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AITHISG OIFIGEIL

# Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid)

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# Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 22 December 2021

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

## Portfolio Question Time

### Justice and Veterans

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** Good afternoon. I remind members that Covid-related measures are in place and that face masks should be worn when you are moving about the chamber or around the Holyrood campus.

The first item of business is portfolio question time, and the first portfolio is justice and veterans. Members who wish to request a supplementary question should press their request-to-speak button or enter R in the chat function during the relevant question.

#### Victim Notification Scheme Review

1. **Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the review of the victim notification scheme. (S6O-00558)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** We will commence the review of the victim notification scheme early next year, to ensure that it serves victims effectively. That was agreed by the victims task force in March, and we continue to engage with partners to develop the review. The task force's preference is for the review to be led by an independent chairperson, supported by a working group of representatives of the organisations that operate the scheme and victims' organisations. We intend to proceed on that basis.

The detailed approach and remit of the review are being considered. It is likely to include matters such as the possible extension to the scheme's scope, information sharing between agencies and links with the task force's work on developing a victim-centred approach.

**Tess White:** Victim Support Scotland has highlighted, shockingly, multiple suicide attempts by victims as a result of the letter that notifies them that the perpetrator in their case is to be released. The organisation believes that the scheme is not fit for purpose and that the need for a review has never been greater.

The Scottish Government has dithered and delayed, but the Scottish Conservatives have committed to reform the victim notification

scheme, as part of our victims law. Does the cabinet secretary support those proposals?

**Keith Brown:** On victims generally, what is really important is that we ensure that we reduce the number of victims in society. Our having far more police officers per capita than there are elsewhere in the United Kingdom, giving them a wage increase and the achievement of some of the lowest recorded levels of crime are important in reducing the number of victims.

It is also true that a number of areas to do with victims should be looked at. As Tess White said, a review has never been more appropriate, which is why we are taking forward a review that will cover all aspects of victims in the justice system.

The intention is to ensure that, right across the justice system, the approach becomes much more victim centred and trauma informed. That is a small thing to say, but it is a big goal to have in mind; it is the Scottish Government's goal. If we achieve that, we will make more improvements, on top of the changes that we have made in recent years to improve how we treat victims in the justice system.

**Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP):** What initiatives and programmes are available to ensure that victims' voices are heard, and that victims are represented throughout the justice process?

**Keith Brown:** As I said, we intend to have a victim-centred approach. As part of that, we recognise the importance of ensuring that victims' voices are heard, including through representation on the victims task force, the renew, recover and transform advisory group and reference groups in which victims share their experiences and expertise, to help to inform policy and practice.

We have legislated to strengthen victims' rights and voices—from the introduction of the victims code for Scotland and the standards of service for victims and witnesses to the strengthening of the victim notification and victim statement schemes.

We recognise that more can be done. We will continue to work with partners to improve victims' experience.

#### Modern Slavery and Organised Crime (Police Training)

2. **Bill Kidd (Glasgow Anniesland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what training is given to the police force to identify potential victims of modern slavery involved in organised crime. (S6O-00559)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister joins us remotely.

**The Minister for Community Safety (Ash Regan):** Any form of human trafficking or exploitation is completely unacceptable.

The training and development of officers and the operational delivery of policing are, of course, matters for the chief constable. Police Scotland has informed me that the national human trafficking unit undertakes human trafficking training on various courses at the Scottish Police College throughout the year, and that Police Scotland's human trafficking champions disseminate briefings and guidance to local officers.

In addition, the Unseen app, which was recently introduced in Police Scotland, can be accessed by operational officers on their mobile devices. The app provides a wealth of information on modern slavery and exploitation. It clearly explains the indicators of human trafficking and exploitation and what to look for.

**Bill Kidd:** Charities and non-governmental organisations are aware that victims of modern slavery, including some teenagers, are often involved in drug and knife crime and have been exploited by groomers and gangs. What processes are in place to ensure that the burden of criminality is not misplaced on victims of modern slavery? Will new funding for victim support help to provide routes out of modern slavery for people who are in those circumstances?

**Ash Regan:** When it is believed that a child or young person under 18 is a victim of exploitation or human trafficking, an immediate child protection response is required from police officers who are trained to undertake relevant procedures, including interagency referral discussions. Police Scotland has in place clear guidance to ensure a dual investigation of suspected criminal activity and potential human trafficking that might have led to an offence being committed.

Decisions regarding prosecutions are for the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. The Lord Advocate has published instructions regarding the presumption against prosecution of persons who are the victims of trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour who have committed offences as a consequence.

A key priority of the new victim-centred approach fund is to provide support and assistance to adult victims of human trafficking to help them to recover and begin to rebuild their lives.

**Jamie Greene (West Scotland) (Con):** Modern slavery is an appalling crime. It is even more so when the victim is used by criminal gangs. To tackle it, we must understand the scale of it. Is the minister comfortable that the current national

referral mechanism data gives the level of accuracy that Police Scotland needs to tackle the crime? The answer to my recent parliamentary question on that matter seemed to imply that no one really knows how many people are enslaved in modern Scotland.

**Ash Regan:** Jamie Greene is completely right to say that it is an appalling crime. The data that we use is the data that we have. The numbers this year are slightly down on the previous year's, but Covid is having an impact on that. In general, modern slavery can be hidden. That is its nature, so the figures will perhaps not always reflect what is happening on the ground.

The Scottish Government is working with a wide range of partners. We have a serious organised crime task force and strategy, which aims to reduce the harms that are caused by serious organised crime and its involvement in human trafficking.

If Jamie Greene would like to meet me to discuss the matter further, I would be happy to do that.

### Victims and Survivors Views

**3. Maggie Chapman (North East Scotland) (Green):** To ask the Scottish Government what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the views of victims and survivors are considered by Community Justice Scotland and the justice board for Scotland and its sub-groups. (S6O-00560)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** The justice board, of which Community Justice Scotland is a member, undertakes a wide range of engagement activity to ensure that the views of victims and survivors are taken into account.

Justice board members are represented on the victims task force, alongside representatives of victim support organisations and a victims representative. That ensures that the task force's work is directly informed by the experiences of victims. The task force includes Community Justice Scotland, which co-leads the trauma-informed workforce workstream.

Victims organisations are also represented on a number of justice board sub-groups, including those relating to Covid-19, the recover, renew, transform programme and the recovery of community justice and preventing offending group.

Outwith the justice board, Community Justice Scotland has a statutory duty to assess the extent to which national community justice outcomes are achieved. It recently noted that community justice partners

"are closely linked to victim support services and that supporting victims is a high priority locally."

**Maggie Chapman:** I would like to explore in more detail how victims' voices are taken into account in strategic and operational discussions. The victims task force recently discussed victims' voices. There is concern among support organisations that, on the rare occasions when views or feedback are sought from the people whom they support, there is little follow-up. There is no communication about what is done with those views or what has happened as a result of feedback. I know that the recover, renew, transform advisory group has also—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Chapman, can we please have a supplementary question?

**Maggie Chapman:** What more can be done to restore victims', witnesses' and survivors' confidence that their feedback is valued and that their voices are being heard and acted on in a way that is not wasting their time and retraumatising them.

**Keith Brown:** I will have to refer to what currently happens. Along with the work of the victims task force, my officials and representatives of the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service and the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service meet monthly with victim support organisations and provide feedback on how their input is helping to shape our approach to making improvements to the justice system to aid victims' recovery.

An advisory group including victims organisations was established to provide the criminal justice board with independent expert advice on the potential impacts that could arise for people who go through the justice system. Members of the criminal justice board have, in turn, attended the advisory group to feed back on the advice that has been received.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 4 is from Finlay Carson, who is joining us remotely.

### Victim Surcharge Fund

**4. Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the victim surcharge fund. (S6O-00561)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** The victim surcharge fund reopened for applications on 7 December 2021, with a closing date of 14 January 2022. Allocations will be announced in February 2022. At least £165,000 is available in this round.

Five organisations shared £157,000 earlier this year. That money has been used to provide direct practical help to victims from the fund.

The victim surcharge fund initial report for 2019 to 2021 was published on 1 October 2021, and a copy is available in the Scottish Parliament

information centre. It provides information on payments made into and out of the fund. Information on the collection of the victim surcharge is published in the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service's quarterly fines reports.

**Finlay Carson:** In its 2016 manifesto, the Scottish National Party promised that the victim surcharge fund would deliver £1 million of extra funding a year to go towards victims organisations, but in two years of operation it has paid out only £157,000, and the cabinet secretary's recent announcement that the latest round of funding will deliver only £165,000 will add to the disappointment of victims. Why has the fund fallen so far short of what was promised to victims of crime?

**Keith Brown:** There is perhaps a misunderstanding on the part of Mr Carson as to how the fund is to work. The amount raised is entirely dependent on the number and value of fines imposed by the courts, and it was always going to take a number of years for the fund to build up. Only individuals or organisations who have been cautioned after 2019 are affected, and their cases will take time to progress through the court. Members will of course know the impact of the pandemic on the court system.

It is true to say that the collection rate for the victim surcharge in Scotland is 79 per cent, which compares favourably with the rate in England and Wales, which is 61 per cent. Notwithstanding the pandemic, we of course expect the amount that can be paid out to victims organisations to increase in future years.

**Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** Many victim support organisations across the country do valuable work to assist victims of crime. Since its inception, how has the victim surcharge fund supported such organisations in the Clydebank and Milngavie constituency?

**Keith Brown:** We are in the fortunate position of being able to fund all the organisations that applied for the first round of the fund. Details of those organisations can be found in the initial report, and they include Victim Support Scotland, which offers support nationally. Individuals and families that access support from the fund through those organisations came from a range of localities across Scotland. We do not break down that data by constituency.

Victim support organisations throughout Scotland are welcome to apply to the second round of funding.

### Forensic Examination Services (Children and Young People)

**5. Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Government what update it can

provide on delivering forensic examination services for children and young people in island and rural communities. (S6O-00562)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** Child-centred and trauma-informed healthcare is at the centre of the current paediatric services that are provided to children and young people in Scotland who experience child sexual abuse. The national pathway for clinicians supporting children who have experienced child sexual abuse was published in November 2020 and makes it clear that the wellbeing of the child is paramount through each step of the process.

**Liam McArthur:** I thank all those who have helped to establish a service that allows adult survivors of rape and sexual assault in Orkney to be examined without having to be flown off the island. I recognise the added complexities of delivering forensic examinations of children and young people, but I am concerned that even efforts to explore how telehealth might be used to support the examination of a child who has experienced physical neglect, rather than sexual abuse, have been halted due to problems with admissibility of images captured in that way. Will the cabinet secretary speak to the Lord Advocate to establish how any concerns might be overcome, so that such an option can be tested and put in place for children and young people in my constituency?

**Keith Brown:** I am happy to take that up with the Lord Advocate, and with the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, given that telehealth is the subject of the discussion. An important point, which the member has previously acknowledged, is that there have been substantial improvements in relation to adults' services, but there is a continuing need to work on making sure that we have the same level of service for children. I am more than happy to take up the issues with the Lord Advocate and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, as the member has outlined.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 is from Stephanie Callaghan, who is joining us remotely.

#### Justice Vision and Priorities Delivery Plan

6. **Stephanie Callaghan (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on this year's review of the justice vision and priorities delivery plan. (S6O-00563)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** The Scottish Government published a report in March 2021 highlighting the key achievements in justice since

the publication of "Justice in Scotland: vision and priorities". The report summarised the progress that has been made and highlighted the key achievements under the seven justice priorities since 2017. The report also describes the impact of Covid-19 on policy development and on the justice system. The justice vision and priorities ran from 2017 to 2020 and it is due to be refreshed. Our new vision for justice will be published in the new year and will seek to build on the lessons that we have learnt so far.

**Stephanie Callaghan:** The report made us aware of the impact of Covid-19 on the justice sector. What steps has the Scottish Government taken to help the sector and its recovery from the pandemic?

**Keith Brown:** I am sure that the member will be aware of some of the efforts made by the Scottish Government as it continued to support justice agencies to take action to address the backlog caused by the Covid pandemic and to minimise the impact on all court users. As part of the recent budget announcement, and in the continued absence of any apparent Covid funding from the United Kingdom Government, we announced significant funding increases for the justice portfolio—funding that is required to deal with the backlog and to support community justice services in recovering from the pandemic.

We have established a justice recovery fund for the next financial year of £53.2 million to be allocated to recovery, renewal and transformation activity across the justice system, including the ability to maintain enhanced court capacity and remote jury centres. That builds on the additional £50 million allocated in this financial year, which, by way of a tangible example, helped to deliver the setting up of 16 additional solemn and summary courts from September.

#### Management of Offenders (Scotland) Act 2019

7. **Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government when it plans to enact sections 5 to 7 of the Management of Offenders (Scotland) Act 2019. (S6O-00564)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** The provisions in sections 5 to 7 of part 1 of the 2019 act relate to making electronic monitoring a condition of licence. Electronic monitoring is already a feature of post-release sentence management as a condition of licence for uses such as home detention curfew. The Parole Board for Scotland currently has an ability to recommend licence conditions, which can include an element of electronic monitoring. A number of provisions of the 2019 act have already been commenced and the next set of commencement regulations

planned for the act is now likely to come into force in early 2022.

**Oliver Mundell:** The sections of the 2019 act that I mentioned would allow exclusion zones to be imposed on criminals when they are released on licence. Does the cabinet secretary agree with Scottish Conservative proposals to allow victims to request those exclusion zones?

**Keith Brown:** There are two ways in which the suggestion made by the member can be taken forward. We can look at it in relation to victims, but we must also look at the practical impacts of electronic monitoring, especially where that requires GPS. Further work on the latter point is currently being undertaken with justice partners, and I will ensure that the member's former point is covered in the victims review, which I mentioned earlier.

**Collette Stevenson (East Kilbride) (SNP):** What impact has the Scottish Government's focus on early intervention, prevention and rehabilitation had on efforts to reduce the use of imprisonment?

**Keith Brown:** It has had a substantial impact. People in prison now are generally serving longer sentences and there are far fewer people serving sentences of less than 18 months, because of legislation that was previously passed. Other interventions that have taken place under this Scottish Government have also helped to deal with the situation that the member mentions. We are very conscious that more needs to be done, not least in relation to some of the proposals in the bail and release bill. That is currently out for consultation.

