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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 28 November 2018

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Leaving the EU: Legislative Consent Motions

1. **Paul Masterton** (East Renfrewshire) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the granting of legislative consent motions for legislation on the UK leaving the EU. [907833]

4. **David Duguid** (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the granting of legislative consent motions for legislation on the UK leaving the EU. [907836]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): As this is the last Scottish questions ahead of the 30th anniversary of the bombing of PanAm flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988, I think it would be appropriate to place on record what I am sure all Members of the House will feel at the time; their thoughts and prayers will be with the families and friends of the 270 people who perished and every other person whose life has been affected by the events of that night.

The UK Government are fully committed to the Sewel convention and the related practices and procedures for seeking legislative consent.

Paul Masterton: I associate myself with the Secretary of State's comments. The Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill is vital for my constituents in ensuring continuity of healthcare in the European Union and for the 200,000 expats living in the EU. Will he do everything he can to urge the Scottish Government not to continue to play political games and to grant an LCM to this vital piece of legislation?

David Mundell: It was extremely disappointing that the Scottish Government announced that they would not grant LCMs in relation to a number of Bills without even seeing the details of those Bills. The Healthcare (International Arrangements) Bill is an important one for Scots living abroad, and it would be totally unacceptable to put their treatment at risk, so I hope that the comments that Mr Mike Russell made the other day are perhaps an indication that they will not proceed with this politicking approach.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): The Fisheries Bill is one of the Bills that my right hon. Friend referred to; it lays the groundwork for the revival of fishing in Banff and Buchan and all along Scotland's coastline,

and what is more, it confers new powers on the Scottish Government. I know that the Scottish National party's policy is to take us back into the common fisheries policy, but does he agree that they should show at least some respect for coastal Scotland by working constructively and supporting an LCM for the Fisheries Bill in Holyrood?

David Mundell: Recent events demonstrate that there are no limits to what legislation or whose interests the SNP will play politics with. As my hon. Friend said, both the Agriculture Bill and the Fisheries Bill are important pieces of legislation for Scotland and ones with which the Scottish Government should be fully engaged.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is beginning to sound like this Government are only committed to the Sewel convention when it suits them. Is it not the case that the blatant disregard for the decisions and opinions of the Scottish Parliament throughout the Brexit process shows that this Government and Secretary of State are committed to undermining the devolution settlement, and that that is only going to be exacerbated when the Scottish Parliament votes against the Brexit withdrawal agreement?

David Mundell: What the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends do not like about the Sewel convention is that it is a convention of this United Kingdom Parliament. It is part of Scotland being part of the United Kingdom and that is something that they continue to oppose.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Two of the Secretary of State's own loyal Back Benchers have specifically asked him what discussions he has had with the Scottish Government, and he has refused to answer. Are we to take it from that that he has had no such discussions and that he has no intention of having further discussions with the elected Government of Scotland?

David Mundell: I am afraid that that is not the correct interpretation. As the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends know, since they ask about it repeatedly, I engage fully in the Joint Ministerial Committee (EU Negotiations), and there are extensive discussions about these issues and framework agreements in that forum and in many others.

Leaving the EU

2. **Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [907834]

3. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [907835]

8. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [907840]

11. **Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [907844]

13. **Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister on the effect on Scotland of the UK leaving the EU. [907846]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I have regular meetings with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and colleagues. The deal is a deal for all parts of the UK and it will protect jobs, security and the integrity of our United Kingdom.

Douglas Chapman: I see that the Prime Minister is in Glasgow today talking about Brexit and exports. Does the Secretary of State recognise the disruption and delays that are expected at UK ports as a result of the withdrawal agreement, which necessitates the development of Scottish ports as an alternative route for Scottish exporters? If he is pledging support for the Prime Minister for a poor deal for Scotland, will he also support the Rosyth-Zeebrugge ferry, which would help our exporters to get their goods to market?

David Mundell: I would certainly be happy to discuss the specific issue of the Rosyth-Zeebrugge ferry with the hon. Gentleman, but if he and his colleagues do not want to see disruption at ports and elsewhere, they should not, on 11 December, be voting for a no-deal Brexit.

Stuart C. McDonald: Today, the Chancellor has confirmed that every single Brexit scenario will leave the economy worse off and can be justified only by what he described as political benefits. Given that Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, surely the Secretary of State must now acknowledge that there are no political or economic benefits and that Brexit would be an all-round disaster for Scotland.

David Mundell: I will take no lessons from the hon. Gentleman on taking action to damage the Scottish economy. The SNP's position is to take Scotland out of its biggest market—the UK market—and leave everyone in Scotland poorer.

Deidre Brock: To quote a tweet from @ScotTories:

“Let me be absolutely clear: As we leave the EU, we need complete control over UK fishing. #NonNegotiable”.

So said one of the Secretary of State's Scottish Tory colleagues. Can he credibly tell Scottish fishing communities that the Prime Minister's deal meets those terms?

David Mundell: I absolutely can, and that is why I am today signing the Scottish Fishermen's Federation pledge on delivering a Brexit for the fishing industry. I look forward to the 35 SNP MPs, who say they stand up for Scotland's fishermen, doing likewise.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: It struck me this week that the juxtaposition of the festive season with the Brexit negotiations could help the Secretary of State kill two proverbial birds with one stone. It comes to the House's attention, via the Glasgow *Herald*, that his good friend and former chair of the Scottish Tory party is to be summoned imminently to give evidence to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee about his dodgy donations during the Brexit referendum campaign. I was wondering whether the Secretary of State, being a

parsimonious chap, was going to save money on postage and deliver his Christmas card to his former friend, Mr Cook, in person at Westminster.

David Mundell: I am afraid that that question is too convoluted for these purposes. It is a matter for Committees of this House who they take evidence from.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Yesterday, the Scottish Government produced analysis of the Prime Minister's deal suggesting that the withdrawal agreement we are being asked to vote on would make all of us poorer, but the interim Scottish Conservative leader immediately dismissed it as an excuse for another referendum, even though the Chancellor said today it would make us poorer. Who of the two is right?

David Mundell: I am sure the hon. Gentleman did not wish to mislead the House, but the analysis produced by the Scottish Government is not an analysis of the deal the Prime Minister has negotiated; it is a rehashed version of a document produced in January that looked only at generic issues. The analysis that this Government will be producing will be focused on the deal that has actually been negotiated.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Leaving the most successful union in history after 311 years would bring economic chaos to Scotland. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the effect of Scotland leaving the UK would be much worse than the effect of Brexit under any scenario?

David Mundell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. As we have discussed many times in the Chamber, Scotland trades four times as much with the rest of the UK as it does with the EU. I am sure that people in Scotland are starting to ask why the SNP is so keen on delivering a no-deal Brexit. It is because the SNP sees that it is the ideal backdrop for an independence referendum debate.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Nicola Sturgeon wants to drag Scotland into constitutional chaos by having a further two referendums, against the will of the Scottish people. Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the First Minister's stance?

David Mundell: I absolutely condemn Nicola Sturgeon's desire to create division, chaos and uncertainty. All along she could have joined the Prime Minister and worked with the UK Government to get a deal for Scotland and the UK, but she chose to put her own interests and an independence referendum first.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the BP Clair Ridge project, which started up in November and will produce an estimated 640 billion barrels of oil? Does he agree that this is clear evidence of confidence in the Scottish economy as we leave the EU?

David Mundell: In his time in the House, my hon. Friend has established himself as a champion of the oil and gas industry. That news is indeed very welcome, and it demonstrates BP's continuing confidence in our UK Government's approach to the sector.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, from the off, our Prime Minister's No. 1 priorities have been the protection of our economy, the national interest, and the protection of our UK internal market—in complete contrast to the Scottish National party, which only sows division, and would go out of its way to destroy that internal market, which is of prime importance to Scottish business?

David Mundell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The distinction between the leaders of the various parties is very clear: the Leader of the Opposition is focused on a general election, the leader of the Scottish National party is focused on an independence referendum, and Theresa May is focused on the national interest of this country.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I do not know whether the Secretary of State realises how ridiculous he has looked with his resignation-non-resignation business. He is like a demented Grand Old Duke of York. He has led his merry band of Scotch Tories halfway up resignation hill, and has forgotten whether he is going up or down. Scotland voted overwhelmingly against Brexit, and increasing numbers of Scots do not want anything to do with it. If the Secretary of State cannot represent the people of Scotland, will he just resign and get out of the way, for goodness' sake?

David Mundell: Well, I suppose there is no greater expert in the House on being ridiculous than the hon. Gentleman, swinging one way and another on every issue of the day. I am quite clear. The United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, and this Government will deliver that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. We have four Front-Bench supplementary questions and we are pressed for time, so they need to be brief.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Mr Speaker, "We could not support any deal that...leads to Northern Ireland having a different relationship with the EU than the rest of the UK".

Those are the words of the Secretary of State for Scotland. I put it to him that the backstop provides exactly that in the withdrawal agreement. Given that, how can he justify remaining in the Cabinet?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman has quoted selectively from what I said. I acknowledged that there were already significant differences between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, not least because of the Belfast agreement, and in relation to, for example, the single electricity market. However, I am clear about the fact that the greatest threat to the integrity of the United Kingdom is posed by the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues. That is why they want a no-deal Brexit.

Tommy Sheppard: Given the gravity of the situation, I think we should expect Ministers of the Crown to answer questions put to them. The Secretary of State

has publicly refuted the differentiation on which the withdrawal agreement is based; he has threatened to resign on numerous occasions; and now he has nailed his colours to the Prime Minister's mast, and invested what political capital he has left in this deal. I ask him this: if the withdrawal agreement is rejected by this Parliament, as it surely will be, will he at that point resign his position?

David Mundell: My position is quite clear. The integrity of the United Kingdom must be preserved. The SNP and Nicola Sturgeon see Brexit as an opportunity to break up the United Kingdom, so above all else I put that first.

Lesley Laird (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): May I begin by supporting the Secretary of State's comments in relation to Lockerbie?

The Secretary of State drew red lines for his support for the Brexit deal on the integrity of the UK and on fishing. Unless those things were protected, he would resign. The Prime Minister has come back with a deal that creates a border in the Irish sea and sells out Scottish fishermen. May I ask what the right hon. Gentleman is still doing at the Dispatch Box?

David Mundell: What I am doing is standing up for the integrity of the United Kingdom. When I see Jeremy Corbyn and Nicola Sturgeon caballing about what they are going to do next, and no doubt agreeing that the keys of No. 10 Downing Street will be handed over to Labour for another independence referendum, I know I am doing the right thing.

Mr Speaker: Order. One respect in which the right hon. Gentleman is not doing the right thing is his referring to Members of the House by name. He knows better than that, and I hope he will improve his performance.

Lesley Laird: The right hon. Gentleman knows my views, but judging by the looks on the faces of those sitting beside him, I do not think he has quite got the mood of the room. The reality is that the Secretary of State's so-called red lines were written in invisible ink; they disappeared when the Prime Minister came back from Brussels. Labour will vote against the Prime Minister's deal; it is a bad deal for Scotland and it is a bad deal for working people. The Commons could unite behind Labour's alternative: a comprehensive and permanent customs union with a British say in future trade deals, and a strong single market relationship to support British business. It is clear that this deal cannot command the support of the Commons. If the Secretary of State now thinks this deal is the best deal for the country, why does he not put that theory to the test and call for a general election and let the people decide?

David Mundell: The hon. Lady has just proved the point from my first answer, and now that she has taken an interest in the fishing industry, which I was not previously aware of, I hope she will sign the Scottish Fishermen's Federation pledge on what should now happen in relation to the fishing industry. I did not know what Scottish Labour's position was on this issue, and I do not expect many other people do, but it should not surprise us that ultimately it is being Nicola's little helpers to vote for a no-deal Brexit.

Growth Deals

5. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on the Scottish economy of future growth deals in Scotland. [907837]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Nigel Adams): Through city and growth deals the UK Government have already committed over £1 billion of investment to Scotland and are working on further growth deals for Borderlands, Ayrshire and Moray. The UK Government are committed to delivering a city and growth deal for every part of Scotland. City and growth deals show the benefits that are delivered to the economy when Scotland's two Governments work together.

Chris Davies: I thank the Minister for his answer and welcome him to his place. The UK Government have now invested over £1.1 billion in city deals across Scotland; does my hon. Friend agree that this is the Conservatives delivering for Scotland?

Nigel Adams: I thank my hon. Friend for his warm words of welcome and completely agree: the over-£1 billion of investment in Scotland's cities shows that this Government have a clear role in delivering economic growth in Scotland. Just last week my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was in Perth announcing £150 million of investment as part of the Tay cities deal. My hon. Friends the Members for Angus (Kirstene Hair) and for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) were instrumental in securing investment not only for their constituencies, but for the whole region as part of the deal.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry to be unkind, but the Minister is taking too long; we have a lot to get through.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): Given the recent news from Michelin that it will lose up to 850 jobs from Dundee, it is now more important than ever that all commitments on the Tay cities deal are met. The Scottish Government are committed to £200 million. Can the UK Government today give a guarantee that they will fully match that £200 million investment?

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman rightly raises this issue, and I know how important it is to his constituency, but, as I said previously, £150 million is being committed to the region in a growth deal and we are working with the Scottish Government in the Michelin action group, which met on 12 November. With support from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy we have presented a number of potential areas for further exploration for repurposing the site either with Michelin or a third party, and I understand that the next action group meeting will be on 30 November.

Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab): Some £120 million was announced as part of the Edinburgh city deal to upgrade Sheriffhall roundabout, but the A720 city bypass that stems off the roundabout is chock-a-block, start to end every day, which will affect my constituents and those of the Secretary of State. This seems to have slipped

down the Scottish Government agenda. Those constituents would like to know what conversations the Secretary of State has had with Scottish Government Ministers.

Nigel Adams: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. The deal for Edinburgh was signed on 7 August. There is a £300 million investment from this Government, and I know how important this is for her constituency. I will ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to follow up on her question so that she has more details.

Leaving the EU: Fishing Industry

6. **John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the fishing industry in Scotland on access to UK fishing waters after the UK leaves the EU. [907838]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Fishing is of totemic importance in Scotland, and I regularly meet representatives of the fishing industry in Scotland to discuss the opportunities for the sector when we leave the EU.

John Lamont: As we have already heard, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation has launched a campaign calling on all parties to back its pledge for the UK to take back control of our waters after we leave the European Union. I am pleased that the Secretary of State has signed that pledge. I have signed it and Scottish Conservatives are signing it. Does my right hon. Friend agree that all parties in this House should sign that pledge?

David Mundell: I absolutely do agree. When people stand up and say that they are speaking up for the fishing industry, they need to back that up. This pledge does exactly that, and I look forward to all 59 of Scotland's MPs signing it. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is quite a lot of noise in the Chamber, but I want to be able to hear the ordinarily distinctive burr of the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael).

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Why did the Government ever think it would be a good idea to include fisheries in the transitional arrangements?

David Mundell: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the transitional arrangements will involve a period in which things will remain as they are, in order to provide certainty, but there is a clear mechanism for fishing to leave those transitional arrangements and to be part of the Fisheries Council in December 2020, to plan ahead for 2021.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I recently visited Atlantic Canada on a trade visit, where I met Canadian fisheries and ocean tech companies that are invested in Scotland. They are enthusiastic to work more closely with the UK once we have left the common fisheries policy to ensure that we have better balanced and managed fisheries. Can my right hon. Friend give me a commitment that we will do just that?

David Mundell: I am certainly able to give my hon. Friend a commitment in both regards. We are looking to work with important partners such as Canada, and to leave the common fisheries policy.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): The Minister claims that the Scottish fishermen should rest easy because he has signed the Scottish Fishermen's Federation's pledge. A month ago, he signed a letter to the Prime Minister saying that he would resign if Northern Ireland was treated differently from Scotland because of the threat to Scotland. If he has not lived up to his resignation promise, how can the Scottish fishermen ever believe that he will live up to the promise he has made in the fishermen's pledge?

David Mundell: I respect the right hon. Gentleman's point of view, but I believe that the biggest threat to the integrity of the United Kingdom comes from those on the SNP Benches and from people who are seeking to bring about a no-deal Brexit. A no-deal Brexit is the most certain way to see Scotland leave the United Kingdom, and I am not going to support anything that brings that about.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State claims that this deal is a good deal, but on fishing, that claim was blown out of the water by President Macron of France before the ink was dry on the political declaration. The reality is that the Secretary of State cannot guarantee that the UK will not be pushed into the backstop indefinitely if access to waters and quota shares are not agreed with the European Union. That is an undeniable breach of his red line. He promised to resign over that very issue, yet he is still here, desperately claiming the false choice between no deal and a bad deal. When did he realise that he cared more about his ministerial Merc than about a good deal for Scotland's fishermen?

David Mundell: Again, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's taking an interest in fishing for the first time. If he listened to the fishermen, he would know that Bertie Armstrong, the chief executive of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation had said that no red lines had been crossed. What I find even more concerning in all these debates on fishing is that Scottish Labour is lining up with President Macron to do down this country. Our Prime Minister is fighting for the best possible deal for our fishermen. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a lot of noise in the Chamber, but I want to hear the voice of Erewash. I call Maggie Throup.

Connectivity: Scotland and the rest of the UK

7. **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support connectivity between Scotland and the rest of the UK. [907839]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (**Nigel Adams**): The UK Government are committed to constructive intergovernmental working and a joined-up approach to all matters that relate to cross-border transport connectivity. At a working level, much co-operation goes on between officials in the Department for Transport and Transport Scotland on these issues every day.

Maggie Throup: What discussions has my hon. Friend had with the Department for Transport specifically to ensure that HS2 is able to link up in a further extension with Scotland, to ensure that we get the connectivity between Scotland and the rest of the UK?

Nigel Adams: I know that this issue is very close to my hon. Friend's heart, and the Department for Transport is working extremely closely with Transport Scotland and Network Rail to look at future options around HS2 that might have a good business case, working towards the UK and Scottish Governments' shared ultimate ambition of a three-hour journey time between London and Scotland.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): It is all very well talking about connectivity between Scotland and the rest of the UK, but in remote parts of my constituency, connectivity is rubbish: you would be better off with two tin cans and a length of string. Should we not sort out Scotland first?

Nigel Adams: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. With his two cans reference, I think he was referring to the digital connectivity issues. I would politely remind him that £1.7 billion of public money is being invested to support vital improvements in broadband coverage, and this Government have invested £121.8 million in Scotland's superfast broadband infrastructure. Per head, that is over twice the funding that England has received.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [907883] **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 28 November.

The Prime Minister (**Mrs Theresa May**): I am sure that the whole House will join me in paying tribute to Baroness Trumpington, who sadly passed away yesterday. From her time at Bletchley Park as a codebreaker during the second world war, through to her time in government and public service, she led an extraordinary life. She will be sorely missed.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Rosie Cooper: I am sure the whole House would want to be associated with the Prime Minister's remarks.

The misery inflicted on my constituents by Northern rail continues unabated: long waits for already full trains; trains that do not arrive on time; whole-day cancellations; and even the cancellation of last trains, leaving people stranded. There can be no more excuses. This latest Northern rail fiasco began in May, with timetabling and communications issues. Is it not time to get the communications right, and timetable the end of the Northern franchise?

The Prime Minister: First of all, we are clear as a Government that the performance in the north and the disruption that was caused to rail passengers following

the timetable changes that took place on 20 May were unacceptable. It is clear that we saw a combination of delayed Network Rail infrastructure works and reduced time to plan a modified timetable, which meant that the new timetable was finalised too late. We know that passengers are currently not getting the service they deserve, although there are more Northern rail services now than there were earlier this year; but much more needs to be done. We are working alongside Transport for the North, Northern, TransPennine Express and Network Rail on improving services and punctuality. We have asked Richard George to review the performance of the region's rail network and to make recommendations to improve reliability, and where operators are found to be at fault, we will take action.

Q4. [907886] Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): No one can question the Prime Minister's work ethic and determination to reach a deal with the European Union—a deal that many people thought unachievable—but despite her best endeavours, many people still have considerable concerns that this has left us with an uncomfortable choice, and I share those concerns. As the Prime Minister heads to Scotland, what guarantees can she give to those who have concerns about the future of the fishing industry under this deal, and also our precious Union?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the issue of the fishing industry and our precious Union. I am a committed Unionist, as he is, and as indeed are all my colleagues on the Conservative Benches. Our deal in relation to fisheries means that we will become an independent coastal state. That means that we will be able to negotiate access to our waters. We will be ensuring that our fishing communities get a fairer share of our waters. We will be determining that issue of access to our waters, and we firmly rejected a link of access to our waters and access to markets.

I have to say also that we are very clear, as I made clear in my statement on Monday, that we will not be trading off a fisheries agreement against anything else in this future relationship; and I am confident that my hon. Friend will have seen the support for the deal, which has been recognised by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I echo the Prime Minister's words about Baroness Trumpington. We thank her for her service to this country throughout her life. We will also remember her as a great codebreaker, as a very demonstrative Member of the House of Lords with her physical symbols, and also for her wit on "Have I Got News For You".

I also want to pay tribute to my friend Harry Leslie Smith. Harry passed away early this morning in Canada. Harry also served in the war, and he was an irrepressible campaigner for the rights of refugees, for the welfare state and for our national health service. He was passionate about the principle of healthcare for all as a human right. We thank Harry for his life and his work.

On Sunday, the Foreign Secretary said of their Brexit deal that it

"mitigates most of the negative impacts."

Can the Prime Minister tell us which of the negative impacts it does not mitigate?

The Prime Minister: I am sure the whole House will also wish to pass on our condolences to the family and friends of Harry Leslie Smith.

What we see behind the analysis that we have published today, and indeed the Chancellor recognised it this morning, is that our deal is the best deal available for jobs and our economy that allows us to honour the referendum and realise the opportunities of Brexit. This analysis does not show that we will be poorer in the future than we are today. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes, it does."] No, it does not. It shows that we will be better off with this deal. What would make us poorer, and what would have an impact on our economy for the future, are the policies of the right hon. Gentleman—more borrowing, higher taxes and fewer jobs. The biggest risk to our economy is the right hon. Gentleman and his shadow Chancellor.

Jeremy Corbyn: On the same day that the Foreign Secretary made his statement, the Prime Minister said:

"This is the best possible deal. It is the only possible deal."

Well, it is not hard to be the best deal if it is the only deal. By definition, it is also the worst deal.

The Government Economic Service forecasts published today are actually meaningless, because there is no actual deal to model, just a 26-page wishlist. The Chancellor, however, said that the Prime Minister's deal will make people "worse off." Does she agree? The Chancellor does not appear to be here to be consulted.

The Prime Minister: As I have just set out to the right hon. Gentleman, what the analysis shows is that the deal we have negotiated is the best deal for our jobs and our economy that delivers on the result of the referendum for the British people. I believe that we should be delivering on the result of the referendum.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about the political declaration—he calls it a wishlist. What he is describing is a political declaration that has been agreed between the United Kingdom and the European Union and that sets out

"an ambitious, broad, deep and flexible partnership across trade and economic cooperation, law enforcement and criminal justice, foreign policy, security and defence and wider areas of cooperation."

What does Labour have to offer? Six bullet points. My weekend shopping list is longer than that.

Jeremy Corbyn: After eight years of making our economy weaker through austerity, their botched Brexit threatens more of the same. Professor Alston said in his damning UN report into UK poverty:

"In my meetings with the government, it was clear to me that the impact of Brexit on people in poverty is an afterthought".

In her Chequers plan, the Prime Minister promised frictionless trade with Europe after Brexit. Her future partnership guarantees no such thing. Does the Prime Minister understand why MPs are queuing up not to back her plan?

The Prime Minister: Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman who is backing my plan: farmers in Wales, fishermen in Scotland and employers in Northern Ireland. When MPs consider the vote, they will need to look at the importance of our delivering on Brexit and ensuring that we deliver Brexit, and doing it in a way that

protects jobs. On that subject, he referenced what had happened to the economy over the past eight years: we have seen the number of young people not in education, employment or training at record lows; we see borrowing this year at its lowest level for 13 years; we see more people in work than ever before, and the fastest regular wage growth for nearly a decade; and today we have seen the number of children living in workless households at a record low and the proportion of workless households at a record low. That is good, balanced management of the economy by the Conservatives.

Jeremy Corbyn: If it is good, balanced management of the economy, why did Professor Alston say there are 14 million people in our country living in poverty? The Prime Minister claims support for her deal, but last week more than 200 chief executives and entrepreneurs described her Brexit deal as the worst of all worlds—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Mr David Morris, calm yourself. Take some sort of soothing medicament if that is what is required, but, above all, calm yourself.

Jeremy Corbyn: A private email that the CBI sent round says of the deal:

“no need to give credit to negotiators I think, because it’s not a good deal.”

All the Prime Minister can commit to is that we will be working for frictionless trade. She has gone from guaranteeing frictionless trade to offering friction and less trade. After these botched negotiations, the country has no faith in the next stage of even more complex negotiations being concluded in just two years. So what does the Prime Minister think is preferable: extending the transition with further vast payments to the European Union or falling into the backstop with no exit?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there is an exit from the backstop—there is an alternative to the backstop, but we do not want the backstop to be invoked in the first place, and neither do the Government of the Republic of Ireland and neither does the European Union. He is referring again to this issue of the political declaration and the nature of the political declaration. He will know that the European Union cannot agree and sign legal texts on a trade arrangement with a country that is a member of the European Union, so it cannot do that until we have left the European Union. Let me just say this to him: the December joint report was 16 pages long and it took less than a year to turn it into 599 pages of legal text. The political declaration is 26 pages long. It is perfectly possible to turn that into the legal text within the nearly two years that is available. At every stage people have said that we could not do what we have done. They said we could not get agreement last December—we did. They said we would not get an implementation period—we did. They said we would not agree a withdrawal agreement and political declaration—we did. It takes hard work and a firm commitment to work in the national interest, and that is what this Government have.

Jeremy Corbyn: That would explain why the Business Secretary does not have much faith in this either—he is already discussing the transition period being extended to 2022, apparently. Parliament voted for the Government

to publish their “legal advice in full”. The Government today say they will ignore the sovereign will of Parliament. In 2007, the Prime Minister wrote to the then Prime Minister saying that the legal advice for the Iraq war should have been published in full to Cabinet and MPs. So why does the Prime Minister not practise what she preached?

The Prime Minister: Of course, there is a legitimate desire in Parliament to understand the legal implications of the deal. We have said and been clear that we will make available to Members a full, reasoned position statement laying out the Government’s legal position on the withdrawal agreement, and the Attorney General is willing to assist Parliament by making an oral statement and answering questions from Members. But as regards publication of the full legal advice, the advice that any client receives from their lawyer is privileged; that is the same for Government as it is for any member of the public.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Chancellor said:

“What we are not going to do is publish the raw legal advice from the Attorney General”.

The Prime Minister herself wanted to see legal advice in the past, and MPs need to see the advice, warts and all, so that they can make their informed decision on this matter.

The Prime Minister insists that her Government will be able to negotiate every aspect of the UK’s future trade relationship with Europe within the space of two years. We have had two and a half years since the referendum; so far, 20 of her own Ministers have resigned. This is the most shambolic Government in living memory, and she is now asking Parliament to vote on the basis of a 26-page wishlist without even seeing the full legal advice. It is now clear that Parliament will not back this plan, so is it not time for her to accept that reality and make way for an alternative plan that could work for the whole country?

The Prime Minister: I will take no lectures from the right hon. Gentleman, who has seen 100 resignations from his Front Bench. Today, we saw what really lies behind Labour’s approach. Last night, the shadow Chancellor told an audience in London that he wanted to seize upon a second referendum and vote remain. So now we have it: they want to cause chaos, frustrate Brexit and overturn the will of the British people. That would be a betrayal of the many by the few.

Q5. [907887] John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): Small Business Saturday takes place this Saturday. It is a great campaign that encourages us all to support local shops and businesses across our land. In Scotland, there are more than 340,000 small and medium-sized businesses, supporting 1.2 million jobs. Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the Federation of Small Businesses and all the small businesses that take part in the event, but particularly Lindsay Grieve, the butcher in Hawick, Stems, the florist in Jedburgh, and Archie Hume, the gentlemen’s outfitters in Kelso?

The Prime Minister: I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising what I think we should all, across the House, accept is an excellent campaign. I look forward to perhaps being able to visit some of the excellent shops

that he just mentioned when I am in his neck of the woods. It is important that we help small businesses, which is why we are taking more than 655,000 small businesses out of paying any business rates at all. We want to change the system so that rates follow the lower level of inflation, which would mean a saving every year and would be worth more than £5 billion to businesses over the next five years, and we are providing £900 million to cut the bills of eligible small retailers by one third for two years. I congratulate Lindsay Grieve, Stems the florist and Archie Hume, and I look forward possibly to visiting them. I am sure that many Members of this House will be recognising the importance of small businesses on Small Business Saturday and championing the excellent contribution that they make to our economy.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): May I take the opportunity to wish everyone in the House a happy St Andrew's day for when it comes on Friday?

Today, the Chancellor said that the Prime Minister's Brexit deal will leave the economy "slightly smaller", and that "in pure economic terms" there will be a loss. That has now been confirmed by the Government's own analysis, which shows that real wages will fall. Does the Prime Minister agree that her deal will leave people poorer than the status quo?

The Prime Minister: The analysis shows—*[Interruption.]* No, the analysis does not show that we will be poorer than the status quo today. What it shows—*[Interruption.]* No, it doesn't. What the analysis shows is that this is a strong economy that will continue to grow and that the model that actually delivers best on delivering the vote of the British people, and for our jobs and our economy, is the model that the Government have put forward, the deal that the Government are proposing.

Ian Blackford: I wonder whether the Prime Minister has read her own analysis, because quite clearly, under any scenario of leaving the single market and the customs union, we will be poorer. The Prime Minister wants to take us back to the days of Thatcher and a belief that unemployment is a price worth paying. That is the reality. No Government should choose to weaken their economy and make their citizens poorer. That is what the Prime Minister is doing.

The Prime Minister will travel to Scotland today. People in Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain. We voted for our rights to be respected—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is entitled to be heard and he will be heard, as every other Member of this House will be heard. It is a simple point. Please digest it.

Ian Blackford: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Prime Minister will travel to Scotland today. People in Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain. We voted for our rights to be respected and we are not prepared to give up those rights. The Prime Minister must explain to the people of Scotland why her deal will rob them of their rights as EU citizens.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman started with comments about the Government's approach to unemployment. What do we see under this Government? Some 3.3 million jobs have been created since the Conservatives came into power and the OBR is forecasting

a further 800,000 more jobs being created in our economy. The employment rate is at a near record high, employment is at a record high and the unemployment rate has almost halved since 2010. He talks about what the people of Scotland voted for. They voted to stay in the United Kingdom and they voted for 13 Conservative MPs.

Q8. [907890] Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): It is a fact with any divorce proceedings that if the parties cannot reach a fair and equitable agreement, they go to a judge to ask for a decision. In the case of the divorce between the UK and the EU, this Parliament must be the judge. Does the Prime Minister agree that once this Parliament has rejected the EU's controlling and dominating proposal, which will not leave us free to decide our future, the UK will be better off spending the money we set aside to prepare for a clean, global Brexit?

