

Westminster Watch

A quick look at what Edinburgh's MPs were up to in the House of Commons last month.

All eyes have been on Holyrood recently, what with the first SNP leadership contest in two decades and Scotland getting its sixth First Minister, Humza Yousaf.

Now that both parliaments are on their Easter break, there's usually time for a bit of a break from political drama (although not this year, with the astonishing scenes of [police searches](#) at SNP headquarters and the home of former First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and former SNP CEO, Peter Murrell).

Nevertheless, it seems like a good time to catch up with what has been happening at the other Parliament and what our five Edinburgh MPs having been working on while the rammies continued up here.

Below is a flavour of some of their work during March, with key exchanges, questions tabled and speeches made in the chamber, and links to Hansard if you want to read more about anything of interest.

You can view their pages for more details of all their work at parliament [here](#).

Edinburgh North and Leith – Deidre Brock MP



Deidre Brock MP for Edinburgh North and Leith

Deidre Brock MP had 11 spoken contributions and 9 written questions recorded in March.

Deidre Brock crosses swords with the Leader of the House, Penny Mordaunt, at [Business Questions](#) pretty much every Thursday morning, which can be a bit more of a convivial exchange than the bear pit of Prime Minister's Questions the day before.

During March, issues raised included the lack of time for scrutiny of the controversial '**Illegal Migration Bill**', the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's tax bill [compared with ten years of stagnating salaries](#) for UK workers, questions over **energy costs, climate change** and the government's budget priorities. She even requested "*a debate on broken British dreams and sunk hopes*" helpfully adding "*that is not a country and western song, Mr Speaker.*"

The looming possibility of another power scrap between the UK and Scottish Governments was raised at [Scotland Questions](#), with the UK Government having mooted the idea of blocking the **deposit return scheme** using the UK Internal Market Act 2020 (UKIM). Ms Brock said The Scottish Government had been having detailed discussions about the scheme, and the case for an exclusion, since October last year.

In response, Scottish Secretary Alister Jack spoke of the concerns from businesses about the deposit return scheme, and said: "*The Scottish Government asked for their UKIM exemption after they put their scheme together. If I were building a house, I would get planning permission and then build my house, not do it the other way around.*"

At the statement launching the new [UK Government Energy Security Strategy](#) Ms Brock asked why **tidal energy** support had been cut when it could produce huge amounts (up to 11 GW) of reliable clean electricity for far less than the cost of nuclear. The response denied there was a cut but said they had

[“moved to a one-year allocation”](#).

The Edinburgh North and Leith MP also raised a question over the proposed **British Bill of Rights**, which the Joint Committee on Human Rights said should not proceed, could weaken protections and showed “disregard for international legal obligations”. The [response from Dominic Raab](#) talked of “foreign national offenders using elastic interpretations of human rights to frustrate a deportation order”.

On the budget, Ms Brock [asked why](#) “non-dom” tax status was not abolished after academic research estimated it could bring in £3.2 billion to the Treasury. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury mumbled about “behavioural ramifications”, presumably meaning the non-dommers would up sticks and leave.

Ms Brock [spoke on Commonwealth Day](#), calling for “a new way forward for the **Commonwealth** based on respect and a real acknowledgement of the past” and raising the devastating impact of climate change on so many Commonwealth countries.

Written Questions: Deidre Brock tabled [9 written questions in March](#), one to the Treasury on action to reduce tax avoidance, the others to the Home Office, raising a number of issues including IT failures, family separation of Afghanistan refugees and the visa schemes for Ukrainians.

Edinburgh West – Christine Jardine MP



Christine Jardine MP for Edinburgh West

Christine Jardine had 10 spoken contributions, and 2 written questions recorded in March.

Ms Jardine had [a Prime Minister's Question this month](#). She used it to raise the issue of high energy costs and **fuel poverty**, calling for a cut to bills to the level of last April. She also managed a quick sideswipe at The Scottish Government and the need for a **housing insulation** programme, one aspect Rishi Sunak was more than happy to support in his response.

Energy costs and its impact on **Scotland's whisky industry** [was raised at Treasury Questions](#). Ms Jardine pointed out that with around 75% of the price of a bottle going to the Exchequer, surely there was more they could do to assist? Apparently not, according to Chancellor Jeremy Hunt, who said "we are doing everything we can".

At [Justice Questions](#), she asked about addressing gaps in **domestic abuse support** in a forthcoming 'Victims Bill', including "the lack of specialist services for minority groups, the lack of mental health support, and the gaps in provision for children". There was a fairly positive, if non-committal, response from the Minister with an offer to work constructively on the bill when it comes forward.

During a debate on the Public Order Bill, [Ms Jardine raised 'buffer zones'](#), with a clash of rights between those protesting outside abortion clinics and the freedom of choice of the women using the services, pointing out "it is not protesting but bullying and harassment".

At Business Questions, the Edinburgh West MP asked for time to be given to debate the **benefits of the Union**, while [at Scottish Questions](#) she pointed to polls showing a fall in support for independence, the Lib Dem victory at the recent Edinburgh council [by-election](#), and called for Scotland's new First Minister to focus on domestic issues, which

unsurprisingly caused an outbreak of consensus with the Scottish Secretary Alister Jack.

Ms Jardine also [led a debate on the creation of a registry for bereaved children](#), to help ensure they can access professional support to help with their grief. She made a heartfelt speech from her personal experience which was warmly received from people on all sides in the chamber.

Written Questions: [Two written questions](#) from Christine Jardine this month, both to the department for Transport, asking about VAT and electric charging points, and **sustainable transport**.