### 101 Phone Line (Waiting Times)

**8. Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to reduce waiting times for people calling Police Scotland's non-emergency 101 phone line. (S6O-00565)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Veterans (Keith Brown):** As the member will be aware, delivery of the police 101 service is a matter for Police Scotland. Police Scotland has played, and continues to play, a crucial role in protecting our communities through the pandemic, and it has, alongside all sectors, been impacted by its own Covid-related absences.

I meet regularly with the chief constable, who updates me on the contingency plan to ensure that calls to 999 continue to be answered in less than 10 seconds, and that resilience plans are in place to meet the peak in calls to the 101 line at this extremely busy time.

**Murdo Fraser:** We are all conscious of the impact that Covid has had across the public

service, but even before the pandemic I heard many concerns from constituents about the time that it took for them to get a response on the 101 non-emergency service. Those concerns will have simply been highlighted and extended as a result of the current situation with Covid. Is the justice secretary engaging with Police Scotland on the possibility of bringing in more resource for the 101 number to ensure that people are not having to wait—in some cases, for half an hour or more—for the phone to be answered?

**Keith Brown:** I engage with Police Scotland—I spoke to the chief constable about the issue as recently as last week. The deployment of resources in the police service is, of course, a matter for Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority, and they are doing exactly what Murdo Fraser suggested in allocating more resource.

The member is right to raise his concerns, and I know that he has engaged directly with the police on the issue. However, I point to the more recent figures, for October this year, which show that there has been a substantial improvement.

It is worth bearing in mind that the function of Police Scotland's 101 service is often to pick up calls that would normally go to other agencies—in many cases, local authorities or care services. Police Scotland has to cope with that additional burden at the same time as the Covid-related absences that I mentioned. Nevertheless, I will continue to discuss the matter with Police Scotland, and I am sure that it will have heard Murdo Fraser's suggestion today.

## Finance and the Economy

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The next portfolio is finance and the economy. As ever, if a member wishes to ask a supplementary question, they should press their request-to-speak button or place an R in the chat function during the relevant question.

### Social and Affordable Housing (Draft Budget 2022-23)

**1. Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government how much it has allocated in its draft budget for 2022-23 for building social and affordable housing in Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders. (S6O-00566)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The cabinet secretary joins us remotely.

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** Our draft budget increases funding for affordable housing by £174 million, which brings the total investment next year to £831 million and total investment across the

current session of Parliament to £3.6 billion. We have not yet allocated the additional £174 million, but existing five-year planning assumptions mean that all local authority areas will benefit from increases in funding in comparison with the previous session of Parliament. Investment in Dumfries and Galloway specifically is £15 million higher, at £106 million, and investment in the Scottish Borders is £17 million higher, at £82 million.

**Emma Harper:** I recently visited Passivhaus housing in Dalton, near Lockerbie. The Passivhaus model is hugely beneficial in reducing energy bills for residents and in assisting our fight in tackling the climate emergency, and there is evidence to suggest that it can be beneficial for health as a result of the air filtration. Can the cabinet secretary comment on whether any funding in the budget is being used to explore the building of social and affordable houses to meet the Passivhaus standards?

**Kate Forbes:** The member raises an important point, and I will be happy to explore those issues further with her. The affordable housing supply programme and the social housing net zero heat fund have supported, and continue to support, the delivery of homes to Passivhaus standards in urban, rural and island communities across the country, including in Dumfries and Galloway.

We are continuing to take rapid action to increase the energy efficiency of new homes and to modernise construction. We recently consulted on improvements to the high energy standards in building regulations, and the consultation included an option that approaches the level of specification that is associated with the Passivhaus model.

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** The record to date is not good. In 2016, the Scottish National Party promised to build 50,000 affordable homes and it has failed to meet that target. The SNP ministers have spent less than half the £25 million budget that was allocated to rural housing funds and £11.4 million of that funding delivered just 59 affordable homes, so why should the people in rural Scotland trust that the SNP can deliver this time round?

**Kate Forbes:** Many criticisms could be levelled at the Government but not on our commitment to building affordable housing. The member will know, as I do, in representing a rural area, that the amount of housing that has been built over the past five years considerably exceeds the amount of housing that was built prior to that.

Planned investment in Dumfries and Galloway is almost £24 million in the current year alone and will enable an estimated 172 affordable homes to start on site and an estimated 166 homes to complete, all for social rent. Those are not small

figures; they are hugely important. Such homes are a cornerstone of our rural communities.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 2 has not been lodged. Question 3 is from James Dornan, who joins us remotely.

### **Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Businesses (Government Support)**

**3. James Dornan (Glasgow Cathcart) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the support that it is providing to retail, hospitality and leisure businesses. (S6O-00568)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister also joins us remotely.

**The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee):** We recognise the difficulties that omicron brings for businesses and their employees, which is why we are providing £375 million to support sectors that have been impacted by the necessary additional public health measures. That funding includes the £100 million that was announced last week for those who have been directly impacted during this key trading period, and it provides £66 million to the hospitality sector and £8 million for the food and drink supply chain, including wholesalers. An update will be provided on the allocation of that funding as soon as possible.

The budget also continues support for the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors by delivering 50 per cent rates relief for the first three months of 2022-23—capped at £27,500 per ratepayer—as well as the lowest poundage in the United Kingdom for the fourth year in a row and a total relief package that is worth an estimated £802 million.

**James Dornan:** Although I welcome the significant additional funding to support businesses that the Scottish Government has announced, I also recognise that we cannot go far enough to fully compensate for the substantial impact of omicron within the restrictive resources that are currently available to the Scottish Government. Does the cabinet secretary—I mean “minister”; I nearly promoted Ivan McKee there—agree that businesses now need the scale of financial support that they received earlier in the pandemic and that that can come only from the UK Government, which has the necessary borrowing powers that the Scottish Government does not?

**Ivan McKee:** Absolutely. We know that the scale and urgency of the omicron challenge require that there be financial support for businesses and their employees on a scale similar to that at the start of the pandemic. Although we have announced significant funding for businesses to deal with the impact of omicron, totalling £375

million—significantly more, proportionally, than the chancellor has announced for the UK as a whole—it is worth noting that, of course, that will not fully compensate businesses and their staff. That is why we continue to call on the UK Government to put the necessary support schemes, including furlough, in place to protect workers, given that, under the current UK funding arrangements, only the Treasury has the borrowing powers to provide support on such a scale.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I will take two brief supplementary questions, which are both from members who join us remotely. I would appreciate succinct questions and answers.

**Paul Sweeney (Glasgow) (Lab):** The minister will be aware of the problems that are faced by the travel sector, particularly companies with retail stores. Glasgow-based Barrhead Travel, which is the largest travel agent in Scotland and an employer of more than 500 people, contacted me this week to say that business has been badly hit by the recent announcements but, as of yet, there has been no indication of specific support from the Government. What discussions has the Government had with the travel industry about extending support to the industry? Will he meet me and representatives from Barrhead Travel to hear at first hand how the lack of support from the Government is suffocating one of Glasgow's biggest companies?

**Ivan McKee:** I have previously met representatives of Barrhead Travel, along with other businesses in the travel sector, to understand the extent of the challenges that they are facing. It is a difficult time for the sector, and I continue to meet regularly with its representatives, as does my colleague the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy, who meets businesses across the wider hospitality, leisure and travel sector with regard to the level of support that is available.

I have just spoken about it, so the member will be aware that, yesterday, the First Minister announced that a total of £375 million has been made available to support business, including businesses in the travel sector. In the context of the first £100 million, there was specific mention of the travel sector. The details of how that and the other £275 million will be distributed are being worked through at pace with representatives and will be communicated as soon as we have the final details.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That was neither a brief question nor a brief answer. Let us see whether we can do better.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** I would not get your hopes up, Presiding Officer.

The minister just mentioned furlough. For how long should the scheme be in place, because workers are struggling? Should there be a furlough scheme every time there is a new wave of the virus? What plans does he have to support workers who are really struggling?

**Ivan McKee:** The member makes a good point. We believe that a furlough scheme for affected sectors should be introduced when necessary. Given the restrictions that are now having to be put in place for good public health reasons in hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism and other heavily affected sectors, we think that the UK Government should put in place a furlough scheme that supports workers in those sectors.

We are doing what we can to support business but, without the employment data that only the UK Government has, we are in a difficult position when it comes to supporting workers directly. That is why we are calling on the UK Government to step up to the plate and put in place a scheme that supports those affected workers at this difficult time.

#### **Scottish Fiscal Commission Report (Funding Shortfall)**

4. **Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what its response is to the Scottish Fiscal Commission report, which anticipates a funding shortfall of £190 million in 2022-23 driven by slower growth in employment in Scotland compared to the United Kingdom. (S6O-00569)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** The Scottish Fiscal Commission and the Office for Budget Responsibility have stated that the continued uncertainty around the pandemic means that there will be more volatility than usual in their forecasts. It is important to note that the final position on the performance of income tax revenues in 2022-23 will be known only once outturn data is published in 2024.

The problem in the fiscal framework is that strong earnings growth in London and the south-east means that our budget can be reduced even while earnings growth in Scotland has increased in every year since tax devolution prior to the pandemic. Rising inequality elsewhere in the UK should not see Scotland's budget reduced. I believe that that needs to be addressed in the upcoming fiscal framework review.

**Brian Whittle:** The cabinet secretary will be aware that the Scottish Fiscal Commission's forecast also shows that, by 2026-27, the shortfall could be as much as £417 million. That indicates that there are serious issues in the Scottish

economy. What are the cabinet secretary and the Scottish Government doing to address the issue?

**Kate Forbes:** I thank the member for posing the question, because we need to get beneath the headline figures. The Scottish Fiscal Commission estimates that the Scottish Government's decisions on income tax since 2017-18 add around £552 million to tax receipts next year, compared with following UK Government income tax policies. That implies that the Scottish budget could have been £742 million worse off next year if it were not for our tax policies.

On the specifics of the Scottish economy, the sectoral composition of the Scottish economy will likely be a contributing factor. We rely on receipts from the oil and gas industry, in which activity has been slowing in recent years, which has a disproportionate impact in the Scottish economy. Even a small reduction in pay and employment in that sector has a large effect on revenues. Conversely—Presiding Officer, I will finish with this line—the rest of the UK relies more heavily on receipts from the financial services sector, in which pay growth has been strong. We need to get behind the numbers to understand what is really going on in the Scottish economy.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** We have two brief supplementary questions. Both of the members are in the chamber, so I can eyeball them.

**Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** Thank you, Presiding Officer—no pressure, then.

I make the cabinet secretary aware that I have been contacted by Gleneagles hotel, Crieff Hydro and Simon Howie Butchers, which are important businesses in my constituency. They have told me that, to operate at full capacity, they need to close a staffing shortfall of up to 25 per cent and that they want to be able to recruit from beyond our borders to do so. I wrote on their behalf to the UK Government—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question.

**Jim Fairlie:** —but the reply was negative. Does the cabinet secretary agree with me that that is another area in which this Parliament needs the powers to legislate so that we can manage the challenges that our industries face to promote growth in those industries?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That was not really a supplementary to the previous question. Briefly, cabinet secretary.

**Kate Forbes:** The member is right in saying that the biggest challenge that business has faced over the past few months, which no one can have missed, is labour market shortages. That is driven almost entirely by the removal of freedom of

movement. The UK immigration system is failing to meet the needs of Scotland's employers. Ultimately, without our having full control over economic and immigration policy, which the UK Government refuses to give us, we do not have the powers to resolve the labour market shortage and allow business to grow.

**Daniel Johnson (Edinburgh Southern) (Lab):** The cabinet secretary is absolutely right that we must get behind the numbers. However, when we do, they show that increases in earnings in Scotland are lagging behind not just those in London and the south-east but those in every other devolved nation and every English region. Why have we still not received the 10-year economic plan, which was promised by the end of the year? Why has it been delayed? When will it be published?

**Kate Forbes:** The member and I had extensive dialogue on that topic at the Finance and Public Administration Committee yesterday, so I will not go into the detail now.

On the specific questions, the member will, I hope, appreciate that business is struggling right now and that publishing a 10-year strategy when business is looking for financial support next year is a challenge. We have been working with the advisory council. The strategy is in a very good place. My hope is that we will be able to publish the plan as soon as possible. However, we need to ensure that there is as much space and capacity as possible in Scotland's economy for all economic actors to participate. While we are in the grip of a new variant, perhaps now is not the right time to do so.

#### **Small Businesses (Non-domestic Rates)**

5. **Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what assessment it has made of the impact on small businesses of non-domestic rates being reintroduced after the first three months of the new financial year. (S6O-00570)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister joins us remotely.

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** We are extending the retail, hospitality and leisure relief by 50 per cent for the first three months of 2022-23, capped at £27,500 per ratepayer. We are also maintaining the United Kingdom's most generous small business bonus scheme, which will take more than 111,000 properties out of rates altogether.

Throughout the pandemic, we have consistently delivered more direct support to business than we have received in consequentials. Yesterday, the First Minister confirmed additional funding to

deliver a package of support worth a total of £375 million. On the basis of the Barnett formula, that is equivalent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer confirming a £4.6 billion support package, in contrast to the £1 billion that he announced.

**Colin Smyth:** The Scottish hospitality group has said that removing the 50 per cent business rates relief just three months into the new financial year could

“spell the end for many hard-pressed Scottish hospitality businesses.”

The Federation of Small Businesses said that there is a

“compelling case to further extend the duration and level of the relief ... especially if we’re not out of the woods”

by spring.

Will the Scottish Government listen to Scotland’s small businesses, rethink the budget and extend the business rates relief to a full year, as Labour and businesses are consistently calling for?

**Tom Arthur:** One of the key asks of business prior to the budget was to avoid a cliff edge on 31 March, and the 50 per cent relief for the first quarter delivers that.

It is also important to consider the broader package of support that is being provided. For the fourth year in a row, we will have the lowest poundage anywhere in the UK. Some 95 per cent of properties that are liable for non-domestic rates will pay a lower property tax in Scotland than they would elsewhere in the UK. In addition, the small business bonus scheme continues to deliver no rates for more than 100,000 businesses across Scotland. That must also be seen in the context of our being the first part in the UK to extend 100 per cent relief for retail, hospitality and leisure for all of 2021-22, which was not replicated in England for example.

We have listened. We have taken this proportionate, balanced decision in the context of a challenging budget settlement. We are also, of course, responding in haste to the omicron crisis by providing support totalling £375 million.

**Fiona Hyslop (Linlithgow) (SNP):** Can the minister outline what assessment has been made of the 100 per cent rates relief that is available to Scottish hospitality businesses, compared with the rates relief that is available in England, which is now limited to 66 per cent? Does he agree that the Scottish Government’s on-going higher level of business support, which continues to be available now and will be right through to April 2022, has provided and continues to provide vital business support for this winter period of disruption? Yes, more needs to be done, but that is a strong foundation.

