Nicola Sturgeon: Well my view on this and I’ve said we’ll set out his very clearly in our manifesto for the election next year, but you know I think what we need to do, firstly is to respect the result of the referendum last year, but also to say very clearly that it’s not the right of any politician to stand in the way of the opinion of the Scottish people if there is an appetite at some point in the future to have another referendum.

So it really boils down for me to public opinion. If there’s no shift in public opinion then I think it would be wrong to propose another referendum but equally if we do see a sustained shift in public
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opinion then it wouldn’t be right for anybody to rule it out.

Andrew Marr: So what I’m confused about is whether public opinion is the most important thing, or these triggers that have also been talked about like for instance the British exit from the EU?

Nicola Sturgeon: Can I, let me deal with the EU question first of all because I actually think that stands as a case apart. I think if we do see a scenario over the next couple of years where Scotland votes to stay in the European Union but we find ourselves being taken out of the EU anyway then that so fundamentally changes the nature of the UK that people voted to stay part of last year that I think it is very likely that we would see rising demand for another referendum.

Andrew Marr: And in effect that would trigger almost an automatic Scottish referendum?
Nicola Sturgeon: I think we would see demand for another referendum. I’m not saying its automatic but I think we would see demand for another referendum and those circumstances perhaps be unstoppable. I think to look at other issues, I think you know you can look at, you can continued austerity, the renewal of Trident, all issues that many people in Scotland feel very strongly about. What I think those issues do if the Conservatives continue to ignore the views on the Scottish people that were expressed so clearly in the general election this year then you’ll see those issues I think drive support for independence in the years to come.

Andrew Marr: But you’ll be watching the polls more than you’ll be watching individual political events?

Nicola Sturgeon: I’ll be watching public opinion and there’s two reasons. I mean people will say well that’s you just
saying you’ll have a referendum we can win it. Let me be clear, I don’t want to have another referendum that we don’t win. But there’s something I think more fundamental than that, and that is about something that’s put to me I think very understandably by a lot of people and that’s about respect for the result last year.

I was deeply disappointed in the result last year, it’s not the one I wanted but I respect it and therefore I think to say that we should look to see a shift in public opinion before having another referendum is being respectful to that result and to those who voted no. But if people who voted no last year start in significant numbers to change their minds then no politician me or David Cameron I think has got any right to stand in the way of people having a democratic choice.

Andrew Marr: Gordon Brown has said that if the Scotland bill doesn’t give Scotland full welfare control, full powers that will
blow the union apart on that at least you agree with him?

Nicola Sturgeon: We’ve still got a way to go in the Scotland bill and I very much hope to see it’s strengthened in key areas of tax, of welfare, of some of the issues that matter most to Scotland. People in Scotland are watching how the Westminster parliament behaves in this matter. And you know I’m not going to recommend a package to the Scottish parliament that has Westminster introduce a framework for the fiscal arrangements that’s not fair, I hope that doesn’t arise.

Andrew Marr: In effect John Swinney has already said that unless you get a more generous settlement you’re not interested in...

Nicola Sturgeon: It’s not generous Andrew it’s fair. We’re not asking for any favours, but a fair settlement. The block grant that Scotland gets will have to be adjusted to take account of new tax powers
but also new spending powers and all we’re arguing for is for the mechanism used to make that adjustment to be fair to Scotland.

Andrew Marr: And if you get to that then we’ll hear what you’re going to do with income tax powers for instance, thresholds and rates?

Nicola Sturgeon: We’ll set out at not just in our budget but our manifesto next year exactly what our intentions are. The powers that are being proposed, we will use them to full effect, so don’t mistake me there.

Andrew Marr: You will vary income tax rates in due course?

Nicola Sturgeon: Well no, we will use the powers to full effect based on what we think is right for Scotland. I’m not going to sit here and tell you know what our income tax proposals are going to be.
Andrew Marr: Rats!

