have not been considered. Implications for the workforce are significant, and the bill as introduced does not provide solutions to ensure that provision is equitable for all of Scotland's children.

Mr Rennie stated that the Government did not reach out to him and that it needs to come forward with something better. First, I am sorry that Mr Rennie—and Mr Whitfield, of course—feels left out. That was never my intention. My priority has been to engage with Liz Smith to find solutions to the challenges that I and many others have raised. The evidence is clear about the unique role and benefits that are offered by residential outdoor education for the development of our children and young people; I think that we all agree about that.

Members have touched on an inconsistency, which is that, although young people from more deprived backgrounds can often benefit most from outdoor learning opportunities, that cohort receives fewer such experiences overall. We know that many schools are using PEF money to ensure that young people have such opportunities, but I agree that it will be important to build a better picture of current levels of provision of residential outdoor education nationally in order to understand better the implications of the bill.

I recognise that there is strong support across the chamber for the general principles of the bill and that some members may question the Scottish Government's decision to abstain on the motion and not to lodge a financial resolution. I do not shy away from that position. If this were a Government bill, it would face equal scrutiny, and ministers would be challenged on the uncoded elements and the significant data gaps in the financial memorandum.

As I have said, I remain open to working constructively with the member in charge to address the concerns. Having listened to the debate today, I would also be interested in working with members from across the chamber.

17:21

Liz Smith: I begin on a note of consensus with the minister—I value the discussions that we have had. However, the fact that the substantial letter from the Government arrived just last night—seven weeks after the Education, Children and Young People Committee's report was issued and, as two members have indicated, a long period after the bill was discussed—did not do much to ensure that scrutiny in the debate was as good as it should have been.

The minister seems to be having a conversation with the cabinet secretary. I ask her whether she will consider the sensible point that Douglas Ross, the convener of the committee, made about the financial resolution. I sit on the Finance and Public Administration Committee. I understand that the Government has issues with the finance relating to the bill, but I believe that those issues can be resolved. I do not accept that the bill is unaffordable, as the minister said. That has to be measured against the choices that the Scottish Government has made on other policies. That is the important thing. The bill is not unaffordable; there are possibilities for funding it.

As I said in my opening speech, pupil equity funding is a valuable concept, which I fully supported when it was introduced. It is a great idea. Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat members have all mentioned it, not just in this Parliament but at Westminster. However, if some of the funding is being put into the next year, that suggests that it is not all being spent in the timescale in which it is issued. It is also suggested that the Government has changed the criteria according to which the funding is being issued; it has gone into a local government attainment grant. That is very different from the original intention of pupil equity funding. If it is true that £30 million of the money was spent on public sector teachers pay, I question whether other choices could have been made. The Government has to look at that angle when it comes to affordability, which the minister mentioned.

I also hope that the minister recognises that, over quite a number of months, I have provided the Scottish Government with alternative models of funding. There are plenty of examples of places where money can be found, such as public trust money. Further, we happen to know, from what ministers, particularly the Deputy First Minister, have been saying on other issues, that the Scottish Government is quite rightly looking for

models that combine public sector finance and private sector finance, and surely that is something that can help, too.

Natalie Don-Innes: Absolutely, and I think that that proves our willingness to work on that point. However, I made efforts to meet Inspire Scotland and others to find out more about how the public trust model could work, and it would be too unreliable for something that would be a statutory entitlement for schools.

Liz Smith: With respect, minister, it says in the letter that you sent last night that there are possibilities around decoupling some of this. You cannot just say that it is something that you would—

The Presiding Officer: Always speak through the chair, please.

Liz Smith: The minister cannot just dismiss that aspect, because her letter suggests that it might be an option that could be considered.