Edinburgh South West – Joanna Cherry MP



Joanna Cherry MP for Edinburgh South West

During March there were 11 spoken contributions from Joanna Cherry MP and no written questions.

Joanna Cherry had two Prime Minister's Question this month. In the first, she raised [Brexit's ongoing economic impact](#), quoting back Rishi Sunak's comments that the Northern Ireland Brexit deal puts them in an *"unbelievably special position"* with access to both the EU and UK markets, making it *"the world's most exciting economic zone"*.

Ms Cherry asked *"if there can be a very special status for the province of Northern Ireland, why can there not be a very special status for the nation of Scotland?"*. In response Mr Sunak said *"There is a very special status for the nation of Scotland, and that is inside our United Kingdom."* (...should someone break it to him that Northern Ireland is in the UK too?)

In her [other question to the PM](#), Ms Cherry requested Prime Ministerial intervention to help women who had been working as prosecutors and judges in **Afghanistan** prior to the return of Taliban rule, who had been left behind after troops withdrew and were now *"in mortal danger"*. Mr Sunak agreed a meeting to discuss.

Ms Cherry spoke in the debate ["Change of Name by Registered Sex Offenders"](#), about a loophole in the rules which can lead to offenders going missing and reoffending. She spoke of the Ian Huntley case, where he changed his name and avoided disclosure of his criminal record when he got a job with access to children. She raised her concerns about offenders exploiting the principle of **self-identification**, changing both name and gender on documents which could be used for criminal record checks, and suggested some steps that could be taken to address this.

The Edinburgh South West MP spoke in support of proposed amendments to the **Public Order Bill**, including a bid to remove

stop and search powers without reasonable suspicion. She [raised concerns](#) that the bill goes beyond its stated aim to tackle dangerous and highly disruptive protests, and “poses an unacceptable threat to the fundamental right to engage in peaceful protest”.

Ms Cherry spoke on several occasions on the **Illegal Migration Bill**, raising a number of concerns in detail about the Bill’s potential breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights. Ms Cherry is Chair of the parliament’s [Joint Committee on Human Rights](#) which was tasked with scrutiny of the Bill. Ms Cherry also [expressed her frustrations](#) about the speedy passage through parliament of this controversial measure, and her view that the government had not properly addressed the implications and issues raised in opposition amendments.

The Home Secretary Suella Braverman was also questioned on the **international human rights** implications of the bill and [whether the plan](#) was ultimately to take the UK out of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The policy to send **asylum seekers to Rwanda** for processing of their applications was also raised with the Home Secretary. Ms Cherry asked whether she believed this was a safe place for gay people and trans people. [In response](#) she was referred to the High Court judgement that “It has been deemed to be a proper, lawful partnership”.

Edinburgh South – Ian Murray MP



Ian Murray MP for Edinburgh South

In March there was 1 spoken contribution and no written questions recorded from Edinburgh South MP, Ian Murray.

Ian Murray used **Scottish Questions** to call for an [election now at Holyrood](#), following Humza Yousaf becoming the new leader of the SNP and First Minister. He said: *“The new First Minister of course inherits a divided party and the SNP’s dreadful record on public services, but he does not inherit Nicola Sturgeon’s mandate.”* Mr Jack said it would be hypocritical of him to agree as he had defended the change of Prime Minister, stating instead that *“there is a precedent for political parties voting in new leaders who then assume office”*. In response Mr Murray accused both Conservatives and the SNP of being *“democracy deniers”*.

Mr Murray also raised a **health** related issue, saying trials by BioNTech and Moderna of vaccines that can attack cancer cells were taking place only in England and sought action to ensure *“potentially life-saving treatments should be available throughout the UK”*. The Secretary of State agreed to arrange a meeting with the Health Secretary.

Edinburgh East – Tommy Sheppard MP



Tommy Sheppard MP for Edinburgh East

In March there were 5 spoken contributions recorded from Hansard and 2 written questions from the Edinburgh East MP.

Tommy Sheppard [spoke during the passage](#) of the **Illegal Migration Bill**, describing it as *“a most foul and shameful policy, which depends on dehumanising and criminalising some of the most vulnerable people on this earth.”*

He [called instead](#) for the opening up of more **legal routes to asylum**, applications to be more quickly processed and people allowed to work while they wait.

He raised the **economic impact of Brexit** at Treasury questions, quoting figures from an Office for Budget Responsibility report which predicted the UK economy would shrink by 4% and trade would go down by 15%. [In response](#) the Minister said the OBR had previously said it was *“too early to reach definitive conclusions”* and the government were instead focussed on *“seizing the opportunities”* of new trade deals etc.

During March Tommy Sheppard also [spoke in a debate](#) on **relations with China**, discussing the increasing influence on economy and society in towns across the UK including Edinburgh. He raised the need for a strategy to navigate that influence while continuing to press the case on international human rights issues. He raised three particular points with the Minister, calling for sanctions for individuals in Hong Kong, the case for a Commissioner to examine incoming finance to determine if any is illicit and outlawing imports from Xinjiang unless proof is provided that the products were made without forced labour.

Written questions: There were two written questions from the Edinburgh East MP last month, both relating to our Armed Forces communities. One asked about the review of the [experience of LGBT veterans](#), prior to the lifting of the ban on LGBT personnel serving, the other about [non-religious](#)

[pastoral support](#) – to which the Minister confirmed a non-religious pastoral officer was being recruited for each of the Armed Forces.



Photo: Una Purdie