The Prime Minister: May I say to my hon. Friend that what—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's question was heard, I want to hear the Prime Minister's reply, and the Prime Minister is entitled to have it properly heard.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Backing this Brexit deal means that we will control our borders, we will end free movement once and for all, we will protect jobs with a deal that is good for our economy, we will no longer send vast sums of money every year to the European Union—we can spend it on our priorities—and we will be able to strike free trade deals around the world, as well as taking back control of our laws and having a good security partnership. But if we reject this deal, we go back to square one, with damaging uncertainty that would threaten jobs, threaten our investment and the economy, lead to more division and mean that there was less time to focus on the issues that our constituents wish us to focus on. I think the choice is backing the deal in the national interest, so that we can build that brighter future, or going back to square one, if it is rejected.

Q2. [907884] Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): My constituent Matthew is one of those very brave people who have waived their anonymity around abuse they suffered at the hands of a member of the Church of England. The Prime Minister will be very aware of the harrowing evidence coming out of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, which could have been prevented if a law on mandatory reporting had been in place. International evidence shows that, when introduced, mandatory reporting doubles the number of children placed in safety. Will the Prime Minister commit to protect children and introduce mandatory reporting across all institutions, including the Church of England?

The Prime Minister: May I first say how sorry I am to hear of the case of the hon. Lady's constituent, Matthew, and the abuse that he suffered? Sadly, what has come out of this independent inquiry is that too much abuse was allowed to carry on for too long, and that too many people suffered as a result. It is not just the case that they suffered at the time when the abuse was taking place; that suffering remains with them to this day, and we should all recognise that.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of mandatory reporting, which we looked at very carefully when I was Home Secretary. There is actually mixed evidence on the impact of mandatory reporting. In fact, there is some evidence that it can lead to the genuine cases not being given the resources they require. I want the hon. Lady to be in no doubt about the seriousness with which I and this Government take the issue. We are doing our best to repair—I will not claim that we can fully repair—by giving some sense of justice to the people who suffered at the hands of too many institutions, including institutions of the state, for too long.

Q10. [907892] **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Many of my constituents are worried about crime. The Chancellor acknowledged in his Budget speech that policing is under pressure because of the changing nature of crime. With decisions on the national police funding settlement imminent, may I urge the Prime Minister to ensure that we can get more police on the beat in Barnet and beyond?

The Prime Minister: I recognise my right hon. Friend's concerns, and reassure her that we have been protecting police funding since 2015. We have enabled police forces further to increase funding through the council tax precept. This year, including council tax, there is an additional £460 million available to the police. However, I recognise the issue that my right hon. Friend has raised, and we will continue to ensure that the police have the resources they need to cut crime and keep our communities safe. There is also a role for chief constables and police and crime commissioners—as operational leaders and elected local representatives—to decide how best to deploy resources in order to manage and respond to individual crimes and local crime priorities.

Q3. [907885] **Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): I know the Prime Minister is visiting Scotland today, and I hear that there is already great dancing in the streets. But like most Scots, I have been horrified by the arrogant, shambolic and non-inclusive way in which the Government have gone about the Brexit negotiations over two torturous years. What lessons has the Prime Minister learned so that we can have very simple, more productive and faster negotiations when we decide to dissolve the Act of Union?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will be well aware of the vote that took place in 2014 and the desire of the Scottish people to remain in the United Kingdom. We have been working with the devolved Administrations at every stage throughout the negotiations. Indeed, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has been having regular meetings with the devolved Administrations, and officials have also been meeting them, so we have ensured that the voice of the devolved Administrations has been heard in our negotiations.

Q13. [907895] **Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): The small businesses of North Dorset's market towns play a vital role in our local economy. On the cusp of Small Business Saturday, will the Prime Minister assure me that she will ensure—and, if necessary, intervene to ensure—that the rules governing the provision of rural cash machines are safeguarded, and that the actual

needs of our rural communities are recognised, thereby underpinning those vital jobs and businesses in our rural communities?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for again recognising the importance of small businesses, particularly in rural communities. We recognise that the widespread free access to cash remains extremely important in the day-to-day lives of many consumers and businesses throughout the UK. LINK—the UK's cash machine network—is committed to maintaining free access to cash through its extensive footprint of ATMs. The Payment Systems Regulator, set up by the Government, regulates LINK and is ensuring that the UK payment system works in the interest of consumers. I assure my hon. Friend that the regulator is closely monitoring the situation and is holding LINK to account for its commitments to maintaining a broad geographic spread of ATMs across the United Kingdom.

Q6. [907888] **David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Watching a premature baby in an incubator hooked up to oxygen, being assisted to breathe, is an incredibly difficult experience. I can say that because both my children have been through it. But the reality with statutory paternity leave is that the law does not work for parents of premature babies. We spend weeks on neonatal intensive care units, and we want to take our paternity leave for more than 56 days. So will the Prime Minister agree to meet me and the campaigning charity, Bliss, to look at how we can give support to parents of premature babies?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue, which is obviously, through personal experience, very close to his heart, but I know it is of concern to other Members of this House. I understand that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is undertaking a review of the provisions for parents of premature babies, and also for those who experience multiple births, as it is the Department responsible for the parental leave legislation. It is working with charities representing parents of premature babies—parents of babies who require neonatal care—to better understand the pressures and the issues that those parents have to face when their child is born prematurely or sick. It expects to be in a position to share the key findings of this review with interested parties in the new year. I will ensure that a relevant Minister from the Department meets the hon. Gentleman and the charity to hear that experience first hand.

Q15. [907897] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Last week, a debate took place at Durham Union. The motion was, "This House believes that the United Kingdom is less united than ever". I was part of the team opposing the motion, and we comfortably defeated it. Does my right hon. Friend agree with those young people that the agreement that this House is being asked to vote on actually threatens our Union, was worked out by largely unelected people, and has a distinct remain flavour?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend might not be surprised if I say that I do not quite share that analysis of the deal that we put forward. Look, this is a deal that does deliver on Brexit. I think this is important: it does

deliver on Brexit but it does so in a way that protects our United Kingdom. That is an issue that I have set out in this House on many occasions, and it is one that we were very keen to ensure was dealt with in this deal. It is a deal that protects jobs, but it also delivers on the people's vote to ensure that we leave the European Union and that we do so in a way that delivers no free movement, no jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, and not sending those vast annual sums to the European Union every year. But I thank my hon. Friend for engaging with those young people in Durham and debating this matter with them. It is very important that we ensure that young people maintain that interest in politics.

Q7. [907889] Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The Chancellor has broadcast to the nation that Brexit will make the UK poorer, the Prime Minister's last-minute concession in Europe puts Gibraltar's future on the line, and our long-term trade arrangements are simply unknown. Article 50 can be revoked. Is it not time for a people's vote with an option to remain?

The Prime Minister: First, I have already quoted—referenced—what the Chancellor said. The hon. Lady's reference to the issue of Gibraltar goes absolutely contrary to what the Chief Minister of Gibraltar has said about the way in which the United Kingdom has absolutely stood by Gibraltar—and we will continue to stand by Gibraltar. She will have heard me say before that I believe, in terms of a second referendum, that it is important that we deliver on the vote of the British people. But I would also just ask her to consider this: it would not be possible to hold a referendum before 29 March next year. That would mean having to extend article 50—[*Interruption.*] She wants to extend article 50—delaying Brexit or leaving with no deal. I believe that the best option for this country is to ensure that we deliver on the Brexit vote, that we leave the European Union next March, that we do not delay that point, and that we leave with a good deal that will protect jobs across the country.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Is the Prime Minister concerned about religious persecution in the Holy Land, and will she welcome the visit of the Patriarch of Jerusalem?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend. Of course, he will know that this weekend marks the start of Advent, which is a time of expectation and hope for Christians. Today is Red Wednesday—a day when landmark buildings, including these Houses of Parliament, will turn scarlet as an act of solidarity with persecuted Christians.

I certainly welcome the Patriarch of Jerusalem's upcoming visit. I know that some Israelis can face additional structural challenges, particularly Christian and Muslim Arab Israelis, who experience higher rates of poverty and unemployment, and can face discrimination. We certainly encourage the Israeli Government to do all they can to uphold the values of equality for all enshrined in their laws. I give my right hon. Friend the assurance that I will continue to work with Governments, with the international community and with the United Nations to support the rights of minorities, including Christians.

Q9. [907891] Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): In the next 10 days, there will hopefully be informed debate on the Government's Brexit proposals and various alternative routes, including an election, a people's vote and no doubt others. There is absolutely no reason why the public should be alarmed by continuing discussion of a chaotic no deal, because it is entirely within the power of this House and the Government to stop it. Will the Prime Minister reassure the public that under no circumstances will that happen?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman, with his long years in this House, knows that we will on 11 December look at the deal that the Government have negotiated with the European Union. I believe there is a clear choice. I believe that backing that deal will provide people with certainty and ensure that we deliver on the vote of the British people in the best way for jobs and our economy. Failure to back that deal, I believe, would lead to chaos and uncertainty for people for the future, and the clear message I get around the country is that people do not want that chaos and uncertainty.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): This country exports vast amounts of plastic to developing countries, under the guise of recycling. Could we incentivise recycling in this country and seek to ban the exporting of our rubbish to other countries, where it often ends up in landfill or the ocean?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has raised an important issue. I hope that she recognises the action the Government have taken in relation to plastic. I was very pleased yesterday, when I was at the winter fair at the Royal Welsh, to see a company that 29 years ago started recycling plastic and turning it into products that people could use, such as garden seats and tables. That was an innovative initiative 29 years ago, and it is slap bang what we all consider to be the right thing to do today.

Q11. [907893] Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): The Prime Minister is currently travelling the country seeking public support for her Brexit deal, which she says will secure industry and jobs. Will she visit Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead, where workers have been forced into industrial action, fighting the threat of casualisation, to save hundreds of skilled secure jobs in Merseyside at a company that has won £620 million of Government RAF contracts? What faith can people have in the future she offers if she will not act to save skilled secure jobs in our own defence industry?

The Prime Minister: May I first say to the hon. Gentleman that I realise what a worrying time this must be for the employees of Cammell Laird? Obviously, the Government do not have a role in the strategic direction or management of the company, but officials are in close contact with the company and are being kept informed. I hope there can be a dialogue between all sides, so that they can work together to come to a solution that is in the best interests of all involved. As I say, I recognise what a worrying time this must be for the employees of that company.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): It has been widely reported that, fearing a backlash here in the UK, the Prime Minister personally intervened to stop the Government offering sanctuary to Asia Bibi, the Pakistani Christian mother who faces a very serious threat to her life. Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to put the record straight and commit to doing everything this country can to offer sanctuary to that mother?

The Prime Minister: First—I might say this in answer to a number of questions—my hon. Friend should not necessarily believe everything he reads in the papers. The position that the Government take is very clear: our prime concern must be the safety and security of Asia Bibi and her family, and we want to see a swift resolution of the situation. Obviously, there is a primary function for the courts and Government in Pakistan. The Prime Minister, Imran Khan, has publicly supported the Supreme Court and has promised to uphold the rule of law, while providing continued protection for Asia Bibi.

We could approach this in two ways. We could go out there and say something, just to show that the UK is doing that, or we could ask what is right for Asia Bibi. We are working with others in the international community and with the Pakistani Government to ensure that our prime aim—the safety and security of Asia Bibi and her family—is provided for.

Q12. [907894] **Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): This morning, in the Westminster Hall debate on the proposed plan for the Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service, the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service finally admitted, in relation to funding, that “Tyne and Wear has had a more challenging settlement than other fire authorities”. How will the Prime Minister right this wrong?

The Prime Minister: It sounds to me as if the hon. Lady has already raised her concerns in relation to this matter, with the debate in Westminster Hall, and we have—[*Interruption.*] Yes, we have been looking at the issue of fire authorities, and what we have seen over time is, actually, that sometimes plans are attempted to be put forward, on which money has been spent, which have not worked for fire authorities. It is important that we make sure that the level of protection and support that they provide is there, and obviously she has had a response from the Minister this morning.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): The Prime Minister will be aware that, in recent weeks, an unprecedented number of migrants—more than 100 migrants—have crossed the English channel to enter the United Kingdom in small unseaworthy craft. Does she agree that it is very important that Britain and France work together to find the people traffickers behind this, put a stop to them, bring them to justice and ensure that we invest more in our border security?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has raised a very important point, of which he is acutely aware as the Member for Dover. Earlier in the year, in our discussions with the French Government, we agreed that we could set up a co-ordination centre, which would enable the French and UK Governments and authorities to work together on exactly these sorts of issues. My right hon.

Friend the Home Secretary has ensured that that co-ordination centre has now been stood up—literally, in the last few days.

Q14. [907896] **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The liquidated company Home Energy and Lifestyle Management Systems used the UK Government’s green deal scheme to mis-sell to and defraud hundreds of my Renfrewshire constituents. HELMS owner, Robert Skillen, has recently emerged from hiding. While he is ultimately responsible and should face the consequences, no one expects to be scammed by a Government-backed deal. Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and step in and compensate the HELMS customers for the money stolen from them under a UK Government banner?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of the details of the case that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and perhaps it would be better if I were to write to him in response to his question.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): It is of great concern to my constituent Carol Law, a staunch Brexiteer, that her name has ended up on the database of another europe.org, the left-leaning remain campaign group. From this organisation, Carol this week received an unsolicited email, seemingly from the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), asking her to stop Brexit. Carol is a smart lady, however, and knows that our best years lie ahead outside the EU. Will the Prime Minister please take this opportunity to educate Opposition Members about general data protection regulation rules and ask them to remove Carol from any databases they are associated with?

The Prime Minister: I think that everybody needs to take care in relation to the names that they have on databases. The core point of what my hon. Friend was saying was to reveal the view, which a number of people have on the Labour Benches, that actually they should be trying to stop Brexit. I believe we should be delivering Brexit for the British people. As my hon. Friend believes—and, indeed, I concur with her—outside the European Union, there is a bright future ahead for this country. Our best days lie ahead of us.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): My constituent Sarah Rushton’s brother has been missing for over two years. Yesterday, I met her and Peter Lawrence, the father of Claudia Lawrence, who expressed their frustration that the Guardianship (Missing Persons) Act 2017 has yet to be implemented, despite receiving Royal Assent in April 2017, and is unlikely to take effect until July 2019. Will the Prime Minister assure me that there will be no further delays in the measures in the Act being fully implemented?

The Prime Minister: I will ensure that the Minister responsible will be in touch with the hon. Gentleman in relation to the enactment of those provisions.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): The Lords European Union Committee has stated:

“On the basis of the legal opinions we have considered we conclude that, as a matter of EU law, Article 50...allows the UK to leave the EU without being liable for outstanding financial obligations”.

The Prime Minister told me in Prime Minister's questions two weeks ago completely the opposite. Who is right: the Prime Minister or the Lords European Union Committee?

The Prime Minister: The Committee of the House of Lords that my hon. Friend has quoted—it was quoted by another hon. Friend after the statement I made on Monday—did indeed say that in its view there was no legal obligation. There is a different opinion on this, which is that there are legal obligations for this country when we leave the European Union in terms of financial payments. I believe, as I have said before, that this is a country that upholds its legal obligations.

Liz Kendall (Leicester West) (Lab): I do not think that I have ever heard a Minister say that their Government's plans would make our country poorer, as the Prime Minister's Chancellor did this morning. Is that what she came into politics for?

The Prime Minister: Let me be very clear that what the Chancellor made clear this morning is that the Brexit deal that delivers best for our jobs and for our economy will continue to see our economy grow. It is not a case of the deal making us poorer than we are today. Our economy will continue to grow, and that is what is clear from the analysis and from the Chancellor.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. May I say to the hon. Lady, who is perched, poised and about to pounce with a point of order, that ordinarily points of order come after urgent questions and statements? If there is some peculiarly compelling reason why the matter should be aired now, because it somehow flows from proceedings, I am happy to hear it, on the assumption that it is brief.

Rachel Reeves: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Have you been made aware of why the Chancellor is unable to respond to the urgent question? This is an incredibly important issue about the future of our country. He has found plenty of time to visit the television and radio studios this morning. He should be in this Chamber right now.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order, and I recognise that she chairs an important Select Committee of the House, but the short answer for her, and for the benefit of the House and others attending to our proceedings, is that who the Government field to respond to an urgent question that I have granted is exclusively a matter for the Government. I think that the hon. Lady knows that—I take her puckish grin as testimony that she is aware of the fact—but she has registered her disapproval with the force and alacrity that we have come to associate with her. Meanwhile, however, we will hear the urgent question and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will reply.

Leaving the EU: Economic Analysis

12.48 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's publication of the economic and fiscal analysis of various Brexit scenarios.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): Today the Government published the analysis of the economic and fiscal effects of leaving the European Union, honouring the commitment we made to the House. It is important to recognise that the analysis is not an economic forecast for the UK economy; it only considers potential economic impacts specific to EU exit, and it does not prejudice all future policy or wider economic developments. The analysis sets out how different scenarios affect GDP and the sectors and regions of the economy against today's arrangements with the European Union. Four different scenarios have been considered: a scenario based upon the July White Paper; a no-deal scenario; an average free trade area scenario; and a European economic area-type scenario. Given the spectrum of different outcomes, and ahead of the detailed negotiations on the legal text of the deal, the analysis builds in sensitivity with effectively the White Paper at one end and a hypothetical FTA at the other.

The analysis shows that the outcomes for the proposed future UK-EU relationship would deliver significantly higher economic output, about seven percentage points higher, than the no-deal scenario. The analysis shows that a no-deal scenario would result in lower economic activity in all sector groups of the economy compared to the White Paper scenario. The analysis also shows that in the no-deal scenario all nations and regions of the United Kingdom would have lower economic activity in the long run compared to the White Paper scenario, with Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland all being subject to a significant economic impact.

What the Government have published today shows that the deal on the table is the best deal. It honours the referendum and realises the opportunities of Brexit. [*Interruption.*] It is a deal that takes back control of our borders, our laws and our money. [*Interruption.*] Let me be very clear to the House and to those who say that the economic benefits of staying in the EU mean that we should overturn the result of the referendum: to do so would open up the country to even further division and turbulence, and undermine the trust placed by the British people in our democracy. What this House and our country face today is the opportunity presented by the deal: a deal that honours the result of the referendum and safeguards our economic future; or the alternative, the risk of no deal or indeed of no Brexit at all. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Somebody said something about "dishonest". No Member should accuse another Member of being dishonest in this Chamber. I am not quite sure who I heard, but that must not be repeated. This is a disagreement between right hon. and hon. Members, and colleagues must remember that.

John McDonnell: The Chancellor promised us that the House would have a detailed economic analysis of the options ahead of the meaningful vote on Brexit.

The least we could expect is that, instead of touring the broadcast studios, the Chancellor would be here himself to present an oral statement on the information.

Let us be clear. We are now in the ludicrous position of seeing an analysis produced today on the economic implications of Brexit, which is in fact largely an assessment of the Chequers proposals abandoned months ago. What the analysis produced by the Treasury today shows us is that if a no-deal scenario with no net EEA migration comes to pass—something the Government have recklessly, if incredibly, been threatening—we could see GDP almost 11% lower compared to today's arrangements. Under the hard Brexit some Government Back Benchers have been promoting, it would be 7% smaller. Only a Chancellor who talks about "little extras" for schools would talk about this kind of effect as being "a little smaller".

Can the Minister confirm that no deal is not an option the Government will allow to happen? Does the Minister agree that the one thing this document shows is that the deal on the table is even worse than the abandoned Chequers deal? Have the Government done any analysis whatsoever of the actual proposed backstop arrangements and will they be published in advance of the vote in a few days' time? What fiscal assumptions is the Department making about extending the transition period, given that there may be no limit to what the European Union could ask for in return for such an extension? To be frank, if the Minister's Government are not prepared to put jobs and the economy first in their Brexit negotiations, is it not time that they stepped aside and allowed Labour to negotiate that deal?

Mel Stride: Let me deal first with the point the right hon. Gentleman made about the Chancellor. The Chancellor is of course accountable to this House. He will be appearing before the Treasury Committee on Wednesday to give full account of the arrangements we are discussing today. Indeed, the Prime Minister herself will be appearing before the Liaison Committee.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the Chequers deal and the fact that analysis is being based around that in this paperwork. That is entirely appropriate given that, as he will know, the political declaration suggests a spectrum of possible outcomes for the arrangements. That is why we not only analyse the Chequers proposal, but have a sensitivity analysis around that proposal as well.

The right hon. Gentleman raises the issue of a no-deal scenario. It is the Labour party that is pushing us more in the direction of a potential no-deal scenario by—I have to say it—deciding for its own political reasons to object to the deal we have put forward. To be clear, that deal is good for safeguarding the economic future of our country and it delivers on the 2016 referendum, giving us control of our borders, our money, our laws and ensuring we protect the integrity of the United Kingdom, while allowing us to go out and make future trade deals. This Government are totally committed to achieving that.

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is not possible to leave a free trade area with our largest and most important wealthy customers and introduce tariff barriers, custom delays, regulatory divergences and delays at borders without

[Mr Kenneth Clarke]

making this country poorer than it otherwise would be? It is difficult to see how anybody who follows economic policy can argue the contrary while keeping a straight face. Can he reassure me that the withdrawal agreement that is being put before the House enables no change at all to be made to our economic and trading arrangements through March next year until we go into a transition period that can be extended as long as is necessary to introduce practically any economic arrangement for the future that we want? It is obvious to me that we should stay in the single market and the customs union. Can he reassure me that that is still a perfectly reasonable possibility?

Mel Stride: My right hon. and learned Friend raises a number of points. The paper does not duck the question of the economic impact of the proposed deal compared to the status quo—the relationship with the European Union as it persists today. It makes it very clear that it will be detrimental in the economic sense. That is extremely clear. But I would put it to him that the deal is the best for the economy going forward as part of a deal that also delivers on several other things, some of which are entirely non-economic, such as control of our borders and free movement.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Before and after the EU referendum, the Scottish National party said that leaving the EU would damage our economy. In December 2016, almost two years ago, the Scottish Government produced “Scotland’s Place in Europe”, our compromise position that makes it clear that, second only to staying in the EU, remaining in the single market and the customs union would be the best thing for Scotland’s economy and for the economy of the UK as a whole. The Prime Minister’s deal will cost every person in Scotland £1,600 compared to staying in the EU. The economy will grow more slowly. The agri-food sector will be particularly affected across all scenarios. Trade deals that we might strike will only increase GDP by a potential 0.2%. Public sector net borrowing will be higher. In what alternative reality is this a good deal?

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady is arguing to remain in the European Union. That would not respect the will of the British people as expressed in the referendum, the largest turnout in any electoral event in this country’s history. She talks about the imposition of trade barriers and the impact on the economy. There would be few impacts worse, I suggest, than Scotland becoming independent and having a customs barrier between ourselves and Scotland.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Treasury publish the average 25-year growth rate in the last 25 years before we joined the European Economic Community and the average 25-year growth rate since 1992, when we have been in the full single market? In Treasury terms, this will show a massive loss of income and output as a result of belonging to those things, so the sooner we get out, the better.

Mel Stride: My right hon. Friend seems to have already availed himself of precisely that information to make his point. What I can assure him is that Stephen Nickell,

formerly of the independent Office for Budget Responsibility, will, at the behest of the Treasury Committee, be looking at all the facts and figures and the model that we have employed in this respect. He will be given access to officials across all Departments to assist him in doing just that.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I inadvertently neglected to congratulate the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) on an important birthday on Monday, but I belatedly express the hope that he enjoyed himself, being fêted by family, friends and, as appropriate, his Select Committee—I call Mr Hilary Benn.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. There was nowhere I would rather have spent my birthday than in the House of Commons questioning the Prime Minister on the Brexit deal, and I am sure that the same is true of the Prime Minister. On today’s urgent question, the Government are of course unable to analyse the political declaration because no one has the faintest idea about what kind of economic relationship will result from it, so instead, they have chosen to model the Chequers plan—the facilitated customs arrangements and the common rulebook—which has already been explicitly rejected by the European Union, which is why we have ended up with a vague political declaration. What is the purpose of trying to rest the Government’s case about minimising economic damage to the country on an option that the EU has already told us that it will not agree to?

Mel Stride: I echo your congratulations, Mr Speaker, to the right hon. Gentleman on his very special day. In the case of the political declaration, the right hon. Gentleman will know that it does not give a specific outcome because that is to be negotiated as we go forward, as was always going to be the case. However, while the analysis that we are presenting today is anchored on the Chequers arrangements and the July White Paper, it of course provides a sensitivity analysis around that to reflect the fact that there is a spectrum of potential outcomes.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): The Treasury, the OBR and the Bank of England between them produce numerous forecasts every year. When was the last time that any of them got one right?

Mel Stride: I suspect that in the history of highly detailed, complicated economic forecasts with myriad variables, there is probably not one in the entire history of the planet that has been entirely right in every respect. However, that is not an argument that my right hon. Friend can deploy not to go out and do an honest, sensible appraisal of what the likely outcomes are going to mean, both fiscally and in terms of GDP, as we go forward.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): The Government have confirmed this morning what the independent National Institute for Economic and Social Research set out yesterday: relative to continued membership of the European Union, the country will be substantially poorer, with no Brexit dividend for the budget relative

to the position now. Is it not also the case that the Government's relatively optimistic forecasts are based on the assumption of a smooth and rapid transition to a trade deal, or an indefinite period in a transitional arrangement, and that the likely outcomes and scenarios are potentially a great deal worse?

Mel Stride: No. The right hon. Gentleman raised specifically the issue of a Brexit dividend, and the Chancellor has rightly always been very clear on that. There is uncertainty in the economy at the moment and this is one of the key reasons why, if we can agree a deal, get that deal to stick and get rid of that uncertainty, a huge level of investment will come to our shores and this will be a huge shot in the arm to the British economy.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): Let me start by saying that this economic analysis has been published at the behest of the Treasury Committee, but none of the three men called before me so far from the Government side is on that Select Committee. I say to the Minister that I was very clear in the letter that I wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 27 June, which is available on the parliament.uk website for any interested parties. I said:

"The long-term analysis should consider the economic and fiscal impact of... implementing the Withdrawal Agreement and the terms of the future framework".

It is clear, sadly, that that is not what has been published today. It may be the case that it is not possible, as we have heard, to model particularly those agreements and the future framework, but that should then be explained to the House out of respect for the House. This is only the first part of the economic analysis to be published. We will have the Bank of England's economic analysis at 4.30 pm and that of the Financial Conduct Authority, and then there will be various relevant witnesses, including the Chancellor, giving evidence to my Committee in the course of next week. So I say to hon. Members that, rather than leaping to conclusions about what is on the printed page today, we should all take the time to read it in detail—all 90 pages, and the technical amendment of over 70 pages—and the Bank of England's analysis, and we should listen to the evidence given next week, then listen to the debate, and then we will make our judgments on 11 December.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before the Financial Secretary responds, and I note what the right hon. Lady said, I just say to the House that by contrast with the experience of earlier periods, during and indeed throughout my tenure, it has been my overwhelming and almost invariable practice—[*Interruption.*]—as the sedentary nod of the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) testifies, to call everybody in urgent questions and statements. That did not use to happen. It almost always happens with me, so if people would just be a little bit patient, rather than everybody thinking, "I am more important than the other person," everybody will get in. I called the Father of the House and two Secretaries of State of some standing. [*Interruption.*] And the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) was a Secretary of State, but the Chair decides who to call and when, and I will always ensure that everybody gets a fair opportunity. It has to be that way. I have always treated the right hon. Lady with the very greatest of respect and I will always

do so. I will also try to equalise the gender balance, but I hope that people will understand when I say that there are limits to what the Chair can do. The Chair also depends on who is present and who is standing. I am doing my best and I always will.

Mel Stride: I think my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan) is entirely right in her exhortation to the House about the importance of making sure that we fully digest the two documents that are being brought forward—and indeed, as she suggests, the announcement that will be made by the Bank of England at 4.30 this afternoon—and that we in turn review very closely the evidence that the Chancellor and others give to the Treasury Committee. We do not want to make the kind of mistake that the Leader of the Opposition made when he dismissed our deal without even having read a word of it.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I cannot help feeling sorry for Government economists today, because not only have they had people in the House disparaging their work, but what is more, they seem to have been asked by the Government to do what appears to be a spin job. May I ask the Minister whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer even asked the Government Economic Service what model could appropriately be produced based on the political declaration about the future that we are going to have to vote on?

Mel Stride: What I can tell the hon. Lady is that this analysis has been carried out, for example, not solely by the Chancellor or the Treasury, but right across Whitehall. Every Government Department has been involved in that. No direction as to the detail or what the outcome of the analysis should be has been made by Ministers, and it is important that I go on the record in this urgent question to defend those officials who are not able to speak for themselves in these circumstances and say that the Government have absolute confidence in them and their integrity.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I am sure that my right hon. Friend recalls the wild inaccuracy of the Treasury's forecasts before the referendum—of a punishment Brexit and an increase in unemployment of 800,000—but is there not a major flaw in the document we have before us? Global trends have not been modelled, yet it is thought that 90% of future global economic growth will come from outside the European Union. Without thinking about that, this forecast is worthless.

Mel Stride: I would make two points to my hon. Friend. First, this is not a Treasury report, as such, but as I have just outlined, it has involved discussions right across the whole of the Government. Secondly, on future trade deals, he will find buried within the detail that in fact assumptions have been made about future trade deals with countries such as the United States, China and India.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): The analysis published by the Government today, while not entirely clear in its picture, does highlight the specific impact that a bad Brexit would have on the north-east region. Today's figures provide the modelling

[Catherine McKinnell]

for the north-east against a Chequers deal and an average free trade arrangement, but uses no deal as a base for that analysis. Can the Minister confirm today the impact on the economy of the north-east of a no deal and the Government's intended deal as compared with the status quo—remaining in the EU?

Mel Stride: As I identified earlier, a no deal, as compared to the Chequers deal and the sensitivity analysis around that, would see every region, country and sector of the UK economy disadvantaged as a consequence. As the hon. Lady will see from the analysis presented, the impact of a no deal would be particularly felt in the north-east. That is the case also with the west midlands and the east midlands, where manufacturing is particularly prevalent. The model also showed potential impacts on agriculture, with a strong impact in areas such as Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): As you know, Mr Speaker, the hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) and I tabled an amendment to the Finance Bill calling for the publication of precise modelling based on the status quo but to include the Government's political declaration. The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick)—he is my friend, and I am not by any means saying he has done anything dishonest—gave the following assurance at the Dispatch Box to this House, and as a result, the amendment was not pushed to the vote. Had it been, it would have been passed. *Hansard* records that my hon. Friend gave the following assurance to the House:

“The analysis will consider a modelled no-deal scenario, or World Trade Organisation terms; a modelled analysis of an FTA scenario; and a modelled analysis of the Government's proposed deal.”—[*Official Report*, 19 November 2018; Vol. 649, c. 661.]

At that time, it was the “proposed” deal, because it was before last weekend, when it became the political declaration. It is not the fault of my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, but it is somebody's fault, because a promise was made at the Dispatch Box and in private that led to a course of action that meant that an amendment was not put to the vote that would have been put to the vote and agreed. I would like to know, please, why that solemn promise has been broken.