**Tom Arthur:** Of course, and as Fiona Hyslop will well understand, it has never been possible to provide all the support that businesses have needed during these challenging times. However, as the only Government to offer uncapped relief since the start of the Covid pandemic, as well as an unprecedented reduction in the poundage, we have been there for businesses when they needed us most. We proved that again yesterday when the First Minister announced a total package of £375 million in direct business support.

**Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** How is the Scottish Government responding to requests from the business community for long-term reform of the structure of business rates?

**Tom Arthur:** As Liz Smith will be aware, we have a tone date on 1 April next year and a revaluation the following April. We will listen closely to calls from business, but the immediate priority is to provide stability in the non-domestic rates system to allow the Barclay reforms to bed in. That is something that we will do over the coming period.

I will be happy, later in this parliamentary session, to have further discussions with members who wish to make concrete proposals for the type and nature of reform that they would wish to see.

### Hospitality Sector (Financial Support)

6. **Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what further financial support it considers may be necessary to assist the hospitality sector as the Covid-19 pandemic continues. (S6O-00571)

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ivan McKee joins us remotely.

**The Minister for Business, Trade, Tourism and Enterprise (Ivan McKee):** We recognise the difficulties that omicron brings for businesses and their employees, which is why we are providing £375 million to support sectors that are impacted by the additional necessary public health measures. That funding includes the £100 million announced last week for those who are directly impacted during this key trading period, and that includes £66 million for the hospitality sector. An update will be provided on the breakdown and allocation of funding as soon as possible.

Although the support that we are providing to businesses is significant, businesses clearly need large-scale financial support, such as a furlough scheme, which can only come from the United Kingdom Government, as it has borrowing powers that the Scottish Government does not. We have repeatedly called on the UK Government to urgently provide support similar to that which was available earlier in the pandemic.

**Fulton MacGregor:** Just last night, I was contacted by a constituent who operates SDLS Dancewear in Coatbridge, the only such shop in North Lanarkshire. The cancellations of dance events and pantomimes following yesterday's announcement has absolutely devastated my constituent's income so close to Christmas. What support does the Government intend to give businesses such as that, which are more indirectly impacted by the current restrictions, as they supply the sectors that the restrictions hit most?

**Ivan McKee:** We know how difficult the necessary additional public health restrictions are for businesses, including those in the events sector and, very importantly, those in that sector's supply chain. That is why we are providing £375 million to support businesses that are impacted by the restrictions. That includes £100 million that was announced last week for those that are directly impacted during this key trading period. An update will be provided on the breakdown and allocation of the rest of that funding as soon as possible.

Although that is significant funding, we of course understand that it will not fully compensate business. The scale and urgency of the omicron challenge requires financial support for business, as I have said, on a scale similar to that which was put in place at the start of the pandemic. Given the current UK funding arrangements, only the Treasury has the borrowing power to provide support on such a scale. It is absolutely vital that the UK Government steps up and provides that additional support at this time.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** There is a brief supplementary from Rachael Hamilton, who joins us remotely.

**Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con):** I draw attention to my entry in the register of members' interests. Small businesses risk going down due to the Scottish National Party Government. This morning, NFU Scotland said that it has serious worries about the impact of short-term let licensing on Scotland's rural economy. Even Fergus Ewing agrees with the 60 per cent of respondents to a Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee survey who strongly oppose the licensing scheme. Does the minister agree that the SNP Government should ditch the damaging plans to license short-term let accommodation providers, in order to prevent the knock-on impact on small rural businesses that are reliant on tourism and have been battered by the Covid regulations?

**Ivan McKee:** To be honest, Presiding Officer, that question is straying very far from the original question, but I shall answer it anyway.

The Government believes that we should move ahead as planned with the licensing of short-term lets, and my colleague Shona Robison is taking forward those proposals. We have listened extensively to the sector—I have had several meetings with representatives of the sector to understand their concerns, and many of those concerns have been addressed. However, we believe that, in principle, the licensing regime is the right thing to do and we will take it forward with the changes that have been made as a consequence of our listening closely to the concerns of the sector.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Relevance is for the chair to decide.

### Employee-owned Businesses

**7. Claire Baker (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress it has made on its commitment to increase the number of employee-owned businesses in Scotland to 500 by 2030. (S6O-00572)

**The Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth (Tom Arthur):** An independent inquiry into employee ownership recognised that, as of March 2019, Scotland is leading the way, with 111 of the 370 employee-owned business in the United Kingdom. Scottish Enterprise records show that approximately 120 employee-owned businesses are now headquartered in Scotland, with around 170 operating in the country.

**Claire Baker:** I would appreciate it if, in the minister's response, he could say by how many the number has increased in the past year, which was the original point of the question.

I anticipate that there has been a slight increase but, if the target of 500 is to be reached by 2030, we need to step up the work on that. It is fair to say that co-operative development Scotland is the Cinderella service of Scottish Enterprise, but evidence shows that co-operatives are more resilient, which is exactly what we need in these uncertain times. What budget commitments are there to achieving the target? Are there interim targets that can accelerate the pace of change?

**Tom Arthur:** We are supporting co-operative development Scotland, which as the member correctly says is within Scottish Enterprise. Of course, Scottish Enterprise is represented on the industry leadership group for employee ownership, of which I am the ministerial co-chair. We are working constructively with partners across the employee-owned sector to increase the number of employee-owned businesses in Scotland, including the number that are headquartered here. That is an important and serious piece of work that

is part of the bigger community wealth building agenda, and we are making good progress.

In recent meetings of the group, we have recognised that there has been a significant uptick in the number of organisations that are transitioning to employee ownership, not just in Scotland but across the UK. There is a real moment that we can capitalise on. CDS is being supported to do that in partnership through the ILG, and I look forward to taking that work forward. I am more than happy to meet Ms Baker if she would like to discuss the matter further.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 8 is from Pam Gosal, who joins us remotely.

#### **Draft Budget 2022-23 (Stakeholders)**

**8. Pam Gosal (West Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government what discussions it has had with relevant stakeholders regarding the draft budget for 2022-23. (S6O-00573)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy (Kate Forbes):** The Scottish Government, including me personally, engaged with a wide range of stakeholders in advance of the budget being published, including local government, trade unions and business groups, and there was wider portfolio dialogue on their respective interests. That engagement is part of our efforts to promote transparency and inform decision making. For example, we met with tax professionals, business representatives, civil society organisations, research institutes and others, and ran a consultation process on how we should use our tax powers as part of the budget.

**Pam Gosal:** There is a cut of £1.1 million to drug services, a £2 million real-terms cut to prisons and a £371 million real-terms cut to local authorities. In my region, West Dunbartonshire Council faces a funding gap of around £7 million, and that is not to mention the £2 million cut to attainment challenge funds in the region, which has some of the highest child poverty rates in the country. Can the cabinet secretary explain why, despite the highest block grant funding since devolution, the Scottish Government is cutting vital funds for public services?

**Kate Forbes:** I suggest that, rather than spinning the line that this is the biggest budget ever, the member should note that some of the comments that she has made reveal how challenging the budget is. We have had all Covid consequential stripped out of the budget, despite the fact that we are dealing with a variant right now and that Covid will continue to have an impact. We are having to absorb all that within the block grant in next year's budget.

The member referred to specific budget lines. On drugs support, for example, the budget

includes £61 million specifically to address drug misuse, as part of our commitment to invest £250 million over the lifetime of this parliamentary session. Given the impact of the highest inflation rate for a number of years, alongside the on-going impact of Covid, it has been hugely challenging to deal with the budget. If the member would like me to increase any budget line, I look forward to her telling me where the money should come from.

**Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP):** Can the cabinet secretary advise the chamber on whether Ms Gosal has contacted her to suggest how much more in resources the Scottish Government should provide for the additional expenditure that she seeks, and how those resources should be paid for? They would need to be paid for either by transfers from other budget lines or by increased taxation.

**Kate Forbes:** Ms Gosal has not contacted me to date, although I have obviously been engaging on the matter with the Conservatives' spokesperson. All parties have made a lot of asks, but no party has told me which taxes to increase or what to cut.

#### **Education and Skills**

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 1 is from Gillian Martin, who joins us remotely.

#### **School Examinations 2022**

**1. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what plans are being put in place for the 2022 school examinations. (S6O-00574)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** As we confirmed in August, we are planning that exams will take place in 2022. Significant modifications have already been made to course assessments—both exams and coursework—to take into account disruption to learning. Contingency plans are in place, as the Scottish Qualifications Authority outlined in August and described in more detail in September, to offset any further significant national disruption that arises from Covid. That approach provides the flexibility to adapt to any increased levels of disruption to learning at a national level.

**Gillian Martin:** Obviously, since the cabinet secretary indicated that physical exams will take place in 2022, the omicron variant has arrived and public health advice is adapting to that. What reassurances can she provide that the Scottish Government's priority will continue to be keeping our children and young people and our school staff safe?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** As Gillian Martin would rightly expect, the safety of children and young people and of our education staff remains our overriding priority while we try to minimise any further disruption to learning where that is possible. The Scottish Government regularly reviews the guidance in the light of emerging scientific evidence. Indeed, refreshed school guidance was most recently published on Friday 17 December. The guidance was informed by the Covid-19 education recovery group and the advisory sub-group on education and children's issues. The details of the enhancements to existing mitigations reflect the changing balance of risks following the emergence of the omicron variant. As Gillian Martin would expect, we will keep the situation under regular review.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):** Yesterday, the First Minister said that schools will open "as normal" in the new year, but, as parents and teachers have been pointing out to me since then, things are far from normal in our schools. Schools and classes have been closing for weeks, and disruption is widespread. Maintaining an exam diet will require new action from the Government. What new approaches will the cabinet secretary take on ventilation, testing, staffing and digital learning to ensure that our children have a fighting chance of sitting the exams?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I point Mr Marra to the guidance that I referred to in my answer to Gillian Martin, which deals with ventilation, testing and staffing. We are clear that we need to continue to look at what is happening across Scotland.

My message, at this point, is to thank teachers and support staff for everything that they have done and will continue to do in the new year and to ask everyone to play their part in ensuring that we keep cases of the omicron variant as low as possible, to allow as little disruption to education as possible.

**Willie Rennie (North East Fife) (LD):** The cabinet secretary has committed to the reform of qualifications in the future. In particular, she said that she will develop a shared purpose and principles for Scotland's assessment and qualification system from November until February. What public engagement—particularly teacher engagement—has taken place to develop that shared purpose now?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** We are still in the middle of the consultation that Mr Rennie would expect us to do, including with unions and teacher representatives, to ensure that we are considering the purpose and principles as widely as possible.

The purpose of Mr Rennie's question is to ensure that practitioners are deeply involved in the

process. I reassure him that they absolutely will be, both in its initial stages and in the work that Professor Louise Hayward will take forward, although the work that she undertakes is, of course, for her to direct.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The member is not in the chamber for question 2. Alexander Stewart joins us remotely for question 3.

### Attainment Gap

**3. Alexander Stewart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government whether it will provide an update on the efforts being made to close the poverty-related attainment gap. (S6O-00576)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Closing the poverty-related attainment gap remains a key focus for this Government. Through our record investment of £1 billion, we continue to fund and empower headteachers in 97 per cent of schools to support their pupils who are most impacted by poverty.

In recognition of the impact of poverty and the pandemic on children and young people across Scotland, from next year, as well as seeing continued investment in the pupil equity funding, all 32 local authorities will be funded to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap. That funding will empower schools and local councils to drive education recovery and accelerate progress in tackling the poverty-related attainment gap. Those allocations have been confirmed on a multiyear basis for the first time, from 2022-23 until 2025-26.

**Alexander Stewart:** Clackmannanshire, in my region, has been the beneficiary of additional funding through the Scottish attainment challenge. Although Clackmannanshire will receive £1.3 million in additional attainment funds next year, the funding will be cut to less than £500,000 pounds by 2025-26. Does the cabinet secretary believe that the most effective way of improving the prospects of children in Clackmannanshire is to strip more than £800,000 of attainment funding from their schools?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Our decision to share the investment over the 32 local authorities is a recognition that poverty is in all our communities and that the impact of the pandemic is shared across Scotland. We have been asked to consider those points, in particular, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has supported our going forward with changes to the programme. If Mr Stewart thinks that we should do something different, he can perhaps advise which funding I should cut from that of other councils in his region that will receive funding for the first time.

**Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):** Teachers are often asked for two stars and a wish. One star this year must go to our young people and their families, and another star should go to the staff in our schools, in early learning and in colleges. My wish is that the Government gets a grasp on the on-going education crisis. What percentage of pupils in Scotland have a Government laptop or device this Christmas?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** As the member will know, we made significant investments in the initial stages of the pandemic to ensure that those devices were distributed. I would be happy to provide the member with updated figures for that work, which is, of course, on top of the sterling work that local authorities have completed, as well as the work that the Scottish Government has undertaken.

The member will be aware that further funding has been made available in next year's budget to ensure that we undertake further work on that important project.

### Science Subjects Uptake

**4. Alex Rowley (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Government what action it is taking to encourage uptake of science subjects by secondary school pupils. (S6O-00577)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Scottish Government's science, technology, engineering and mathematics education and training strategy has set out a range of actions to encourage the uptake of science subjects in Scotland's secondary schools. We have invested in a range of measures to increase the capacity of teachers and school leaders to develop inspiring STEM courses, including measures to address the gender imbalance in STEM subjects.

We are supporting, among other initiatives, the delivery of science subjects throughout the school journey through teacher professional development provided by the Scottish Schools Education Research Centre and the raising aspirations in science education—RAISE—programme. The SSERC also delivers the Young STEM Leader awards programme, which aims to inspire and reward young people who take up STEM subjects and encourage their peers to do so.

**Alex Rowley:** I thank the minister for her answer, but it is clear that the strategies are not working either in her constituency or in mine. In Fife, a total of 1,166 fewer pupils studied chemistry, biology or physics at S4 across the region than did the previous year. There is clearly a problem there.

Do we know what the impact of Covid has been on our schools, local authority by local authority?

Has a proper impact assessment been done? Are local authorities being asked to produce the detail of that and to set out a clear recovery plan for education in their regions?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I point Mr Rowley to the work that will be undertaken with the Scottish attainment challenge refresh, which will ensure that we are investing that £1 billion from the Scottish Government across all 32 local authorities—including Fife Council, for the first time, and a number of schools in Mr Rowley's region. That is very important, because we need to look at the impacts of Covid and of poverty.