Nicola Sturgeon: I know that’s disappointing to you. But the point I was going to make is that proposals, the proposals that are on the table, they still leave about eighty five percent of all welfare spending with Westminster, seventy percent of all tax raising with Westminster. That’s why I say they’re inadequate and I’ll continue to argue for more.

Andrew Marr: In the commons this week you’re gearing up for a big vote, a big argument about George Osborne’s austerity plans and as the SNP you have produced your own plan...

Nicola Sturgeon: Well we outline a plan this week and I challenge Jeremy Corbin and his labour party to vote with us on this. What we will say this week is similar to what we said in the run up to the general election, it’s possible to have a fiscally responsible approach to the budget, so get a current budget and
balance by 2019/20 to have debt reducing without implementing the scale of austerity that the UK government is proposing.

Andrew Marr: But this is a UK proposal so it depends upon George Osborne looking at your numbers and saying you know what, that Nicola Sturgeon’s right I’m going to change direction, not likely.

Nicola Sturgeon: You know what we’ll put our case in the House of Commons and right now we’re the only united strong incredible opposition in the House of Commons. Now I know there are many Tory MPs, you probably know better than I do being based down here in London, that are deeply, deeply uncomfortable at what is about to happen with tax credit cuts. So what we were putting forward is a plan that would still get the budget of the country, the finances of the country into better shape but not do it by penalising hard working people. So we’ll make that
case in the House of Commons, a good start would be for Jeremy Corbyn instead of as he’s said they’re going to vote for George Osborne’s fiscal charter to vote with us and try to build that progressive majority for an alternative to austerity.

Andrew Marr: See what they say is there’s nothing progressive, there’s nothing left wing or centre left about building up a debt and paying the bankers off.

Nicola Sturgeon: This is not...

Andrew Marr: Getting rid of the debt is something you need to do but labour said they’re going to do it by raising taxes rather than cutting welfare.

Nicola Sturgeon: It’s not about accumulating more debt but let’s be clear about this. What the Tories are doing is austerity of choice, it’s not austerity of necessity they’re going much, much further than any fiscal necessity demands and
that’s the difference they’re ideologically wanting to cut public spending, unfortunately doing it on the backs of vulnerable and hard working people. We want to take a different approach and labour will have to decide what side they’re on.

Andrew Marr: You mentioned Jeremy Corbyn a moment ago. He said when I interviewed him that the SNPs in effect was all mouth and no trousers when it came to the anti-austerity rhetoric. That you’ve been involved in privatisation...

Nicola Sturgeon: We will see next week whether he backs the SNP or troops through the lobbies in the House of Commons with George Osborne to vote for the fiscal charter.

Andrew Marr: You’ve talked a lot about your record as the SNP but there are more and more voices now saying it’s not such a great record, why is it for instance that
the number of kids from disadvantaged backgrounds in Scotland who go to university is half the number than in England.

Nicola Sturgeon: It wasn’t the statistics and I’m not trying to get off the hook on this point, the statistics between Scotland and England are measured in slightly different ways.

[Cross talking] The numbers of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university is rising. The attainment gap in our schools.

Andrew Marr: It’s hardly rising, if I may say so First Minister, it’s 1.1% ...

Nicola Sturgeon: It is rising I’ve established that, widening access to university and there...

Andrew Marr: It’s rising more slowly than in England.
Nicola Sturgeon: I don’t accept that is the case necessarily it is rising and we’re determined to see it rise further. More young people from deprived backgrounds go to university than was the case when we took office. We’ve got higher employment than anybody else in the UK, youth unemployment at the lowest level in a decade.

Andrew Marr: The financial system that you have put in place for disadvantaged students in Scotland means they get about half the amount of money than if there would have been south of the border.

Nicola Sturgeon: Well firstly, we protected education so no young person has to pay nine thousand pounds a year in tuition fees to go to university. We’ve got a good and very competitive package of student support, we’ve increased student support, we’re not, we’ve not. George Osborne has just announced they’re going to take grant support away completely and move entirely to loans instead of grants, we are not doing that.
Andrew Marr: Numeracy and literacy rates in primary school in primary four and primary seven among the poorer families are shocking and getting worse.