Mel Stride: I have huge respect for my right hon. Friend, whom I count as a friend, but I gently say to her that I do not believe that any promises have been broken. We have come forward with an analysis of the deal, and that analysis, of necessity, is a spectrum of possible outcomes. The political declaration very clearly does not identify a specific end point, so the choice we are left with is taking a position on a particular set of circumstances—in this case, the Chequers deal, as set out in the July White Paper—and then doing a sensitivity analysis so that we capture the different scenarios in which the final deal could land, although that, as we know, is currently unknown because it is subject to detailed negotiation.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Minister has blown apart the Prime Minister's entire claim by admitting that he cannot do any kind of

assessment of the political declaration of the deal because, as he said and as it says in paragraph 28 of the political declaration, there is a spectrum of outcomes and controls. The trouble is that his assessment of that spectrum includes a huge range of possible outcomes for the growth of the economy, ranging from a 1% drop to a 7% drop. That is a substantial range. He is asking us to vote for this deal blindfolded, with no idea, and undermining our negotiating strategy in the process. Will he confirm that that is what he has just done?

Mel Stride: I am sorry to disappoint the right hon. Lady, but I will not confirm that, because, as I said in my last answer, the deal, as set out and elaborated upon in the political declaration, does indeed set out a spectrum of potential outcomes, so it is logical that it is that spectrum of potential outcomes that we should be modelling, and that is precisely what we have done.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): A few minutes ago, the Prime Minister twice regaled the House with a catalogue of the economic successes that this country is currently enjoying. That success is all the more remarkable when one recalls that prior to the referendum the Treasury solemnly warned that in the event of a leave vote the country would immediately enter recession. Given the historical shakiness of Treasury forecasting, is my right hon. Friend prepared to make not only the modelling but the working assumptions applied by the Treasury available to responsible third parties, such as economists of free trade, so that they may review them and see whether they agree?

Mel Stride: I can reassure my right hon. Friend that, as I outlined earlier, Stephen Nickell, formerly of the OBR—an independent body—will at the behest of the Treasury Select Committee have full access to all the information, data and methodology used to produce these impact estimates, and I can assure him that officials will co-operate fully.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): In 13 days, we in this House will vote on the future of our country, and yet the Government rushed into triggering article 50 and went recklessly into a general election without any timetabled plan for getting to 29 March, which is now the date. Will any information be made properly available to the House in the next 13 days to enable us to make a decision without being blindsided?

Mel Stride: I am slightly surprised by the hon. Lady's question, because that is the very purpose of the information we are discussing. That information has been set out in great detail. As my right hon. Friend the Chair of the Treasury Select Committee has exhorted, it is incumbent on us all, given the magnitude and importance of the decisions we are about to take, to go away and digest that information in great detail.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): The recession under the last Labour Government was the worst since the second world war and saw GDP fall by 7% and unemployment increase by 1 million. How would the effect of moving from a deal-based Brexit to a no-deal Brexit compare with that terrible outcome under the last Labour Government? Does my right hon. Friend

agree that, because modelling future differences in regulation are involved, the process of modelling Brexit is a fundamentally uncertain one and that we should be very cautious and understand that there will be inevitable uncertainty in any forecast?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend is absolutely right in his latter point about uncertainty. Of course, this is simply a set of estimated outcomes, and everybody in the House will look at it closely and form their own opinion upon it. The impacts of a no-deal Brexit are estimated within the papers, but he is absolutely right that what we inherited in 2010—the largest peacetime deficit in our history—is a very frightening comparison to contend with.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The Government, like a third-rate conjurer, hope that if they produce a range of examples for scenarios that are not going to happen, such as no deal or Chequers, somehow we will be taken in by it. Is it not about time the Government do what the House asks them to do, whether on legal advice publication or giving us the facts to make the decision, so that this House can take back control on behalf of the British people?

Mel Stride: We have done precisely what the House required us to do in setting out the estimated impacts of the deal, of an average free trade agreement, of an EEA-style scenario and, indeed, of a no deal. As for the hon. Lady's point about the legal advice, I know that the Attorney General will be making a statement to the House in due course.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Is not the truth that the range of economic forecasts published today show the importance of trying to secure the withdrawal agreement? When I look at my constituents, I see the small to medium-sized enterprise manufacturing base that employs so many people who feed into the supply chain to the big companies that export frictionlessly into the European Union. It is important that we honour the result of the referendum, but that we also do everything possible to ensure that we do not fall off the cliff edge. The figures published today show that that would be catastrophic. We can argue about the size of those figures, but one thing is clear: if we do not allow a proper withdrawal agreement to take place, there will be a catastrophic economic impact, and it is the responsibility of us in the House to make sure we do everything possible to avoid that.

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend's assertions lie at the heart of what we are all considering: the future of our country and the expressed will of the British people at the time of the referendum. What this deal—as opposed to no deal—will do is safeguard our economy and the jobs that we have created as a Government, ensure that we deliver on our pledge to take control of our borders, our money and our laws in order to protect the integrity of the United Kingdom, and enable us to go out as a globally facing nation and do deals with other countries around the world.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Government are treating both Parliament and the people with contempt. The economic analysis published today

is essentially worthless, because it does not model the Prime Minister's blindfold Brexit. We have just heard why that is: because there are not enough facts in there, and it is just a leap into the dark. Does the Minister accept that the British public deserve better than this? Does he accept that they deserve facts, and that they also deserve a say on those facts?

Mel Stride: I assume that the hon. Lady is referring to the suggested second referendum. As I said in my opening remarks, I think that that would be entirely the wrong route. The British people took a decision in 2016. At that time the hon. Lady and I were on the same side of the argument, but the difference between us is that I respect that democratic decision. It would not be appropriate to go back with what would be a politician's vote to seek a different outcome.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): There is no point in sugar-coating it: there is clearly a cost to Brexit. However, there would also be a democratic cost were we to ignore the will of the people as expressed in the referendum. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the House were to turn its back on a deal that minimises that cost and respects the will of the British people, we would plunge our economy into a period of great uncertainty, which would have huge costs and at the end of which the options would still be exactly the same?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The choice before the House is to go for a deal that will safeguard our economy for the future and deliver on the aspirations and the messages that we saw at the time of the referendum. To go into uncharted territory beyond this deal—which could potentially end in a no deal—would not, I suggest, be in the best interests of any of our constituents.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): The Chancellor said, very sensibly, on the radio this morning that if, or rather when, the Government's proposals were voted down by the House, the Government would have to consider all other options. If one of those options is the so-called pivot to Norway, may I say to the Minister, as someone who has voted for that in the past, that the ship has sailed? The only option left available to get us out of this mess is a people's vote.

Mel Stride: The right hon. Gentleman will have heard my response to the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) in respect of a people's vote. As for the so-called Norway option, that of course comes with single market membership, and would require us not to relinquish and absolve ourselves from free movement, which I believe is one of the essential things on which the electorate voted in 2016.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): When taking part in the debate on Scottish independence, I often saw how economic forecasts could be used to muddle the debate, and also to confuse constituents. Although I welcome the analysis—[*Interruption.*] Hang on; will Members just let me finish? I welcome the analysis that has been released today, but may I ask my right hon. Friend to release, as the tool in the analysis prescribes, further sensitivities that would allow us not only to see the difference between the assumptions in

[*Luke Graham*]

the Chequers deal and those in the political declaration—as assumptions can be clearly stated—but to see, in the context of what is said by many on the leave side of the argument, what potential upside, if any, we could gain from other trade deals with the United States, Australia or indeed China? That would help to inform our decision making.

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend has invited me to go into some of the technical detail of what has been put before the House this afternoon. Let me direct him to my earlier remarks about the work that Stephen Nickell will be doing. It will be very detailed and very forensic, and will deal with all the assumptions, including the trading assumptions to which my hon. Friend has referred. Of course, that information will in time—in a short time—be available to the House.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): However people vote, they expect the Government to put our national interest first. The deal on which we will vote in 13 days' time clearly does not do that, and we are now confronted with circumstances in which the Prime Minister and the Chancellor are expecting us to vote for a deal that they know—and we all know—means that our economy will grow more slowly, and we will have a smaller economy with fewer jobs and less investment. No one voted for that in the referendum in June 2016, so can the Minister understand why so few MPs are going to vote for this deal in 13 days' time?

Mel Stride: What the British people voted for in 2016 was this. They voted for a responsible Government to enter into robust negotiations with the European Union on behalf of the British people and secure a deal which safeguards our economy, the jobs and the economic future of all our constituents, but which also—critically—delivers on several other issues including an end to free movement, an end to the common fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy, control of our borders, not sending vast sums of money to the European Union, maintaining the integrity of the United Kingdom, and ensuring that we are able to go out and strike trade deals around the world as a global country. That is what we are delivering on.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I spluttered over my cornflakes this morning when I heard the Chancellor spinning away on television and radio about something that had not yet been announced to the House. May I gently say to the Minister that it would have been proper for the Chancellor to make a statement to the House, rather than the Minister's being dragged here by an urgent question?

The Government's forecasts before the referendum told us that after the referendum there would be massive unemployment, a recession and an emergency Budget. That was proved to be totally wrong, so why should anyone believe a Government forecast for years and years in advance? Is this not just another Project Fear?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend's question is predicated on the erroneous assumption that this is a Treasury forecast. It is not actually a forecast. It is a set of impact

assessments, and it is not a Treasury document, but one that has been brought together through intensive work across Government.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) has a particularly beguiling approach to seeking to be called, which is to show that she has a bigger and more enthusiastic smile than any other Member of the House.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): We can all do beguiling.

Mr Speaker: We can all do beguiling, but—well, we will leave it there. Lucy Powell.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I always thought that my teeth were one of my better features.

Chris Bryant: That's why you take them out so often. [*Laughter.*]

Lucy Powell: Yes!

I suspect that the fairly candid approach today has actually hardened opinion on both sides of the debate. Given that, and given that the only really clear piece of advice that we get from this analysis is the catastrophic impact of a no deal, what action are the Government taking, legally and in terms of parliamentary procedure, to ensure that there will not be a no deal?

Mel Stride: The Government have taken a large number of actions, over thousands of hours of negotiation with the EU, to ensure that we do not have a no deal. The history of these negotiations is clear. We were told many months ago that we could not possibly arrive at a point at which we agreed the phase 1 issues, and we did just that. We were told that we were never going to agree an implementation period, and we did just that. We were also told that we would never agree a deal with the EU that we could bring back to the House, and we have done just that. The mission of this Government is to work tirelessly, day in day out, to ensure that we have the right deal for our people.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): As a member of the Treasury Committee, may I put on record, Mr Speaker, that you do indeed get in every colleague in an urgent question and statement, and that, in the Chair, you have, in my experience, been more committed to fairness, the rule of law and natural justice than some other Members of this House?

The Treasury Committee will look at the backstop and the risks of entering the backstop, but I cannot see the modelling for the backstop in this document. Can the Financial Secretary tell me where it is, and if it is not in this document, can it be provided before the Chancellor appears before the Treasury Committee so we can fully assess this deal and the risks—and economic risks—of the backstop?

Mel Stride: As my hon. Friend will know, our position on the backstop is extremely clear: we do not envisage requiring the backstop. We anticipate a deal by the end

of 2020, which is the end of the implementation period. There are alternatives to the backstop, as he will know, including a short-term extension to the implementation period, and of course in the event of our actually ending up in the backstop there is a mechanism through the Joint Committee and independent arbitration to pursue an exit from it. But we do not anticipate using the backstop.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Ah, yes, the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie); he is a patient and laid-back fellow.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Speaker—I think.

On reflection, it was probably quite wise of the Chancellor not to come here to give this statement. He definitely owes the junior Minister a stiff drink afterwards, because he is not waving, but drowning, especially as in this dodgy prospectus he has essentially admitted that we will not know on what free trade agreement the country is being asked to vote on 11 December. Does he not realise that the reason so many Members will not buy the dodgy sales pitch he is peddling today is that nobody is convinced about this Brexit lottery and just being told “Have faith, keep your fingers crossed, go with us in this giant leap in the dark”?

Mel Stride: It is not a giant leap in the dark to have a political declaration that makes clear that the deal that both sides will pursue in good faith will have at its heart a deep free trade agreement between ourselves and the EU27 with no tariffs, no quotas, no additional charges and so on, and will give us an end to free movement, end our sending vast sums of money to the EU and see us free to go out and do deals with other countries around the world.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): We can trade predictions until we are either blue or red in the face, but the common-sense folk in the country know that as we leave the EU there are bound to be issues that need to be mitigated. On behalf of my constituents, I just seek this one, hopefully simple, assurance: that the Treasury has the resolve, the agility and the flexibility to address those issues as, when, or if they occur.

Mel Stride: I think I can keep my answer fairly short and say to my hon. Friend that we do indeed have precisely the resolve that he seeks.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): The Chancellor said this morning:

“There will be a cost to leaving the European Union, because it makes our trade less fluid and it cuts us from an important export market. It creates some level of barriers.”

In another interview, the Chancellor agreed with the interviewer’s analysis that every scenario under which we leave will be detrimental to our country’s GDP. Constituents of mine have already been in touch this morning appalled by these admissions from Government. Why does the Minister believe democracy was suspended two and a half years ago, and why will he not ask the country if this is actually what people really want?

Mel Stride: I gave my reasons earlier on the question of the second referendum: the country took a decision in June 2016, in the highest turnout of any electoral event in our history, and they decided that we should leave the EU. It was then incumbent upon us as a responsible Government to deliver on that decision; to us, that has meant that we should safeguard our economy—and this deal does that—but critically also deliver on a number of the other issues, which I have outlined at length in this urgent question, to make sure we deliver all those things for the British people.

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister says that the report will draw a comparison between current arrangements and various unspecified alternatives. Current arrangements in Liverpool have turned Liverpool’s fortunes around and the EU has been pivotal in Liverpool’s regeneration. We simply do not know what the Government proposals in the long term actually mean; we do not know what they are as they are merely speculative. So how will the Government make an assessment of the impact of Brexit on Liverpool? How far will this undermine its current success?

Mel Stride: Within the papers we have produced today there are regional impact assessments, including for the hon. Lady’s part of the country, of the various possible outcomes. The direction of travel that this Government are taking is to make sure we have as frictionless arrangements as possible with the EU27 going forward so that just-in-time delivery exports and imports can flow freely; indeed, that was at the heart of the July White Paper model. The hon. Lady will also know that at the heart of the political declaration is a no tariff, no quota, free trade arrangement. All those things will be important to ensuring we protect the jobs of her constituents.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): This is totally unacceptable. Had amendment 14 to the Finance (No. 3) Bill been put to the vote last week, it would have passed and it would have required the Government to provide a model with remain as the baseline against their proposed withdrawal agreement. On the basis of promises made at the Dispatch Box, we did not press it to a vote. The Minister has denied that those assurances were given, and I do not want to do this but I am going to read what the Exchequer Secretary said to me and the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry): “I will explain at the Dispatch Box that we will look at three scenarios: WTO, FTA and the Government’s proposed deal.” There is no doubt about the promise that was made to us, in return for which we agreed not to press amendment 14 to a vote. Can the Financial Secretary tell me why I should not think that the right hon. Member for Broxtowe and I have not been misled, and does this analysis not prove the overriding point that the best deal on offer is the one we have now, which is why we need a people’s vote on this issue to settle it?

Mel Stride: What the Exchequer Secretary said at the Dispatch Box was right, and these reports deliver on exactly what he said. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman gives me a moment, I will try to explain the answer to his charge. First, he sought a comparison with the baseline, as he termed it. The baseline comparison is there: it is the status quo—it is our arrangement with

[*Mel Stride*]

the EU27 that we have at the moment as a member of the EU. He then suggests that we did not make a comparison of the deal with that, but many Labour Members have said, “We don’t know exactly what the deal is and we want to know what it is now.” We do not know what the deal is because the political declaration—understandably, given that we have a negotiation now to go through—sets out the parameters and the spectrum of potential outcomes. Therefore, in order to fulfil the obligation the Exchequer Secretary made at this Dispatch Box, we have made just that comparison—a comparison of the Chequers arrangement, with a sensitivity around that, with the base case. That is exactly what the Exchequer Secretary said we would come forward with.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): It is probably a gross understatement to say that economic forecasts have a very poor record. Since the referendum, all the forecasts have indicated that we should now be in the midst of a deep economic recession, yet the Government are boasting—and have real-time evidence—that we are riding the crest of the economic wave. In the Minister’s initial response, he said that this document was only about the potential fiscal impacts. He also said that it did not anticipate future policies, that it was based on a hypothetical free trade arrangement, and that some of the effects would be felt only in the long run, which of course is very uncertain. Can he understand why many of us in the House do not believe that it is worth the paper it is written on? This is certainly not the basis on which we should make a judgment on whether to vote for a flawed and deeply damaging deal.

Mel Stride: These papers put forward an honest appraisal of the estimated impacts of the different scenarios that we have been discussing this afternoon. The right hon. Gentleman makes a more general point about the inexactitude of economic forecasting, and he is right. We have a whole slew of variables, and we are looking at casting 15 years beyond the end of the implementation period—in other words, to 2034–35—which is quite a challenge. However, that is not the same as saying that we have not taken an honest and robust approach to this task. We have done that, and we have gone further. At the behest of the Treasury Committee, we have said that we will have an expert to go through all the details of the analysis, with access to all the officials across all the Departments involved, and that that information will in turn be made available.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Government’s conduct in this matter has been appalling. There is only one clear message that the public should hear from this: Brexit makes you poorer. Every scenario, including the European Economic Area scenario that many of us put forward as the least worst option, will make people poorer. Even though the Treasury—or the Government, or whoever the Minister is trying to claim it is—has not modelled this scenario, the National Institute of Economic and Social Research has modelled the Government’s deal, and that modelling also shows that we will be poorer. So why will the Government not simply agree to take this back to the people and let them make the choice in a people’s vote?

Mel Stride: Given that this is about the fifth time that I have been asked that specific question, I hope you will forgive me, Mr Speaker, if I refer the hon. Gentleman to my previous answers.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): If the Prime Minister will not rule out no deal for sound economic reasons, will the Minister do so for vital health reasons? Is he aware that, according to specialist cancer charities, patients are already scaling back on their doses and stockpiling medicines because of fears over the prospect of no deal? Why will the Government not deal with their concerns and rule out the prospect of no deal now so that those patients can have the reassurance they need?

Mel Stride: It will be for Parliament ultimately to decide whether the Government’s deal prevails. I think that the right hon. Gentleman and I are on the same side here, because I believe that the prospect of a no deal is deeply unattractive—notwithstanding the fact that we are making extensive preparations for no deal—partly for the reasons he has identified. We want a deal. We want this deal. We want a deal that is good for our country, and we want to avoid the very situations that he has elaborated on.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): I don’t know about you, Mr Speaker, but I remember this Government lecturing Labour Members for years about the problems of saddling future generations with borrowing and debt. The Brexit deal that the Minister proposes is modelled in this bogus paper. Will he confirm that it states on page 76 that we will be borrowing an extra £37.5 billion by 2035 as a result of this deal?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are figures of that nature in this report, because it is an honest and open report about the implications of all the possible outcomes. However, we have to compare that with no deal, or with the EEA or an average FTA deal. We have negotiated with the European Union and we have to deal with politics not just as perpetual opposition but as the art of the possible and the art of doing a deal that will be good for this country, safeguard our economy and deliver on those things that the referendum result told us in 2016.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): The trouble with the Government being in denial is that they just keep on denying that they are in denial until they go blue in the face. What we have learned today is that this Minister cannot read the writing on the wall, even when he has written it himself. The truth of the matter, when we boil this all down, is that the country will have to pay a price if Brexit goes ahead, and the people who will have to pay the most are the poorest in the land—my constituents. Should they not have the right to a final say on this?

Mel Stride: This is now the sixth or seventh time that I have been asked whether we should have a second referendum. I shall just reiterate what I have said on each previous occasion. As the hon. Gentleman will know, we had a vote in 2016 and it had the largest turnout of any electoral event in this country’s history—[*Interruption.*] He rolls his eyes, but I think that fact is significant. It would be a betrayal of the will of the

British people to now go out and say, “We didn’t actually like the answer you gave the first time, so how about a different answer this time?”

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Chancellor said on the radio this morning that the Prime Minister’s deal—he said the Prime Minister’s deal, not Chequers—would lead to a smaller economy than at present. Will the Government therefore commit to publishing the economic analysis behind what the Chancellor said this morning? Does the Minister not think it odd and wrong for the Government to ask us to vote for a deal that will make the economy smaller and people worse off?

Mel Stride: This deal protects the economy over and above the other options and possible outcomes, which is what this House wanted us to assess. We have done that, and this deal is clearly the best option on the table economically. It also delivers on the other elements, including the non-economic ones, that are important to people up and down the country, including intra-EU migration.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is clear that Brexit makes people poorer. As chair of the all-party parliamentary group for disability, I have been inundated by correspondence from concerned people with disabilities up and down the country. What will the impact be for people with disabilities? Will an equalities impact assessment be undertaken? Given that many of those people are already living on a shoestring and could become poorer, what safeguards will the Government put in place?

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady asks specifically about those with disabilities. This Government have an outstanding record in that respect. We spend £50 billion—*[Interruption.]* We spend £50 billion on those with disabilities and long-term health conditions. The critical point here is that the only reason we can provide that support is because of our effective, responsible stewardship of the economy. The responsible thing to do for the economy now, in order to protect just the constituents to whom she refers, is to ensure that this deal prevails, that we get economic certainty behind us and that we see the economy safeguarded, improving and growing into the future.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The 90-page economic analysis repeatedly cites the importance of trade to the north-east, and the significant negative impact of no deal. Will the Minister confirm that, because of our manufacturing strengths, our exports and our integrated pan-European supply chain—which, regardless of claims by the European Research Group, cannot be replaced by deals with Australia, America or China—the only deal that could possibly work for jobs in the north-east is permanent membership of a European customs union?

Mel Stride: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to identify and characterise the businesses in her constituency in that way. They are deeply connected through supply chains to the European continent. That lies right at the heart of the political declaration and of our commitment to having the most frictionless trade possible and having

no barriers, quotas or additional charges involved in that aspect of the relationship. I would say to her, respectfully, that she cannot view this deal in a vacuum. She has to consider it in the context of the alternatives. There is a danger, as she will recognise, that if we end up in no-deal territory, all the very things she fears may come to pass. It is really important for all of us across the House who have manufacturing businesses in our constituencies to stand up for them and support this deal.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Minister has been at pains to make it clear that he is speaking to a Government-wide document, so may I ask him about an aspect of Government policy that will be material to the economic outcome of whatever deal the Government bring forward—that is, policy in relation to migration? Despite promises of an immigration White Paper, last year through to this summer, it is still not in front of us. Will the Minister guarantee that we will have that White Paper, clarity about the Government’s immigration policy choices and a proper economic analysis of their impact, in time for the vote on 11 December?

Mel Stride: We will of course come forward with further information about the policies that we intend to pursue in the area that the hon. Lady raises, but I point her to the fact that within the analysis being presented today, there is of course an analysis on both a “no net migration” basis between ourselves and those based in the European economic area, compared with the free movement that we have today. So that is actually factored into the analysis that we are reviewing now.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): The Chancellor admitted this morning that any Brexit deal will make the British economy and the British people worse off. Does the Minister agree with him?

Mel Stride: What matters now is that we support this deal, to support the economy. The analysis clearly shows that compared with the other options, particularly no deal, it is by far preferable, in terms of the economics and the impact on the economy, to support this deal.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Every assessment that the Government have published this morning shows Wales being worse off. I will not burden the Minister with yet another question about a people’s vote, but can he confirm from the Dispatch Box that in the entirely hypothetical case that we were to stay in the European Union, Wales would be not worse off but better off?

Mel Stride: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman’s question is predicated on a train that has left the station, because we are leaving the European Union on 29 March—we are going to honour the will of the British people as expressed in June 2016—but I can reassure him that of the various scenarios that these papers review, this Government’s hard-won deal with the European Union is by far the best of all the alternatives for his constituents.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): I should say, with a background in local government, that had our cabinet been expected to make such an important decision without any financial information

[Jim McMahon]

and without the legal advice being made available to the decision makers, the council would be in special measures by now. Let me just put the Government on warning: Members of this House will not accept this as fulfilling their responsibility when casting such important decisions. Does the Treasury accept that part of the reason why the economic shock will be felt in our regions is the chronic under-investment and the stubbornness, through austerity, in hitting those economies right at the heart of their communities?

Mel Stride: No. If the House agrees to this deal, and we proceed to get a deal with the European Union that does all the things that I have many times in response to this urgent question outlined to Members, it will provide confidence. It will provide further investment. It will support jobs. It will seek growth. It will see unemployment, which is already at a 45-year low, nice and low, where we want it to be. So I would urge the hon. Gentleman to support the deal and to do so on behalf of his constituents.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): Today, I am absolutely incandescent, because it is insulting to my constituents that that piece of paper that the Minister has produced today is going to make them poorer. The Minister has not had the decency to compare the current situation with what it would be like to remain in the EU. Welsh farming unions are being told that they have to accept the deal because otherwise there will be no deal. That is scaremongering—absolute scaremongering. I am fed up with people coming to me and telling me to back the withdrawal agreement. I will not back something that makes my constituents, my family and everybody else poorer. I am an unapologetic people's campaigner; I want a people's vote. This spin—what the Minister is saying and what the Government are saying to the people—is absolutely wrong. The Government are misleading them, and I am angry. Everybody is angry. We want a people's vote.

Mel Stride: A second referendum would be deeply divisive for our country. It would send a signal—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Lady has had her say. She and I campaigned on the same side in the referendum. I wanted us to stay in the European Union, but the difference between us is that I am a democrat, and I believe that when we have a referendum, which was

widely debated over a long period, and a result is given, on the highest turnout of any electoral contest in our country, that result must be respected.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): UK Government analysis in 2014 said that Scottish independence would cost the economy 0.4% to 1%, but HM Treasury analysis today says Brexit will hit the UK economy by 3.9%. With apologies to my former colleague Callum McCaig, the previous Member for Aberdeen South, does the Financial Secretary to the Treasury honestly believe that the UK can afford to be independent?

Mel Stride: Yes is the answer. We have a bright future ahead of us. We have the opportunity, with this deal, to go out and do other deals around the world with other countries. The report makes specific reference, for example, to the United States, China, India and other important trading nations. We know that those parts of the world outside the European Union are growing far more strongly than countries within the bloc of the EU27, so I am optimistic about the future of my country.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am not going to draw any conclusions, Mr Speaker, on your assessment of how big or beguiling any of my attributes might be, because they obviously have not been enough to catch your eye until now. I draw the Minister's attention to footnote 42 of the analysis, which states:

"For the purposes of EU exit modelling, the UK is assumed to pursue successful trade negotiations with the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Brunei, China, India...Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay...Uruguay",

United Arab Emirates,

"Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain".

In the real universe, in which none of those deals is fully in place by the end of the transition period, how much worse than the Government's own grim forecasts will the economic impact of Brexit really be?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman is questioning some of the assumptions within a very complicated model, and as he has identified, the assumptions include that free trade agreements will be entered into with a variety of other countries. It is incumbent on him, if that is an area of the model that he wishes to stress-test particularly forensically, to look further into it, to look at the work that I have already outlined to the House will be carried out independently on behalf of the Treasury Committee, to question Ministers on that specific issue as he sees fit and to proceed in that manner.

Points of Order

1.58 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will come to the hon. Lady, but I think I will take the Opposition Front Bencher first.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I seek your advice? The Financial Secretary to the Treasury failed to answer adequately the questions and assertions from the right hon. Members for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) and for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), among others, specifically on a missing scenario based on Britain's current deal. How can I get clarity, therefore, on the content of footnote 1 on page 4 of the executive summary, which says:

"The four scenarios, and the policy assumptions underpinning them, were approved by ministers?"

In that respect, were there other scenarios, including, for example, the scenario on the current deal, specifically ruled out by Ministers notwithstanding the advice of Treasury advisers and advisers from other Departments, as the Minister put it, for the sake of comprehensibility?

Mr Speaker: I always seek to be helpful to Members with points of order, although I hope the hon. Gentleman will not take offence if I say that his intervention just now had many distinguishing features, but that of being a point of order was unfortunately not one of them. He seems to me to be raising a question that he would have liked to ask if he had had the opportunity to do so and that could have been raised by the shadow Chancellor if he had chosen to do so, but he did not. [*Interruption.*] The shadow Chancellor is signalling that it is a response to what has since been said, which is not an unreasonable point. I do not think that I can procure an answer for him now if a Minister does not wish to rise to his feet and stand at the Dispatch Box.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: If the Financial Secretary wants to be helpful and courteous to the House, as he ordinarily is, by leaping to his feet to seek to respond to the point, he is welcome to do so. I am grateful to him for his co-operation.

Mel Stride: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. With respect to the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), and I do respect him, in my responses to the various questions I was asked this afternoon, I made it very clear that with the report we have, indeed, responded in the way that was required. We have benchmarked the deal—expressed as a potential range of different outcomes, which he will know is exactly how the deal is expressed within the political declaration—against the status quo, our current relationship with the EU27.

Mr Speaker: We are grateful to the Minister for that. What I would say to the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) is that it is perfectly possible for this matter to be further aired in correspondence, and I have a hunch that it might well be—[*Interruption*—]—as we speak. Moreover, it is even possible for the matter to be aired

by the alternative route of questions, and I have a physical image in my mind now of one or other of the two relevant parties on the Opposition Front Bench beetling towards the Table Office to table the said questions. Those routes—correspondence and written questions—are not mutually exclusive. I hope that is helpful.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am saving up the hon. Lady. It would be a pity to squander her at too early a stage of our proceedings.

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On 13 November, this House unanimously passed a motion on an Humble Address concerning the legal advice provided by the Attorney General to Cabinet on the terms of the draft withdrawal agreement. I made it clear in that debate that the motion requires

"the publication of the final"—

and full—

"advice provided by the Attorney General to the Cabinet concerning the terms of any withdrawal agreement...this to be made available to all MPs...it should be made available after any withdrawal agreement is reached with the EU, but in good time to allow proper consideration before MPs are asked to vote on the deal."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 2018; Vol. 649, c. 192.]

It was on those terms that the motion was passed, unopposed by the Government.

Upon your advice being sought at the end of that debate, Mr Speaker, you said that

"the motion is effective—I have been advised thus. It is not just an expression of the opinion of the House; it is an expression of the will of the House that certain documents should be provided to it."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 2018; Vol. 649, c. 236.]

I understand from today's written ministerial statement that an oral statement will be made to the House on 3 December by the Attorney General, but I am deeply concerned by the comments from the Chancellor this morning and from the Prime Minister on the Floor of the House that the Government do not intend to comply with this motion in full and will, instead, publish only a position paper summarising the Attorney General's advice. I am now seeking your advice, Mr Speaker, on what further steps I can take to ensure the Government comply with the motion approved by this House and provide this advice in full and in time to inform the meaningful vote.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of his intention to raise this point of order. He raises a very important matter, and I understand from the written ministerial statement that a document setting out "the Government's legal position" will be published on Monday—described by the Prime Minister as a "full, reasoned position statement".

I must be careful not to prejudge, but if the right hon. and learned Gentleman believes that he already knows enough to be sure that Ministers are not complying with the Humble Address, he is free to write to me, as early as he likes, to suggest that the House has seen, or is about to be subject to, a contempt and to seek precedence for a motion to deal with it. It will be for me

[Mr Speaker]

to decide, and I will not linger, whether there is an arguable case that a contempt has been committed, and therefore whether an appropriate motion should be put urgently before the House.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I concur entirely with what has been said by the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer). The view he has expressed is, I think, felt widely across all parties in this House, and I really do hope that the motion that was passed will be delivered in full, because on the day of that debate we made it very clear where we stand, and we expect the Government to respond in full to the will of the House.