The other part of the work that I announced in my ministerial statement on the refresh is the work that will be undertaken with local authorities to include stretch aims for improving what is happening in the different local authorities, including Fife Council. That work will be available in the new year and will be published for Mr Rowley to comment on.

**Ariane Burgess (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** How is the Scottish Government engaging secondary school pupils in the new draft national planning framework as a way of sparking interest in STEM and meeting the national skills shortage?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** What happens within schools is a matter for schools and teachers themselves. We do not have a set national curriculum in Scotland. I am sure that teachers will see the importance of what happens in this area and will encourage their pupils to take it up, but that is, of course, a matter for teachers themselves.

**Meghan Gallacher (Central Scotland) (Con):** Reports from the Scottish Qualifications Authority show that, in 2020, young women made up only 28 per cent of higher physics students and 24 per cent of advanced higher physics students. Those statistics are the same as they were when the Scottish National Party came to power, in 2007. Does the cabinet secretary agree that it is vital to encourage young women to study STEM subjects in schools? Will she commit to ensuring that the next generation of women feel empowered to pursue STEM careers and continue to close the gender gap?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** I very much agree with the premise of that question and on the importance of tackling the gender gap. I point the member to the STEM strategy, which includes a number of policy initiatives, delivered particularly through Education Scotland, to ensure that the issue is being tackled. The STEM strategy also looks very carefully at what we need to do from the early years all the way through, because, when it comes to STEM or to caring, gender

stereotypes are already set by the time children are at nursery. We are determined to take the issue on at all levels. If the member can suggest any specific ways in which the Government could be doing more on this, I am more than happy to work with her on that in the new year.

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** What steps is the Scottish Government taking to further encourage women to have careers in STEM? It is not just about school; it is about encouraging women even in college or higher education.

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Emma Harper raises an important point. As I said during my previous answer, that is really at the heart of the Government's STEM strategy, because we know that we need to tackle gender inequality right across the education and learning landscape.

She rightly points out that the issue is one that affects colleges and universities, too. There are damaging perceptions around who does what job and, therefore, who does what course, and women remain very underrepresented in many STEM sectors. We will, of course, keep up to date on that. I cite the example of the work that Education Scotland is doing through its improving gender balance and equality team, which seeks to work with school clusters to ensure that more work can be done on that. We also do a lot of work in that area in colleges and universities, although universities are, of course, independent from Government.

#### **Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths Teachers (Rural Areas)**

**5. Jim Fairlie (Perthshire South and Kinross-shire) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what progress is being made in recruiting science, technology, engineering and maths teachers, especially in rural areas. (S6O-00578)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** The Scottish Government is offering 150 bursaries of £20,000 for career changers to do teacher training in STEM subjects where the demand for teachers is at its greatest. To date, the bursary scheme has provided for the training of approximately 452 STEM teachers.

A new phase of our teacher recruitment campaign, which aims to encourage students and career changers to apply for a teacher education course, is under way, and it has a particular focus on STEM subjects.

In addition, since the start of the pandemic, we have provided £240 million of additional investment over two financial years specifically for the recruitment of more education staff, and a further £145.5 million of permanent funding will be provided from April 2022.

**Jim Fairlie:** The shortage of teachers in particular subject areas is more difficult to address in rural areas than it is in urban areas, and that is certainly true of STEM subjects. How is that challenge reflected in the Scottish Government's response to the recommendations of Ekosgen's final report for Education Scotland, "Evaluation of the STEM Grants Programme Round Two and Wider Education Scotland STEM Support"?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Mr Fairlie rightly points to another scheme that the Scottish Government supports through Education Scotland—the STEM grants programme. I understand that £3 million of funding has been delivered through that programme since 2018. The recent report includes mention of a number of innovative bids for rural areas. I understand that that has been a real strength of round 2, as it has provided teachers with access to high-quality professional learning, which acts as an enabler to retaining staff. As Mr Fairlie will be well aware, that is particularly important in our rural and remote areas.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 6 comes from Siobhian Brown, who joins us remotely.

#### **Classroom Temperature**

**6. Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** To ask the Scottish Government what measures are being put in place to keep pupils warm while they are in classrooms over the coming months, given the need for adequate ventilation to mitigate the risks of Covid-19. (S6O-00579)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Our updated guidance for schools gives potential approaches to increase natural ventilation while balancing temperature and user comfort. Strategies will vary depending on local circumstances, but they can include partially opening doors and windows to provide ventilation while reducing draughts; opening high-level windows in preference to low-level windows to reduce draughts; purging spaces by opening windows, vents and external doors, for example between classes or during break and lunch; flexible uniform and staff dress policies to help to ensure that children, young people and staff can stay warm if doors require to be opened; and maintaining appropriate heating strategies.

**Siobhian Brown:** Over the past few months, it has become apparent that ventilation plays an important part in reducing transmission of Covid variants. How is the Scottish Government ensuring that the appropriate risk assessments are conducted for indoor teaching environments?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** As the member will be aware, the Scottish Government has provided

an additional £10 million to local authorities, on top of the £90 million that was provided earlier on in the pandemic, for measures including on ventilation. She is quite right to point out that an important part of all the work in that area is adequate risk assessment. Our recently updated guidance, which I referred to in answer to previous questions, sets out an increased expectation that sufficient CO<sub>2</sub> monitors should be made available across all local authorities to allow learning, teaching and play spaces to be assessed often to support on-going decision making by staff about balancing ventilation with temperature during the winter months. As a broad guideline, spaces should be assessed for a minimum of one full day per week under normal occupancy.

**Michael Marra (North East Scotland) (Lab):**

Let us be clear that what that means is “Open the window.” After two years, that is what the Government has come up with. Young people are learning in freezing temperatures, wearing hats, scarves and gloves.

Just in the past week, a teacher in Dundee told me that the red light on their CO<sub>2</sub> monitor is on constantly. He has been told to ignore it and he now has Covid. At best, he will miss Christmas with his family.

Will the cabinet secretary begin the immediate procurement of high-efficiency particulate air—HEPA—filter machines for every classroom, so that that completely unacceptable situation does not arise for a third winter in a row?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** If that teacher has indeed been told to ignore a red light, I strongly suggest to Mr Marra that, if he has not done so already, he encourages the teacher to contact his trade union.

Arrangements are in place to ensure that any member of staff who has concerns can have those concerns addressed at a local level. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has made it clear that trade union representatives can raise specific issues that cannot be resolved satisfactorily at a local level through the workforce issues group that COSLA chairs.

I point Mr Marra, once again, to the fact that our guidance on ventilation is based on expert advice. HEPA filters are not a replacement for natural ventilation—that point has been made clear in the expert advice that we have received.

I also point Mr Marra to the COVID-19 Recovery Committee, where there have been many discussions about the issue. For example, the committee heard evidence from Dr Shaun Fitzgerald, who said:

“My first port of call would be to try to use the infrastructure that is already there—namely, opening

windows—and to be smart about the way that it is used.”—*[Official Report, COVID-19 Recovery Committee, 4 November 2021; c 39.]*

We are following the expert advice on the matter and will continue to do so. We are, of course, open to change if that expert advice itself changes.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Question 7 was not lodged. Graham Simpson joins us remotely for question 8.

### Attainment Gap

**8. Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Government how it plans to close the attainment gap in light of the report, “Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Levels 2020-21”. (S6O-00581)

**The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville):** Our refreshed Scottish attainment challenge, backed by record investment of £1 billion in this session of Parliament, empowers schools and local authorities to drive education recovery and accelerate progress in tackling the attainment gap.

Alongside that increased investment, we are working with partners across education to develop a framework for recovery and accelerated progress, which we will publish in the new year.

Planning and reporting will be streamlined, enabling us to understand what schools and local authorities expect to achieve and by when, using local stretch aims. Schools and local authorities will set out their ambitions for improvement, using local knowledge and professional expertise.

**Graham Simpson:** I should apologise for the original question, because, of course, it is not an attainment gap—it is a chasm, and it is getting bigger. The figures in the ACEL report are absolutely scandalous. I will not go over them, but everywhere we look, that chasm is getting wider.

The cabinet secretary would do well to listen to people such as the commission on school reform, which suggests in its report “Playing Catch-Up” that, among other things, we should have flexible additional support and a greater roll-out of free devices. Will she do so?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** The figures in the ACEL statistics are greatly concerning. However, I point the member to the fact that the challenge that we face is an international one, and that recent remarks from England, for example, acknowledge that all schoolchildren will have been impacted by Covid. We need to recognise the context that we are working in.

We have increased the funding that is going into the attainment challenge from £750 million in the previous session of Parliament to £1 billion in this

session of Parliament not just because we are very concerned about what is happening in the statistics, but because we want an increase in the pace of change. That is exactly why we are prioritising investment in that area during a particularly difficult budget year.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** We have to do all that we can to close Scotland's attainment gap. The cabinet secretary referred to the issues that other countries are having with the pandemic, attainment gaps and the slippage in the most deprived communities. What analysis has the Scottish Government done of how other countries are faring in that regard? Are there lessons to be learned from other countries that we can implement here in Scotland?

**Shirley-Anne Somerville:** Mr Doris is right to point to the impact that the pandemic has had across the globe. I referred to recent comments that came from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. We have also heard from HM chief inspector of education and training in Wales that maths, reading, Welsh language and social skills have suffered during Covid-19 lockdowns and school closures in Wales. That comes on top of the findings of the United Nations and World Bank report that was published earlier this month, which pointed to school closures resulting in significant learning loss.

That is exactly why we are doing everything that we can to ensure that there is as little disruption to education as possible in the new year. That is an important lesson that we need to learn, as Mr Doris has asked us to do, from previous aspects of the pandemic.

## Water Environment

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Annabelle Ewing):** I remind members that Covid-related measures are in place and that face coverings should be worn when you are moving around the chamber and across the Holyrood campus.

The next item of business is a statement by Màiri McAllan on protecting and improving the water environment. The minister will take questions at the end of her statement, so there should be no interventions or interruptions.

15:16

**The Minister for Environment and Land Reform (Màiri McAllan):** A plentiful supply of good fresh water is essential for life. It provides safe drinking water, sterile health facilities and food that is safe to eat. It is key to our environment through supporting a rich diversity of wildlife and plants, and it supports the sustainable growth of our economy. Indeed, our biggest food and drink export, whisky, takes water and turns it into the water of life.

Scotland is renowned worldwide for the quality of our rivers, lochs and seas, and our natural environment attracts millions of visitors every year. It would be too easy to take that invaluable national asset for granted. We must manage our water environment effectively to meet our social, economic and environmental needs.

River basin management planning allows us to do that. I announce today that we are publishing the third river basin management plans, which set out objectives and actions up to 2027. The plans are underpinned by scientific evidence, with action being targeted where it can have the greatest environmental benefit. I thank the Scottish Environment Protection Agency for its expertise in producing an ambitious yet achievable programme of work.

Before I set out what the plans will deliver, let me take a moment to note Scotland's position today on water quality. SEPA's most recent classification indicates that 66 per cent of Scotland's overall water environment is already in good condition. In comparison, the average across Europe is around 45 per cent, with many areas being significantly lower, including our nearest neighbour, England, where the rate is just 16 per cent.

The overall classification is built on four separate themes: water quality, water quantity, fish migration and physical condition. I will address each in turn.

Water quality is already at its highest-ever level, with 87 per cent of our water environment meeting

good standards. Our aim is to reach 92 per cent by 2027. Success in that regard reflects improvements. For example, better rural land management is reducing diffuse pollution from activities including spreading of slurry and pesticides.

Improvements have also been made through Scottish Water's investment programme. Our public water supply and waste water treatment system is one of the largest industrial processes in Scotland, and the industry has dramatically reduced its environmental footprint in the past few decades. Since 2010, Scottish Water has worked with SEPA to upgrade 104 waste water treatment works and 279 storm overflows, with investment of £686 million.

However, there is more to do. That is why Scottish Water is publishing its "Improving Urban Waters—Route Map", which, backed by £500 million of investment, sets out actions to continue improving Scotland's waste water network.

Over the next six years, Scottish Water will invest approximately £150 million to improve the remaining 40 waste water treatment works and 24 priority storm overflows, which will benefit around 400km of Scotland's rivers and lochs. The route map also sets out how it will develop solutions for another 235 storm overflows by 2031, which is also backed by £150 million. Scottish Water will also improve monitoring and public communication on more than 1,000 highest-priority overflows by 2024, with a further £50 million of funding. Those are ambitious plans that are backed by substantial sums.

One reason why we are able to protect and improve our water environment effectively is that the key bodies that are involved are national and public entities. Scotland's water—through Scottish Water—is still in Scotland's hands, which allows broad investment and democratic leadership. We also have, in SEPA, a public independent regulatory body. That synergy allows for challenge and coherence.

In recent months, Scottish Water and SEPA have undertaken a rigorous and balanced assessment of environmental evidence against a backdrop of understandable public concern about spills and debris, which have grown in recent years as climate change increases the frequency and intensity of storms. Of course, we also need to reduce the amount of rainwater that enters our sewer systems in the first place. The next 10 years will see a shift towards more blue-green infrastructure and away from impermeable concrete.

We have been considering urban areas, but rainfall in rural areas can also cause pollution. SEPA has built a strong working relationship with

the agricultural industry and has visited around 6,000 farms since 2010. That work will continue alongside the introduction of new Government rules on slurry to help farmers to contribute to air, water and bathing water quality.

Speaking of bathing water quality, I point out that Scotland's 85 bathing waters are now in the best condition since 2015, when tighter standards were introduced: 99 per cent of our bathing waters now pass environmental standards, with more than ever reaching "excellent" status. Two weeks ago, I was delighted to visit Ayr beach as its hard-earned step change to a "good" classification was confirmed. A lot of work was involved in that.

Water quantity sits alongside water quality. SEPA monitors water quantity to identify use and availability of water for all its vital functions. The flows and levels are generally at good condition in 90 per cent of Scotland's lochs and rivers. However, climate change is affecting that. This summer we had the fourth-driest spell since 1884, which has caused scarcity in parts of Scotland. Over the next six years, SEPA will work with businesses that abstract water to help them to switch to more water-resilient systems.

Fish migration is the third pillar of Scotland's overall water quality picture. Migratory species—in particular, Atlantic salmon and sea trout—are iconic for Scotland but face significant challenges from a number of pressures, including climate change, with droughts and higher temperatures threatening their survival.