On the issue of additional support for learning, there are costs associated with that—I have never suggested otherwise. In that regard, I come back to the excellent speech that Pam Duncan-Glancy made. Additional support for learning costs extra money. Some 40 per cent of children in Scotland now have additional support needs, but, of that 40 per cent, 3 per cent have very complex needs. If we listen to the comments from Nevis, who I quoted in my opening speech, we will hear that the effort and expense to get him to the centre were considerable. However, that is the point: it happened, thanks to the school and the people at the centre, some of whom are in the gallery just now.

We should be aware that, over time, the centres have become well aware of the need to ensure that they articulate with modern Scottish education. As Mr Whitfield rightly said, that means the curriculum for excellence. There is also a recognition of the need for greater diversity. Residential outdoor education is not all about climbing Munros, kayaking or jumping off a cliff; it is much more diverse than that now. If we are going to get it right for every child, we have to recognise the diversity of our pupils and ensure that we are delivering for every one of them. I do not think that that is too difficult.

As Jamie Greene and Oliver Mundell have rightly said, let us be ambitious for this Parliament, but, even more importantly, let us be ambitious for our young people. I hear time and again from parents, pupils and the centres that, after Covid, there is an awful lot of anxiety around. We owe it to those young people to give them hope and optimism and to give them the skills that outdoor education provides through building resilience,

self-esteem and confidence. We must ensure that we do that, and that is the main reason for the bill.

Presiding Officer, do I have a little more time?

The Presiding Officer: You have until 5.30.

Liz Smith: I will return to the issue of teacher contracts. I must take seriously what the unions and COSLA are saying—those are serious concerns, and we have to address them. I am hopeful that we can address them, because there are many teachers who are in unions and the COSLA set-up who are already doing outdoor education. We have to give them the support that they need, because most teachers come back to us to say that outdoor education is the most valuable thing that we can do.

I want to finish with a comment that was given to this Parliament at the time of this building's opening, 21 years ago, when the late Edwin Morgan's "light of the mind" poem was read. In it he asked:

"What do the people want of the place? They want it to be filled with thinking persons as open and adventurous as its architecture.

A nest of fearies is what they do not want.

A symposium of procrastinators is what they do not want.

A phalanx of forelock-tuggers is what they do not want".

My bill is adventurous in more ways than one. Yes, it contains an element of risk, but what aspect of life does not? As with outdoor education itself, the risk is managed and mitigated well. Let us therefore be parliamentarians who are as open and adventurous as the wonderful architecture that we are in just now. I encourage all members of the Parliament to do what is right by our young people and support the bill.

Decision Time

17:30

The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

There is one question to be put as a result of today's business. The question is, that motion S6M-16789, in the name of Liz Smith, on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, 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.

17:30

Meeting suspended.

17:33

On resuming—

The Presiding Officer: We move to the vote on motion S6M-16789, in the name of Liz Smith, on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1. Members should cast their votes now.

The vote is closed.

Foysoyl Choudhury (Lothian) (Lab): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I am struggling with my app. I would have voted yes.

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

Annie Wells (Glasgow) (Con): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I do not know whether my vote went through. The screen disappeared. I would have voted yes.

The Presiding Officer: I can confirm that your vote was recorded, Ms Wells. Thank you.

Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I could not connect. I would have voted yes.

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

For

Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Balfour, Jeremy (Lothian) (Con)
 Bibby, Neil (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Lothian) (Lab)
 Briggs, Miles (Lothian) (Con)
 Burgess, Ariane (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
 Burnett, Alexander (Aberdeenshire West) (Con)
 Carlaw, Jackson (Eastwood) (Con)
 Carson, Finlay (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)
 Chapman, Maggie (North East Scotland) (Green)