Mr Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what he has said to me and to the House. To what he has said there is really nothing substantive that I need to add. All I would say to him is that, on the basis of what he has said, it is open to him also to write to me on this matter.

Caroline Lucas *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I apologise for holding the hon. Lady back, but I had a sense that those points of order were going to relate to each other. Her point of order is on a different and unrelated matter, and I look forward to hearing it.

Caroline Lucas: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Earlier today, the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) named both the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and me in her question to the Prime Minister, claiming that we were somehow complicit with the group Another Europe is Possible in terms of its misuse of data. I ask the hon. Member for Morley and Outwood, through you, to correct the parliamentary record. Another Europe is Possible is 100% compliant with the general data protection regulation. It turns out that her constituent took action via the group's website, and the communication she has had subsequently has been in line with the opt-in preferences that she actively expressed on that website.

Further, Mr Speaker, will you indicate what action could be taken if it were to be found that the Prime Minister inadvertently misled the House during Prime Minister's questions when she replied to the Leader of the Opposition, "This analysis does not show that we will be poorer in the future than we are today... No, it does not. It shows that we will be better off with this deal"? I think the ministerial code suggests that, if it were the case that she inadvertently misled the House, she should be able to come back to the Chamber to make a statement.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order, and I thank her for it. I think, however, that she may be seeking to continue the argument. All I would say is that the content of an hon. Member's remarks is a matter for that hon. Member. I note what the hon. Lady has said, and it will now be reproduced in the *Official Report*, about the circumstances, and Members and others will form their own judgment of that.

In the event that anybody has inadvertently misled the House, it is incumbent on that Member, whoever he or she is, to take the opportunity to correct the record. I can assure the hon. Lady that she will have plenty of opportunity to pursue these matters in the days ahead.

I would like to leave it there at present. I am responding almost on the hoof to what the hon. Lady has said. [Interruption.] She is looking slightly quizzical and, because I am in a generous mood, and I think it is right to be generous—[Interruption.] The Clerk is implying that I should not be generous. [Laughter.] He is a very generous-spirited person, but he is implying perhaps that I should not be generous. If the hon. Lady wishes to raise a further point of order, I will hear it, although I offer no guarantee that I will reply to it to her satisfaction.

Caroline Lucas: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Thank you for your generosity. I simply express my confusion, because I genuinely thought that is what the ministerial code suggests. Were the Prime Minister to be demonstrably shown to have inadvertently misled the House by claiming something that is not the case—we know it is not the case—I am surprised there is not some way to ask her to come back to the Chamber to formally make that correction, rather than simply allowing it to sit on the parliamentary record.

Mr Speaker: The difficulty is that the ministerial code is the code under which, if I understand this correctly, the hon. Lady is seeking redress or correction. I am not the arbiter of the ministerial code—as she will know, the Prime Minister is its arbiter. In these circumstances, it is very difficult for me to say anything beyond what I have said. If the hon. Lady feels genuinely strongly that an effective injustice, albeit inadvertent, has been committed, I strongly advise her to raise this matter in correspondence with the Prime Minister in such a fashion as she sees fit. The hon. Lady can raise it in private correspondence or she can publicise the correspondence if she so wishes and seek to extract the outcome that she thinks is appropriate in this case. I repeat that if an error has been made, an error should be corrected. It is in that sense as simple and incontestable as that, but I hope people will understand when I say that it is not for the Chair to judge whether an error has or has not been made. I have set out what the circumstances are or what situations should apply in the event of an inadvertently misleading statement. I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order and for her patience.

Fire Safety (Leasehold Properties)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

2.11 pm

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require freeholders of certain properties that have failed fire safety tests to carry out remedial work; to make provision for sanctions for such freeholders who fail to carry out such work; to ensure that leaseholders are not held liable for the costs of such work; to make provision for a loan scheme to assist freeholders in carrying out such work; and for connected purposes.

Few rights are as basic or as essential as the right to a decent and safe home. Everyone should be able to go to sleep at night knowing that they and their families are safe, but in June 2017 we saw the shocking consequences of what happens when that right is not guaranteed. The Grenfell Tower disaster showed beyond all doubt that there can be no complacency on fire safety. The tragedy is not simply that this was recognised only after the fire, but that there had been warnings. The inquest into the 2009 Lakanal House fire warned that proper fire safety checks could have saved lives, but the action that was needed was not taken.

The Hackitt review of building regulations and fire safety, launched after the Grenfell Tower fire, found that the regulatory system was “unfit for purpose”. It found that there is no clarity about responsibilities and a lack of competence at assessing fire risk. It found that there is inadequate means of compliance assurance, and inadequate deterrence or redress for non-compliance. Crucially, it found that residents’ concerns about fire safety risks are not properly heard. It spoke to the neglect of fire safety concerns by successive Governments. Instead of rigorous processes and high standards, a system had developed where corners were cut, costs were reduced and self-regulation was assumed.

Although it is now recognised how wrong this approach is, its consequences are not all behind us. As of last month, 457 residential blocks and public buildings over 18 metres in height have been found to have ACM—aluminium composite material—cladding, the type of cladding that was applied to Grenfell Tower. Of these, 410 are unlikely to meet building regulations, with as many as eight of those being in my constituency of Battersea. It is now widely recognised that this is not good enough and that fire safety remedial work is needed. Although the Government have created a fund for social landlords to carry out fire safety remedial work, the question of costs at private leasehold blocks has been left unanswered. With nearly 300 private residential blocks across the country, this is a major issue.

The costs involved are great, with fire safety remedial work at some blocks expected to cost as much as £40 million, meaning costs per apartment of as high as £40,000. Leaseholders have been told that they may be expected to pay these eye-watering costs. That is the situation facing leaseholders in Sesame Apartments, a block in my constituency. Residents of the block contacted me last year because they were concerned not just that their block was not fire safe, but that they may be held liable for costs of remedial work. They had discovered that their building has ACM cladding, after a fire in the block revealed that compartmentalisation had failed.

A “waking-watch” system was put in place, at the cost of thousands of pounds per week—to date, the cost has been nearly £1 million, while replacing the cladding is expected to cost £2 million. In total, the costs per flat approximate to between £30,000 and £40,000.

I have met residents on multiple occasions, in constituency surgeries and in Parliament. I have written to Secretaries of State and Housing Ministers, but still, after a year, residents are living in fear that these colossal costs will be passed on to them, and that is having a serious impact on their lives. One resident has told me of the “heart-break” of money they had saved for IVF treatment now needing to be set aside in case these costs are passed on to them. Another young woman told me that her pride at getting a foot on the housing ladder was dashed when she found out that her 25% shared ownership may make her liable for 100% of the costs. Others tell me that they cannot move because the property value has plummeted because of the risks of these costs.

A similar situation confronts leaseholders across the country. Each case has its differences, but we see an unmistakable pattern: residents look on while a group of opaque freeholders, managing agents, developers and insurers fight over the question of liability, all determined to protect their interests and all using their considerable financial resources to argue their case. Developers argue that they built properties to building standards, so they cannot be liable. Insurers argue that the fire safety failures do not break warranty claims, so they cannot be liable. Freeholders point to “sweeping-up” clauses, that can allow them to pass on costs to leaseholders, so they cannot be liable either. Unlike leaseholders, these people each have teams of lawyers to make their case.

Against that, leaseholders, who are ordinary people—teachers, nurses, lawyers, doctors—face the prospect of their lives being burdened with tens of thousands of pounds of costs. These are costs that many could not ever imagine affording. In this fight, they must do it themselves, using their spare time to defend their futures. Whereas freeholders, developers and insurers argue their case, one party is unambiguous in their innocence—the leaseholders, who are in no way responsible for fire safety failures and who have only suffered because of them. While they argue their case, leaseholders tell me how powerless they feel, and how they feel like David, confronted by Goliath. As these arguments rage on, month after month, leaseholders know that the costs are piling up, and that their homes remain unsafe and their blocks remain wrapped in unsafe cladding.

We know that in some cases developers have stepped in to pay the costs, for example, at Citiscape in Croydon. In other cases, such as that of New Capital Quay in Greenwich, the insurers have accepted liability. But leaseholders in hundreds of other blocks have not been so lucky. They remain at risk of devastating costs and uncertainty. When they are being let down by the system, when they are being asked to pay huge costs they are not responsible for, it is the Government’s duty to remedy these ills and to right this wrong. From the beginning, the Government have said that leaseholders should not be held liable for these costs and that “morally” the freeholders should pick up the tab. Just recently, in response to a parliamentary question, the Minister for Housing went so far as to say that the private sector must,

[Marsha De Cordova]

“fund the measures necessary to ensure the safety of residents and must do all they can to protect leaseholders from additional costs.”

But leaseholders need more than just words; they need action.

The Bill would give the Government the opportunity to do what is right. It would end uncertainty and the fear of ongoing fire-safety failures by requiring freeholders to carry out fire-safety remedial work. It would enforce the requirement through sanctions for freeholders who fail to act. It would create a loan scheme to assist freeholders in the carrying out of the work, which would ensure that costs would not be passed on to leaseholders. The Bill would end the year-long nightmare that many leaseholders have suffered. It would end their fear of living in unsafe buildings and ensure that those who are in no way at fault for these failures are not held liable for them. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Marsha De Cordova, Janet Daby, Emma Dent Coad, Preet Kaur Gill, Karen Lee, Thelma Walker, Rosie Duffield, Lloyd Russell-Moyle, Eleanor Smith, Hugh Gaffney, Anneliese Dodds and Chris Williamson present the Bill.

Marsha De Cordova accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 January, and to be printed (Bill 298).

OFFENSIVE WEAPONS BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

Ordered,

That the Order of 27 June 2018 (Offensive Weapons Bill (Programme)) be varied as follows:

- (1) Paragraphs (4) and (5) of the Order shall be omitted.
- (2) Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading shall be taken in one day in accordance with the following provisions of the Order.
- (3) Proceedings on Consideration—
 - (a) shall be take in the order shown in the first column of the following Table, and
 - (b) shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the times specified in the second column of the Table.

Table

Proceedings	Time for conclusion of proceedings
New Clauses, new Schedules and amendments relating to air weapons, firearms or ammunition	3.30 pm
Remaining proceedings on Consideration	6.00 pm

- (4) Proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at 6.00 pm.
- (5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at 7.00 pm.—(Gareth Johnson.)

Offensive Weapons Bill

Consideration of the Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 2

REPORT ON THE USE OF AIR WEAPONS

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 6 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, lay a report before Parliament on the safe use of air weapons.

(2) The report under subsection 1 must consider, but is not limited to—

- (a) whether existing legislation on the use of air weapons is sufficient;
- (b) whether current guidelines on the safe storage of air weapons needs revising; and
- (c) whether the current age restrictions surrounding the possession and use of air weapons are sufficient.”—
(Karin Smyth.)

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.22 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 3—*Controls on miniature rifles and ammunition*—

“(1) The Firearms Act 1968 is amended as follows.

(2) Omit subsection (4) of section 11 (Sports, athletics and other approved activities).”

This new clause would amend the Firearms Act 1968 to remove the exemption on miniature rifle ranges, preventing individuals without a firearms certificate from being able to acquire and possess semi-automatic rifles without a check by the police.

New clause 4—*Possession of component parts of ammunition with intent to manufacture*—

“(1) Section 1 of the Firearms Act 1988 is amended as follows—

(2) After subsection 4A insert—

“(4B) A person other than a person permitted to manufacture ammunition by virtue of being a registered firearms dealer or holder of a firearm certificate authorising the type of ammunition being manufactured commits an offence if—

- (a) The person has in his or her possession or under his or her control the component parts of ammunition and,
- (b) The person intends to use such articles to manufacture the component parts into ammunition.

(4C) A person guilty of an offence under subsection 4b is liable—

(a) On summary conviction—

- (i) In England and Wales to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months (or in relation to offences committed before Section 154(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 comes into force 6 months) or to a fine or both.
- (ii) In Scotland to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or to both.

(b) On conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years to a fine, or to both.”

This new clause would create a specific offence for the possession of component parts of ammunition with the intent to manufacture, for all persons other than those registered as firearms dealer or holders of a firearms certificate authorising the type of ammunition being manufactured.

New clause 18—*Offence of failure to store an air weapon in a locked cabinet*—

“(1) A person commits an offence if they fail to store an air weapon in their possession in a locked cabinet.

(2) The offence in subsection (1) has not been committed if the person has the firearm with them for the purpose of cleaning, repairing or testing it or for some other purpose connected with its use, transfer or sale, or the air weapon is in transit to or from a place in connection with its use or any such purpose.

(3) For the purposes of this section, ‘air weapon’ has the same meaning as in section 1(3)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.”

New clause 19—*Sale of an air weapon without a trigger guard*—

“(1) A person commits an offence if, by way of trade or business, they sell an air weapon that is not fitted with a trigger guard.

(2) For the purposes of this section, ‘air weapon’ has the same meaning as in section 1(3)(b) of the Firearms Act 1968.

(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations define ‘trigger guard’ for the purposes of this section.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.”

Government amendment 26.

Amendment 23, in clause 30, page 30, line 9, leave out from “rifle” to end of paragraph and insert

“, other than a rifle which is chambered for rim fire cartridges, which ejects an empty cartridge case using energy which comes (directly or indirectly) from propellant gas and subsequently chambers a cartridge by mechanical means through the operation of the firing trigger mechanism alone.”

Government amendments 27 to 33.

Amendment 24, in clause 31, page 31, line 9, leave out from “rifle” to end of paragraph and insert

“, other than a rifle which is chambered for rim fire cartridges, which ejects an empty cartridge case using energy which comes (directly or indirectly) from propellant gas and subsequently chambers a cartridge by mechanical means through the operation of the firing trigger mechanism alone.”

Government amendments 34 to 55.

Karin Smyth: I hope that this is third time lucky. I understand the difficulties that the Government are in, but our constituents, on whose behalf we speak, watch these proceedings with great interest and concern, often because it is their loved ones who have lost their lives or been injured. The postponement of this debate on Report has been unacceptable for them.

Having said that, I am pleased to have the opportunity to outline the importance of new clause 2, with which I simply seek to establish in law the requirement for the Department to publish a report on the safety of air weapons. Such a report is necessary because the statistics on air weapons offences are not routinely recorded and official data is difficult to find. The report would require the Department to assess the strength of existing legislation on the use of air weapons. An important aspect of the debate is licensing, to which I shall return in a moment. The report would also require consideration of the existing guidelines on safe storage, about which my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson)

will speak in more detail later. I thank him for his support and for the work that he has done on this issue previously.

The report would also force an assessment on the current age limits for the possession and use of air weapons, which we discussed in Committee. This is important, because young people are disproportionately victims of air weapons offences. I managed to obtain via the Library information that shows that a disproportionate number of 10 to 19-year-olds were victims of air weapons offences in 2017, considering their share of the population, but we need more detail.

The subject of licensing has come up in a number of debates over the years, including in this place and in Select Committee hearings, but there seems to have been a reluctance to push collectively for real change. The dangers posed by air weapons cannot be ignored: their misuse is a matter of public safety. That was the argument put forward by Members of the Scottish Parliament in 2015, when they voted to license air weapons. While others were perhaps doing other things during the conference recess, I went to the Scottish Parliament in Holyrood to hear the arguments for and against licensing and about the experience of it.

The logic for the system in Scotland seems straightforward: as a matter of public safety, only those who have good reason for using, acquiring, purchasing or possessing an air weapon ought legally to be able to obtain one. The Scottish police believe that the scheme has been a success thus far, with more than 21,000 weapons having been surrendered by owners. Some 24,000 licences were issued up to February this year. There is a cost of £72 per licence to cover the administration fee. The Scottish Government’s position is clear: those who have a legitimate use for an air weapon—including for sports and pest control—are not prevented from obtaining one. That gives important clarity to a subject that can be confusing. It sends a clear message that these weapons are not toys and capable of causing serious injury or even death. I simply ask the Minister whether he can demonstrate to me that my constituents in Bristol South are as safe from the misuse of air weapons as people in Scotland, where the guns are licensed.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I do not disagree with anything that the hon. Lady has said, but for the record, has the information from Scotland shown that there has been a decrease in the misuse of air weapons since the change to the law?

Karin Smyth: I cannot answer that question directly, but one issue in Scotland relates to the collection of data from the stable point and into the future. That is important to consider. If the police there see that one of these weapons is in the house when they go to a domestic abuse incident, for example, they can legitimately ask whether there is a licence for it. They have reported anecdotally—I am happy to get more figures—that they certainly feel that that has been helpful in such circumstances.

The Minister previously said that the Department’s response to the air weapons review will answer everything, but I am wondering whether the review that we have been seeking will ever see the light of day. The review closed more than nine months ago and, despite numerous assurances to many Members, we are still awaiting

[Karin Smyth]

its conclusions. We owe it to the victims of air weapons, and their families, to stop the Government kicking the issue into the long grass. It took the Scottish Government just a few months to consider the responses to their consultation on air weapons. We must now demand the same single-mindedness of our Government. I have here the documents, all the way from Scotland, should the Government wish to use them to make progress on the review and look seriously at licensing.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): I declare an interest: as set out in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, I am chairman of the British Shooting Sports Council, the umbrella body for British shooting organisations. I rise to speak to Government amendment 26 on .50 calibre rifles but, on behalf of British sports shooting people, I thank the Government for having listened and acted on this matter, and confirm the BSSC's wish fully to engage with the Government on getting the law right in this policy area. Having just listened to the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) talk about air rifles, I hope that the Government will learn from the debate on .50 calibre rifles. I agree that there are issues in respect of air rifles that need attention and clarification, but we should deal in a cautious and proper manner with the 3 million or so owners of such guns.

The proposal in the Bill to ban firearms with a muzzle velocity of more than 13,600 J, including .50 calibre guns, was not, under any interpretation of the facts, going to help the fight against crime. The guns are very expensive, costing around £20,000 each. There are therefore very few in number, with only 150 or so in private hands. They are extremely bulky, heavy at 30 lb and slow to load, with large, hand-loaded ammunition. In fact, one could hardly find a firearm less likely to be used in a crime. They are simply too big. That is probably why they have never been used in a crime in this jurisdiction.

2.30 pm

That needs to be considered against the wider perspective of the very small chance of people being murdered with legally owned guns. In 2017, for example, just nine people were killed by someone in legal possession of the murder weapon. That is nine people too many, of course, but it is a very small figure compared with deaths by illegal weapons. There has been a lot of confusing evidence about .50 calibres potentially being used as military-style "materiel destruction" rifles—for instance, by terrorists to shoot car engines. However, that would be possible only when used with armour-piercing or incendiary ammunition, both of which are already barred for civilian use. Not only is there no evidence of such firearms being used for criminal purposes in this jurisdiction, as recognised by the National Crime Agency, but to imply that the provision would make the public any safer from gun crime is, I believe, unrealistic.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I am trying to remember, but I think that .50 calibre weapons were used by terrorists in Northern Ireland, although I stand to be corrected.

Mr Djanogly: I believe that they have been, but I advisedly used "in this jurisdiction" for that purpose.

If we are to start banning things just because of the use to which they might be put, logic could dictate that all firearms should be used, as well as all knives. That is not my idea of a free society.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Just to correct what our hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) said, the weapons used in Northern Ireland were illegally imported into this country.

Mr Djanogly: I thank my hon. Friend for that important clarification.

The National Crime Agency position brief was received by the Library and heavily commented on by shooting experts across the board. The following points are based on their feedback. The NCA brief states that .50 calibre rifles

"are built around enormously powerful cartridges originally designed for military use on the battlefield and to have devastating effect".

That is true, but it is also true of one of the most common target rifles ever used, the .303 Lee Enfield rifle and one of the most common hunting rifles, the .308, which is also based on a military round. The current full bore civilian target shooting round, at 7.62 mm, is a military round often used in machine guns. The NCA brief further states:

"The propellant mass in a standard M33 .50 calibre 'ball' round is nearly ten times as great as that in the standard 'ball' round used in the...Army's primary battlefield rifle, the L85."

However, that is simply disingenuous, as the 5.56 round used in the L85 is specifically designed to be light and to perform a totally different role from the .50 calibre rifle. In particular, that round is designed to enable large quantities to be carried by troops and is faster firing and easier to use at close quarters, but to say the L85 is any less dangerous as a result is bizarre.

The irony is that .50 calibre firearms could have their barrels shortened, thus taking them beneath the maximum velocity. The 13,600 J limit is entirely arbitrary, and many owners and manufacturers could simply adapt their guns down to the new limit. The NCA refers to recent seizures of guns, including fully automatic weapons, as showing that crime groups are seeking more powerful weapons, but the .50 calibre is not automatic and there is no evidence of crime gangs ever having wanted to use it.

There was also a failure to consider the historic arms position. People should have the right to engage in shooting sports, unless serious possible injury to the public can be proved. I am a Conservative, and Conservatives to my mind do not ban things for the sake of it.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): It is about 20 years since I fired a .50 calibre. My hon. Friend is entirely right to talk about how large and inappropriate they are for crimes. I very much support the case that he is making.

Mr Djanogly: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

It is unfortunate that this debate is not about the criminals whom we should be targeting, namely the owners of illegal guns that are being used for crimes, but about the law-abiding sporting men and women who would lose out for no good reason.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and thank the Minister for seeing common sense and considering a consultation. I have a shooting range in my constituency. Does my hon. Friend agree that the majority of the totally law-abiding people using my range and others are primarily ex-servicemen and women or ex-policemen and women, and that it is important that they can continue doing what they do?

Mr Djanogly: I am not sure whether those people are primarily ex-servicemen and women, but I am sure that a lot of them shoot. A lot of children learn to shoot on the range in my constituency, which is an important part of the community that provides an important sporting outlet for disabled people, who cannot do other sports and hugely enjoy their shooting.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way; he is being extremely generous. I would ask him to consider this scenario, which happened in my local shooting club. Somebody who was clearly quite troubled was able to book up all the shooting lanes and then held up the shooting range official, took the guns and murdered two women a mile away from my constituency border. My hon. Friend talks about the illegal versus the legal and about the risk being minimal, but when things go wrong, even in minimal-risk circumstances, it can have devastating impacts. That is why I find myself a little hesitant about what is now being changed.

Mr Djanogly: My hon. Friend makes a very fair point. Firearms are potential very dangerous things to use. I can only say to him that, as I said before, the number of legally owned weapons used in crimes is very limited, although that is not to say that we do not have a gun problem in this country. We certainly do, and we need to address it.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): As my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) said, my hon. Friend has been extremely generous in giving way. Guns are meant to be fatal if they are used properly. That is why they have to be protected with super-legislation—the toughest in the world—to ensure that the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle are safe. Indeed, some of the vilification that I suspect my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) got was most unwelcome, because some of the effort that we went to with the tremendously helpful Minister was intended to seek further protection, so that the public were safer.

Mr Djanogly: I thank my hon. Friend for that important intervention. I can honestly say that I have never heard a Member of Parliament or anyone involved in the shooting fraternity say that we do not need very tough rules, but they must work and must be fairly applied.

Just as worrying to the shooting community is the “thin end of the wedge” effect. If we could ban a calibre that is not held illegally and has never been used in a crime, how much easier would it be down the road to ban calibres that have been held illegally and are frequently used in crimes? By picking on the seemingly easy target of only 150 gun owners, the unamended Bill would have undermined shooting sports in this country as a whole.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): Nuclear weapons have never been used for a crime, nor are they used in sport, yet they are not allowed to be held by civilians. I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman’s logic, but I am afraid that I am struggling.

Mr Djanogly: I am afraid that I do not really understand the hon. Gentleman’s logic. I am talking about sports.

It was important and impressive that 74 hon. Members across the House signed the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) to remove the .50 calibre provisions. The Government are to be congratulated on tabling their amendments.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): May I begin by reiterating Labour’s support for the Bill? We gave our support on Second Reading and in Committee, but let me also say how disappointed we have been at the Government’s consistent mismanagement of this important legislation. This should have been a comprehensive and honest response to the horrifying surge in violence that we are seeing in every community in our country. Instead, it is a relatively meagre collection of proposals that, rather than being strengthened in making its way through the House, has been watered down, as the Government have rolled over in response to their Back Benchers.

It is deeply regrettable that the Bill before us is far less effective than what was presented on Second Reading and that, in the Government’s complete paralysis in the middle of Brexit negotiations in their own party, they have refused to listen to the voices of the most senior counter-terror and security experts in the country and instead have once again allowed ideology to win the day.

It is a very sad reflection on our times that matters of great public importance—no task is more important than the Government keeping their citizens safe—are being sacrificed at the altar of Brexit. We have offered our sincere and constructive support throughout the passage of the Bill, supporting the Government’s efforts to respond to the surge in violent crime. We offered our support in Committee and now on Report in their attempt to ban the .50 calibre rifle, but, unfortunately, once again they have proven themselves unable to govern in the national interest, in hock to a group of Members who are prepared to risk public safety.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. As the lead signatory to the amendment that sought to remove these 0.50 calibre weapons from the Bill, the hon. Lady has implicitly accused me of endangering public safety. That is completely untruthful and unworthy, and she should withdraw her remarks.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I did not see that comment as a personal accusation. One thing is clear—the hon. Gentleman has certainly put his view on the record.

Louise Haigh: Later in my speech, I will come to exactly why we think the amendment that the Government have tabled will indeed risk public safety.

The Home Secretary said back in April that he wanted to bring forward an Offensive Weapons Bill within weeks and that if it achieved cross-party support, it would become law “very quickly”, making a “big difference”.

[*Louise Haigh*]

Over the weekend in London and across the country, more lives have been taken in senseless violence. Thirty-seven children have been killed this year. How can it have been allowed that the already limited measures in the Bill have been held up three times now because of a fight over high-calibre rifles? It reflects very poorly on this Parliament.

I speak in support of new clauses 3 and 4 in my name, new clause 2 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), and new clauses 18 and 19 in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson). I will also refer to the amendments regarding .50 calibre rifles, with which the Labour party profoundly disagrees.

New clause 3 would bring miniature rifle ranges under the existing provisions of the Firearms Act 1968. It would remove a loophole in our decades-old firearms law that is providing easy access for non-firearms holders to get their hands on ammunition. Law enforcement officials have been clear on this. They have said in no uncertain terms that the exemption in section 11(4) of the Firearms Act is glaring and provides an easy route for terrorists and criminals to access firearms. This little-known exemption allows non-certificate holders to acquire and possess up to .23 calibre miniature rifles and ammo in connection with the running of a miniature rifle range.

Section 11(4) also allows a person claiming that they are running a miniature rifle range to acquire an unlimited number of .22 calibre rifles and ammunition without any background checks being completed or the police being made aware. In this context, the term “miniature rifle” is something of a misnomer. They are semi-automatic rifles and go far beyond that which is safe in the hands of a non-certificate holder. These are potentially lethal weapons, so this exemption is far too broad.

We are asking the Government to consider using this legislation to stop criminals having ready access to potentially lethal weapons. We were not at all convinced by the Minister’s justification in Committee and were staggered that she suggested that the Government had not been approached regarding this loophole, when they have been copied into the specific correspondence from counter-terrorism experts and the police. They simply cannot say they have not been warned. Will the Minister outline the Home Office’s thinking? Why does the Department believe, in the face of expert evidence, that this exemption does not pose a threat?

New clause 4, in my name and the name of the shadow Home Secretary, would make it an offence to possess component parts of ammunition with the intent to manufacture. Again, this has been explicitly recommended to us by the National Ballistics Intelligence Service, which said in Committee:

“There is a lack of control and legislation around purchasing and acquiring ammunition components. People can freely acquire all the equipment they need to make ammunition; the offence kicks in only once you have made a round.”—[*Official Report, Offensive Weapons Public Bill Committee*, 17 July 2018; c. 42, Q99.]

Senior law enforcement officials have said:

“the reality is that individuals are being found in possession of primers (for which there is no offence) cartridge cases (for which there is no offence), missiles i.e. bullets (for which there is no offence) and smokeless powder (which is technically a minor offence contrary to explosives regulations but rarely...prosecuted).”

The fact is that, unless complete ammunition is found, there is no prosecution despite very strong suspicion that someone is making ammunition to be used in criminality. This simply cannot be right. New clause 4 is an attempt, in the light of the growing threat picture from DIY ammunition making, to give law enforcement the tools needed to clamp down on this practice, which is undoubtedly raising the threat to the public from firearms.

2.45 pm

I turn to amendment 26. It is frankly staggering that we have arrived at this point. The Home Secretary’s clause was backed by the Opposition and could have passed easily through the Commons. He has not only caved in; he has gone a step further than even the rebels on his own Benches were suggesting. His amendments simply seek to preserve the status quo, leaving the security of these very dangerous weapons unchanged. In contrast to the suggestions from the hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown)—and, indeed, agreement from the shooting lobby—that security should be upgraded to level 3, meaning that the gun, the bolt and the ammunition should be in three separate safes, the Government are now proposing that security remain the same.

“We based those measures on evidence that we received from intelligence sources, police and other security experts.”—[*Official Report*, 27 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 918.]

Those are not my words, but the words of the Home Secretary on Second Reading. At what point did he no longer believe the evidence of intelligence, police and other security experts? At what point did he decide that the spectacle of a significant rebellion among Conservative Members was not worth the risk posed by these firearms? Given that so much attention has focused on the .50 calibre, is he satisfied that this amendment will also mean that two even more powerful rifles will now fail to be captured by this prohibition?

The 14 mm and 20 mm have been described by counter-terror police as effective Soviet anti-tank weapons. What on earth are this Government doing allowing these to be held by the licence-owning public? These two types are

“significantly more powerful than other firearms permitted for civilian ownership under section 1 of the 1968 Act...the proposals were based on concerns about the potential for serious misuse of these weapons if they were to fall into the hands of criminals or terrorists.”—[*Official Report, Offensive Weapons Public Bill Committee*, 11 September 2018; c. 230.]

Again, these are not my words, but the words of the Minister in Committee. She told us then that the Government were considering other alternatives for enhanced security for storage and use, yet now we see a complete climbdown.

Bob Stewart: To the hon. Lady’s knowledge, have any of these heavier calibre weapons been used in criminality? If they have not, I am wondering what we are arguing about.

Louise Haigh: Twice in the last two years these guns have been found in the hands of criminals: once in the north, when the barrel was shortened and discovered in wasteland; and once when the weapons were found in the hands of a gun smuggler to organised criminal gangs.

Labour will vigorously oppose these amendments today and any attempt to weaken the already desperately weak provisions in the Bill. The measures contained in clause 30, which in effect ban the enormously powerful .50 calibre, 14 mm and 20 mm are necessary and proportionate. They have been backed up with expert justification of the risk assessments and we are convinced that that assessment has been made in good faith. We will not be playing politics with public safety.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): In my mind, I make a distinction between a legal gun owner and an illegal gun owner. In the two incidents that the hon. Lady described, were the guns held legally?

Louise Haigh: In one case, the weapon was held legally; in the other, it was held illegally. I hope that will help the hon. Lady make up her mind as to how she wishes to vote today.

There are many who seek to question the motives of the senior firearms officers who presented evidence to Parliament on the basis of an assessment of the facts. Those officers gave a reasoned, evidence-based analysis, and we are confident that they are not supporting anything that is not completely necessary to their work to keep us safe.

The hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) made a point about ammunition. In fact, the user requirement for this gun for the military is a system that can immobilise a vehicle with all UK in-service .50 calibre ammunition—not exotic military ammunition at all. Mark Groothuis of Operation Endeavour, the counter-terror policing unit in the Met, told us:

“My concern is that, if one of these guns were to be stolen...and if it were to get into terrorist hands, it could be very difficult to fight against or to protect against. There is very little—nothing, as far as I know—that the police service have that could go up against a .50 in the way of body armour or even protected vehicles.”—[*Official Report, Offensive Weapons Public Bill Committee*, 17 July 2018; c. 33, Q66.]

How is this a risk worth taking? This is a proportionate ban affecting weapons of staggering power. This is the most powerful weapon of its kind still available to the public.

The idea heard in some quarters that this is part of an overall assault on lawful gun-holders is simply nonsense. Last year, there were 157,581 firearms certificates covering over half a million weapons, and over half a million shotgun certificates covering more than 1 million shotguns. This amendment would affect 129 weapons. The truth is that the only way to protect the public from this weapon's enormous power is to remove it from public hands altogether, and the Government have utterly failed in their duty to do so.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We have lots of Members who wish to speak, so if we can be brief we can try to get in as many as possible.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am very grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, to catch your eye in this debate on this important Bill, which contains necessary provisions on the use of corrosive substances and on knives. I think the whole House would applaud that. What the

Government should be doing, as I will demonstrate in the few words that I have to say, is acting on the basis of real evidence.

As the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) said, this is the third time that the Government have listed for debate this Bill's remaining stages. For me, as the lead signatory to amendments trying to remove .50 calibre weapons from the Bill, this is third time lucky. After extensive negotiations with the Government, I persuaded them that there was, as I will demonstrate, no real evidence to ban these weapons, and that they should remove them from the Bill and have a proper evidence-based consultation as to whether these weapons do or do not form a danger to the public.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): My hon. Friend may have seen that I sought to intervene on the shadow Minister on this earlier. He may wish to confirm that it is also the case that there are legitimate reasons for wishing to possess these weapons.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. Of course, those who possess these weapons use them for entirely peaceful purposes. They are some of the most law-abiding people in this country. To ban these weapons on the basis of, as I will demonstrate, very little evidence, if any, is a completely illiberal thing for a Conservative, or indeed any, Government to do.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary very much indeed for reviewing the evidence on these rifles. He listened to everything that I and other colleagues had to say. My amendments attracted no fewer than 75 signatures from across the House. I thank every single one of my colleagues who signed them. I particularly thank and pay tribute to the Democratic Unionist party of Northern Ireland, all of whose Members signed them.

There is very little evidence for banning these weapons. The press seemed somehow to think that my amendments were all about Brexit and assumed that all those who had supported them did so to achieve Brexit. Nothing could be further from the truth. We were genuinely—I speak as chairman of the all-party shooting and conservation group—trying to do the right thing by a group of citizens who, as I indicated to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), are some of the most law-abiding in the country.

Mr Djanogly: I just want to put it on the record that I support shooting and I supported getting rid of this clause, and I do not support Brexit.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Indeed. There will be lots of other colleagues who signed the amendments who are also of the remainder class. I do not agree with them, but I am nevertheless grateful to them for supporting my amendments.

Since the Bill was published, I have become aware that shooting associations have been concerned that the advice received by Ministers was not based on the facts but on a misrepresentation of target shooting. The consultation in advance of the Bill described .50 calibre single-shot target rifles as “materiel destruction” weapons. Nothing could be further from the truth. Civilian target

[Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

rifles fire inert ammunition at paper targets. Only the military possess materiel destruction weapons that fire explosive and armour piercing rounds—all illegal in this country for civilian use.

Much of the evidence given to the Public Bill Committee continued on this theme. These target rifles were described by those who advised the Government as “extreme” and “military”, and inaccuracy, exaggeration and misrepresentation were given full play to support the ban. Much of this was refuted by the shooting organisations. They pointed out that the National Ballistics Intelligence Service was mistaken in declaring that the effective range of these .50 calibre rifles is 6,800 metres. The actual effective range is much less than a third of this.

I want to go on to the National Crime Agency’s letter, which the Government seem to place such reliance on and which was placed in the Library of this House.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman may well be coming on to this, but I thank him for giving way. I wonder what evidence he wants if evidence from one of the most senior counter-terrorist police officers in our country is not good enough for him. I wonder why he feels that he maybe knows more about these weapons than they do.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I greatly respect the hon. Lady, and if she will just be a little patient, I will give her exactly what she is asking me for.

The National Crime Agency wrote to the Home Secretary and the letter was circulated to MPs and placed in the Library. It was signed by Steve Rodhouse, the director general of operations at the National Crime Agency. The argument he used, essentially, is that these very powerful rifles might do serious damage. But the same could be said of most commonly used sporting rifles. Indeed, the most commonly used deer rifle in the UK is a .308 that could, and does, do lethal damage. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin) pointed out, that is what it is designed to do. It is designed to kill vermin against which it is licensed to be used.

In the letter, Mr Rodhouse uses the words “military” and “extreme”. Nearly all calibres of commonly used civilian rifles originated as military rounds. He also quotes the MOD requirement for immobilising a truck at 1,800 metres. What he does not say is the round used, as I have said, is a high-explosive, incendiary and armour-piercing projectile. That is illegal for civilian use in the UK, where these rifles are used for punching holes in paper targets. It is as illogical to say that a civilian .50 calibre rifle should be banned because the Army uses it to fire at trucks as it would be to ban a .308 deer rifle because the Army uses the same calibre to fire at men. Equally, the residual strike of a .50 calibre bullet and the strike of a .308 bullet are both going to achieve the same end.

With regard to security, which was the basis of my original amendments, and to which I urged the Government to pay very close attention in their consultation, every firearms dealer in this country has to adhere to a level 3 security requirement, and the chief police officer of every police force that licenses every firearms dealer has to be satisfied that those requirements are in place.

Some firearms dealers carry weapons that are far more lethal than a .50 calibre weapon because they store them on behalf of the Army. I would suggest that level 3 security would have prevented at least one of these crimes because there would have been the necessary security involved to do that.

Bill Wiggin: I have been very upset to hear the nature of this debate, because the worst thing for any police officer must be to knock on someone’s front door to tell them that their loved one is a victim of crime. This is not a moment to play party politics at all. All guns are dangerous; all guns are for killing. These things are lethal; they require proper protections. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: what we all want to do is to make it as difficult as possible for these accidents to happen, and a ban is not the right way to achieve that.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Can I just say to Sir Geoffrey that hopefully he will recognise that we have six more Members and the Minister to get in?

3 pm

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I am grateful for your advice, Mr Deputy Speaker, but it is important, in view of what the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) had to say, that I refute some of the facts that have been put about.

The figures for stolen firearms should be put into context, which Mr Rodhouse does not do. There are 2 million firearms in civilian hands. Up to July this year, only 204—I accept that that is 204 too many—had been stolen, and the vast majority were shotguns, not rifles. Only 1% of non-airgun firearms crime is committed with rifles, and none of those has ever been from a .50 calibre legal weapon.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley might be interested to know that Mr Rodhouse did not give the whole story regarding the case of the stolen .50 calibre weapon. The police dealing with the theft considered it opportunistic and that the .50 calibre was stolen with other firearms and not specifically targeted—[*Interruption.*] She should just listen for a minute. The .50 calibre was rapidly abandoned, and there is a suggestion that the police were told where to find it. All this points at the criminals finding the .50 calibre unsuitable for their purposes, and one can understand why—a single-shot rifle, requiring hand-loaded ammunition, weighing 30 lb and around 5 feet long, is very difficult to carry, let alone use in a criminal or terrorist incident.

The second case mentioned is the Surdar case. The whole point is that Surdar did not sell his legally held .50 calibre rifle to criminals; they did not want it. In the first case, level 3 security would have prevented a crime, and in the second case, it was a dealer who was not entirely above board.

Mr Rodhouse goes on to talk about the threat of illegal importations. That will not be cured by banning legally held guns. How many .50 calibre weapons have been seized as illegal imports? The answer is none. It is true that most UK firearms law is the product of outrage in the wake of atrocities such as Dunblane or Hungerford. At least legislators in those cases were

seeking to improve the law with clear evidence. Mr Rodhouse, on the other hand, is seeking to persuade Parliament to change the law in relation to .50 calibre weapons without any significant evidence whatsoever.

The Government's original proposal was not supported by the evidence. We in this House have a duty to protect minorities and to ensure that we do not act illiberally by banning things when there is no evidence. I submit that the Government have done the right thing in withdrawing these weapons from the Bill and are right to have a properly evidence-based consultation, to which all experts, including the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley, can give evidence. If, at the end of it, the Government conclude that there is an issue of public safety, we will need to debate that further in the House. I rest my case.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is good to finally get down to further consideration of the Bill, at the third attempt. Let me say at the outset that my party welcomes the Bill. There has been close working between the UK and Scottish Governments in relation to it, and we are largely, but not completely, happy with where it has got to after a pretty thorough Committee stage.

The Bill covers a mixture of reserved and devolved matters, with legislative consent from the Scottish Parliament required for some parts of the Bill. How far the legislation should encroach on devolved issues such as Scots criminal law has been carefully worked through by the Governments to serve specific purposes, and we take the view that that is pretty much as far as the encroachment should go.

There are a number of amendments that I will speak supportively and sympathetically about and will not oppose, but in so far as they are drafted in a way that extends to Scotland, we ultimately take the view they would be better left to the Scottish Parliament to exercise its devolved competence. That includes the three new clauses relating to air weapons. I am sympathetic to what the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) seeks to achieve with those new clauses and the work she is doing, but as she pointed out, the regulation of such weapons was devolved to the Scottish Parliament, which has established a new licensing regime under the Air Weapons and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2015. For those reasons, as far as Scotland is concerned, we wish to leave any further reform of air weapons licensing and regulation to the Scottish Parliament.

There are other amendments, however, that are clearly in reserved territory and that we will consider supporting, including new clauses 3 and 4. For the sake of time, I will not repeat all the arguments made by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh). I will simply say that we agree with her analysis.

On high-energy and .50 calibre rifles, having looked at all the evidence in the round, we would have supported the position set out by the Home Secretary and the Minister at every previous stage of the Bill's passage. We echo much of what the shadow Minister has said today. In Committee, we heard persuasive evidence from the NCA, the National Police Chiefs Council, ballistics experts and counter-terrorism police about the power of these weapons. The evidence we heard was that these rifles are dangerous because of their range

and because there is little—perhaps nothing—that the police have in the way of body armour or even protected vehicles that could go up against some of these weapons.

I emphasise that we are not in favour of prohibition for the sake of it. If those same expert witnesses think that an alternative solution to alleviate risk can be found, we will listen. We fully appreciate the impact that this would have on the recreation of a small number of citizens, but it is a small number; we are talking about 18 certificates in Scotland altogether.

The point is that the Home Secretary said he would further consider the proposed prohibition months ago on Second Reading, way back before the summer, yet no amendments were forthcoming before the previously scheduled final stages of the Bill. There has been no adequate explanation of what has changed in the past couple of weeks, and as matters stand, the Bill will leave this place with the prohibition removed but no alternative measures in its place.

The Home Secretary is now going against and ignoring the evidence we received from the NCA, the National Police Chiefs Council, ballistics experts and counter-terrorism police, as well as what I have been told by Police Scotland. I have tried, without success so far, to find out whether any of those witnesses has changed their view. In the absence of any adequate explanation, this reeks of internal party politics trumping important issues of public safety. It is not the right way to make legislation, and it is not the right way to treat the public.

Mr Baker: The purpose of my amendments 23 and 24 is to avoid banning lever-release rifles. They are probing amendments; I just wish to explore the Government's position, and I do not intend to press them to a Division.

I would like to start by thanking Little Chalfont Rifle and Pistol Club and my constituents who are members of it for helping me better to understand lever-release rifles by allowing me to fire several of them. Lever-release rifles are built and designed in the UK. They have a mechanism by which the rifle unloads itself with propellant gas but stops short of reloading. In a sense, they are self-cocking, but not self-loading. A lever is pressed to release the working parts and load the next round. My amendments would allow lever-release rifles but ban so-called MARS—manually activated release system—rifles, which allow the working parts to come forward using a second trigger press.

The lever-release mechanism was produced within current firearms law to be suitably used and owned on a section 1 firearms licence. These rifles are a valuable resource for disabled and elderly shooters in particular, who can struggle with conventional operating actions, and are no more dangerous than any other legally owned firearm of a similar calibre. The mechanism is not a bump stock, which has no place in target shooting; there seems to be unity about that.

The National Rifle Association has provided evidence that lever-release systems do not significantly increase the rate of fire capability of rifles. Lever-release rifles have a comparable rate of fire to bolt-action rifles—that is, one to two rounds per second, against one or less with a bolt-action rifle. Those rates of fire are based on un-aimed shots. In reality, the rate of fire for aimed shots, including the time taken to come back to aim and replace magazines, will yield an aimed shot about every

[Mr Baker]

two to four seconds in the hands of an expert marksman, regardless of the system used. I can certainly testify to that, having tried them. They have considerable recoil, and the idea of having a high rate of fire with aimed shots is really for the birds.

The lever-release system can allow an able-bodied shooter to maintain their firing position, assisting accuracy in a sport that is defined by accurate shooting. According to British Shooting, disabled people currently make up 25% of recreational shooters—a number that it is committed to increasing further. The NRA has informed us that 42.5% of its members are aged 60 or older. Lever-release rifles can allow less able people to continue to participate in the sport.

It seems unnecessary to ban lever-release rifles. My amendments would ban so-called MARS firearms, where the trigger is pulled a second time. I would like the Minister to set out exactly why shooters with lever-release rifles should have those weapons taken from them. A cornerstone of democracy is minority rights. I do not think that these weapons represent a significant additional risk for having a lever-release mechanism, and though I am only probing the Government's position, I would like the Minister to set out in detail why owners will be stripped of those firearms.

Finally, in the original impact assessment, published alongside the consultation document, the Government estimated the total cost of compensation for the owners of these firearms to be between £1 million and £1.1 million in the first year of the policy. Responses to the consultation suggest that this was a considerable underestimate, and I very much hope that the Minister will be able to give us a new and more accurate estimate of the cost of the compensation.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I wish to speak in support of new clause 2, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), and new clauses 18 and 19, which I tabled for the House to consider today.

I confess that I would not have tabled new clauses 18 and 19 had we had some clarity from the Government on the consultation on air weapons. Members will recall that the Government were asked to undertake a consultation on air weapons safety by the West Suffolk coroner on 10 October 2017 and that the Government announced a consultation on air rifle legislation on 12 December 2017. It closed on 6 February 2018, to which as I recall—on 20-something November 2018—we still have not had a response, despite some 50,000 consultation responses.

The reason why I want this to be looked at is quite clear and quite tragic. My constituent George Atkinson was killed by an air rifle in a tragic accident at a cousin's house some years ago. The air rifle in the house was not locked in a cabinet, and George had access to it. Playing with air rifles, as I did myself in my own house as a child, resulted in George's accidental death, and his family had the tragedy of losing their 13-year-old son.

John and Jane Atkinson, George's parents, have campaigned very strongly to try to get some measure of safety added to air rifles. They are not against the use of air rifles as a whole, but they want some safety

measures added. The figures back up their concerns. We have seen some 25 cases of serious injury from air rifles this year and 288 cases that resulted in slight injury, while air rifles have been used in some 2,203 incidents—not just accidents, but deliberate use—involving offences in 2016-17.

The legislation—this is where I hope my two new clauses will come in—is currently the Firearms Act 1968, which says that it is an offence for a person in possession of an air weapon to fail to take reasonable precautions to prevent someone under the age of 18 from gaining unauthorised access to it. However, it does not define what reasonable precautions are in relation to protection for individuals.

As I have said, my constituents, although they have lost their son, do not wish to see airguns banned; they wish to see them made safer. My new clauses would do two things. The first new clause would ensure that airguns had to be kept in a lockable cabinet at home, with the key kept separate from the cabinet. If that had been in place, it would accordingly be an offence if the cabinet was accessed. There has to be a lockable cabinet.

The second new clause shows that we want trigger guards to be added to air rifles that, again, are only accessible by the owner of the air rifles. That does not prevent anybody from owning an air rifle or using an air rifle, or impose legal requirements on using one for sport or any other purpose. However, the new clauses would put in place two significant measures that would strengthen the Firearms Act and make the reasonable precautions measurable. Without measurable reasonable precautions, nobody can say what a reasonable precaution is.

For the memory of children and young people such as George Atkinson, it is important that we seek to have reasonable precautions. I want to hear from the Minister whether she will look at and support new clauses 18 and 19, and when she expects to respond to the consultation. Will she take on board those two suggestions, and, ultimately, not ban such weapons, but—perhaps as part of the wider examination mooted in new clause 2, moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South—look at what measures we can take to make them safer?

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that when the firearms legislation was revised in 2002, just before he became a Northern Ireland Minister, it brought anything firing a projectile with over 1 kJ of energy within the ambit of a firearms certificate? That distinguishes between airsoft and air rifles, so every air rifle in Northern Ireland has to be on a firearms certificate. That does not ban them, but it brings in the security protections and measures that he has outlined.

3.15 pm

David Hanson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me of the proposals that were brought in for Northern Ireland.

New clauses 18 and 19 are reasonable. A lockable cabinet and a lockable trigger guard will ensure that children and young individuals, who do not realise the potential power of these weapons, have more difficulty accessing weapons whose legal owners may currently

keep them in an unlocked cabinet and without a trigger guard. I think the Minister needs to look at this, and I hope that she will support the new clauses. If she will not do so, I hope for a good explanation why not.

Huw Merriman: I wish to speak to Government amendment 26 and other related amendments. I had not intended to speak, but I feel duty bound to do so. Some time back, when the proposal to ban .50 calibre weapons came to the fore, like many of my Conservative colleagues, I wrote to the Minister to ask for the evidence base for it. The response I got back did not ultimately persuade me that there was such an evidence base. I think of myself as a libertarian, and if we are going to ban anything, there needs to be a justification for doing so. I was very much part of raising that query and concern.

I absolutely supported the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), which would have tightened up some of the rules around gun clubs with regard to these weapons. I am speaking in order to do almost an about-turn—I touched on this in my intervention during my hon. Friend's speech—and this has really come to light for me. The issue is not so much about the .50 calibre weapons. I take the point, and it is well made, that one would not be able to remove and use this type of weapon in such a way; they are used for a specific purpose. None the less, if we are not careful with our gun clubs and do not make sure that the rules are tight, there will be situations where there are breaches that have tragic consequences. I want to reference what I touched on in my intervention.

I will run through the exchange that happened during the court process. Mr Craig Savage, the constituent I referred to—in fact, this happened just into a neighbouring constituency—managed to book his local gun club. It is my local gun club—I have actually used it—and the same one that has written to me to try to persuade me how safe it is and what a great pursuit the sport is.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Does my hon. Friend not agree—I am aware of the point he is about to make—that gun clubs provide a sport that is gender-blind, ability-blind and age-blind, and that target rifle shooting is one of the most egalitarian sports available?

Huw Merriman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Gun clubs do, indeed, provide such a sport. I will suggest to the Minister where we can support them in their endeavours and actually make things better. Quite frankly—and gun clubs are aware of this as well—if they do not fulfil their role in a safe and secure manner, they know full well that it will be very hard for us, as their representative MPs, to justify their continued existence.

I want to take the House through the transcript involving the defendant and 1066 Target Sports. The defendant had asked whether he and a friend could book a live fire at 6.30 pm on the Friday. In one email, he asked whether it was busy during that time, and he later took up the offer of booking out all the lanes so that he and his friend

“could have the place to ourselves”.

I am sure colleagues are wondering why, at this point, nobody smelled a rat. The next day, he emailed to say that his friend had dropped out and he would have to “swing back another time”.

The defendant arrived at the complex at about 5 pm on the Friday of the shooting and was met in reception by Mr Graves, the deputy manager. Mr Graves said that the defendant had mentioned that he had prostate cancer and did not have much time to live. During the live firing he spoke about religion and rifles, and he made reference to “police-assisted suicide” and wanting to be “remembered as a man”. The defendant then went to the toilet. While the deputy manager was reloading, the defendant returned, wrestled the gun away, aimed it at his chest and said, “I will not hurt you, but I will need you to open the door”, which he duly did.

The defendant then made the 10-minute journey to Bexhill Road, where at 7.40 pm Raven Whitbread, her mother Heather Whitbread and her sister Michelle Savage were sitting in the lounge relaxing and eating a meal. Suddenly the defendant smashed through the window. Raven was told by her sister and mother to hide, as she was seven months pregnant. Raven said that she saw Craig Savage standing over her sister, and then she saw her body jolt. She ran into the annexe to call the police. Her mother was shot dead thereafter.

That is what happens if we do not get this right. People lose their lives in tragic situations because sometimes we too blindly see the risks as being so small that they will not occur. But when the law is broken, tragic events occur and people lose their lives. I think that we are duty bound not to say that the risks are so small that we should not control legitimate behaviour. We should ensure that those risks are minimised even further, and reduced to zero if possible.

I am asking the Minister whether we can look at gun clubs to ensure that they are made more secure, along the lines that my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds talked about, and really to look at a wholesale review and reform of gun clubs. If we do—I will tell my local gun club this—I just cannot support them.

John Woodcock: I will keep my remarks brief, as you have requested, Madam Deputy Speaker, because we are shortly to vote. That was a brave speech by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). I hope that the Minister would accept that I am prepared to support the Government when they do the right thing on national security, and that therefore it is not out of overt partisanship that I think this cave-in is truly shameful.

I feel sorry for the Minister, because I think that it is the Home Secretary, or indeed the Prime Minister, who should really be here to account for why they are now disregarding all the advice they have received from the police and intelligence officials and caving in to—I have to say it—the backwoodsmen and, occasionally, women of their own party, rather than seeking to govern in the national interest on security. There was a way here whereby a Government who either had a level of authority or were prepared to reach across the House to do the right thing on national security could have got a clear majority for this important measure.

The threat of terrorism in this country is growing. It is inadequate, and potentially morally bankrupt, simply to say that because there has not been an attack recently, since the IRA threat, then there will not be one in future.

Mark Garnier *rose—*

John Woodcock: No, I am not going to give way.

We know that the terror threat is growing. The Government received clear advice that these—

Vicky Ford: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Woodcock: No, I am not going to give way to the hon. Lady, who I am afraid will say anything that the Whips tell her to say. If the Whips had told her to say the opposite, she would absolutely have said the opposite. *[Interruption.]* Well, okay then, if she wants to tell me why—

Vicky Ford: Why? Three years ago, almost to the day, more than 100 young people were killed in an attack on a Paris theatre. It was our Prime Minister who called for reform of European gun law, and I was the Member of the European Parliament who led that reform. This is a Government who are committed to the highest standards of gun control across Europe. If we are to continue that ongoing co-operation with our European neighbours, it is vital that we have evidence-based legislation that directs the gun controls at the right organisations. That is why I will be supporting the Government today.

John Woodcock: Well, I have to say that the hon. Lady would be supporting the Government whatever their position was. I thank her for the intervention, however, because it does make an important point. The Prime Minister, as a former Home Secretary, does understand the threat, so the fact that the Government are doing the wrong thing because of party interest is shameful.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): I thank all Members across the House for their passionate and heartfelt views on these important topics. I welcome the indication from the shadow Minister that the Bill continues to have the support of the Opposition.

The first duty of Government is to keep the public safe. That is why we have brought the Bill forward, to give the police and other agencies the powers they need to tackle serious violence and crime. But it is the definition of democracy that Government must meet that duty in ways that are effective but also proportionate. We have some of the strongest gun laws in the world, particularly for rapid-fire rifles. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) has indicated that his amendment is intended to be probing. However, those rifles remain in the Bill because we are concerned that they can discharge rounds at a rate that brings them much closer to self-loading rifles, which are already prohibited for civilian ownership under section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968. Indeed, that appears to be one of the selling points for such rifles. We have therefore included them in the Bill, because we are of the view that the indiscriminate use of rapid-firing rifles, including lever-action rifles, is such that they should be prohibited in the same way as other full-bore, self-loading rifles. I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe has raised the interests of disabled shooters. Of course that is part of our assessment, but we are satisfied that there are other rifles that those with disabilities can use if they are prevented from using these rifles.

Let me move on to air rifles. I know that the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) and the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) have run long campaigns on air rifles. I hope that they both know that we have conducted this review following the coroner's report into the terrible and very sad death of Benjamin Wragge, a 13-year-old boy who was shot accidentally with an air weapon in 2016. As I said in Committee, we received more than 50,000 representations from members of the public, and the issues raised by the new clauses tabled by the hon. Lady and the right hon. Gentleman will be considered in that specialist review, which will be published shortly. I therefore ask them not to press their new clauses to a vote.

I want to make a small point that might assist the right hon. Member for Delyn in deciding whether to press new clause 19 to a vote. The new clause refers to trigger guards, rather than trigger locks. I understand that he wants to look at locks. At the moment, air weapons are fitted with trigger guards. But I am happy to have a conversation with him, and with any other Member, about the applicability of locks as part of the review process.

On Government amendments 26 to 55, I recognise the very, very strong feelings across the House. I spoke at the beginning about the balancing act—indeed, it is a discussion we had constantly in Committee—between effectiveness and proportionality. We saw that today, let alone on Second Reading and in Committee, in relation to clauses 30 and 31. The clauses were included in the Bill to strengthen the controls on high muzzle energy rifles. They are currently controlled under general licensing arrangements. The effect of the clauses would be to subject those rifles to the more rigorous controls provided by section 5 of the 1968 Act. This was because our law enforcement colleagues have concerns as to the potential effect if these rifles fall into the wrong hands. Our strong gun laws mean that those who shoot in the countryside or at ranges have met the standards expected in firearms licensing and by their local police force.

Gavin Robinson: I know the Minister has had extraordinary tension over this issue and has engaged very sincerely on it over the course of the Bill's proceedings. I commend her commitment to public safety—I think unfair comments have been made today. I recognise, as a signatory of the amendment—others have signed it as well—that there is a willingness to engage sincerely in the consultation that she will bring forward to deal with this in the appropriate way.

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He mentions the consultation, so I should formally mention our consideration of all the concerns we have listened to. The Home Secretary has listened very carefully to those concerns, as well as to the representations and advice from law enforcement colleagues. In the light of those circumstances, it is now the Home Secretary's view that we should give further detailed consideration to this and other issues relating to firearms that have arisen during the course of the Bill. It is therefore our intention to launch a full public consultation on a range of issues on firearms safety that have arisen over the past few months during the passage of the Bill. Accordingly, we have decided to remove those clauses at this stage. I emphasise that the current licensing

arrangements remain in place. The consultation will include other issues that have arisen, including for example, points relating to miniature rifle ranges raised by colleagues across the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman).

3.30 pm

Debate interrupted (Programme Order, this day),

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83E), That the clause be read a Second time.

Question negatived.

The Deputy Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order 83E).

Clause 30

PROHIBITION OF CERTAIN FIREARMS ETC: ENGLAND
AND WALES AND SCOTLAND

Amendments proposed: 26, page 30, leave out lines 6 to 8.

Clause 30 currently applies the prohibitions in section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968 to certain kinds of high velocity rifle. Clause 31 makes equivalent provision in relation to Article 45 of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 2004. This amendment and Amendments 27 to 55 remove rifles of that kind from the application of section 5 and Article 45 and make consequential changes to the Bill.

Amendment 27, page 30, line 30, leave out “, (ag)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 28, page 30, line 34, leave out “, (ag)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 29, page 30, line 36, leave out “(ag),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 30, page 30, line 38, leave out “(ag),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 31, page 30, line 40, leave out “(ag),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 32, page 30, line 43, leave out “(ag),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Clause 31

PROHIBITION OF CERTAIN FIREARMS ETC:
NORTHERN IRELAND

Amendments proposed: 33, page 31, leave out lines 6 to 8.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 34, page 31, line 28, leave out “, (ea)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 35, page 31, line 31, leave out “, (ea)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 36, page 31, line 33, leave out “(ea),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 37, page 31, line 35, leave out “(ea),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 38, page 31, line 37, leave out “(ea),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 39, page 31, line 41, leave out “(ea),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Clause 34

PAYMENTS IN RESPECT OF SURRENDERED FIREARMS
OTHER THAN BUMP STOCKS

Amendments proposed: 40, page 32, line 20, leave out “other than firearms”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 41, page 32, line 22, leave out “30(3)” and insert “30(2)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 42, page 32, line 24, leave out “31(3)” and insert “31(2)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Schedule 2

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS RELATING TO
SECTIONS 30 AND 31

Amendments proposed: 43, page 40, line 23, leave out “, (ag)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 44, page 40, line 24, leave out “, (ea)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 45, page 40, line 27, leave out “, (ag)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 46, page 41, line 1, leave out “, (ea)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 47, page 41, line 4, leave out “, (ag)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 48, page 41, line 5, leave out “, (ea)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 49, page 41, line 8, leave out “(ag),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 50, page 41, line 12, leave out “(ea),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 51, page 41, line 19, leave out “, (ag)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 52, page 41, line 20, leave out “, (ag)”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 53, page 41, line 22, leave out “(ag),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 54, page 41, line 26, leave out “(ag),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Amendment 55, page 41, line 38, leave out “(ea),”.

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 26.

Question put (single Question on amendments moved by a Minister of the Crown). That amendments 26 to 55 be made.—(Victoria Atkins.)

The House divided: Ayes 309, Noes 274.

Division No. 269]

[3.31 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy

Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria

Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridge, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Choze, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip

Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evannett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goldsmith, Zac
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert

Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Liddington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew

Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles

Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Amanda Milling and
Rebecca Harris

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brennan, Kevin
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Crawley, Angela
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
Davey, rh Sir Edward

David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
Day, Martyn
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Fellows, Marion
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Grant, Peter
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike

Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham
P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Linden, David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
Mc Nally, John
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonald, Stuart
C.
McDonnell, rh John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McGovern, Alison
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, rh Edward
Monaghan, Carol
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Moran, Layla
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen

Morris, Grahame
Nandy, Lisa
Newlands, Gavin
Norris, Alex
O'Hara, Brendan
O'Mara, Jared
Onasanya, Fiona
Onn, Melanie
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Ryan, rh Joan
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sherriff, Paula
Shuker, Mr Gavin
Siddiq, Tulip
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
Smeeth, Ruth
Smith, Angela
Smith, Eleanor
Smith, Jeff
Smith, Laura
Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeter, Wes
Stringer, Graham
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Tami, rh Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaz, Valerie

Walker, Thelma
Watson, Tom
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Dr Paul
Williamson, Chris

Wilson, Phil
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammad
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Thangam Debbonaire and
Stephanie Peacock

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendments 26 to 55 agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I have now to announce the result of today's deferred Division in respect of the question relating to child support. The Ayes were 310 and the Noes were 230, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division list is published at the end of today's debates.]

New Clause 16

OFFENCE OF THREATENING WITH AN OFFENSIVE WEAPON ETC IN A PRIVATE PLACE

'(1) A person ("A") commits an offence if—

(a) while A is in a private place, A unlawfully and intentionally threatens another person ("B") with an article or substance to which this subsection applies, and

(b) A does so in such a way that there is an immediate risk of serious physical harm to B.

(2) Subsection (1) applies to an article or substance if it is—

(a) an offensive weapon within the meaning of section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953,

(b) an article to which section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (offence of having article with blade or point in public place) applies, or

(c) a corrosive substance.

(3) In the application of subsection (1) to an article within subsection (2)(a) or (b), "private place" means a place other than—

(a) a public place,

(b) a place which is part of school premises, or

(c) a place which is part of further education premises.