In years gone by, economic development meant that dams and weirs were constructed. Those restricted the passage of migratory fish and prevented them from accessing good-quality habitat. The river basin management plans that have been published today commit to removing or easing 244 otherwise impassable man-made barriers to fish migration. Those actions will help to ensure that by 2027 99 per cent of our water environment facilitates fish migration.

The river basin management plans set out how we will work collaboratively to restore urban rivers and improve management of surface water during storms. Through the water environment fund, we have already helped to restore a number of urban river areas and have created blue-green corridors and spaces for active travel. The plans provide for SEPA, working with local authorities, to develop a number of new restoration projects to improve the ecological condition of rivers in Scotland's towns and cities. That includes 17 projects that are already in development.

When it comes to Scotland's water, we have so much to be proud of. Around two thirds of our water environment is in good condition, which is higher than the European average and

significantly higher than the figure for our UK neighbours. Scotland's bathing waters are at their best ever, with 99 per cent passing standards and more than ever assessed as excellent. Since 2010, our public water company has invested nearly £700 million in upgrading waste water treatment works and storm overflows while keeping customers' bills the lowest in the United Kingdom.

However, we are determined and poised to do more. We will invest more than half a billion pounds in Scotland's waste water network. We will continue to promote best farming practice in 57 priority catchments and we are introducing new slurry management regulations. In the next five years, 244 impassable man-made barriers to fish migration will be eased. Around £5 million per year will be spent, through the water environment fund, to remove redundant structures on rivers and to create urban green space.

The plans that are being published today will together seek to address all remaining major sources of pollution over the next six years. All that is in addition to our multi-annual £0.25 billion investment in peatland restoration, £42 million a year and an additional £150 million over the next five years on flood risk management, and a new budget of £11.7 million for coastal change adaptation. That is all taking place while we continue to tackle plastic pollution through the deposit return scheme, by banning harmful single-use plastics and by developing a marine litter strategy with a focus on microplastics.

After a decade and more of co-ordinated and concerted action, backed by hundreds of millions of pounds of investment, Scotland has a water environment the quality of which outperforms that of our neighbours. However, we are not complacent. Our plans identify and will solve persistent historical issues, while rising to new challenges such as climate change. I hope that we can all get behind those ambitions; I look forward to working with Parliament to achieve them.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** The minister will now take questions on the issues that were raised in her statement. I intend to allow around 20 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business. It will be helpful if members who wish to ask a question press their request-to-speak buttons now.

**Brian Whittle (South Scotland) (Con):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement. Scotland's waterways—be it our seas, beaches, canals, lochs or rivers—are important for our wellbeing and our environment, as well as having a significant impact on our economy. Tourism, fishing and aquaculture are all major contributors to the Scottish economy and, as such, support

many livelihoods and communities, especially in our rural areas.

It is little wonder, therefore, that Scottish salmon farmers were warning recently that the Greens in coalition with the Scottish National Party would be catastrophic for our industry, especially after the Greens pledged to shut down open-pen salmon farming and to stop further growth in that sector.

Further concerns have been raised about the developments that are planned in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, some of which, we understand, have been given the green light without an environmental impact assessment, which seems at odds with protecting such an important ecosystem. Local residents are saying that their voices are not being heard.

With the supposed phasing out of landfill in Scotland being pushed back from this year, I must again raise the issue of Tarbolton landfill site and the continuing saga of significant quantities of leachate seeping out into the surrounding waterways, which has been happening for several years now without a resolution.

How is the Scottish Government constructively working with our aquaculture sector to ensure the continued and sustainable growth of salmon farming in Scotland? What safeguards does the Scottish Government have in place to ensure that any developments at Loch Lomond and similar sites are rigorously scrutinised, to protect such important natural beauty spots? Finally, what is the Scottish Government doing to ensure that waterway pollution such as that which is happening at Tarbolton landfill site will not happen at any other sites as they are shut down?

**Màiri McAllan:** Aquaculture is a vital part of our economy, and the Scottish Government is absolutely agreed on supporting it, but we—including the industry—would all agree that it must be done in a way that is as environmentally friendly as possible.

The member will know that, under the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011, SEPA is responsible for regulating organic waste and chemical discharges from fish farms. In June 2019, SEPA introduced its new framework for aquaculture, which tightens the sea bed protections and standards for fish farms, uses more accurate computer modelling to assess development proposals and requires increased monitoring by operators of their effects on the environment.

In 2020, we transferred responsibility for the authorisation of discharges of medicine from wellboats from Marine Scotland to SEPA, meaning that SEPA can now regulate such medicine discharges holistically. I have the responsibility in Government for overseeing those matters, and I

am in frequent discussion with SEPA and the industry on them. I work closely with my colleague Mairi Gougeon on the other aspects of aquaculture that are important to our rural economy.

I agree that there are concerns about Tarbolton landfill site and risks to surface water quality. That is why I am pleased to say that, with funding from the Scottish Government, SEPA has procured work to reduce the impact of Tarbolton landfill site on nearby water courses. Environmental specialists are undertaking detailed design work and are expected to begin construction of measures to prevent waste water from leaving the site in spring 2022. As I have done before, I commit to continuing to work with Brian Whittle. I know that he has a close interest in those matters, as I do, and I will be sure to keep him updated on that work.

I will allow my colleagues in the planning ministerial portfolio to address the matter of Loch Lomond with the member, but I assure him that the environmental impacts of all planning applications in Scotland are of concern to me and I keep them closely in my sights.

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank the minister for advance sight of her statement. Despite the positive picture that she painted, we know that sewage spills into Scotland's rivers have increased by 40 per cent in the past five years, albeit that Scottish Water is required to monitor less than 3 per cent of overflows. Sewage overflow has become the norm rather than an emergency release valve during a storm, so any investment in improving overflows is welcome, but improving 6 per cent of nearly 4,000 overflows—just a third of those that are classed as unsatisfactory by Scottish Water—over the next decade does not go far enough.

As well as inadequate funding of infrastructure, we are also seeing the defunding of the regulator. The recent Green-SNP budget cut SEPA's budget again, this time by £2.1 million. If the Government claims to be taking the nature emergency seriously, will the minister tell us how the Government can justify cutting the budget of the very agency that is responsible for enforcement?

Is it not time for tough, legally-binding targets to end sewage pollution backed by properly funded enforcement and infrastructure?

**Màiri McAllan:** I thank the member for a really important question. I point out that combined sewage overflow is a fundamentally important part of a water system. Its purpose is to prevent backup into homes and businesses during periods of heavy rainfall, which are increasingly occurring as the effects of climate change continue to bite. I also point out that the overflows are heavily

licensed and that, when that is the case, an overflow, in and of itself, does not necessarily cause environmental damage.

Let me make clear what we are announcing today. Over the past decade, nearly £600 million of investment by Scotland's public water company and independent regulation by SEPA have led to 104 waste water treatment works and 279 storm overflows being improved. That has taken us to a situation in which 66 per cent of water in Scotland is of good quality compared with 16 per cent in our nearest neighbour and the European average of 45 per cent.

Not complacent, and keen to rise to the challenges posed by climate change, we are investing a further £500 million over the next five or six years to continue that work. We will improve all the remaining waste water treatment works and, crucially, tackle in stages the highest priority storm overflows.

I understand the public's concern about what enters their water environment and I take it very seriously. We have a lot to be proud of in what we have achieved thus far, but what we are setting out today is about identifying and tackling all remaining sources of pollution in what is already a very ecologically sound situation in Scotland.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I call the next member to ask a question, I point out that, although I have given front-bench members and the minister a bit of latitude, if we have more succinct questions and answers, we can get in every MSP who is seeking to ask a question.

**Siobhian Brown (Ayr) (SNP):** I refer members to my entry in the register of members' interests, as I am a sitting councillor on South Ayrshire Council.

I thank the minister for the very positive update and the welcome news from SEPA about improvement works at the Tarbolton landfill site, which is adjacent to my constituency. It has been extremely concerning that the water quality at Ayr south beach has been classified as "poor" for four consecutive years. I put on record my thanks for all the collaborative hard work that has gone on since 2018 to improve the water quality. The water quality has been classified as "good" this year, which is very welcome. I also thank local groups including Ayr Rotary club, Alloway Rotary club and the don't trash Ayr group—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Ms Brown, could we have a question, please?

**Siobhian Brown:** What steps can the Scottish Government take to assist in continuing to build on that work and to ensure that protections are strengthened for our beaches, beach users and marine life?

**Màiri McAllan:** Like the member, I was absolutely delighted with Ayr's classification. It now joins the 99 per cent of Scotland's bathing waters that are passing our rigorous environmental standards. I visited Ayr and spoke to Scottish Government officials, Scottish Water, SEPA, NFU Scotland and South Ayrshire Council. I thank them all again for their efforts, and I thank the member for her efforts in her elected roles.

In addition to the intensive work that has already been carried out, SEPA and Scottish Water will, in partnership with the council, continue to improve the sewerage systems serving homes in the area and connect them to the public sewer system where that is possible. That work is backed by £3 million of funding.

More widely, we need to encourage the public to properly dispose of litter and not to flush inappropriate items, including wet wipes and cotton buds, which can block the sewers and cause spills. We are working to support and promote the development of the fine to flush standard, which will help in that regard. We were the first Administration in the UK to ban beads and buds, and we are moving on to address more problematic single-use plastics including cutlery and straws. We are also developing the deposit return scheme, which will combat beach litter, and tackling microplastic pollution.

In all those ways, the huge achievement at Ayr should be sustained by the actions that we and our partner agencies are taking.

**Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con):** Will the minister outline what funding and support is available to landowners, land managers and groups to tackle invasive non-native species on our river banks? How will her plans ensure that, in the drive to plant trees, we do not see the inappropriate and damaging plantations close to rivers that we saw in the 1950s and 1960s?

**Màiri McAllan:** The beauty of a statement on water quality is the breadth of questions that it can attract. I will get back to the member, if he does not mind, on what specific funding is available, because I do not have that information at my fingertips.

I can tell him that the Scottish Government's forestry grant scheme has a section that is dedicated to the appropriate riparian planting along river banks that is essential for keeping water clean and cool, that is important for species and that is very much aligned with the biodiversity and climate targets that we are pursuing. Our forestry grant scheme is already working hard, and I will get back to the member with some information on the specific funding streams that are available to landowners.

**Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP):** I congratulate the minister on her first statement and the Scottish Government on the ambition that it is showing. Figures from the river Almond action group suggest that the Harthill waste water treatment works, in my constituency, is failing to meet water framework directive requirements and that there were 256 sewage spills into the river Almond, via the How burn, in 2019. Can the minister advise whether the welcome investments that she has announced today will help to bring the Harthill works up to licence standard and help to achieve "good" water quality status for the Almond by 2027?

**Màiri McAllan:** I am acutely aware of the concerns of residents and the member about the position with regard to the river Almond. The river basin management plans that I have announced today include work to upgrade seven waste water treatment works on the river Almond, with the aim of improving water quality to "good" status by 2027. I am pleased to confirm that the Harthill waste water treatment works is one of those seven.

More generally on the river Almond, the Scottish Water "Improving Urban Waters—Route Map" will address any high-priority sewer overflows in the area by 2027. I know that that will be of interest to the member and to all those in the area who have campaigned for improved water. I want them to know that the Scottish Government has listened and that we are seeking to act.

Bathing water is an issue that has occasionally been raised with me with regard to the river Almond. I put on record that any application for bathing water status will be assessed by the bathing water designation review panel, whose advice normally comes to ministers for consideration in January and February each year.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Monica Lennon is joining us remotely.

**Monica Lennon (Central Scotland) (Lab):** I welcome the statement, because constituents in my region are very concerned about the environmental and health impacts that are being discussed. Almost 17 million cubic metres of sewage was pumped into Hamilton waste water treatment works alone between 2016 and 2020, so it is a big concern locally. I have asked the minister this before and she was asked again by a colleague today: will she agree to bring in binding targets?

Wet wipes were mentioned in relation to plastic pollution, but will she commit to bringing in a ban on plastic-based wet wipes in the near future?

**Màiri McAllan:** I will address the initial part of the question by repeating the three points that I made in response to Colin Smyth.

The spilling of combined sewer overflows, in and of itself, is not an environmental hazard. Where overflows are heavily licensed, it is very dilute and SEPA regulates it. It is only when there is a problem with the system that a problem arises. We accept that problems arise; I have pointed to our 10 years of investment and the improvements that we have already made. I am now pointing to the next five years of improvements, specifically in relation to those overflows that have been identified by SEPA as having a problematic impact on the water environment. I assure the member that that work is happening, it will be monitored and ministers will get an annual report on progress towards the targets that I have set out.

On plastic pollution and wet wipes, we are working on a UK-wide basis on the fine to flush standard. I understand that there are reserved powers involved. That is now the ministerial responsibility of my colleague Lorna Slater, but I take a very close interest in it.

One thing to highlight and warn members about is the insidious impact of the United Kingdom Internal Market Act 2020, which could prevent Scotland from moving faster on some of these environmental issues. We could be held back should the rest of the UK not choose to take the same direction.

We are working on a four-nations basis on the wet wipes issue and I will be glad to keep the member updated on that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Before I ask the next MSP to pose their question, I ask members for more succinct answers, please; otherwise, not all the MSPs who wish to ask a question will be able to do so.

**Marie McNair (Clydebank and Milngavie) (SNP):** As the minister will know, my constituency has a well-known water border, the River Clyde, which has significant links to Scotland's shipbuilding past and present. However, because of the industrial past of the Clyde and surrounding areas, the river has been deeply affected. Can the minister outline plans to prevent future contamination, in order to improve the water quality of the Clyde, particularly for habitats and biodiversity?

**Màiri McAllan:** That is an excellent question, and I have an interest in it as a constituency MSP for Clydesdale, which the Clyde runs through, although people often forget that.

Much has been done to clean up the Clyde in recent decades but, of course, some pockets of industrial contamination remain. I welcome the work of Clyde Gateway in tackling problems such as the residues of chromium in the Polmadie Burn. Between 2010 and 2021, £610 million has been

invested in waste water assets, to ensure that sewage is treated properly before it comes anywhere near the Clyde.

For context, until recently, the river was in the worst category for water quality—the bad category—but I am delighted that, in recent years, it has moved up the scale and is now rated as good in a number of aspects. One symbol of that is that I recently had the pleasure of attending salmon school on the banks of the Clyde at Crossford in Clydesdale, where the children learn about the return of salmon to the Clyde. They were very keen to tell me that, with the salmon being included in Glasgow's coat of arms, they saw the return of the species as the manifestation of "Let Glasgow flourish".

**Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD):** The one figure that is missing from the minister's statement is the one that prompted us to ask for that statement last month. As *The Ferret* revealed, last year alone,

"sewage spilled into Scotland's waterways more than 12,000 times"

and, while Ian Blackford tore into UK ministers about the situation in England, officials here admitted privately that Scotland is "way behind". It is clear that the environment watchdog's first concern was not the health of our streams, rivers and communities but its own reputation. Will the minister commit to annual reporting of sewage spillages? Can she tell us whether the plan is to eliminate those spillages or set a specific target?

**Màiri McAllan:** Presiding Officer, I know that you asked for brevity, but please allow me a chance to debunk some of what the member has just said.

I will address the issue of the freedom of information request. I am not criticising the process, which is exceptionally important, but when answers are taken out of context, meaning can be lost. In the answer to the freedom of information request, reference to "unacceptably high" relates to just six out of 350 storm overflows, not to the overall system. Reference to being "way behind", as the member quoted, was not about the frequency of spills, nor the effect on the environment, but about monitoring alone. On that point, in years gone by, Scottish Water took a strategic decision to focus investment on improving, not monitoring, the overflow problems. I think that that approach has borne fruit, given that 66 per cent of our water environment in Scotland is now of good quality. I have set out how we are not resting on our laurels but are working to improve some of the most problematic storm overflows.

On the question of elimination—

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Minister, I really need to allow other members to have a chance to speak.

**Màiri McAllan:** We will not eliminate overflow, because it is a vital part of the system.

**John Mason (Glasgow Shettleston) (SNP):** As an MSP whose constituency covers part of the Clyde, I confirm that it has improved tremendously throughout my lifetime.

Will the minister confirm that she said that 66 per cent of the water environment in Scotland is good, compared with 16 per cent in England? Does that not show that we are definitely getting something right?

**Màiri McAllan:** Our figure of 66 per cent for a good water environment, compared with England's 16 per cent, speaks for itself. We share a lot of challenges with our neighbours in England, such as ageing infrastructure, heavy rainfall and increased rainfall with climate change, but I believe that we made the right decision to prioritise improvement, rather than monitoring, of overflows.

I also believe that we are aided by the fact that Scottish Water is in public hands, which allows us to make strategic, nationwide and democratic decisions and investments over a long period, such that we have the cheapest bills across the whole of the UK.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Dean Lockhart is joining us remotely.

**Dean Lockhart (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** The budget is being cut across a number of environment portfolios, including environmental quality, SEPA and Scottish Water itself. Will the minister clarify precisely how the budget cuts will help to improve the future water environment in Scotland?

**Màiri McAllan:** I will keep my answer brief. The budget settlement was reached in exceptionally difficult fiscal circumstances. Today, I have laid out a plan for the next five years that shows that Scottish Water and SEPA are working very well indeed under the circumstances.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Mark Ruskell, to be followed by Stuart McMillan, both of whom are joining us remotely.

**Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** I welcome the statement, but protected species such as the Atlantic salmon are being threatened by critically low water levels in our rivers during the summer. Scottish Water is making the problem worse by deciding to restrict outflows to water bodies such as Loch Venachar. How can the minister encourage SEPA to review Scottish—[Inaudible.]—to ensure that it carries out

appropriate assessments of potential damage to the environment when it makes such decisions?

**Màiri McAllan:** I am sorry, Presiding Officer, I did not catch that.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Mr Ruskell, there was a slight glitch on the line. Could you possibly repeat just the question, rather than the preamble?

**Mark Ruskell:** My point was about the critically low water levels in many of our areas, which are exacerbated by Scottish Water's decisions to restrict outflows to water bodies such as Loch Venachar. How can we encourage SEPA to review Scottish Water's licences to ensure that it carries out appropriate assessments of potential damage to the environment when it makes such decisions?

**Màiri McAllan:** I am not particularly in the business of encouraging SEPA—it is independent, and it is very much my prerogative to let it get on with the rigorous independent work that it does. However, the coming together of the plans that I have set out today makes it clear that SEPA challenges Scottish Water, and Scottish Water is ready to respond. The member knows that SEPA regulates extraction of water and reviews the processes that it undertakes in order to do so. I expect that to continue, but I do not want to stand here and encourage SEPA to do that or anything else.

**Stuart McMillan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (SNP):** Will the minister detail what action the Scottish Government is taking to reduce the impact of climate change on Scotland's water environment?

**Màiri McAllan:** That is a very important question. We are already seeing many aspects of climate change affecting us in Scotland. In summer, we saw the driest conditions in the west for 100 years. The Scottish Government responded to that by providing, for example, an emergency bottled water scheme.

Another impact of climate change is that it causes our rivers to warm. In response to another member's question, I mentioned that we are promoting riparian tree planting to keep water cool and help foster species.

Of course, one of the main impacts of climate change that we are seeing is flooding. The Government is providing £42 million a year, together with an additional £150 million over the next five years, for flood mitigation. We must be prepared to respond to those very real challenges.

## Business Motion

15:51

### The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):

The next item of business is consideration of business motion S6M-02654, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

#### *Motion moved,*

That the Parliament agrees—

(a) the following programme of business—

Tuesday 11 January 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* First Minister's Statement: COVID-19 Update

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Addressing the Impact of Labour Shortages on Scotland's Economy

*followed by* Legislative Consent Motion: Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill - UK Legislation

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 12 January 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Covid Recovery and Parliamentary Business; Net Zero, Energy and Transport

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: Mental Health and Wellbeing in Primary Care Services

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 13 January 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions:

Rural Affairs and Islands

*followed by* Scottish Government Debate: National Mission on Drugs – the First Year and Next Steps

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

Tuesday 18 January 2022

2.00 pm Time for Reflection

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Topical Questions (if selected)

*followed by* First Minister's Statement: COVID-19 Update

*followed by* Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee Debate: Retrofitting of Properties for Net-zero

*followed by* Committee Announcements

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Wednesday 19 January 2022

2.00 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.00 pm Portfolio Questions: Health and Social Care; Social Justice, Housing and Local Government

*followed by* Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business

*followed by* Business Motions

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

*followed by* Approval of SSIs (if required)

5.10 pm Decision Time

*followed by* Members' Business

Thursday 20 January 2022

11.40 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

11.40 am General Questions

12.00 pm First Minister's Questions

*followed by* Members' Business

2.30 pm Parliamentary Bureau Motions

2.30 pm Portfolio Questions: Constitution, External Affairs and Culture

*followed by* Stage 1 Debate: Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill

*followed by* Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

(b) that, for the purposes of Portfolio Questions in the week beginning 10 January 2022, in rule 13.7.3, after the word "except" the words "to the extent to which the Presiding Officer considers that the questions are on the same or

similar subject matter or" are inserted.—[George Adam]

*Motion agreed to.*

## Parliamentary Bureau Motions

15:51

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

The next item of business is consideration of seven Parliamentary Bureau motions. I call George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, to move motions S6M-02655 to S6M-02659, on approval of Scottish statutory instruments; S6M-02660, on designation of a lead committee; and S6M-02666, on parliamentary recess dates.

*Motions moved,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel and Operator Liability) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 8) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/440) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel and Operator Liability) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 9) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/441) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel and Operator Liability) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 10) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/443) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel and Operator Liability) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 11) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/454) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel and Operator Liability) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 12) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/455) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee be designated as the lead committee in consideration of the Non-Domestic Rates (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Bill at stage 1.

That the Parliament agrees, further to motion S6M-00125 and under Rule 2.3.1, that the parliamentary recess dates of 24 December 2021 to 9 January 2022 (inclusive) be replaced with 24 December 2021 to 9 January 2022 (inclusive) with the exception of 29 December 2021 and 5 January 2022, on which dates business may be programmed by the Bureau.—[George Adam]

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

## Decision Time

15:52

**The Presiding Officer (Alison Johnstone):** I propose to ask a single question on seven Parliamentary Bureau motions. As no member has objected, the question is, that motions S6M-02655 to S6M-02660 and S6M-02666, in the name of George Adam, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, be agreed to.

### *Motions agreed to,*

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel and Operator Liability) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 8) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/440) be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel and Operator Liability) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 9) Regulations 2021 (SSI 2021/441) be approved.

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

## Dumfries City Status

**The Deputy Presiding Officer (Liam McArthur):** The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S6M-02397, in the name of Emma Harper, on the potential for Dumfries to achieve city status. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

### *Motion debated,*

That the Parliament welcomes the bid from Dumfries and Galloway Council for Dumfries to be recognised as Scotland's eighth city, as part of the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee in 2022; understands that, on 27 November 2020, Dumfries and Galloway Council officially launched its campaign to see the town secure city status in 2022; believes that Dumfries, known nationally as Queen of the South, could benefit socially, financially and culturally if successful; understands that when other towns, such as Perth, Stirling and Inverness, received city status they went from strength to strength, with greater job creation, increased inward migration, higher visitor numbers, increased investment and improved transport infrastructure connectivity to other cities; believes that there is potential for Dumfries' city status to benefit the entire Dumfries and Galloway region through promotion of what it sees as the region's world class facilities, such as its mountain biking at the various 7Stanes sites, its world-recognised Galloway dark skies park, its world-leading food and drink sector, including its local breweries and whisky, gin and rum distilleries, as well as through its historical and cultural ties to Burns, Bruce and Barry; commends the work of all partners involved in taking the bid forward including Dumfries and Galloway Council, Mark Jardine and the Dumfries People's Project, the Lord Lieutenant of Dumfries, Fiona Armstrong, and local people for their constructive involvement from early 2021; supports all efforts to secure city status for Dumfries, which due to its geographical location could be Scotland's "first city", and believes that it would improve investment to the town, and region as a whole, and put Dumfries on the international map as one of Scotland's cities.

15:54

**Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP):** This is the final members' business debate this year. I hope that we can end the term on a positive, consensual note while doing something that I greatly enjoy: shining a big muckle light on the south-west of Scotland and my hame toon, Dumfries. I thank those members who signed my motion, which enabled the debate to go ahead today.

Presiding Officer, 2022 presents an exciting opportunity, as part of Her Majesty's platinum jubilee, for toons across the United Kingdom to receive city status. Her Majesty appoints new cities. When I picked up this opportunity with Mark Jardine and the Dumfries People's Project in June this year, I brought together stakeholders for an initial meeting. They included local elected members, council officials, community councils and organisations, community leaders, the Lord

Lieutenant and Deputy Lieutenants of Dumfries, and many others.

From the meeting came the realisation that there existed many preconceptions about what makes a town qualify to be a city. So, before I extol the virtues of Dumfries and our wider region, I want to do some myth busting. Questions have been asked about the first myth: “Don’t you need to have a cathedral?” The answer is no—Willie Coffey is laughing, because he asked me the same question 10 minutes ago. That is not a requirement for a town to be a city, although we do have an amazing red sandstone church on the Crichton campus, and it is an awfie braw place tae visit.

The second myth is that Dumfries isnae big enough. The answer to that is that there is no population requirement for city status award. Dumfries has a population of 48,229, which is mair than 16 of the cities that already have city status, including Stirling and Perth. Other issues have been raised, such as, “Ye cannae be a city acause there are too many seagulls and too many empty shops.” Sadly, all cities are tackling the same issues of empty shops and vacant, abandoned and derelict buildings. Those matters can be addressed if we aspire to do that, and they are being addressed.

**Bob Doris (Glasgow Maryhill and Springburn) (SNP):** I just want to put on record that I spent part of my summer holidays in Dumfries and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It felt like a city to me, so good luck in your endeavours.

**Emma Harper:** I thank Bob Doris for that intervention. As he spent part of his summer in Dumfries, I would encourage all members to do that, because it is a braw, bonnie place.

We have had the issue raised of our empty shops and our vacant, abandoned and derelict buildings. However, having an aspiration to attract inward investment and inward migration to improve the town—as happened in Perth, Stirling and Inverness when they became cities—will help to tackle many of the issues that I have highlighted. Just making the city bid application has led to conversations about what needs to be done to address the issues that I have highlighted. Even some positive publicity helps.

I will turn to why Dumfries—the toon I am proud to live in, which has cultural, social, innovative and environmental attributes—is worthy of city status. Dumfries is the hame of Robert Burns. It is the birthplace of Peter Pan and the place that led Robert the Bruce to become King of Scotland. Dumfriesshire is also the hame of the savings bank founder Henry Duncan; the father of modern physics, James Clerk Maxwell; the civil engineer Thomas Telford; the first bicycle, which was

invented by Kirkpatrick Macmillan; the father of the American navy, John Paul Jones; the Galloway car, which was made for women by women at Tongland and Locharbriggs; the artists Jessie Marion King and Edward Hornel; the musician Ray Wilson of Genesis fame; and the actors Sam Heughan—a lot of the lassies will know him—and John Laurie from the cult classic film “The Wicker Man”. Nor can we ever forget local Dumfries lad Calvin Harris.

Dumfries has a long history and some great stories and characters. We even have our ain ancient breed of kye, the world famous Belted Galloway.

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** Emma Harper has listed lots of wonderful people from Dumfriesshire, but none of them needed city status to succeed. What is it about Dumfries being a city that she feels is so important and so lacking at the moment?

**Emma Harper:** I thank Mr Mundell for that intervention, but I am coming to that. It is about aspiration.

We boast a vibrant cultural scene, with the Big Burns Supper; the guid nychburris festival; the oldest working theatre in Scotland, the Theatre Royal; and many arts, music and book festivals. Dumfries and Galloway has the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization biosphere and the world-recognised dark skies park in the Galloway forest. Hopefully, it will also be the hame of Scotland’s next national park.

All of D and G is an amazing outdoor greenspace adventure park. It is home to world-class facilities such as the 7stanes mountain bike trails, the otter pools—

**Dr Alasdair Allan (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP):** Will the member take an intervention?

**Emma Harper:** Do I have time, Presiding Officer?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I can give you some of the time back, Ms Harper.

**Emma Harper:** Okay. Thanks.

**Dr Allan:** I am compelled to ask the member this question after that last intervention. Has she encountered any other opposition within Dumfries to the idea of city status, or is it just coming from over there, on the Conservative benches?

**Emma Harper:** It is jist comin fae ower there. A few folk have been sceptical, and I have invited all the sceptics to discuss the matter. My door is open to anybody who wants to have a conversation about what they think the issues might be and why they might oppose the move.