Choudhury, Foysoyl (Lothian) (Lab)
 Clark, Katy (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Cole-Hamilton, Alex (Edinburgh Western) (LD)
 Dowey, Sharon (South Scotland) (Con)
 Duncan-Glancy, Pam (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Eagle, Tim (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Ewing, Annabelle (Cowdenbeath) (SNP)
 Ewing, Fergus (Inverness and Nairn) (SNP)
 Findlay, Russell (West Scotland) (Con)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Golden, Maurice (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Gosal, Pam (West Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Greene, Jamie (West Scotland) (Con)
 Greer, Ross (West Scotland) (Green)
 Griffin, Mark (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Gulhane, Sandesh (Glasgow) (Con)
 Hamilton, Rachael (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hoy, Craig (South Scotland) (Con)
 Johnson, Daniel (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab)
 Halcro Johnston, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Kerr, Liam (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kerr, Stephen (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Lennon, Monica (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Leonard, Richard (Central Scotland) (Lab)
 Lumsden, Douglas (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mackay, Gillian (Central Scotland) (Green)
 Marra, Michael (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney Islands) (LD)
 McCall, Roz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Mochan, Carol (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Mountain, Edward (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Mundell, Oliver (Dumfriesshire) (Con)
 O'Kane, Paul (West Scotland) (Lab)
 Rennie, Willie (North East Fife) (LD)
 Ross, Douglas (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Rowley, Alex (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Ruskell, Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
 Slater, Lorna (Lothian) (Green)
 Smith, Liz (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smyth, Colin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Stewart, Alexander (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Sweeney, Paul (Glasgow) (Lab)
 Villalba, Mercedes (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Webber, Sue (Lothian) (Con)
 Wells, Annie (Glasgow) (Con)
 White, Tess (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Whitfield, Martin (South Scotland) (Lab)
 Whitham, Elena (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (SNP)
 Whittle, Brian (South Scotland) (Con)
 Wishart, Beatrice (Shetland Islands) (LD)

Against

Mason, John (Glasgow Shettleston) (Ind)

Abstentions

Adam, George (Paisley) (SNP)
 Adam, Karen (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)
 Adamson, Clare (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP)
 Arthur, Tom (Renfrewshire South) (SNP)
 Beattie, Colin (Midlothian North and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Brown, Siobhian (Ayr) (SNP)
 Callaghan, Stephanie (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Almond Valley) (SNP)

Dey, Graeme (Angus South) (SNP)
 Don-Innes, Natalie (Renfrewshire North and West) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP)
 Dornan, James (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP)
 Dunbar, Jackie (Aberdeen Donside) (SNP)
 Fairlie, Jim (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee City West) (SNP)
 Forbes, Kate (Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gilruth, Jenny (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)
 Gougeon, Mairi (Angus North and Mearns) (SNP)
 Gray, Neil (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP)
 Harper, Emma (South Scotland) (SNP)
 Haughey, Clare (Rutherglen) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Linlithgow) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP)
 Lochhead, Richard (Moray) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Gordon (Edinburgh Pentlands) (SNP)
 MacGregor, Fulton (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
 Mackay, Rona (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
 Macpherson, Ben (Edinburgh Northern and Leith) (SNP)
 Maguire, Ruth (Cunninghame South) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Rona Mackay]
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 McAllan, Màiri (Clydesdale) (SNP) [Proxy vote cast by Jamie Hepburn]
 McKee, Ivan (Glasgow Provan) (SNP)
 McLennan, Paul (East Lothian) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP)
 McNair, Marie (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP)
 Minto, Jenni (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Nicoll, Audrey (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)
 Robertson, Angus (Edinburgh Central) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee City East) (SNP)
 Roddick, Emma (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Dunfermline) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Collette (East Kilbride) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kaukab (Glasgow Kelvin) (SNP)
 Stewart, Kevin (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Southside) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (Perthshire North) (SNP)
 Todd, Maree (Caithness, Sutherland and Ross) (SNP)
 Torrance, David (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)
 Tweed, Evelyn (Stirling) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division on motion S6M-16789, in the name of Liz Smith, on the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1, is: For 64, Against 1, Abstentions 53.

Motion agreed to,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Schools (Residential Outdoor Education) (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: That concludes decision time.

Meeting closed at 17:35.

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