(4) In the application of subsection (1) to a corrosive substance, "private place" means a place other than a public place.

(5) For the purposes of subsection (1) physical harm is serious if it amounts to grievous bodily harm for the purposes of the Offences against the Person Act 1861.

(6) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, to a fine or to both;

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 4 years, to a fine or to both.

(7) In relation to an offence committed before the coming into force of section 154(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (maximum sentence that may be imposed on summary conviction of offence triable either way), the reference in subsection (6)(a) to 12 months is to be read as a reference to 6 months.

(8) In this section and section [Search for corrosive substance on school or further education premises]—

"corrosive substance" means a substance that is capable of burning human skin by corrosion;

"further education premises" means land used solely for the purposes of—

(a) an institution within the further education sector (within the meaning of section 91 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992), or

(b) a 16 to 19 Academy (within the meaning of section 1B of the Academies Act 2010),

excluding any land occupied solely as a dwelling by a person employed at the institution or the 16 to 19 Academy;

"public place" includes any place to which, at the time in question, the public have or are permitted to have access, whether on payment or otherwise;

"school premises" means land used for the purposes of a school, excluding any land occupied solely as a dwelling by a person employed at the school; and "school" has the meaning given by section 4 of the Education Act 1996.—(Victoria Atkins.)

This new clause and NC17 and Amendment 25 make provision for and in connection with a new offence of threatening another person with an offensive weapon, bladed article or corrosive substance in a private place.

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.45 pm

Victoria Atkins: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Government new clause 17—*Search for corrosive substance on school or further education premises.*

New clause 1—*Protection for retail staff—*

'(1) A person ("the purchaser") commits an offence if they intentionally obstruct a person ("the seller") in the exercise of their duties under section 1 of this Act.

(2) In this section, "intentionally obstruct" includes, but is not limited to, a person acting in a threatening manner.

(3) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale.'

New clause 5—*Prohibition of bladed product displays—*

'(1) A person who in the course of a business displays a bladed product in a place in England and Wales or Northern Ireland is guilty of an offence.

(2) The appropriate Minister may by regulations provide for the meaning of "place" in this section.

(3) The appropriate Minister may by regulations make provision for a display in a place which also amounts to an advertisement to be treated for the purposes of offences in England and Wales or Northern Ireland under this Act—

(a) as an advertisement and not as a display, or

(b) as a display and not as an advertisement.

(4) No offence is committed under this section if—

(c) the bladed products are displayed in the course of a business which is part of the bladed product trade,

(d) they are displays for the purpose of that trade, and

(e) the display is accessible only to persons who are engaged in, or employed by, a business which is also part of that trade.

(5) No offence is committed under this section if the display is a requested display to an individual age 18 or over.

(6) The appropriate Minister may provide in regulations that no offence is committed under section 1 of the display complies with requirements specified in regulations.'

New clause 6—*Report on the causes behind youth violence with offensive weapons—*

'(1) The Secretary of State must, within 6 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, lay a report before Parliament on the causes behind youth violence with offensive weapons.

(2) The report under subsection 1 must consider, but is not limited to,

- (a) The effect of the reduction in police numbers on the levels of youth violence with offensive weapons;
- (b) The effect of the reduction in public spending on—
 - (i) children's services,
 - (ii) Sure Start,
 - (iii) state-maintained schools,
 - (iv) local authorities,
 - (v) youth offending teams,
 - (vi) Border Force, and
 - (vii) drug treatment programmes.

(3) The report under subsection 1 and the considerations under subsection 2 must consider the benefits of the public health approach to violence reduction.

(4) The report must contain all departmental evidence held relating to subsection 2 and 3.'

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to review the causes behind youth violence with offensive weapons.

New clause 7—Offence of threatening with an offensive weapon—

'(1) Section 1A of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 (offence of threatening with offensive weapon in public) is amended as follows.

- (a) After "Offence of threatening with offensive weapon" leave out "in public".
- (b) In subsection 1(a), after "weapon" leave out "with him or her in a public place".
- (c) In subsection 3, after "section" leave out "'public place" and "offensive weapon" have" and insert "offensive weapon" has'

This new clause would mean that threatening with an offensive weapon anywhere would be an offence, not merely in a public place.

New clause 10—Threatening with a bladed article or offensive weapon in a dwelling—

'(1) Section 139AA of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (offence of threatening with article with blade or point or offensive weapon) is amended as follows.

(2) After subsection 12 insert—

13 Where the threatening offence takes place in a dwelling, a person charged with this offence may rely on the defence available in a "householder case" set out in section 76 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.

14 In subsection 13 above, "dwelling" has the meaning given in section 76 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.'

New clause 11—Threatening with a bladed article or offensive weapon in a dwelling (No.2)—

'(1) Section 1A of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 (offence of threatening with offensive weapon in public) is amended as follows.

(2) After subsection 10 insert—

11 Where the threatening offence takes place in a dwelling, a person charged with this offence may rely on the defence available in a "householder case" set out in section 76 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.

12 In subsection 11 above, "dwelling" has the meaning given in section 76 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.'

New clause 12—Threatening with a bladed article or offensive weapon in a dwelling (No.3)—

'(1) Section 1A of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 (offence of threatening with offensive weapon in public) is amended as follows.

(2) After subsection 10 insert—

11 Where an offence under this section takes place in a dwelling it shall be a defence for a person charged with such an offence to prove that he had lawful authority or reasonable excuse for having the article with him.

12 In subsection 11 above, "dwelling" has the meaning given in section 76 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.'

New clause 13—Threatening with a bladed article or offensive weapon in a dwelling (No.4)—

'(1) Section 139AA of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (offence of threatening with article with blade or point or offensive weapon) is amended as follows.

(2) After subsection 12 insert—

13 Where an offence under this section takes place in a dwelling it shall be a defence for a person charged with such an offence to prove that he had lawful authority or reasonable excuse for having the article with him.

14 In subsection 13 above, "dwelling" has the meaning given in section 76 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.'

New clause 14—Protection for retail staff: bladed articles—

'(1) A person ("the purchaser") commits an offence if they intentionally obstruct a person ("the seller") in the exercise of their duties under section 141A of the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

(2) In this section, "intentionally obstruct" includes, but is not limited to, a person acting in a threatening manner.

(3) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale.'

New clause 15—Offence of threatening with blade or offensive weapon (No.2)—

'(1) Section 139AA of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (offence of threatening with article with blade or point or offensive weapon) is amended as follows.

(2) In subsection 1(a), after "applies" leave out "with him or her in a public place or on school premises".

(3) Omit subsection 2.

(4) Omit subsection 3.

(5) Omit subsection 5.'

This new clause would mean that threatening with a knife anywhere would be an offence, not merely in a public place or school/further education premises.

New clause 20—Offence of threatening with a non-corrosive substance—

'(1) A person commits an offence if they threaten a person with a substance they claim or imply is corrosive.

(2) It is not a defence for a person to prove that the substance used to threaten a person was not corrosive or listed under schedule 1 of this act.

(3) In this section, "threaten a person" means—

- (a) that the person unlawfully and intentionally threatens another person ("A") with the substance, and
- (b) does so in such a way that a reasonable person ("B") who was exposed to the same threat as A would think that there was an immediate risk of physical harm to B.

(4) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 4 on the standard scale.'

New clause 21—Prohibition on the possession of a corrosive substance on educational premises—

'(1) A person commits an offence if that person has a corrosive substance with them on school premises, further education premises or higher education premises.

(2) It shall be a defence for a person charged with an offence under subsection (1) to prove that they had good reason or lawful authority for having the corrosive substance on school premises, further education premises or higher education premises.

(3) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (2), it is a defence for a person charged in England and Wales or Northern Ireland with an offence under subsection (1) to prove that they had the corrosive substance with them for use at work.

(4) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (3), it is a defence for a person charged with an offence under subsection (1) to show that they had the corrosive substance with them for use at work.

(5) A person is to be taken to have shown a matter mentioned in subsection (4) or (5) if—

- (a) sufficient evidence of the matter is adduced to raise an issue with respect to it, and
- (b) the contrary is not proved beyond reasonable doubt.

(6) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction in England and Wales, to an imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, to a fine or to both;
- (b) on summary conviction in Northern Ireland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or to both;
- (c) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 4 years, to a fine or both.

(7) In relation to an offence committed before the coming into force of section 154(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (maximum sentence that may be imposed on summary conviction of offence triable either way) the reference in subsection (7)(a) to 12 months is to be read as a reference to 6 months.

(8) A constable may enter any school, further education premises or higher education premises and search those premises and any person on those premises, if they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that an offence under this section is, or has been, committed.

(9) If, in the course of a search under this section, a constable discovers a corrosive substance they may seize and retain it.

(10) The constable may use reasonable force, if necessary, in the exercise of entry conferred by this section.

(11) In this section—

“corrosive substance” means a substance which is capable of burning human skin by corrosion;

“school premises” means land used for the purpose of a school, excluding any land occupied solely as a dwelling by a person employed at a school;

“school” has the meaning given by—

- (a) in relation to land in England and Wales, section 4 of the Education Act 1996;
- (b) in relation to land in Northern Ireland, Article 2(2) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (SI 1986/ 594 (NI 3)).

“further educational premises” means—

- (a) in relation to England and Wales, land used solely for the purposes of—
- (b) in relation to Northern Ireland, land used solely for the purposes of an institution of further education within the meaning of Article 2 of the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (SI 1997/ 1772 (NI 15) excluding any land occupied solely as a dwelling by a person employed at the institution”.

“higher education premises” means an institution which provides higher education;

“institution” includes any training provider (whether or not the training provider would otherwise be regarded as an institution);

“higher education” means education provided by means of a higher education course;

“higher education course” means a course of any description mentioned in Schedule 6 to the Education Reform Act 1988.

New clause 22—Offence of threatening with corrosive substance on educational premises—

“(1) A person commits an offence if that person threatens a person with a corrosive substance on school premises, further education premises or higher education premises.

(2) In this section—

“corrosive substance” means a substance which is capable of burning human skin by corrosion;

“threatens a person” means—

- (a) unlawfully and intentionally threatens another person (“A”) with a corrosive substance, and
- (b) does so in such a way that a reasonable person (“B”) who was exposed to the same threat as A would think that there was an immediate risk of physical harm to B.

“school premises” means land used for the purpose of a school, excluding any land occupied solely as a dwelling by a person employed at a school;

“school” has the meaning given by—

- (a) in relation to land in England and Wales, section 4 of the Education Act 1996;
- (b) in relation to land in Northern Ireland, Article 2(2) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (SI 1986/594 (NI 3)).

“further educational premises” means—

- (a) in relation to England and Wales, land used solely for the purposes of —
- (b) in relation to Northern Ireland, land used solely for the purposes of an institution of further education within the meaning of Article 2 of the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (SI 1997/ 1772 (NI 15) excluding any land occupied solely as a dwelling by a person employed at the institution”.

“higher education premises” means an institution which provides higher education;

“institution” includes any training provider (whether or not the training provider would otherwise be regarded as an institution);

“higher education” means education provided by means of a higher education course;

“higher education course” means a course of any description mentioned in Schedule 6 to the Education Reform Act 1988”.

(3) A person guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction in England and Wales, to an imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, to a fine or to both;
- (b) on summary conviction in Northern Ireland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months, to a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum or to both;
- (c) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 4 years, to a fine or both.

(4) In relation to an offence committed before the coming into force of section 154(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (maximum sentence that may be imposed on summary conviction of offence triable either way) the reference in subsection (7)(a) to 12 months is to be read as a reference to 6 months.”

New clause 23—Advertising offensive weapons online—

“(1) A person or company commits an offence when a website registered in their name is used to advertise, list or otherwise facilitate the sale of any weapon listed in Schedule 1 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order (SI 1988/2019) or any offensive weapon capable of being disguised as something else.

(2) No offence is committed under this section if—

- (a) the website removes the advertisement or list within 24 hours of the registered owner of the website being informed that the advertisement or list includes a weapon listed in Schedule 1 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order (SI 1988/2019) or any offensive weapon capable of being disguised as something else.

(3) The registered owner of a website that is guilty of an offence under subsection (1) is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction in England and Wales, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 51 weeks, to a fine or to both;
- (b) on summary conviction in Scotland or Northern Ireland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.’

New clause 24—Enforcement—

‘(1) It shall be the duty of every authority to which subsection (4) applies to enforce within its area the provisions of Clauses 1, 3, 4, 17 and 20 of this Bill.

(2) An authority in England or Wales to which subsection (4) applies shall have the power to investigate and prosecute for an alleged contravention of any provision imposed by or under this section which was committed outside its area in any part of England and Wales.

(3) A district council in Northern Ireland shall have the power to investigate and prosecute for an alleged contravention of any provision imposed by or under this section which was committed outside its area in any part of Northern Ireland.

(4) The authorities to which this section applies are—

- (a) in England, a county council, district council, London Borough Council, the Common Council of the City of London in its capacity as a local authority and the Council of the Isles of Scilly;
- (b) in Wales, a county council or a county borough council;
- (c) in Scotland, a council constituted under section 2 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994(1);
- (d) in Northern Ireland, any district council.

(5) In enforcing this section, an enforcement authority must act in a manner proportionate to the seriousness of the risk and shall take due account of the precautionary principle, and shall encourage and promote voluntary action by producers and distributors.

(6) Notwithstanding subsection (5), an enforcement authority may take any action under this section urgently and without first encouraging and promoting voluntary action if a product poses a serious risk.’

New clause 25—Investigatory powers for trading standards—

‘(1) Schedule 5 of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 is amended in accordance with subsection (2).

(2) In Part 2, paragraph 10, at end insert—

“section (Enforcement)”.’

This new clause is consequential on NC24

New clause 26—Aggravated offence of possessing a corrosive substance or dangerous knife—

‘(1) A person is guilty of an aggravated offence of possessing a corrosive substance in a public place if—

- (a) they commit an offence under section 6 of this Act, and
- (b) at the time of committing the offence, the offender was—
 - (i) the driver of a moped or motor bicycle, or
 - (ii) a passenger of a moped or motor bicycle.

(2) A person is guilty of an aggravated offence of possessing certain dangerous knives if—

- (a) they commit an offence under section 1A of the Restrictions of Offensive Weapons Act 1959, as amended, and
- (b) at the time of committing the offence, the offender was—
 - (i) the driver of a moped or motor bicycle, or
 - (ii) a passenger of a moped or motor bicycle.

(3) A person guilty of an aggravated offence under this section is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction in England and Wales, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, to a fine or both;
- (b) on summary conviction in Scotland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, to a fine or both.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “moped” and “motor bicycle” have the same meanings as in section 108 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.’

New clause 30—Review of the Act—

‘(1) The Secretary of State must, within one year of this Act receiving Royal Assent, appoint an independent person to conduct an annual review of the provisions contained in this Act and the effect those provisions have had on crimes involving offensive weapons.

(2) The review under section 1 must consider, but is not limited to—

- (a) the impact the provisions on corrosive substances have had on crimes involving these substances, and whether these provisions are still adequate;
- (b) the impact the provisions on firearms have had on crimes involving these weapons, and whether the provisions are still adequate;
- (c) whether existing police funding is sufficient to ensure the adequate enforcement of the provisions of this Act and offences relating to offensive weapons; and
- (d) anything else the Secretary of State, or independent person appointed to conduct the review, thinks appropriate.

(3) The annual review under section 1 must be laid before both Houses of Parliament.’

New clause 31—Amendments to the Crossbow Act 1987—

‘(1) The Crossbow Act 1987 is amended as follows.

(2) After section 1 insert—

“1A Requirement of crossbow certificate

(1) Subject to any exemption under this Act, it is an offence for a person to have in their possession, or to purchase or acquire, a crossbow to which this section applies without holding a crossbow certificate in force at the time, or otherwise than as authorised by such a certificate.

(2) It is an offence for a person to fail to comply with a condition subject to which a crossbow certificate is held by them.

(3) This section applies to crossbows with a draw weight of which is to be determined in regulations designated by the Home Secretary, following consultation with—

- (a) the National Police Chiefs’ Council;
- (b) any other person or body the Home Secretary may deem necessary.”

(3) After section 1A insert—

“1B Application for a crossbow certificate

(1) An application for the grant of a crossbow certificate must be made in the form prescribed by regulations issued by the Home Secretary to the chief officer of police for the area in which the applicant resides and shall state such particulars as may be required by the form.

(2) A crossbow certificate shall be granted where the chief officer of police is satisfied that—

- (a) the applicant is fit to be entrusted with a crossbow to which section 1 of this Act applies and is not a person prohibited by this Act from possessing such a crossbow;
- (b) that he has a good reason for having in his possession, or for purchasing or acquiring, the crossbow in respect of which the application is made; and
- (c) in all the circumstances the applicant can be permitted to have the crossbow in his possession without danger to the public safety or to the peace.”

(3) In section 6 (punishments), in subsection 1, after “section 1” insert – “, or section 1A or section 1B”.

(4) After section 7 insert—

“7A Regulations

(1) A power to make regulations under this Act is exercisable by statutory instrument.

(2) Regulations under this Act may make provisions for the issuing of a crossbow certificate.

(3) A statutory instrument which contains regulations under this Act is subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.”

Amendment 12, in clause 1, page 2, line 11, leave out “imprisonment for a term not exceeding 51 weeks” and insert “a community sentence”

This amendment, along with Amendment 13, would replace the custodial sentences for the new offence in Clause 1 (sale of corrosive products to persons under 18) with community sentences.

Amendment 13, page 2, line 14, leave out “imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months” and insert “a community sentence”

This amendment, along with Amendment 12, would replace the custodial sentences for the new offence in Clause 1 (sale of corrosive products to persons under 18) with community sentences.

Amendment 14, in clause 6, page 7, line 7, after “place” insert “with intent to cause injury”

This amendment would make it an offence to have a corrosive substance in a public place only with the intent to cause injury to someone.

Amendment 3, page 8, line 3, after “otherwise” insert

“and means any place other than premises occupied as a private dwelling (including any stair, passage, garden, yard, garage, outhouse or other appurtenance of such premises which is not used in common by the occupants of more than one such dwelling).”

This amendment would extend the definition of public places in relation to England and Wales and Northern Ireland to include communal spaces within residential blocks.

Amendment 15, page 8, line 39, leave out clause 8

This amendment, along with Amendment 16, would remove mandatory custodial sentences for people convicted under the new offence in Clause 6 who have at least one previous relevant conviction.

Amendment 16, page 9, line 37, leave out clause 9

This amendment, along with Amendment 15, would remove mandatory custodial sentences for people convicted under the new offence in Clause 6 who have at least one previous relevant conviction.

Government amendment 56.

Amendment 8, in clause 17, page 16, line 41, at end insert—

“(ab) the seller is not a trusted trader of bladed products, and”

Amendment 9, page 17, line 3, at end insert—

“(3A) The Secretary of State may by regulations determine the conditions of being designated a trusted trader of bladed products in England and Wales for the purposes of section 17(1)(ab).

(3B) Scottish Ministers may by regulations determine the conditions of being designated a trusted trader of bladed products in Scotland for the purposes of section 17(1)(ab).

(3C) The Department of Justice in Northern Ireland may by regulations determine the conditions of being designated a trusted trader of bladed products in Northern Ireland for the purposes of section 17(1)(ab).”

Amendment 1, in clause 18, page 17, line 44, at end insert—

“(4A) It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under section 17 to prove that they reasonably believed that the buyer bought the bladed product for use for decorating purposes.”

Amendment 2, page 18, line 24, at end insert—

“(10) For the purposes of this section a bladed product is used by a person for decorating purposes if and only if the product is only used to make improvements, enhancements or repairs to real property or personal property.”

Amendment 4, in clause 23, page 23, line 8, after “further education premises” insert

“and higher education provider premises”

Amendment 5, page 23, line 10, after “further education premises” insert

“and higher education provider premises”

Amendment 7, page 24, line 8, at end insert—

“(7A) After subsection (6A) insert—

(6B) In this section “higher education provider” means an institution which provides higher education; “institution” includes any training provider (whether or not the training provider would otherwise be regarded as an institution); “higher education” means education provided by means of a higher education course; “higher education course” means a course of any description mentioned in Schedule 6 to the Education Reform Act 1988”.

Amendment 6, page 24, line 11, after “further education premises” insert

“and higher education provider premises”

Government amendments 57 to 61.

Amendment 22, in clause 25, page 26, line 41, leave out “the purpose only of participating in religious ceremonies” and insert “religious reasons only”

This amendment extends the defence to cover the possession of a ceremonial Sikh Kirpan for religious reasons on occasions other than religious ceremonies.

Amendment 17, page 28, line 28, leave out clause 28

This amendment, along with Amendments 18 and 19 would retain the current definition of risk for the existing offences in Section 1A of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 and Section 139AA of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, and for the new offence in Clause 29.

Amendment 11, page 29, line 6, leave out clause 29

This amendment would mean that threatening with a knife anywhere would be an offence, not merely in a public place or school/further education premises.

Amendment 18, in clause 29, page 29, line 14, leave out “(A)”

This amendment, along with Amendments 17 and 19, would retain the current definition of risk for the existing offences in Section 1A of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 and Section 139AA of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, and for the new offence in Clause 29.

Amendment 19, page 29, line 16, leave out from “that” to the end of line 18 and insert

“there is an immediate risk of serious physical harm to that person”

This amendment, along with Amendments 17 and 18, would retain the current definition of risk for the existing offences in Section 1A of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 and Section 139AA of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, and for the new offence in Clause 29.

Amendment 10, in clause 39, page 35, line 34, after “section” insert “17(3B).”

Government amendments 25, 62 and 63.

Victoria Atkins: This group of new clauses and amendments deals with matters on which I know there is a great deal of agreement across the House. I will

speak to Government new clauses 16 and 17 and Government amendment 25, and in response to new clauses 7, 10 to 13, 22 and 15 and amendment 11, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies).

Let me start by saying how grateful I am to my hon. Friend for his new clauses and amendment. I know that he has raised this issue in the past, and, of course, he spoke very eloquently about it during our Second Reading debate on 27 June. There are offences available for the prosecution of a person who threatens someone with an offensive weapon in private, but those offences do not describe the criminality sufficiently, and do not attract the same penalties as those that are possible when the offence is committed in public. I have therefore been convinced by my hon. Friend that there is a gap in the law that should be filled.

Under new clause 16, it would be an offence for a person unlawfully and intentionally to threaten another person with a corrosive substance, a bladed or pointed article, or an offensive weapon in a way that poses an immediate risk of serious physical harm to that person. The offence will apply in any private place, which means anywhere other than a public place or school, or further education premises, where it is already an offence. In respect of a corrosive substance, a private place means anywhere other than a public place. The lawyers have been terribly exercised about that.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): As the Minister probably knows, there was a nasty incident in Coventry a couple of days ago when a young man lost his life as a result of people carrying knives. How does she propose to strengthen the Bill? We have been here before—we have had amnesties and all sorts—but we never seem any nearer to tackling the problem. Has the Minister any proposals in that regard?

Victoria Atkins: Let me say first that I am terribly sorry to hear of the incident in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but I cannot comment on the specifics. The Bill is but one part of the Government's serious violence strategy, which has been a rolling programme of action since April. The purpose of these measures, particularly in relation to knives, is to address the concern expressed to us by charities, the police and others about the ability of young people to get hold of knives.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): Does the Minister appreciate the serious concern in the British Sikh community about people being in possession of a kirpan? As president of Gatka Federation UK, I know that many people are concerned about the practice of that Sikh martial art. Various individuals and organisations, including the Sikh Council UK and the Sikh Federation UK, have expressed solid concerns, and I think that an amendment has also been tabled. I hope that the Minister can allay those genuine concerns.

Victoria Atkins: I am delighted to say that I can, and I promise to deal with that in more detail in due course. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), her colleague the hon. Member for Wolverhampton North East (Emma Reynolds) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who have led discussions on the issue.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Victoria Atkins: May I make a little more progress?

In relation to the issue of a private place, it will become an offence to threaten someone with a corrosive substance on educational premises, for example, a point raised under new clause 22 by the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms). This provides for a maximum penalty of four years, in line with the maximum penalty for the public offence and considerably more than the current six-month maximum for a threat that amounts to common assault, which is the offence that may be charged currently.

The Government amendment would avoid householders having to justify owning their kitchen knives—again that demonstrates the balancing exercise we have had to do in this Bill. It targets the criminality that my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley wants to address while denying my fellow lawyers the chance to argue about possessing domestic implements, a sentiment I know my hon. Friend will endorse. New clause 17 will provide the necessary powers to enter and search for a corrosive substance on school and further education premises in support of the new offence.

Government amendment 25 simply sets the extent of the new offence as England and Wales, but I know my hon. Friend and others are keen to ensure that householders who have to defend themselves against burglars are not caught inadvertently by this new offence. That is not the intention of the Government, or I suspect the House, if this new offence is passed. The new offence is designed to capture perpetrators who have no recourse to the well-established defences of self-defence, defence of another and defence of property.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for giving way. The Minister said that the corrosive substances offence applies only to England and Wales, but I understand that some of the legislation applies to Northern Ireland. Can the Minister confirm either now or later that this legislation, which we welcome and wish to see, can be applicable in Northern Ireland under the rules and laws we have there as well?

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is drawing me into the incredibly complex area of applicability in Northern Ireland. He is right that many of the measures in the Bill have corresponding provisions for Northern Ireland, but I am sure that in due course I will be able to help the House with the particular point on corrosive substances, if I may return to that.

Gavin Robinson: The Minister will see in the Bill that for the specific provisions in clauses 1 to 4 it is for a newly appointed Minister of Justice in Northern Ireland to bring forward an order on the day that they so appoint.

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

I hope that this new offence will attract widespread support across the Chamber. It recognises that some threats in private can be very serious indeed. I will therefore ask my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley not to press his amendments and I commend to the House new clauses 16 and 17 and amendment 25.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I thank the Minister very sincerely for the way she has engaged in this issue. Clearly it was a ridiculous loophole that the offence of threatening somebody with a knife applied only in a public place and not in a private place, and I am delighted that the Minister listened to the argument and engaged with it and has brought forward these new clauses today, which I will happily support. On that basis I am very happy to confirm to her that I will not press my new clauses in this regard.

Victoria Atkins: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend and thank him again for his help not just on this but on a drafting correction that we made in the Bill Committee.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): He is always helpful.

Victoria Atkins: My colleague sitting next to me is quite right: my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley is always helpful.

Government amendments 56, 62 and 63 are minor amendments and have been included at the request of the Scottish Government. It is fair to say, as I said in Committee, that my officials have had a good working relationship with the Scottish Government on this Bill. These new amendments are intended to facilitate the operation of the new offences within the Scottish legal system. Under the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 provision is made for matters of routine evidence in criminal proceedings. These provisions operate so as to allow to be admitted into evidence certain routine matters by virtue of a certificate provided by an authorised expert. That means that if the accused person does not provide at least seven days' notice of an intent to challenge the evidence prior to trial it is admitted without any further proof being necessary. Given that many prosecutions in this area may be at summary court level, requiring expert testimony in these cases as a matter of course would be unduly expensive, so these amendments will ensure that the new corrosive offences included in the Bill are subject to the existing matters of routine evidence provisions.

Amendments 57 and 58 will limit the new offence of possession of an offensive weapon in section 141(1A) of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to possession "in private". That is to prevent overlap with existing offences. In shorthand, the aim of clause 24 is to prohibit the possession in private of offensive weapons as defined by section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988—for example, zombie knives. Amendments 57 and 58 clarify this to mean in private, because it is already against the law to possess any bladed article—which is obviously wider than the definition of offensive weapons—under section 139 of the 1988 Act.

The approach that we have taken to the new possession offence in the Bill is to mirror the defences that already applied to the manufacture, importation, sale and general supply of curved swords. The burden of proof for the defences that apply to the current legislation for manufacture and so on is to show that the defence applies. Therefore the burden of proof for the defences provided for the new possession offence in the Bill will also be to show that the defence applies. However, the burden of proof for the defence in relation to possession of an article with a blade in public is to prove, which is a higher burden, so to avoid inconsistency we are limiting the new possession offence in the Bill to places other than a

public place. In this way, we will continue to rely on existing legislation for possession in public, and the new possession offence in the Bill will apply only in private.

I shall turn now to amendments 59 and 61, and to the Opposition's amendment 22. Amendments 59 to 61 clarify the wording of clause 25 so as to include "religious reasons", rather than "religious ceremonies". I am grateful to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston, the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), who tabled amendment 22 and worked with me and my officials to get the law into a better place. This included facilitating discussions with representatives of the Sikh Federation last week, and it was a pleasure to meet them. We can now ensure that the Bill does not inadvertently prohibit the possession and supply of kirpans as part of the observance of the Sikh faith.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I should like to thank the Minister for her response to the amendment on the possession of the kirpan, the religious sword that is used by Sikhs. My hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) and I represent a large Sikh community, and they have been very concerned about the omission in the Bill. We would also like to congratulate the all-party parliamentary group for British Sikhs on the work that it has done, and we thank the Minister and the Secretary of State for their willingness to listen and to act on behalf of the Sikh community.

Victoria Atkins: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I want to make it clear that it was never the Government's intention to worry anyone or inadvertently to criminalise acts of faith in that way. I hope that the Sikh community and those who represent them understand that we did this with the very best of intentions.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I should like to thank the Minister for the open, listening approach that she has taken in response to representations from myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), the Sikh Federation and others who have contacted her. Can she clarify that the effect of the Government amendments to the Bill will be to maintain the status quo as far as Sikh religious practice is concerned? That is all that the community were asking for throughout this process, and if that is what the amendments will do, I believe that they will be warmly welcomed.

Victoria Atkins: I am happy to confirm that. The original wording mirrored the wording used in existing legislation for offences in public, but we have of course understood that praying at home, for example, may not fall within the definition of ceremony. We do not want to leave any doubt or room for worry; we are amending the Bill to enable prayers and so on at home to continue.

4 pm

Mr Jim Cunningham: The Minister has been very generous in giving way. May I identify myself with my colleagues in support of the amendment? Like them, I have been approached by the Sikh Federation, and when I referred earlier to the knives issue, I was not referring to the federation and its members' religious practices; I was talking about crime and so on.

Victoria Atkins: Of course. I am sure that everyone who works in this complex area has sympathy with the hon. Gentleman in wanting to clarify the point he raised in his earlier intervention.

As the Government have tabled amendments 59 to 61, I hope that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston will not press amendment 22.

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op) *indicated assent.*

Victoria Atkins: I shall move on to new clause 1. The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) continues to raise the issue of the safety of retail staff, and I thank him for that. Indeed, I recently discussed that issue with him, and also with the head of the British Retail Consortium. Although the Government fully understand the concern of retailers and their staff about being threatened or attacked if they refuse to sell a corrosive product or bladed article to a member of the public, we do not believe that a new criminal offence as set out in new clauses 1 and 14 would provide additional protection or result in more people being prosecuted. The law already provides the police and Crown Prosecution Service with sufficient powers to prosecute this type of offending and provide protection to retail staff. A number of criminal offences are available to cover a wide range of unacceptable behaviour, including that described in the tabled amendments, ranging from abusive and threatening language to actual violent offences against the person. So, we submit that there is no gap.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): A group of women shopworkers came to see me because of regular threatening behaviour by a gang of youths. These women were afraid and fearful, especially when they had to work alone. We have an opportunity today to strengthen the law; it clearly needs strengthening. We should do so.