We have opportunities with our otter pools, the 7stanes, our miles of bonnie rivers, our lochs and the Solway coast. If Bob Doris comes back to Dumfries and Galloway, he will find that it is an outdoor rural adventure. Dumfries, as the first rural city in Scotland, will have an amazing opportunity to pursue a sustainable and green economic recovery from the pandemic.

Our world-leading food and drink sector, including local breweries and gin, whisky and rum distilleries, provides first-class visitor destinations and would hugely benefit from Dumfries becoming a city. Dumfries also has worldwide importance in innovation and medical history, as the first-ever ether anaesthetic in Europe was delivered in 1846 by doctors Scott and McLauchlan at Dumfries infirmary. As a toon, we satisfy the cultural, social, environmental and innovation criteria for recognition as Scotland's eighth city.

The Scottish Government publication "Scotland's Agenda for Cities", which was revised in 2016, states that we want

"A Scotland where our cities and their regions power Scotland's economy for the benefit of all."

That was published before the realities of the Brexit harms were known and before the Covid pandemic. I am keen to hear from the minister what is next for the vision for cities and whether it is being revised to show how Scotland's cities can help to power economic recovery for our regions, bearing in mind that we will have one new city in Scotland by March 2022.

For all those reasons and to aid with post-pandemic economic recovery, Mark Jardine of the Dumfries People's Project submitted the bid with complete support from Dumfries and Galloway Council, led by Provost Tracey Little. The bid is also supported by local charities, businesses, schools, young people, community groups and organisations such as Dumfries and Galloway Housing Partnership.

Geographically, Dumfries would be the first city in Scotland for those heading north and the only city in the South Scotland region. If it was awarded city status, that could increase tourism, attract business and bolster investment into the entire region. Dumfries would truly be the queen of the south.

One benefit of city status is good transport links with other cities and easy access to the varied beauty of rural Scotland. We know that many aspects of transport infrastructure across South Scotland, such as bus and train links, the A75 and the A77, need improved. City status will bring greater emphasis on those issues and more attention to the need for roads investment. That will be achieved only through wider attention to our whole region.

When Perth, Stirling and Inverness received city status, they went from strength to strength, with greater job creation, increased inward migration, increased visitor numbers and improved transport infrastructure to connect them with other Scottish cities. I want that benefit for Dumfries and our wider region. I ask the Scottish Government to do all that it can to help with that aim, so that Dumfries can be the newest Scottish city and the queen of the south. I look forward to hearing colleagues' contributions.

16:03

**Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con):** It probably does not need to be stated, but I am a committed monarchist and, God willing, I wish to see Her Majesty reign over the United Kingdom for many years to come. After what is set to be another dark winter, the platinum jubilee celebrations offer a ray of light at the end of the tunnel and will, I hope, be an opportunity for all our communities to once again come together and rejoice in all that is good about our country. I say that because I do not want anything that follows to be seen as disrespectful to the royal family, who have been such great supporters of causes across Dumfriesshire. Nor would I wish anything that I say to reflect negatively on the significant efforts of Mark Jardine, who, through the People's Project, has done so much for the town of Dumfries.

However, in my view, none of the above is a good enough reason to squander the main selling point of Dumfries, as a market town and the hub of our rural community. We cannot and should not simply invent cities just to tick boxes. I also question why, in a large rural region, Dumfries was the automatic candidate. We have already heard that size of population is not a factor, so why should the candidate not be the royal city of Sanquhar? Langholm, the muckle toon, could have become the muckle city.

**Emma Harper:** Man, I think that you should take a deep breath while I make my intervention. We are not talking about a massive concrete metropolis; we are talking about an aspiration for the biggest toon in the south, which can then spill out into the wider region. Do you not have an aspiration for the south of Scotland to have one city?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please speak through the chair, Ms Harper.

**Oliver Mundell:** I have more aspiration for Dumfries than the Scottish National Party does. The SNP has failed Dumfries, as I will come on to later in my speech.

According to a man who still bides in Dumfries, the true meaning of life is

“no in makin muckle, mair”.

Alternatively, we could have had the city of Newton Wamphray or even Gretna Green. That sounds like a flippant point, but I strongly object to the suggestion that somewhere needs to be a city to be successful or that people need to live in a city to succeed.

In this panto season, instead of peddling Dick Whittington-esque myths that only the city streets are lined with gold, and not with rats and rubbish, as we see in Scotland’s largest city, we should, instead—this is where I agree with Emma Harper—be confident in proudly making the case for Dumfries being unique: its sense of community; guid neighbours; being a gateway to much of our rural region; the good work-life balance; the history and culture; and our connection to Burns, Barrie and Bruce, to name but a few.

When the idea was first floated, many people in the town believed that it was an early April fools’ day joke. Others came to the conclusion that the only reason that politicians would be supporting it was that politicians in cities get paid more.

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** I note from the motion that the Lord Lieutenant of Dumfries supports the bid. Do you disagree with her?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Please speak through the chair, Ms Grahame.

**Oliver Mundell:** I would not seek to compromise her role. Dumfries and Galloway Council, which is made up of different political parties, has come to a position, so I would find it odd if she were not duty bound.

That does not mean that everyone supports the bid—far from it. Many people believe that the only reason that it is being taken forward is to distract from all the other things that have not been taken forward. I say to Christine Grahame that I, as an elected representative, am not in the business of backing unpopular ideas. That is why I also oppose border posts and plastic currency to replace the pound.

I do not want to sound too much like Scrooge—or more than I have done already—and dismiss all Emma Harper’s best ideas before Christmas. In all seriousness, though, if we want to restore and increase pride in Dumfries and to keep future generations of Doonhamers at home, we need to focus on what will make a difference—for example, dualling the A75, ditching the £25 million Whitesands bund and depedestrianising at least part of High Street.

I will respect the outcome of the competition process, but I politely ask those who are assisting Her Majesty in identifying a winner to look for a candidate for which there is widespread or unanimous support, not one on which, at best, opinion is divided.

16:08

**Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab):** I thank Emma Harper for lodging her motion. It is nice to hear someone from the Cleyhole backing us Doonhamers—I apologise to those in the official report who, not for the first time, will be wondering what I am talking about.

Dumfries is my home—it is where I was born, where I have always lived and where I am bringing up my family. Frankly, I would not have it any other way. It is a town with a proud and rich history, which includes, as we have heard, the three Bs.

Burns, our national bard, had his last family home in Dumfries, where he wrote many of his finest works, including “Auld Lang Syne”. He frequented a few of the same howfs as I do, such as the Globe Inn, as well as Scotland’s oldest working theatre, the Dumfries theatre royal. Dumfries is where he was ultimately laid to rest, in St Michael’s kirk cemetery. We also have Bruce, whose slaying of the Red Comyn in Dumfries’s Greyfriars kirk led to him claiming the crown as king of Scots. Finally, we have Barrie, the author who studied at Dumfries academy, where my kids will go in a few years, and who was inspired to write “Peter Pan” in the magical Neverland garden of Moat Brae in Dumfries, which is now home to the national centre for children’s literature and storytelling.

Those are examples of how our town’s proud past is cultivating a positive future. Many other examples exist, such as, on the edge of town, the jewel-in-the-crown 85-acre Crichton estate—originally Europe’s biggest psychiatric hospital—which is now home to the south’s largest conference and events venue, a major business park and a vibrant college and university campus with more than 6,000 students.

It is little wonder that the Royal Burgh of Dumfries is known as the “Queen of the South”. That, of course, is also the name of our local football team, which has a proud past too. As a season ticket holder, I hope that we will have an even more positive future soon.

**Emma Harper:** Will Colin Smyth give way?

**Colin Smyth:** I will take an intervention on that point, yes.

**Emma Harper:** I thank Colin Smyth for taking my intervention, given the time constraints—I know that I went over.

I really appreciate that Colin Smyth has mentioned the Queen of the South fitba team and the fantastic Crichton estate. Does he agree that projects such as the People's Project and Alive Radio, and a lot of community support, are out there for the city status bid, and that the whole engagement process is about the community leading the bid from day 1?

**Colin Smyth:** It is about the community. Ultimately, it is about what I call my hame toon. As Queen's fans say, "Yer hame team's yer ain team." I have such memories of supporting Queen of the South—at the 2008 Scottish cup final, for example. It did not matter that we did not actually win the game—thousands of the blue and white army still proudly paraded through the town behind the open-top team bus, days after the game. Getting to that final led to Queen's only venture into Europe, against Denmark's FC Nordsjælland. I remember walking through Copenhagen's main street in the days before that match. It felt as if we were walking through Dumfries as we stopped to chat to so many familiar faces—guid neighbour after guid neighbour.

As Emma Harper said, it is that community spirit and friendliness that really make the town of Dumfries. City status would make Dumfries, and the work of the community groups that have been mentioned—from the Midsteeple Quarter to the People's Project—encapsulates the pride that we have in our town.

I do not know whether the city status bid will be successful. As we have heard, some people might ask whether it is worth it, as it does not come with any extra funding. We are a very proud town, but I know that the research suggests that achieving city status can provide an economic boost and put a place on the map, and Dumfries has as good a case as anywhere to be a city.

**Jenni Minto (Argyll and Bute) (SNP):** Like Bob Doris, I have holidayed in Dumfries, and like it. Would Colin Smyth agree that Oban, in Argyll and Bute, is also a good contender to be the newest city in Scotland?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Be careful, Mr Smyth. [*Laughter.*]

**Colin Smyth:** Oban's was the very first whisky distillery that I visited, many years ago. However, one of the most recent ones—the Annandale distillery—is close to Dumfries, so we could maybe do a swap visit in the holidays at some point in the future.

**Emma Harper:** Oh—together?

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** That was not being careful, Mr Smyth. [*Laughter.*]

**Colin Smyth:** It was very uncaredful, Presiding Officer.

Moving on quickly, I thank those behind the bid—Mark Jardine, the council and the community groups. Whatever the outcome, I hope that this process of discussing how to make Dumfries even better keeps going after the bid, irrespective of whether we win it.

A sign above my office in the Parliament says Doonhamer. In my first ever speech in the chamber, five years ago, I told members that the Doonhamers is Queen of the South's nickname, but also the name for those of us from Dumfries. I explained that

"Its origins lie in the 19th century, when many people from the town worked away from home, particularly on the railways in Glasgow, and they talked about going back doon hame to Dumfries."—[*Official Report*, 31 May 2016; c 39.]

The term has never been more apt than it is today, because, sadly, young people from many of our towns and regions still leave their area for the high-skill, high-wage employment opportunities that are not always available doon hame. That is why I stood for Parliament five years ago. We had lost big manufacturing bases such as ICI, Nestlé and Uniroyal, and I wanted to fight for better opportunities for our young people in what can often be a forgotten part of Scotland.

It is also why I campaigned for a decade as a councillor, representing the Dumfries town centre ward of Nith, for a south of Scotland enterprise agency, which is now up and running, and why I was part of the early days of the Borderlands initiative, which has now developed into the Borderlands inclusive growth deal.

Much more still needs to be done. Whether we win or lose the city status bid, this cannot be the end of the debate on the future of Dumfries. Those who live there and have a genuine stake in our town's future want to see action and more opportunities for young people, and improvements to our town centre. Ensuring that we deliver that action must be the legacy of the bid.

I said at the start of my speech that Dumfries is where I was born and where I have always lived. I suspect that that will always be the case, irrespective of whether we are a proud town or become a city, and I will be more than happy with that.

16:15

**Paul McLennan (East Lothian) (SNP):** I welcome this opportunity to speak in the debate,

and congratulate my colleague Emma Harper on bringing it to the chamber.

In my short time in Parliament, I have often shaken my head at contributions from Tory members, but today really beats all. As a constituency MSP for East Lothian, which is part of the South Scotland region, I am pleased to support my colleagues' calls for Dumfries to receive city status. I was delighted that the local council unanimously supported the bid, and that it has been supported by Labour and SNP MSPs. Oddly, although we have heard the reasons why, no Tory MSP has supported the bid.

Most people think that they know what a city is—they think that a city is a large, densely populated and distinct urban area. A lovely old cathedral is a must—although, as we have heard, that requirement is long defunct, having ended in the 19th century—and the size of the city does not really matter.

The bounds of city status throw up a plethora of quirks. There are 51 cities in England and 69 in the UK, including seven in Scotland, six in Wales, and five in Northern Ireland. Why not Dumfries?

City status is granted by the monarch. Although obtaining city status does not grant the city any special rights, it is a mark of prestige and can be a symbol of pride for citizens.

**Oliver Mundell:** I find it very depressing to hear from someone who represents a rural county that city status is all that matters and that somehow being a city is better than being a rural area. What does someone get from living in a city that they do not get from living in a rural area?

**Paul McLennan:** I will come on to that, although I have to say, as the local member for East Lothian, that if someone suggested city status for Dunbar, Haddington or Tranent, I would bite their hand off.

As has been seen in Perth and Inverness, city status can bring many economic benefits, including increased visitor numbers and a place on the international map. I will touch on the research that has been done on that.

Dumfries has an exciting opportunity to be, geographically, the first and last city in Scotland. It also has an exciting opportunity to be the first and only city in the South Scotland region, which is important.

As Emma Harper said, Dumfries was the home of Robert Burns, Peter Pan and Robert the Bruce. Dumfries—and, indeed, the whole South Scotland region—has wide and expanding areas of forestry, peatland and outdoor green space, which are hugely important in our fight against the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

Dumfries and the South Scotland region are also Scotland's adventure playground, which is important when it comes to attracting visitors. It has world-class hikes, cycle routes, lakes, water for kayaking and swimming, and the world-renowned 7stanes mountain biking facilities. The area also offers world-recognised food and drink, including from local breweries and gin, whisky and rum distilleries. *[Interruption.]*

I can hear comments from the other side of the chamber; I will come on to that.

Becoming a city can be great for business, tourism and civic pride, which is shown in research that was carried out by the University of Reading, which has no interest in the matter at all.

**Emma Harper:** I hear the chunterings from sedentary positions across the chamber. If Dumfries applies for city status, is that not part of what we want? We must have the forward-looking aspiration for the town that the idea is something that people should embrace.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I observe that chunterings have come from other quarters throughout the debate.

**Paul McLennan:** A study that was led by a geography professor, Steve Musson, found that winners of city status in Scotland, including Inverness and Stirling, outperformed their regional neighbours in business growth. That is what Oliver Mundell opposes. Research shows that city status brings economic benefits, so it beggars belief that he is opposing it for political reasons and nothing more.