Nicola Sturgeon: We’ve seen one survey shows a decline in literacy levels. But the attainment gap is reducing, standards in our schools are increasing you see that with the record exam passes that we had this year just as we’ve had in previous years, so we’re doing …

Andrew Marr: You wouldn’t deny there is a problem with literacy and numeracy in Scottish primary schools among disadvantaged kids.

Nicola Sturgeon: I think the survey you’re talking about showed that eighty one percent of young people either had good or reasonably good literacy levels.

Andrew Marr: But if you then break it down by social level and it’s your own figures your
own government’s figures, they’re pretty shocking.

Nicola Sturgeon: Eighty one percent was for children from poorer backgrounds but I don’t accept that’s good enough so I believe we’ve got a record of an education system that is doing well but I want to see it do even better. I’m not going to on this or any other issue and this will be one of the messages to the party conference this week, I’m not going to rest on our laurels I think we’ve got a record to be proud of and we will go into this election defending it vigorously.

Andrew Marr: We could range across lots of policies let’s just do one other one which is the amalgamation of the eight police regions into the new Police Scotland which has not given you the savings that you wanted and has produced some terrible stories about 999 response rates and you’ve lost the guy in charge and so forth; that has not gone well.
Nicola Sturgeon: Well let me first of all say I think a single police force and creating a single police force was the right thing to do because it has allowed us to make savings, one chief constable instead of eight chief constables with all of the attendant bureaucracy that goes with that. So unlike in England we’re not seeing the number of police officers on our streets plummet. We’re addressing the difficulties that the police service has faced but there’s absolutely no doubt in my mind that moving to a single police force has been the right thing to do.

Andrew Marr: The fact that you’ve got a review of it suggests that you also think things have gone wrong, would you, given your time again, done this slightly differently?

Nicola Sturgeon: No but as in any situation where you make a significant and very far reaching reform you have to monitor that and learn lessons.
Andrew Marr: If Michelle Thomson had been a Labour MP or a Tory MP you’d be having a field day, if these allegations, if these allegations are proved to be true what should happen to her?

Nicola Sturgeon: If she’d been a Labour or Tory MP, I don’t know maybe she would still be in the Tory or the Labour party in Westminster groups right now. She to be fair voluntarily has resigned the SNP whip at this stage so she’s not currently a member of the SNP. I as SNP leader if there is action that requires to be taken as a result of the investigation that is underway that action will be taken because we should operate to the highest standards because the people of Scotland have a right to expect that.

Andrew Marr: And you told everybody that you were going to as a party ... do you think your vetting system is good enough for candidates?

Nicola Sturgeon: As a party we’ve quadrupled in size over the past year so that makes it
all the more important that we make sure systems like vetting processes are robust and fit for purpose. So we will learn any lessons that require to be learned. I’m simply not prepared to jump to conclusions about an investigation that’s currently underway. Even MPs are entitled to the presumption of innocence, I know it’s not a fashionable view but it’s one that I think is important to stress.

Andrew Marr: You’ve been doing this job now for almost exactly a year what is the most important thing you’ve learned in that year?

Nicola Sturgeon: I’ve learned about the challenges of leadership you know I was deputy leader to Alex Salmond for a long number of years, you think you know all there is to know about leadership and when you become leader you realise that you know there’s nothing that quite prepares you for that. But I’ve loved every minute of the last year, the difficult bits the good bits and everything in between and I for every day, every hour of that I’m privileged to hold this office
and I’ll just continue to do it to the best of my ability.

Andrew Marr: You mentioned Alex Salmond there, can I just ask you, when I talked to him last time he said that he thought another referendum over all was inevitable would you use the same words?

Nicola Sturgeon: I’ve always believed and I still believe today that Scotland will become independent and it will become independent in my lifetime, so if I believe that, that will only happen through a referendum. So yes, I guess I do believe that another referendum is inevitable but it’s not inevitable just because I say it should happen, it will only prove to be inevitable if that’s what a majority of people in Scotland want.