Victoria Atkins: I am extremely concerned to hear that, but I wonder why the local police are not using the powers already available to them, because if a gang is behaving like that, there are offences that would enable the police to deal with that threatening behaviour, and any violent acts.

The Sentencing Council has set out, in its definitive guideline on assault offences, that it is an “aggravating factor” for an offence to be committed against those who are either working in the public sector or providing a service to the public, and an offence against either group could result in a more severe sentence within the statutory maximum for the offence—and that includes retail and shop staff.

However, there is more to this than the shape of the legislation, as I am sure the right hon. Gentleman would agree. That is why, in October 2017, the National Police Chiefs Council—with the support of Home Office funding—launched the national business crime centre, a repository for good practice, standards and guidance for all business nationally. It also acts as a national alert and data feed service, to enable businesses to have more information regarding crime in their local area.

David Hanson: If all the Minister says is true, why has every retail organisation in the country, and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, argued in favour of new clause 1, which I shall be moving shortly?

Victoria Atkins: They are of course free to do so, but we have looked carefully at the law. However, I chair the national retail crime steering group, which brings retailers and police together to tackle retail crime, and I am happy to ask the police, in that forum, why retailers feel this way.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): If the Minister genuinely does not want to frustrate the content of new clause 1, could she not simply accept it given that there is genuine concern out there that, currently, the law does not go far enough?

Victoria Atkins: I know this will not meet with the approval of Opposition Members but, having looked very carefully at it, we have not been able to identify a gap in the law, which is why, regrettably, I cannot accept new clause 1. We encourage closer local partnerships between police and retailers so that better crime prevention measures are put in place, because that must be a factor. We want to ensure that local police respond effectively to reported crime.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): The reality on the ground, and USDAW and the Co-op Group have been clear about this, is that the police do not consider offences such as shoplifting, and all the things that go on around it, seriously enough even to turn up at a store to take a statement. It is a fact that shop workers at the tills are the ones enforcing the legislation that we pass. When we demand that identification is presented for alcohol and cigarette sales, and the like, it is those workers who are on the frontline in defending the legislation we pass. Surely they deserve our support, too.

Victoria Atkins: Of course, anyone working on the frontline deserves our support. The criminality the hon. Gentleman describes, such as shoplifting, is already enforced, so the discussion should be about local policing priorities. If he writes to me with particular instances in his constituency, I am very happy to raise it through the national retail crime steering group.

Jim McMahon *rose—*

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab) *rose—*

Victoria Atkins: A lot of Members are seeking to intervene, and I will give the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) a chance.

Toby Perkins: The hon. Lady is very kind. She says that she will speak to her committee of retail representatives about why they feel this is necessary, but should she not have done that before rejecting the amendment? It is clear that they are saying it is necessary, so it is a little late for her to say she will vote against the amendment while saying she will start consulting on it.

Victoria Atkins: As part of our discussions—I not only include myself but Home Office officials—of course we talk about the safety of retail staff. As I said, I had a meeting very recently. It is not a question of just starting now; we are aware of these concerns. Of course, hon. Members voicing those concerns in the Chamber gives me and my officials more material to ask the National Police Chiefs Council what is happening on this and whether there is more that can and should be done at local level.

Jim McMahon: I appreciate the Minister's courtesy in allowing me to come back. The reality is that serious violent crime, organised crime and online crime, and the protection of vulnerable groups, takes up a significant amount of police time. In Greater Manchester we have lost 2,000 frontline officers, so it is not right for the Government who have made those cuts and made that decision to put the pressure back on Greater Manchester police to maintain a police service with diminishing resources when crime is going up. It just is not correct. She has an opportunity to respond to the debate, to respond to new clause 1 and to show that we are sticking up for shop workers. It is not good enough to defer responsibility on this.

Victoria Atkins: Forgive me, but it is not a question of deferring responsibility. It is the responsibility of the local police and crime commissioner and the chief constable, under our system of policing, to decide local policing priorities. That is why we had the police and crime commissioner elections a couple of years ago.

The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) is assiduous in his parliamentary questions to me about retail crime, but if hon. Members have concerns that retailers and retail staff in their local area are not being looked after, I encourage them to take it up with their police and crime commissioner, because it really is their decision as to how local resources are prioritised.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): Does the Minister not realise quite how this looks? Shop workers across the country—in every part of the country, every constituency and every region—the frontline workers, their union and the police are saying, “We do not need consultation; we need a change in the law to protect us.” What the Minister is saying, and I say this with respect, is that she and her officials know better. I say we should listen to what the shop workers of this country are telling us and mend the gap in the law.

Victoria Atkins: I do listen—I must disagree with the hon. Gentleman on that. The point I am making is that the laws that can protect shop workers are already in force, so it is not a question of making a new law because we hope that that will address the criminality, because those laws are already in place. There are public order offences, so where someone is rude or abusive, that is a criminal offence already. Our job here is to make law, but this is also sometimes about how it is applied on the ground, and that is what I am talking about. I am talking about saying to the NPCC and others, “What’s happening on these concerns colleagues are raising about how retail workers are being treated in their shops?” I know that this is an important issue, not only to Labour Members, but to my colleagues and to me. That is why if we can do nothing else, we should get the message out there that the law already exists to protect shop workers. We should focus on how that is pushed and put into effect.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab) *rose*—

Victoria Atkins: I am just about to move on to the next topic, but of course I will give way.

Susan Elan Jones: I am grateful to the Minister for that. Does she realise that many shop workers across the country are scared to death about all this? They are

scared to death of knives being pulled on them. This is no longer just a problem in our inner cities; it goes right across the country. This is happening in rural areas and in small towns. My view is that we need to make the legislation as strong as possible, not just to protect the shop workers, but to send a message to people out there that this is a really serious issue.

Victoria Atkins: I completely agree that we need to communicate the fact that the behaviour the hon. Lady described is utterly unacceptable, but she has given the example of a knife being pulled on a shop worker and legislation is already in place to deal with that. Furthermore, the independent Sentencing Council, which sets the guidelines for the judiciary across the country, has said that in that scenario the fact that the knife was pulled on a person in their line of work can be an aggravating factor. So the law is already there and we just need to make sure it is being used as effectively as possible, not just by our police, but by our judiciary.

On the point about serious violence more generally, the hon. Lady will know that we published the serious violence strategy in April. It has marked a step change in how we tackle serious violence, because we acknowledge that serious violence is no longer restricted to our large urban centres and is spreading out across the country, particularly with the rise of county lines. She will know that one of the drivers behind this rise in serious violence is drugs—the drug markets. A great deal of work is being done just on that one stream to tackle that.

For example, a couple of weeks ago we held an international conference, drawing together law enforcement and public health officials from across the world to talk about the rise in serious violence, because this is happening not only in the UK, but in other countries. From that conference, which I was able to attend, although sadly just for a little while, we could see the lessons that we can learn from other policing experts across the world and from public health officials. That is also why the Home Secretary has announced recently that we are looking into a consultation on making tackling serious violence a public health duty for local authorities—all arms of the state. That goes further than the models in Scotland and in Wales, which are often rightly cited as good examples, because we want to look into whether having a public duty will help with the sharing of information and the working together. Those of us who served on the Public Bill Committee and those of us who take a particular interest in this topic know that these things do not always work as well as they should.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Interestingly, the Minister said that the Home Secretary has talked about adopting a public health approach—I believe that was at the Conservative party conference. Since then we have heard absolutely nothing in this Chamber about what is happening on the public health approach. I believe I have asked nine times in this Chamber when we will be getting a debate on this. I do not suppose the Minister would like to respond to that now.

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady asked me about this at the last Home Office orals and I said I would be delighted to debate with her. She has asked this in business questions, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has written to me and to the Home Secretary.

I am keen to have the debate, which I think is really important, and the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), has heard this exchange, so who knows what opportunities may be made available.

4.15 pm

For all the bustle and tussle in the Chamber, there is broad cross-party agreement on this issue. Short-term measures need to be taken, but much longer-term measures are also required, which is why we have announced the setting up of a £200 million endowment fund that will be able, over 10 years, to invest in projects using a much longer-term model than is necessarily the case now. I hope it will be able to do some quite innovative work and to do some work to help young people to avoid getting ensnared by criminal gangs.

Lyn Brown *rose*—

Victoria Atkins: I give way to the hon. Lady, whom I am tempted to call an hon. Friend because she and I have discussed this issue so often.

Lyn Brown: I am delighted that the Minister modelled this part of the Bill on my asks on acid crime. I know that she will have studied my 5 September speech really closely to see our other asks on this issue. When might she find the time to introduce a strategy to deal with the violent crime that is rising from the county lines experience across the country and that will literally join up all the cross-Government actions that have been taken to deal with it?

Victoria Atkins: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady and her constituency neighbour, the right hon. Member for—I am going to get this wrong—

Lyn Brown: East Ham.

Victoria Atkins: Thank you. She and the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) have done a great deal on not only county lines but on corrosive substance attacks. She will know that we now have the corrosive substance action plan, which is a voluntary commitment that we introduced at the beginning of the year to get all the major retailers on the right page when it comes to the sale of corrosive substances, because we knew that it would take time to introduce legislation in this place. I hope that she is pleased and satisfied with the Bill's provisions on corrosive substances.

On county lines, the hon. Lady will know that we have announced the launch of the national co-ordination centre. It brings law enforcement together because, frankly, law enforcement has not been sharing information as well as it could throughout the country on the movement of these gangs of criminals, who exploit the distances between the major urban centres and rural and coastal areas, knowing that constabulary boundaries sometimes get in the way. The national co-ordination centre was launched in September and had an extraordinary week of action in which something like 500 arrests were made. If I have got that figure wrong, I am sure I will be able to correct it in due course.

It is important to note that the co-ordination centre brings together not only law enforcement officials but those involved in looking after children—local

authorities—because we know that the most vulnerable children have been targeted as they are attending pupil referral units or while they are living in care homes. We need to ensure that when the police go in and do a raid, we have social services there to pick up the children and start caring for them, to avoid their being re-trafficked. Indeed, I hope the fact that so many cases are now being prosecuted not only in the traditional manner, for conspiracy to supply class As, but using the Modern Slavery Act 2015, brings real stigma to those gangs that bizarrely and extraordinarily think that it is somehow okay to exploit children.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I hear what my hon. Friend says about the national co-ordination centre. From my experience talking to my local police force, I recognise that crime is interlinked. We can talk about drugs and we can talk about weapons, but they are interlinked issues, and they are interlinked with so many other things. We are asking the police to think holistically in how they look at these issues so that they can put into place a better strategy for dealing with these problems.

Victoria Atkins: That is very much the case. Indeed, in my previous career prosecuting serious organised crime, on occasions we prosecuted organised crime gangs for, for example, the importation of counterfeit cigarettes, because that is what we could get them on. We suspected that they were importing other things, because if they had the lines open to import one type of illicit material, it followed that they probably had the ability to import other illicit materials. Sadly, as we get better at identifying modern slavery, we know that that can also include people.

Let me turn to new clause 5, which deals with an important area that colleagues across the House have expressed interest in.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): If I have understood correctly, the key thing that new clause 16 does is to fill a gap in the law to cover things that happen in private properties, such as the flat in lower Westgate Street in Gloucester, where one of my hapless constituents was murdered precisely because of an argument over drug selling receipts. Can the Minister confirm that police and others would have powers under new clause 16 to move much earlier against the sort of threat that might arise in that situation?

Victoria Atkins: Indeed, and I thank my hon. Friend for being kind enough to show me his great city only a few months ago. We met with senior police officers and others to discuss a number of issues relating to vulnerability, including the vulnerability of those being stalked. He brings to the Chamber his commitment to helping the most vulnerable in his constituency, and he has hit the nail on the head. Filling that gap to cover threatening behaviour in a private place makes it possible to address the sort of situation that he has described. Where gangs are in somebody's home, perhaps at a party, and things turn nasty, the location of the person holding the knife changes under the current law depending on where they are in relation to the front door. The purpose of new clause 16 is to make it irrelevant whether their threatening behaviour takes place when they are standing on one side of the front door or the other.

[*Victoria Atkins*]

New clause 5 concerns the secure display of bladed products. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley, who tabled it, knows that I have taken great interest in this area. We have looked carefully at whether prohibition as set out in the new clause would address the concerns that she and others have rightly raised. Our concern is that the prohibition is a blanket requirement. I have looked into whether there are ways that we could make it more targeted, so that councils with a particular problem with knife crime can lay an order covering the display of bladed products in shops in their locality. What we are doing—not what we would like to do, but what we are in the process of doing—is encouraging much stronger voluntary action by retailers to take more robust measures on displays using a risk-based approach.

Louise Haigh: The Minister is absolutely right that new clause 5 would impose a blanket ban on retailers displaying bladed products, but the Government are proposing a blanket ban on the sale of bladed products to residential premises. Why is it one rule for online and another for face-to-face retailers?

Victoria Atkins: We are indeed introducing a blanket ban on the delivery of bladed products to homes, first because we know that test purchases online have not led to the sort of results that we have seen with retailers. We wanted to close that gap and make it clear to online retailers, some of which do not seem to understand that they currently are not allowed to sell bladed products to under-18s and should have robust measures in place to ensure that they do not. The Bill seeks to re-emphasise that, but we also want to ensure that the person picking up the knife has to go to a post office, delivery depot or local shop with such arrangements and show identification to establish that they are over 18. That is the purpose behind those measures.

We do not currently have evidence of the rate of shoplifting of knives by young people who go on to use them in crimes. That is part of the problem. As a first step, my officials are working with retailers to come up with a much stronger voluntary response, which we know retailers are responding to well, because, in fairness, the voluntary commitments have been working well.

Bob Stewart: When packages are delivered to post offices to be picked up, are they clearly marked, “This is a knife”, or does the post office official know that it is a knife so that it cannot be given to someone under the age of 18?

Victoria Atkins: The conditions in the Bill require those who are selling such products to make it clear on the packaging.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab) *rose—*

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op) *rose—*

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con) *rose—*

Victoria Atkins: Oh, gosh. I am going to try to finish my speech by 4.30 pm, so I will give way to the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) because she has tabled amendments to which I will not have time to speak.

Anna Turley: I appreciate the Minister’s generosity. I hope to speak to those amendments but if time eludes me, fair enough; that is why I want to raise this issue now. Have the Government done an impact assessment of the implications of these measures for online retailers? I speak on behalf of a constituent who runs a DIY shop, and thinks that the implications would be in the region of £30,000 if he was unable to sell wallpaper scrapers and specific DIY knives to residential addresses.

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady’s constituent will be able to sell the products. We are not banning the online sale of bladed products; we are making it clear that retailers have to conduct proper checks as to the age of the person to whom they are selling. They should be doing that at the moment anyway, and this legislation means that they will also have to package the items up as they do if they are selling online or at a distance. The point is that the package has to be labelled, and that it will then be kept at the post office or wherever before being picked up by a person with ID.

Mr Betts: Sheffield is obviously the home of knives in this country—knives for proper purposes. I visited Taylor’s Eye Witness, a firm in my constituency that manufactures and wholesales knives. As it is a wholesaler, 10% of its business is by post, passing things on through other retailers. It says that that aspect of its business is threatened by this legislation. Will the Minister consider amendment 9 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), suggesting a trusted trader scheme, to see whether the requirements of this measure could at least be reduced for trusted traders? This business employs 60 people, whose jobs could be at risk.

Victoria Atkins: Of course I acknowledge the great history of Sheffield as the centre of knife making in this country and, dare I say it, across the world. We have looked very carefully at the trusted trader amendments, but we believe they would introduce more bureaucracy for retailers, which is why we do not support them. This is simply a matter of conducting checks, and then the grown-up who is buying their kitchen knife going to a post office and showing their ID to prove that they are in compliance with the law.

Alex Chalk *rose—*

Victoria Atkins: I will take one more intervention because I have promised that I will finish at 4.30 pm.

Alex Chalk: The Minister is extremely kind. Although I and, I dare say other hon. Members, can understand the public interests of this proposal entirely, retailers would want to be satisfied that there is a level playing field, so that overseas retailers importing knives into the UK are governed by the same rules, and that they are not going—if this is not too much of a pun—to undercut domestic suppliers.

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend because he has identified one of the problems with which we grappled in Committee. The Bill includes a clause specifically for overseas sales. The requirement is that any delivery company that enters into a contract with an overseas retailer or manufacturer must itself conduct the checks as to the age of the person to whom it is delivering. Arguably, the checks are more arduous on delivery drivers for overseas retailers than

for UK-based retailers. He will understand that, if a retailer resides in China, there is very little we can do to require it to comply with these laws, but we have tried to address that point.

I hope and believe that the Bill addresses the concerns that have been raised about the sale and delivery of corrosive products, the possession of corrosive substances, the sale and delivery of knives and so on. I will listen with interest during the rest of this debate because hon. Members have tabled several interesting amendments. I hope that I have answered their concerns with regard to the amendments and new clauses I have spoken on thus far, but I may seek to address one or two amendments at a later stage if there are particular questions they would like me to answer.

4.30 pm

David Hanson: I rise to speak to new clause 1. I say to the Minister straightaway that I think she has missed the point on this. We are trying to strengthen the Bill to protect retail staff who are upholding the law. I support the Government's position in relation to the banning of sales to under-18s of corrosive products and the restrictions on sales of knives. However, the question is whether it is right that those who hold stocks of those items are accordingly prosecuted if they sell them.

The key question for this House is: what about the people who are at the frontline in upholding the law through enforcing this legislation? Under this Bill, in the case of refusal to sell corrosive products and knives, it will not be the police or the security services, police community support officers or police and crime commissioners, or the local council or trading standards who are at the frontline in upholding the legislation that we hope the House will pass this evening. It will be the individual shop staff—often alone; often, perhaps, not much older than some of the people who are trying to buy these products—who are at the frontline of that challenge.

Let us just picture for a moment a large, 24-hour supermarket open at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning with a shop assistant at the front counter refusing to make a sale of a corrosive product or a knife, upholding the legislation that the Minister proposes. Imagine for a moment a small, open-all-hours shop refusing to sell these products, or a DIY store on a Saturday afternoon refusing to sell at that frontline. When that member of staff says no, they say no on behalf of us all in upholding this legislation.

The simple measure that I have brought before the House would strengthen the Bill to give those people some protection. It would tell them what their rights are in upholding this legislation and what defences we are giving to them.

Philip Davies: As I am sure the right hon. Gentleman knows, I worked for Asda for 12 years before I first entered this place, and what he has said about shop staff is absolutely right. It is a hellishly difficult job working on the checkouts in a supermarket—or in any shop, for that matter—and we ask an awful lot of those people, who are not paid an awful lot to do the really responsible job that they do. I agree that the least that we can do in this House, when we put such pressures on them, is to give them the support that they need. On that basis, I very much support his new clause 1.

David Hanson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. As he will know, the frontline staff are the people who are upholding the law not just on this issue but on all age-related sales. While today we can only discuss amendments on corrosive products and on knives, the Minister needs to look at this issue in relation to all age-related sales. Shop staff are upholding the law on our behalf, and they deserve protection. My new clause would strengthen that protection. It provides for a level 4 fine of up to £2,500 for abusive behaviour when staff are enforcing the legislation that the Minister proposes.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, support my right hon. Friend's new clause 1. Does he agree that there is a particular point about staff in small shops that are often open until 8, 9 or 10 o'clock at night? The shop will often be the only place open in that community and not in an area where people are walking past. The one or two staff in there could find themselves under immense pressure from people wanting to buy substances, and they have to reject them with nobody about to help.

David Hanson: My hon. Friend is right. If the Bill was passed with new clause 1 included, shop workers could at least point to a sign on the till saying, "You will face a fine if you do not desist from this behaviour." There are fewer police on the streets to call, but this is an opportunity to at least strengthen the protection of individuals working in these shops.

The retailers we have all met in the past few weeks as part of the "Freedom from Fear" campaign are doing their bit. They are installing CCTV and putting security measures in place. I visited the Co-op in Leeswood in my constituency, where staff have handsets and headphones so that they can communicate, and individuals are being banned from stores. It knows that it has a duty of care for its staff. All I am asking is that the Government recognise they have a duty of care also.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I, too, support my right hon. Friend's new clause. Does he agree that workers in rural locations, where shops are often single-staffed and the distance from the nearest police station may be significant, are often left in a very vulnerable situation indeed?

David Hanson: Indeed. My new clause—if adopted, or if the Minister looks at this as part of age-related sales—would give additional protection to shop workers who are upholding the legislation that this Government have introduced.

The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, of which I am a proud member and which—I declare an interest—gives some support to my constituency party, supports my new clause. The Co-op party, the co-op movement, the Association of Convenience Stores, the British Retail Consortium and the National Federation of Retail Newsagents all support the new clause publicly and visibly because they recognise that they have a duty of care to their staff.

This matters because, in the past 10 years, we have seen a rise in the incidence of assaults on and threatening behaviour towards retail staff. An USDAW survey showed last year that 66% of staff have reported verbal abuse, and the number who reported threats of physical violence increased to 42% in the past year alone.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): I support my right hon. Friend's new clause. I visited a Co-op shop in Croydon recently. The manager there had had a knife pulled on him. There had been several occasions in recent times when incidents had occurred but the police had not come, because the incidents were not deemed important enough. Those shop workers were having to deal with all kinds of incidents. They feel a lack of protection, and they support what my right hon. Friend is trying to do.

David Hanson: My new clause would give added protection, but more importantly, it would show retail staff on the frontline that we are on their side, backing them up and giving them the support they need.

The British Retail Consortium and the Association of Convenience Stores have identified violence to staff as the most significant risk in the sector. The National Federation of Retail Newsagents has published research showing that there are 2,300 incidents daily among its members. The Association of Convenience Stores has said that enforcing the law on age-restricted sales is one of the biggest triggers of abuse against people working in convenience stores. The British Retail Consortium has said that age verification checks are one of the key triggers for attacks. USDAW has said that shop workers are on the frontline of helping to keep our community safe, so their role should be valued and they deserve our respect. The Co-op and police and crime commissioners such as Paddy Tipping in Nottingham have said the same.

If the Minister can agree to this new clause or take it away and look at the general principle with the National Police Chiefs Council, she will be standing shoulder to shoulder with every member of staff who is upholding the law. She will be saying that she is with them and protecting them. She should do the right thing. The 15,000 members of the National Federation of Retail Newsagents want this new clause. The British Retail Consortium, representing 70% of retail trade, wants this new clause. The Association of Convenience Stores, representing 33,000 stores, wants this. The Co-op group wants it. The Co-op party wants it, and the USDAW trade union wants it. It seems that the only person who does not is the Minister. I know that she is concerned about this issue. I ask her to reflect upon it, to support this new clause and to work with those bodies to come to a solution that protects retail staff who are enforcing the legislation that this House has enacted.

Vicky Ford: At the moment, many of our constituents seem to think the only thing we are discussing in this place is yet more Brexit, so it is with great pleasure that I am here to speak about something so important, unfortunately, to the daily lives of many of our constituents.

A few weeks ago, I was invited to speak to a group of 16 to 18-year-olds in my constituency. Colleagues will know that that can sometimes be quite a challenging group of constituents to please. When I told them that one of the things we were working on in Westminster was a new law that would make it so much more challenging to buy and sell dangerous knives—zombie knives and the like—on the internet, they stood up and clapped, because it is so near the top of their list of concerns and of their agenda for how to keep themselves safe when they are out on the streets. They have been

shocked, as we all have been shocked, by the rise in violent crime across the country. When violent crime increases, it is, unfortunately, very often our young people who suffer. I believe that it is the first job of politicians to try to keep our constituents safe, and that is why I welcome the Bill.

We have discussed the sale of knives online, stopping them being sent to residential addresses, and if they are legal sales—in other words, sales of a permitted bladed article to someone over the age of 18—making sure that those who receive them provide identification. I welcome the parts of the Bill that make it illegal to possess the most offensive weapons in private as well as in public, including zombie knives and knuckledusters. New clause 16, moved today, will make the offence of threatening with an offensive weapon in a private place part of the Bill. This new offence of making it unlawful to have offensive weapons in private means that, when the police find a zombie knife in a private place or someone's home—as members of Chelmsford police have—they can arrest and charge the owner with the proposed offence and remove the weapon from the owner.

I am extremely pleased that the Bill extends the current offence of possessing such bladed articles or offensive weapons on school premises to cover all further education premises in England and Wales as well as schools. As I have said, it is this group of 16 to 18-year-olds in my constituency who have campaigned very hard since my election for stronger laws against this type of crime and for stronger action against this type of weapon.

In Essex, we have the highest number of violent incidents relating to urban street gangs and county lines in the whole of the east of England, but we have a police and crime commissioner who is committed to reducing that. While violent crime across the country has increased by 12%, the police and crime commissioner in my own county—the police, fire and crime commissioner; she has now taken on the fire commissioner role as well—told us just last Friday night that it has increased by 3% to 4% in Essex. That is lower than the national rise, but it is still increasing.

Thanks to Ministers listening to the pleas from Essex police, we will now have 150 additional police officers on the streets in Essex, because we have been able to increase the police precept. Essex MPs were united in asking for the increase in the police precept. I am sure the Minister will be very glad to hear that a whole tranche of those new Essex police officers will hold their passing-out parade on Friday afternoon. We are very proud to see that decision actually turning into reality.

At the end of the summer, I spent a day and a night on patrol with my local police. While I have the Minister's attention, I will mention some other items that I would like her to consider. The officers in my district alone did 172 stop and searches last month. They said that the power to stop and search is vital for tackling county lines and getting on top of the increase in violent crime. Stop and searches quite often result in the seizure of offensive weapons, such as the ones we have been discussing.

4.45 pm

My local police are also running Operation Showman to tackle drug use and supply. It has been really successful at targeting the people at the top of the drugs gangs,

and a number of arrests have been made. The police would like to see stronger sentencing when they find those people. They can arrest and re-arrest them, but sometimes the sentences are not as strong as they would like. They would also like stronger stop-and-search powers, especially in cases where they smell cannabis, because it is unclear what they can do at the moment, but that is often linked to other gang-related activity.

There is particular concern about vulnerable young people being targeted by gangs and used as drugs mules. The police have asked me to draw this to the Minister's attention. Sometimes the police, the youth offending programmes and the Crown Prosecution Service will decide to put a curfew on a young person to safeguard them, because the gangs will be unable to exploit them by asking them to go out at night and get involved in violent crime, which is linked to the violent weapons we are discussing today. Of course the young person—we are talking about 14-year-olds—will not say publicly that they want the curfew, but they know that it will protect them. However, when the case gets to court, the magistrate has decided on occasion to overturn the curfew because they think the young person has human rights and should be allowed out after 10 o'clock at night. There does not seem to be a process that allows the police, the youth offending programmes and the CPS to pass that intelligence on to the magistrate before sentencing, so how can we improve the dialogue to ensure that all the information is taken into consideration to safeguard these vulnerable young people?

In the Women and Equalities Committee, we have been looking at sexual harassment, especially in public places and at night. One of our report's recommendations is to encourage more parts of the country to consider purple flag schemes for busy city centres. In my constituency, we are very proud of our purple flag team, who recently won the national award for best Pubwatch scheme. The scheme brings together pub and nightclub owners. My constituency has a very busy nightlife. Indeed, I spent the Saturday before last following the bouncers in five different nightclubs to see the work they do.

Most of those clubs run a scheme that allows absolutely no drugs and has strong co-ordination so that anyone suspected of being involved in drugs or violence is banned, and the ban goes across all the pubs and clubs in the scheme. It has resulted in a 35% drop in night-time violence. It is hugely innovative. The scheme has also introduced acid attack kits to ensure that all those working in the clubs can take swift action if someone is attacked with acid. That is a very innovative, and it has definitely meant that those visiting the clubs and the club owners feel much better prepared.

On a recent visit to my local mosque, I was very taken by the fact that the young people, both boys and girls, were telling me how concerned they were by the rise in acid attacks. I am absolutely delighted that the Bill introduces additional restrictions on carrying dangerous corrosive products. The young people I spoke to, both in schools and in the mosque, were absolutely delighted to hear about this piece of work. New clause 17, which will allow searches for such corrosive substances in schools or further education premises, will also help. I am therefore delighted to support the Bill, which I believe is a very important step forward in reassuring our young people and keeping them safe.

Anna Turley: I rise to support my two amendments, amendments 1 and 2, with regard to a specific constituency case I mentioned earlier to the Minister. I am afraid her response did not go quite far enough to satisfy me, so I would like to press my case a bit further.

My point refers specifically to an online decorating business in my constituency, which expressed deep concerns that the proposed legislation could potentially force them out of business. My constituent estimates that were the Bill to be enacted as it stands, he would lose approximately £32,000 per year. That is probably enough to destroy a small business. He currently sells a number of bladed decorating tools, including bladed paint scrapers, craft knives, safety knives and utility blades—all very niche tools for the DIY trade. These items are delivered to residential addresses and so the provisions under clause 17 could potentially make a significant part of his trade illegal.

There could also be a wider impact on the rest of his business. As customers often purchase those items with other decorating materials such as wallpaper and paint, my constituent is concerned that if people are forced to visit decorating stores to buy a single tool, such as a scraper or a knife, they will buy all their decorating materials and bladed items there in one go. That would have a huge impact on his business.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I wonder whether my hon. Friend has seen, as I think would be the case under the Bill, that people like her constituent would not be able to post those products to somebody's home, whereas somebody selling identical products from overseas would freely be able to carry on sending them by post to the purchaser.

Anna Turley: My right hon. Friend makes a really important point. That is just another huge loophole in the Bill that will have an impact on British businesses, forcing them to be unable to compete. Ahead of Small Business Saturday, I really hope Ministers will take that under consideration.

In response to my question earlier, the Minister responded that the simple difference would be that people would just have to go to a post office to sign for these goods. In areas like mine, people often travel as far as six or eight miles to get to the nearest post office. That is a long way, so why would they not go to the nearest B&Q or other big store to buy all their DIY needs? We are driving out small online businesses who have struggled to get themselves up and running. They are losing out yet again to major stores, because we are making their customers' lives more difficult.

My constituent is just one example of many small and medium-sized businesses across the country that could be inadvertently affected by the Bill. Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy and local communities, and we will all be celebrating them this weekend. I am sure the Government did not intend for the Bill to unjustly penalise online retailers and I am sure this is just an oversight in the drafting. The proposed legislation already makes very specific exemptions on bladed items for activities such as sporting or re-enactment. It would therefore not be unreasonable to extend that flexibility to decorating items which similarly support a genuine public purpose and are used regularly by law-abiding citizens.

[Anna Turley]

I would also like to speak in support of amendments 8 and 9, tabled in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), which seek to address the same problem. There will obviously be a number of other businesses—we have already heard today about the importance of Sheffield steel and Sheffield knives—affected by the poor drafting of the Bill, including in the catering and the arts and crafts industries. The amendments would create a trusted trader status entitling qualifying businesses to sell bladed products to residential premises, creating another means of protecting such legitimate businesses. As long as there was not a resulting excessive administrative burden or unnecessary delays to trading while registering, the trusted trader approach could be an effective means to ensure a satisfactory balance between necessary restrictions on the sale of blades to those who intend to use them as weapons, and ensuring legitimate businesses can continue to operate.

The Minister raised the point about overburdensome regulation in opposition to the amendments. Again, she is already asking people to send their customers to the post office, so that we try to make sure that they are not selling to those under the age of 18. We are already putting such restrictions on people. I do not think it is that burdensome to ask someone to register as a trusted trader, which is a positive thing for them to sign up to and would enhance, not jeopardise, their businesses.