**Oliver Mundell:** Will the member take an intervention on that point?

**Paul McLennan:** No. I am sorry.

The study also found that international firms seeking new bases in the UK are likely to favour cities over towns. Inward investors seeking the best return for their money are drawn to areas that offer large development sites, well-educated workforces and economies of scale.

In becoming a city, Dumfries—and the wider region—might also have greater potential to retain the young workforce because city status will bring economic benefits and provide them with jobs and other positive-destination career outcomes.

However, those are not the only benefits. Dumfries becoming a city could also be a source of great pride for the tens of thousands of people who live there. If we look at Britain's smallest city, St Davids, which has 1,600 people, the benefits of city status are clear for all to see.

I again congratulate Emma Harper on bringing the debate to the chamber. I welcome the opportunity for Dumfries to become the first and

last city in Scotland, and I wish it every success in taking that forward. It is Dumfries today; perhaps it will be Dunbar tomorrow.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** I call Finlay Carson, who joins us remotely.

16:20

**Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con):** With part of the town of Dumfries falling within my constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries, I welcome the opportunity to celebrate and raise the profile of its largest town and the seat of the local authority. However, I am disappointed—but not surprised—by Paul McLennan’s feigned outrage and his suggestion that our position is to do with party politics. Our not supporting the bid does not mean that we do not have the highest aspirations for Dumfries.

The term “Queen of the South” was first used in an address by the local poet David Dunbar, who stood in the 1857 general election. That fitting description has become synonymous with the much-loved town. Generations of my family have lived and worked in the town as hoteliers.

I strongly urge those who have never visited Dumfries to do so, because it has so much to offer—not least the fact that people from the town, who are often referred to as Doonhamers, are among the warmest and friendliest people one could ever meet.

Right from the outset, I wish to make it clear that although I might not be a supporter of the campaign, I have the utmost admiration and gratitude for the campaign behind the bid for the town to be granted city status as part of the eagerly awaited platinum jubilee celebrations. The People’s Project is led by Mark Jardine, who has said that we can make Dumfries and Galloway a tourist destination like the lake district and, by doing so, attract more business to the region. He is absolutely right, but people go to the lake district not because of the draw of the city of Carlisle, but because of the draw of the small towns of Keswick and Ambleside, with their unique and wonderful rural nature. That is what the royal burgh and market town of Dumfries’s selling point should be.

Quite how the town was founded remains something of a mystery. The history books suggest that Dumfries was once deemed to be of great importance by the invading Romans. Indeed, many traces of the Roman presence in Dumfries and Galloway are still being uncovered—coins, weapons, military earthworks and even roads, although I am not sure whether the A75 was included in that list.

The Queen might look favourably on Dumfries because it has strong royal credentials, with

William the Lion having granted the charter to give Dumfries the rank of a royal burgh in 1186, in recognition of its importance as a market town and port. A royal castle—which, sadly, no longer stands—was built in the 13th century. William Wallace chased the fleeing English forces southwards through the Nith valley and back over the border and, for good measure, Robert the Bruce slew his rival, the Red Comyn, at Greyfriars church in the town in 1306. Thankfully, things quietened down a bit. The most famous Scot of all, Robert Burns, moved to Ellisland near Dumfries, and later made the town his home in 1791.

Therefore, it is an understatement to say that Dumfries has a rich historical past. We should—and we do, quite rightly—celebrate that fact. We have already heard a list of famous sons and daughters of Dumfries that would be the envy of many cities. They all came from a rural market town. We are already on the international map because of that.

In her motion, Emma Harper suggests that city status could benefit Dumfries socially, financially and culturally, and claims that Perth, Stirling and Inverness

“went from strength to strength”

as a result of receiving city status. I think that she has got it the wrong way round. In addition, she fails to say how city status could deliver more than a successful rural market town could.

I believe that Dumfries is a sleeping giant that has been failed for too many years, along with the rest of the south of Scotland, by successive Scottish Governments—but now is our time. We have the Borderlands growth deal, levelling up funds and, most important, South of Scotland Enterprise, which can be a catalyst for driving improvements in and around the town and—just as important—right across our region to the other major town and gateway, Stranraer. Maybe Emma Harper, like her SNP colleagues, is forgetting the far west and the credentials of Stranraer to be Scotland’s next city.

It is only through interventions and policies such as the Borderlands growth deal that we can achieve greater job creation, increased inward migration and higher visitor numbers. We hope that such interventions, along with the union connectivity review and the strategic transport projects review 2, will result in increased investment and improved transport infrastructure.

Dumfries is already a strong marketing force; it offers outstanding scenery, warm hospitality and amenities that make it the jewel of the market towns of Scotland. That is the title that we should seek, instead of city status, which, despite what Ms Harper suggests, currently does not have the

support of many people in Dumfries, never mind the rest of the region.

What we have in Dumfries by the bucket load is a belief that the town can do better. With or without city status, we should grab the opportunities that we have right now to make Dumfries, once again, the happiest and best place to live, work and play.

16:25

**Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP):** How depressing the Conservative contributions have been.

I congratulate my colleague Emma Harper on securing the debate, and I support her call for Dumfries to succeed in its application for city status—a campaign that Emma Harper has long been involved in. I congratulate Colin Smyth, too—a colleague on the other side of the chamber who is also in that camp. It seems that it is only the Conservatives who oppose the bid. Goodness knows why.

**Oliver Mundell:** Will the member take an intervention?

**Christine Grahame:** Well, why not? You can depress me again.

**Oliver Mundell:** That is very kind and very much in the Christmas spirit.

Christine Grahame is a veteran of Scottish politics. If she thinks that the bid is politically popular, why does she think that the two constituency members representing the region are not desperate to get behind it? The truth is that people in Dumfries do not support it.

**Christine Grahame:** Those members are both Conservatives, so it is political. I have campaigned on many issues—

**Oliver Mundell:** What is the political benefit?

**Christine Grahame:** Let me make a little progress, Mr Mundell, because you are digging a large hole for yourself.

**The Deputy Presiding Officer:** Through the chair, please, Ms Grahame.

**Christine Grahame:** City status is an enigma. For example, London does not have city status but comprises two cities: the City of London and the City of Westminster. City status is a quirky thing, which, as other members have said, is conferred by the monarch after advice from the Government. It is, however, the monarch's decision.

As other members have said, city status is usually conferred on a royal ceremonial occasion, such as the Queen's platinum jubilee next year.

The criteria are very loose—I will not rehearse them, as they have been mentioned by other members, but they do not include population or cathedrals.

As members can imagine, royal connections are handy, and Dumfries has those going back as far as 1186, when William the Lion of Scotland granted Dumfries royal burgh status. In 1395, Robert III, by charter, granted Dumfries the rights of a town. Next year, we might have another monarch granting rights.

I have referred to a Robert, so let us remember, as others have done, that Robert Burns spent his last years in Dumfries, from 1796 until his death five years later. His body is now interred in the Burns mausoleum.

I turn to Burns's creative connections, particularly when he was at Ellisland farm, which he worked and which now has a complex and the Burns museum. I have been to and spoken at Burns nights there. Famously, Robert Burns wrote "Auld Lang Syne" in Dumfries. Although I do not know of a more internationally known song than "Auld Lang Syne", I do not think that many people realise that it was written in Dumfries, and not in Alloway. "Ae Fond Kiss" was also part of the creativity that came from Burns's years in Dumfries.

Burns wrote so much—130 songs and poems—during his short time in Dumfries before he died, and although he may not fit the traditional definition of a royal, he definitely was, and remains, Scottish royalty in my book. City status would enhance and remind international travellers of the powerful connection of Burns with Dumfries. It is not just Alloway and Burns's cottage that are in the frame.

Finally, on a personal note, what have I got to do with Dumfries and Galloway? Well, I lived in Minnigaff, and I taught at the Douglas Ewart high school in Newton Stewart for more than a decade. Both of my sons were born in the Cresswell maternity hospital—since demolished, although that has nothing to do with my sons having been born there. Both my sons are Gallovidians by birth. I will always remember the breakneck 60-mile journey from Minnigaff to the Cresswell in a pretty rickety ambulance. My next-door neighbour, who was the local midwife, had to have a stop every so often to relieve herself of car sickness. Thank goodness her delivery skills were not required en route.

Later that night, small Angus—all 8 pounds 3 ounces of him—fell asleep and I left the ward. A first-time mum, I stood before a floor-to-ceiling window and looked out over Dumfries, the darkness lit up by the street lights, and wondered what I had let myself in for; 48 years later, with

that son now a father himself, I am still wondering what I let myself in for. That is one of my fond memories of Dumfries. I remember that night very clearly and I remember thinking what a beautiful place it was. It might not be a royal connection, but it is my connection.

I thank Doonhamers Emma Harper and Colin Smyth for, at the very least and whether or the bid is successful, shining a bright light on Dumfries.

16:30

**The Minister for Just Transition, Employment and Fair Work (Richard Lochhead):** I thank Emma Harper for lodging the motion. She has been an energetic and feisty champion for Dumfries and the south of Scotland and I congratulate her on all her work to make the case for city status for Dumfries, which she set out in her speech.

I thank members for their speeches. I have learned a lot about the many famous sons and daughters of Dumfries and about how the town has been a place of invention down the centuries. Given how Emma Harper and other members have sold the town and its attractions to the rest of us, perhaps we should take a leaf out of Bob Doris's book and take a holiday there at some point in future. Whatever happens to the town's bid for city status, the debate has provided a good opportunity for members to talk up Dumfries's many qualities.

We have heard much about what makes Dumfries unique and a deserving candidate for city status. However, several towns in Scotland are applying for city status and I have no doubt that they are all strong candidates; the Scottish Government and I would not want to choose a favourite.

Indeed, I have to be extremely careful. As someone who lives in Elgin and who represents Elgin in this Parliament, I must note that Elgin, too, is bidding for city status. Elgin has a cathedral, which is known as the lantern of the north; it also has too many seagulls, which I hear is an attribute of many of the candidates. Of course, Elgin is bidding alongside not just Dumfries but Dunfermline, Greenock, Irvine, Livingston, Oban and St Andrews.

However, today's debate is about Dumfries. I will highlight some of the ways in which the Government is supporting Dumfries and the wider region.

In April 2020, we launched South of Scotland Enterprise, the economic and community development agency for Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders. SOSE has already supported a range of projects in Dumfries,

including through funding of £8 million to support personal protective equipment manufacturing firm Alpha Solway to establish a new manufacturing hub.

In March 2021, we signed the Borderlands inclusive growth deal, which includes Scottish Government investment of up to £85 million in the south of Scotland over 10 years, along with £65 million from the United Kingdom Government, which means that there will be total investment of £150 million. The projects that the deal supports will enhance regional economic performance, develop the region's tourism offer, support innovation in key sectors, develop the skills and infrastructure that are needed to build communities and create jobs, and improve digital connectivity across the south.

**Oliver Mundell:** The minister has missed one important investment from his list. What has happened to the dualling and upgrading of the A75 over the 14 years of his Government? The answer is nothing.

**Richard Lochhead:** I thought that the member would use the opportunity to celebrate the many good policies that we have put in place to support Dumfries and the wider region. To be fair, in this debate, the Conservatives have come across as—as my late mum would say—big drips looking for a puddle; I think that many people will be taken aback by the negativity that some members have expressed, given the consensus on talking up the attributes of Dumfries.

Dumfries will benefit from the dairy nexus project, which will deliver cutting-edge research to facilitate the decarbonisation of dairy farming. The centre will be based at Scotland's Rural College's Barony campus in Dumfries. The Scottish Government has committed £4 million to support the project.

As other members said, through the Borderlands deal, Dumfries and Galloway will also benefit from £5 million of Scottish Government funding for the 7stanes mountain biking network. That investment will enable the upgrading of several sites and their associated facilities, to develop a stronger visitor experience and to encourage users to travel across the region.

**Emma Harper:** So much is going on in the south-west. The minister talked about the dairy nexus project and the investment in Alpha Solway; a lot of investment is happening in Dumfries right now. Does the minister agree that even the aspiration to apply for city status could raise awareness and shine a light on the south of Scotland?

**Richard Lochhead:** Emma Harper makes a good point. That is, no doubt, one of the considerations that all the communities that are

bidding for city status have taken into account. After all, the competition is being organised by the Queen's platinum jubilee civic awards, which will announce the successful cities next year. Clearly, that group of people—the committee or whoever is taking the decisions—feel that it is worth while for communities to bid for city status. The Lord Chancellor will make a recommendation to the Queen in due course. Others believe that there are benefits to be acquired from city status.

As we are debating the matter against the backdrop of Covid, I point out that Dumfries has also played its role in the national efforts against the pandemic and in the economic and community recovery from its scarring effects. The Scottish Government has provided £55,000 to the Stove Network, Scotland's only arts-led development trust, to mitigate the impact of the pandemic through increasing skills, knowledge and the availability of shared resources for community-led activity.

Our high streets have been particularly impacted by the pandemic. Somebody mentioned empty shops in many communities throughout the country. Midsteeple Quarter is a community-led initiative that seeks to breathe new life into Dumfries town centre by developing a section of the High Street as a contemporary living, working, socialising, learning and enterprising quarter. It aims for the local community to take control of and refurbish underused and neglected High Street buildings. That is another issue in which Emma Harper is taking a close interest. The initiative received £300,000 from the Scottish Government through investment from the south of Scotland economic partnership and will receive continuing support from South of Scotland Enterprise as well.

The regeneration work that supports Dumfries town centre is a great example of what we want to happen throughout Scotland. We aim to achieve that through our place-based investment programme. Local people have stepped up with ambitious plans for revitalising the town centre. They have identified opportunities to bring buildings back into sustainable use. Those solutions promote inclusive economic development, with community wealth as a key theme.

I recognise the efforts of the people and organisations of Dumfries. In particular, I recognise the considerable work that Dumfries and Galloway Council has done in preparing the bid. As we have heard many times in the debate, Dumfries is a wonderful town. It has a strong sense of community and a unique historical, cultural and civic heritage. Its business base—from food and drink to agriculture, tourism and manufacturing—is dynamic and full of innovation. It is also, as Ms Harper stated, the town of Bruce,

Burns and J M Barrie, who based the world of Peter Pan on the gardens of Moat Brae house, which is now an attractive tourist destination.

If Dumfries is successful in its bid, it will become a wonderful city. I say best of luck to Dumfries and, of course, the other candidates. Many people are working hard to make their bids a success and I am sure that Parliament will want to wish them all the best.

*Meeting closed at 17:19.*

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