I hope that the Government will look again at the amendments and recognise that there is, I am afraid, a serious flaw in the drafting of the Bill. I hope that they will work with the Opposition to amend the Bill as it continues its passage through the House, while engaging fully with the retailers and others affected. Otherwise, I am afraid that the Bill as it stands will have a disastrous effect on many of our hard-working small businesses, which are the lifeblood of economies such as mine.

Huw Merriman: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who is a fellow Arsenal fan and one of the nicest people in this place—[*Interruption.*] There was no career to lose—at least for me.

I want to speak about new clauses 5 and 26. I am conscious that the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) has not yet spoken, so I will leave time for her to do so. Generally, I am very supportive of the Bill, and I am very concerned that the number of offences of violence against the person recorded by the police in 2017 was 21% higher than in 2016. That demonstrates the need for more to be done across the House to support the police. There was also the highest level of offences involving knives or sharp instruments since 2011, so we clearly have a problem. This should not be a party political issue; it should be for all of us as constituency MPs to work together to deliver a solution. That certainly came through to me last night, when I was due to be meeting a friend—not just a friend to me, but to many in this place—who works for Save the Children and who I went to the Syrian border with. She did not turn up to the meeting that we were due to have because she was attacked and mugged by somebody carrying a large knife. She is well known to us all, so this is going on in our communities.

Let me deal with new clause 5. I am indebted to the Minister, who is not in her place, but we spoke at length this morning. When I look through the clause, which was tabled by the shadow police Minister, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), it is very difficult to see anything in it that I would not agree with. I can see that the issue may be the impact that it could have on small businesses. However, if I wished to harm myself by going into a shop and buying a packet of cigarettes, those cigarettes would be behind a counter locked in a cabinet, often in very small premises, yet if I wished to harm somebody else, I could go into a shop and pick up a bladed article to do that. Of course, the issue is with regard to shoplifting. Although I absolutely agree with the need to support small businesses and be proportionate, I say to the Minister, through the Front Benchers who are here now, that if we find out from a review over a period of months that we still have difficulties with knives, and that the measures taken on internet restrictions and delivery to addresses have not dealt with this matter, the new clause will need to be looked at again. I therefore ask those on the Front Bench, in return for me supporting their position and the Bill overall—notwithstanding that I think the new clause is excellent—to ensure that we see the new clause again if it is absolutely demonstrated to be necessary.

When I was speaking to the Minister, I had the feeling that we were looking for other solutions, because if we compare the scenario in south London, where knife crime is prevalent, with my constituency, where it is not as prevalent, we see that a one-size-fits-all ban across every single shop may not be proportionate. However, we do have public spaces protection orders, which were brought in to allow local authorities to put orders in place to prohibit certain behaviour relevant perhaps just to that community. Such an order can be applied for if the activities are being carried out in a public space within an authority's area and those activities have a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality and are likely to be persistent, unreasonable and justify such a restriction—so, something as crucial as knife crime should fit within that.

I understand from the Minister, who is back in her place, that the difficulty is that the definition of “public space” would not include a shop. I am sure that that has been tested legally. I was trying to find the research, and in the short time I had I could not do so, but I did notice that the US definition would actually include a shop because, in effect, it only precludes areas relevant to a private gathering or other personal purposes. I understand that a “public space” would tend to be open, but I would ask if lawyers could reconsider whether that is relevant and, if it is, whether local authorities in areas where knife crime is prevalent should be able to apply for such orders. That would have the same effect as the new clause.

5 pm

I hear the Minister when she says that many shops and stores are taking voluntary action. My concern, however, is that those are bound to be the responsible, good stores, and in a way that probably highlights the need for the Government to step in for those stores that are not taking the same action. I ask her to keep an eye on this and, if it turns out the clause is needed and that

the rest of the Bill does not fix the problem, or at least reduce it, to consider adopting the provisions in the new clause.

New clause 26 is another clause against which it is difficult to argue. Moped usage as an aggravated feature is absolutely an issue, particularly, as I understand it, in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq). I am sure the counter view is that the courts will always look at certain matters, including matters prevalent in their own localities, and make an example, and they already have the powers to do that, but if it turns out that the Bill does not reduce that prevalence and that the courts are not targeting in the way that I have described, I would again ask the Government to reconsider the new clause after a period of months and adopt its provisions.

Finally, in case it sounds like I am standing up as an Opposition Member, I would take issue with the point made by the shadow Home Secretary, who has taken her place now, about the police causing moped riders to come off their mopeds before a serious crime takes place. I recognise that, as she says, it is potentially very dangerous—I agree that it should not be legal for anyone and that the police are not above the law—but we are seeing a horrendous increase in the number of crimes involving these machines, and it is absolutely right that the police should intervene to stop the ultimate action that these individuals seek to achieve.

Lyn Brown: The hon. Gentleman rightly says that the shadow Home Secretary has recognised that the use of excessive force is an offence already. The fact that she has drawn attention to that in this place and elsewhere should not be such a big issue, surely.

Huw Merriman: Of course, we are all entitled to our point of view.

Lyn Brown: It's the law.

Huw Merriman: I understand it is the law, but it also sends out a certain message, does it not? The police are looking for our support in dealing with an incredibly difficult problem. I have mentioned how it is blighting many constituencies, including those of Opposition Members. To send out a message that they should not be doing this, and thereby to focus on the police rather than the perpetrators—I made a similar point to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley about new clause 5—is rather demoralising for the police.

Lyn Brown *rose*—

Huw Merriman: I will not give way again because many others wish to speak.

Louise Haigh: Unfortunately, there is not time for me to address all the amendments in the group, but I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol South (Karin Smyth), for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) and for Redcar (Anna Turley), my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), who have all tabled reasoned, evidence-based amendments that would significantly improve the Bill. I support them all wholeheartedly.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) was very kind in offering his support to new clause 5, which would introduce a simple prohibition on the display of bladed products in shops. The new clause is the result of a huge amount of work led by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft), who is chair of the cross-party Youth Violence Commission. One of her most important recommendations was the prohibition of knife displays in shops, a matter that was discussed when experts gave evidence to the Committee. The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers said that it would be helpful to put knives behind displays in shops. A representative said:

“Obviously, now big retailers are increasingly going down the route of making it more difficult for customers to get their hands on the product until they have been age-checked and the transaction is safe. The problem with it, of course, is that all sorts of bladed things are being sold and it is about where you draw the line.”—[*Official Report, Offensive Weapons Public Bill Committee*, 19 July 2018; c. 98, Q239.]

Obviously we want retailers to check people's ages properly when they seek to purchase knives, but the fact of the matter is that many young people who want to access knives will go into shops and steal them if they are readily available. Ultimately, there is little point in having the provisions in the Bill, and putting all the restrictions and burdens on online retailers, if we are not asking face-to-face retailers to abide by the same regulations.

There are a number of restrictions under the law relating to other products—most obviously, the extremely restricted provisions relating to the sale of tobacco, which prohibit the display of tobacco products except to people over the age of 18. The Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002 specifically refers to under-18s, so the principle already exists in law. New clause 5 simply transposes to knives the already sufficient and proportionate response to tobacco. As the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle said, if we walk into a shop and buy cigarettes with which to kill ourselves, they will be behind locked cabinets. A young person, or any person, who walks into a shop and steals a knife in order to kill another person is free to do so: as things stand, the knives are not even behind locked cabinets. We see no reason why that should not be extended to bladed products. Given that the Government are so committed to clamping down on online sales, we hope they recognise that face-to-face sales are a clear issue that needs further consideration.

While we are on the topic of restricting the supply of knives, let me turn briefly to the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central. The clause to which they relate was debated extensively in Committee. We fully support the Government's intention, but are worried that the clause may punish businesses while having little impact on the ultimate aim—to reduce violence.

I remain baffled as to why the Home Office has not simply put strict age verification controls on the sale of knives online, as it does, for example, with gambling, but instead has chosen to punish the online sales industry and traders such as those mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar. My hon. Friend's amendments are very reasonable compromises, put forward by the very businesses that the Minister claims have complained

[*Louise Haigh*]

that they are too bureaucratic. I fear that the clause has not been thought through sufficiently, and will have untold consequences.

New clause 1 was tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn, whom I congratulate on his incredible, impassioned speech and the fantastic campaign that he has mounted. We have made clear from the outset that we are prepared to support amendments to protect shop workers. In Committee, we heard powerful evidence from USDAW and the British Retail Consortium about the increase in the number of attacks on shop workers as a result of restricted sales, and we wholeheartedly support any measure that which will improve their protection. I congratulate USDAW on its brilliant campaign.

Let me now deal with new clause 31. The death of a pregnant woman, Sana Muhammad, just a few short weeks ago in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) has, in his words,

“shocked people...to the core.”—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2018; Vol. 649, c. 310.]

She was attacked in front of her five children by a man with a crossbow, and was tragically pronounced dead a short while afterwards. That tragic case has brought to light, once again, the remarkably weak controls on crossbows, which have lethal effects. It is incumbent on us as a Parliament to decide whether we are comfortable with circumstances in which a lethal weapon is freely available to anyone over the age of 18, with no licensing restrictions at all.

There have been many tragic and disturbing incidents involving crossbows, and the law as it exists has developed only incrementally. Our new clause would create a licensing system. That is not a step that any Parliament should take lightly, but we believe that it has the potential to remove the unregulated sale and possession of some of the most lethal crossbows, while also ensuring that the law-abiding community who use crossbows for sporting purposes are still able to carry out their legitimate pursuit. The clause also creates safeguards which allow further consideration of the power under which a crossbow would become subject to licensing provisions, allowing the Secretary of State to make regulations determining the appropriate draw weight.

Our new clause 6 calls for a report on the causes behind youth violence, a topic that is not discussed much in the entire debate around offensive weapons. The new clause goes to the heart of our issues with the Bill and the Government's seriously weak serious violence strategy. The strategy was published only in April yet we have already seen a U-turn from the Home Secretary, finally agreeing that the public health model must be adopted and that agencies need to be working better to tackle violence. We have been telling the Government all of this for at least the last year, so we are pleased to see progress, but we are alarmed that the strategy is so desperately short on detail. Members hear almost every day from constituents about the levels of crime and the cuts to policing in our constituencies.

The police service is at risk of becoming almost unrecognisable to the public and irrelevant according to the Home Affairs Committee. “Panorama” reported recently that up to half of crimes are being “screened out” by some forces, meaning they get no investigation

at all. This is just the latest indication of a police service creaking under the strain of soaring demand after eight years of austerity. When crimes are not being investigated, deterrence reduces and crime rises further still. It is a vicious circle and one the present Government have locked us into with little recognition of their role in it.

Axing the police was a political choice that has done incalculable harm to our communities, and it is a choice that I suspect many Conservative MPs who voted for swingeing cuts privately regret.

Mr McFadden: I strongly agree with the points my hon. Friend is making. Does she agree with me that if the Government get the police pensions wrong, the issue she has just highlighted will become even worse, because we have been warned by chief constables and police and crime commissioners around the country that thousands more officers could be lost if they are forced to pay for it out of existing police budgets?

Louise Haigh: My right hon. Friend is right. After eight years of cuts to frontline policing, the Government have slapped on another £465 million cut by 2022, which we have been warned will cut another 10,000 police officers from our communities. It is completely intolerable.

New clause 6 would release the Home Office evidence—that we know exists, thanks to leaks—to public scrutiny. We know that Home Office officials believe that the reduction in police numbers has led to a reduction in so-called hotspotting and to an increase in violent crime.

But of course this is not just about police numbers; we need a wholesale review of the impact of the Government's austerity agenda on the vital safety nets that keep our communities safe and the consequent impact on rising crime levels. The now famous example of where we have seen a successful approach is on our doorstep in Scotland, where a 20-year strategic approach was taken to reducing youth violence. That is what is required, as opposed to the Government's strategy, which uses the rhetoric of early intervention and prevention but represents at most a three-year strategy.

The amendments in my name and those of my hon. Friends seek to strengthen and improve the weak legislation before us today. They seek an evidence-based response to the long-term trend in violence that we are witnessing as a result of this Government's austerity agenda. We hope the Government will accept that much more needs to be done if we are to prevent any more young lives from being needlessly taken and will accept the amendments in our name.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I rise to speak in support of my new clause 26, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (*Louise Haigh*) for her support in that. I also, surprisingly, thank the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (*Huw Merriman*) for his support for the amendment, although I am disappointed that he did not say that I am one of the nicest people in the House—perhaps I can prove that to him afterwards.

Some Members have already referred to the Metropolitan police video that went viral showing officers tactically nudging criminals off their bikes in the height of chase. Regardless of whether people support that police strategy, the strength of feeling on this matter is demonstrated by

the fact that the video was retweeted thousands of times and appeared on the front pages of the papers. That is because so many people have been, or know someone who has been, a victim of crimes committed by people on mopeds.

Criminals use mopeds because of the element of surprise it gives when attacking the victim, the victim's helplessness when hit by someone on a moped, and the speed at which the criminal can get away, which makes it particularly effective for theft. Constituents in Hampstead and Kilburn have told me that they are now scared to walk down the street either talking on their phone or showing any of their possessions because they fear someone on a moped snatching those items away. I speak today to give those people a voice and to speak up on behalf of those who believe that the existing legislation to deal with such crimes is no longer sufficient.

5.15 pm

In Committee, I tabled a similar amendment that sought to ensure that the use of a moped while possessing an offensive weapon would become an aggravating factor in sentencing. Committee members supported that move. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) noted the close link between acid attacks and the use of mopeds. I think it is fair to say that my right hon. Friend probably knows this Bill better than anyone else in the House—I hope the Minister will forgive me for saying that—and I will say more about his testimony in support of my amendment in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon Central (Sarah Jones) has done an enormous amount of work on knife crime in her constituency, and she spoke of a couple who had been out walking with their seven-year-old daughter when two people wearing masks and on mopeds came up to them and held a knife to the neck of the daughter. I am sure that Members will understand how frightening and scary that must have been for the family. I am pleased to say that the Minister, who is not in her place, supported the sentiment behind my amendment. She spoke about the short-term and long-term effects of moped crime and acknowledged that their presence in attacks using corrosive substances was a “worryingly frequent occurrence”. However, the Government voted down my amendment, which has paved the way for my new clause today.

New clause 26 seeks to introduce an aggravated offence of possessing a corrosive substance or dangerous knife. A person would be guilty under the new clause if they committed an offence under clause 6 while driving a moped or while a passenger on a moped. If found guilty, offenders would be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, or to a fine, or to both. The liability would be the same for England, Wales and Scotland. I know from the Minister's feedback to the Committee that she was concerned that my amendment was restrictive, which is why I have reflected on it and returned with a new clause that will instead legislate for moped-enabled acid possession to be an aggravated form of the basic offence, rather than being treated as an aggravating factor when sentencing for the basic offence. In other words, new clause 26 addresses the serious specific circumstances that are unique to moped crimes while leaving the sentencing to the discretion of the court.

I should like to remind the Minister and Conservative Members that there is a clear precedent for taking this route. Under section 12 of the Theft Act 1968, taking a vehicle without consent carries a maximum sentence of six months. The aggravated offence under section 12A of that Act—driving the taken vehicle in a dangerous manner—carries a maximum sentence of two years. Let us also remember the campaign of my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). Common assault under section 39 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 carries a sentence of six months. An assault under section 1 of his Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 carries a maximum sentence of 12 months. Members from across the House have told me that they are sick to death of moped crime in their constituencies and the misery that it creates for people living there. They are looking for further deterrents, and my new clause provides an opportunity that I hope we can all get behind.

Beyond looking at the precedents involved, I urge the Government to support my new clause today, because moped crimes are far too numerous for us to be content with the current strategy. Innovative action from the police—whether the spray-tagging of mopeds or tactical collisions—has led to a not insignificant fall in moped crime, but the problem still exists. In June last year alone, Camden suffered 1,363 moped crimes. In 2017, the Metropolitan police reported that 24% of their pursuits involved officers chasing mopeds or scooters. This year, the figure rose to 40%.

I quote one constituent from Hampstead Town, who said:

“I'm on the verge of moving out. The situation is out of control. I've”

suffered attempted muggings

“twice in 10 days. I was walking on the pavement and people on motorbikes tried to steal my wallet, in the middle of the day.”

Such stories are common across all the forums in my constituency, especially among young mothers, who when pushing their prams are particularly worried about being attacked from the back, because they are keeping an eye on their child but also trying to keep an eye on their possessions.

In Committee the Minister rightly argued against complacency, but objected to my amendment, saying that,

“aggravating factors...could be too restrictive, in terms of only applying to mopeds”.

That surely is not a reason to vote down new clause 26; it is a reason to accept my measure and look at expanding the scope.

In addition, conviction rates are unacceptably low. In 2017-18, detection rates for offences resolved through a sanction stood at just 2.6%, which means that more than 97% of moped criminals escaped justice in just that year. That is appalling and unjust.

Moped crime is also costly. As the Minister said in Committee,

“we focus on the terrible psychological and physical impact of these crimes, but often...there is an economic impact”—[*Official Report, Offensive Weapons Public Bill Committee*, 11 September 2018; c. 316-7.]

on livelihoods. I urge Members to read the testimony of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham, who spoke about the economic impact on delivery people,

and the impact on their livelihood when they are hit by moped crime. It should give us all pause for thought as to whether the current strategy is really working, or whether we should be doing something about the current strategy to ensure that we are not all hit by moped crime over and over again.

Of course the Metropolitan police are entitled to celebrate its considerable successes when it reduces any form of crime by a significant degree, but I am sure that Metropolitan police officers and all constituents would say there is a lot more that we can do, and that greater deterrents for moped criminals would be welcome.

My new clause seeks to provide a remedy to that problem. The Minister's rhetoric on moped crime is welcome, but we need to ensure that our legislation actually reflects the unique fears and threats that moped criminals represent to the public. Viral videos will not deter future moped criminals from instilling fear in my constituents, but tougher approaches to the offence may just do that. That is why I commend new clause 26, and hope that Ministers and Tory Members will see fit to support it.

Stuart C. McDonald: I shall be brief, as lots of hon. Members wish to speak.

The provisions in the Bill in relation to corrosive substances and knives are also largely welcomed on the SNP Benches, but I do not think anyone is arguing that the new provisions will transform or revolutionise the fight against knife crime or acid attacks; they can merely play a part in reducing the number of lives affected.

There has been close working between the UK and Scottish Governments, including on amendment 56, which the Minister highlighted. Many of the other amendments in the group would not extend to Scotland, or do not seem intended to do so, so we would argue that further changes to the criminal law of Scotland should be left to that Parliament and I shall speak only to one or two of the amendments tabled.

I welcome the changes to the defence relating to possession of swords for religious ceremonies. We congratulate all involved in tabling and supporting amendment 22 and we welcome the Government response, which we trust will ensure that the new offence of possessing certain particularly offensive weapons catches only those who it is really aimed at, not those involved in religious ceremonies.

It is important to speak about new clauses 1 and 14. We agree absolutely that they flag up a serious problem that must be addressed, and it is good that it has been highlighted today. In Committee, we heard evidence about the growing problems faced by shop workers and the increasing number of thefts and attacks that they face. As part of the recent Respect for Shopworkers Week and USDAW's Freedom from Fear campaign—like other Members, I suspect—I visited a local Co-op store to hear about the challenges faced there and the steps needed to help support shop workers. I totally agree that the problem must be tackled.

A private Member's Bill is being finalised for tabling in the Scottish Parliament in relation to the protection of shop workers, having attracted the requisite cross-party support. The Scottish Government have said that they have an open mind on whether they would support such a Bill. The proposals contained in the Bill consultation

for new offences cover not just shop workers selling age-restricted goods, but bar staff, and indeed door staff. I appreciate that those tabling the amendments before us today have been restricted by the scope of the Bill before us, but as the consultation in the Scottish Parliament pointed out, age restrictions on tobacco and alcohol are almost certainly the most common flashpoints, and if we are to take a legislative approach, I would argue that ideally that would need to cover such sales, too, rather than simply corrosive substances and knives. In short, although I sympathise with the arguments that have been made today, I leave it to the Scottish Parliament to decide the issue holistically in respect of that offence in Scotland.

I will not further delay the House by talking about other amendments with which I sympathise but that relate to devolved matters. New clause 6, which would give rise to a reporting requirement, is slightly shoehorned into the Bill. A general report on the causes of youth violence would clearly be better than one restricted to youth violence with offensive weapons only, but it would, of course, be open to the Secretary of State to go further. Although crime is devolved, some of the possible causes that would be reported on under new clause 6 are not; they are reserved. To finish on a happy note, we willingly shoehorn in our support for new clause 6.

Richard Graham: I rise to comment on two of the new clauses. First, my hon. Friend the Minister has spoken convincingly on new clause 16 and there is widespread agreement in the House that extending the Bill to cover private places, as well as public places, is important. To add to what I said earlier, several recent knife crimes in Gloucester have been committed in public places, most tragically one at the All Nations club, one outside the Pike and Musket pub and others, but, more recently, some have been committed very much in private places—in flats and properties—and I am delighted that new clause 16 covers those places.

New clause 1 was tabled by the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), and everyone in this House wants to see not just shop workers but everyone who engages with the public—including people who work in our railway and bus stations, who are often on the frontline against such antisocial behaviour—fully protected by the law against totally unnecessary behaviour by other members of the public.

It seems to me, and I stand to be corrected, that new clause 1 would apply only to the handling of corrosive substances or bladed instruments. Although that is a good thing, most shop workers want to know that if somebody intentionally obstructs them—in other words, if somebody acts in a threatening manner—that same behaviour would be a crime whether it is a bottle of beer, a bottle of whiskey or a bladed instrument. The new clause perhaps does not suit shop workers as well as it might, but I ask the Minister to consider taking it back to the Home Office for discussion to see what might be done about it.

Victoria Atkins: I hope my hon. Friend realises that I listened with great care to the speech of the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), and I agree that we want to ensure that our shop workers feel protected, as well as being protected, by the law. If I may, I will reflect further on new clause 1, and I invite the right hon.

Gentleman, my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and organisations involved in the retail arena, including trade unions, to the Home Office for a roundtable so we can further discuss the concerns that have been raised this afternoon.

Richard Graham: I am very grateful to the Minister. That is a really good step forward, and I wonder whether the right hon. Member for Delyn would like to comment.

David Hanson: I happily accept the Minister's offer to revisit this with the trade unions and shop organisations. The reason why new clause 1 would cover only corrosives and knives is because that is the scope of the Bill; it should cover age-related products. I would welcome it if we can reflect on that, but I reserve the right to return to the matter in another place should the meeting not prove successful.

Richard Graham: I am not sure this is how these things often work on the Floor of the House, but this is a helpful way forward for all sides. I am grateful to the Minister and the right hon. Gentleman.

On that note, I have said all I want to say on new clause 16, which I think is good, and new clause 1, which will be taken away for consideration.

Vernon Coaker: Let me start by saying that I think we are all pleased with what the Minister has just said to my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) about his new clause 1. The shop workers of the country, the unions and people across the whole of our nation will be pleased with that and will look forward to what we come up with in due course.

5.30 pm

In the short time available, as so many others wish to speak, I want to refer to the excellent new clause 6, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh). Serious violence in this country with the use of offensive weapons is almost an epidemic, if it is not already one. Across our nation, young people, in particular, are regularly being killed on our streets. Young people in particular, including in Gedling, in Nottingham and beyond, face attacks with knives day after day, week after week. This is a national emergency. In the short term, all of us would of course want to see tougher policing and the perpetrators being put behind bars. All that is a given, but new clause 6 says that as a community and as a country we also have to have a better understanding of what is actually going on.

My right hon. Friend and I were just reflecting on how we were in the Home Office in the 2008 to 2010 era, when there again was a big spike in serious violence. We brought everyone together and discussed this with the victims, the perpetrators even, the police and, above all, the local communities affected. We went to them, including on stop-and-search; the stop-and-search we introduced was done on the basis of what those communities found acceptable. That is what we did.

I say to the Minister that I wanted to use this discussion about new clause 6 to say that I do not believe that Parliament discusses serious violence as much as we should. There is a serious violence strategy, but when have we debated it? When has there been a statement? When have we come to this House with the rage and anger that people across this country feel about what is

happening? It is bewildering that we are not raging in this place, not biting my hon. Friend's hand off and saying that we will accept new clause 6 as an indication to the public that we recognise the seriousness of this situation and that we are going to do something about it. I am sick of it. I am sick of turning on the radio when I wake up in the morning and hearing about the latest knife or gun attack. I am sick of families having to meet the police and others to talk to them about their son, as it nearly always is, who has been murdered or stabbed. I am sick of people being terrified by other people carrying weapons. It used to be that this was always in the inner cities, but no longer. New clause 6 gives us a real opportunity to discuss as a Parliament what we as a Parliament are going to do about it.

Let me finish by asking this: is there a greater national emergency? I know Brexit dominates, but this Parliament should be discussing, almost every week, serious violence and why it is happening. We should be having a huge debate on it. For goodness' sake, given the number of young people being killed, and the number of knife crimes offences and other offensive weapons crimes that there are, surely we, as a Parliament, need to wake up and debate it with the priority people in this country would expect.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on his excellent speech and I associate myself with his sentiments. The Bill makes some welcome improvements to how the police and courts tackle threats to the public from offensive weapons. Given the violence and the deaths we are seeing now, it is vital that we act. I welcome some of the amendments, particularly those tabled by Labour colleagues, including new clauses 1 and 6. However, a number of details in this Bill would prove counterproductive in the fight against crime—things that are not based on evidence—so I have tabled a range of amendments. I will speak only briefly to some of them now, given the time available and the fact that other Members wish to get in.

Amendments 12 and 13 would in essence replace short-term prison sentences with community sentences. As the Bill stands, the new offence in clause 1 of selling corrosive products to under-18s is punishable by up to 51 weeks in prison. We are puzzled by this, because it directly contradicts Government policy as articulated at the Dispatch Box. The Secretary of State for Justice himself has said that short-term prison sentences do not work. He said that they should be used only "as a last resort." Amendments 12 and 13 therefore appear to be in line with Government policy and would ensure that the offence set out in clause 1 is punishable by an effective community sentence and/or fine, instead of by an ineffective short-term prison sentence.

Amendment 14 would amend the welcome new offence of possession of corrosives by adding to clause 6 the words "with intent to cause injury". I assume that the current wording is the result of a drafting error.

Finally, amendments 15 and 16 would remove mandatory prison sentences for a second offence of possession of corrosive substances. In other words, they would prevent this House from yet again trespassing on judicial discretion. I have never understood why Governments and colleagues think that they are capable of second-guessing the facts of a case that has not yet happened, or why this House

[*Sir Edward Davey*]

should pretend that it makes any sense at all to bind the hands of judges, who see and hear the real facts of the case, are trained to assess the facts and are experienced in sentencing.

The House may remember when, back in 2014, a Conservative Back-Bench new clause was passed to create mandatory prison sentences for a second offence of possession of a knife. My party voted against that new clause on the principle that mandatory sentences tie judges' hands, put more pressure on already overburdened prisons and mean that more people, especially young people, end up with ineffective short-term prison sentences. Regrettably, that new clause was passed, thanks to some Labour MPs supporting it, the Conservative Front-Bench team abstaining and Conservative Back Benchers voting for it.

To be fair, there were Labour MPs who voted with those of us who opposed the tying of judges' hands. One Labour MP in particular made a fine speech, and said:

"There is a principle at stake here. There is a Sentencing Council and legislation on what is and is not a crime, but surely it must be for the courts to determine what is appropriate for the prisoner in front of them, rather than to have that laid down by statute."—[*Official Report*, 17 June 2014; Vol. 582, c. 1041-1042.]

That MP was the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), so I hope that the Labour Front-Bench team will support our amendments to get rid of mandatory prison sentences.

Back in 2014, when the House debated similar proposals in respect of knife crimes, the supporters of tying judges' hands said that it would send a message to the people, and that that message would reduce knife crime. That was a rather odd argument, which seemed to assume that young people especially tuned into our proceedings with enthusiasm. It had no basis in fact at the time. We now have the benefit of seeing how four years of limiting judicial discretion over knife crime has worked—how the message that Parliament apparently sent was heard.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am listening intently to the right hon. Gentleman, as always, and in a friendly way I express the confident hope that he is approaching his peroration.

Sir Edward Davey: Mr Speaker, you are right to be confident because I am.

There may now be more people behind bars to whom the judges might have given, on the evidence, community sentences. We may now as a society pay more in taxes to keep locked up people whom it would be better not to lock up, so we may not be able to use the money that is currently spent on prisons in other ways, such as for spending on police or youth services.

All that does not look like a good outcome from the message sent by mandatory sentences, so why are we repeating the mistake? What evidence are Ministers using to introduce more mandatory sentences? What happens if the person was coming home from the shops and he or she was holding his mum or dad's shopping bags when stopped and searched? Surely it is for judges to act on the basis of fact, not for Parliament to

second-guess it. We do not think that mandatory sentences are the right approach, and I hope that the other place will deal with the matter.

Stephen Timms: Given the constraints on time, I will speak only to new clause 23, from among the six new clauses that I have tabled, which deals with a particularly important subject.

It might come as a surprise to the House, as it did to me, to learn that weapons that cannot lawfully be purchased in the UK can be purchased online without anyone committing an offence. That cannot be right. The aim of new clause 23 is to plug that gap. It differs from the proposal that we debated in Committee as it allows for a defence if the website removes the offending advertisement for an illegal weapon within 24 hours of being informed of it. That reflects some recent helpful discussions that I have had with eBay about the practicalities of implementing the change that I propose.

The background is that the Criminal Justice Act 1988 introduced a list of weapons that are illegal to sell in the UK, which was expanded in 2002 to include disguised knives. A disguised knife is

"any knife which has a concealed blade or concealed sharp point and is designed to appear to be an everyday object of a kind commonly carried on the person".

It is now illegal to sell that kind of weapon in the UK.

I have been speaking to Mr Raheel Butt, who runs an organisation in the borough of Newham called Community and Rehabilitation Solutions. He is from a gang background and has served a prison term, but since he left prison in 2012, he has made it his mission to stop others making the mistakes that he made. He has pointed out to me that a lot of the weapons being used to kill young people on the streets of our cities, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) pointed out, are being bought online, a lot of them from eBay.

I should say that since I raised these points in Committee, disguised knives have been removed from eBay, although they can still be freely found on other websites. Mr Butt tells me that it is on those sites that those who are killing young people are getting their weapons. However, is it illegal for a website with a UK domain name to advertise weapons that are illegal to buy in the UK? Surely the answer ought to be yes, yet there is some uncertainty about that. If I understood her correctly, the Minister advised us in Committee that she thought that it was unlawful for an illegal weapon to be sold in that way, but then she wrote to us and said, "Actually, no. There is a defence available, because these are simply platforms." My argument is that selling a weapon on a UK website that it is illegal to purchase in the UK should be illegal. That is the aim of my new clause 23.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) intends to detain the House for no longer than three minutes and possibly for less.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I will do my very best, Mr Speaker.

I rise to speak to my amendments 8, 9 and 10, to which a number of colleagues have referred. I fully support the objectives of the Bill. We have a serious problem with knife crime. We need serious solutions,

but we need the right solutions. Knife manufacturers in my constituency are seriously concerned about the possible unintended consequences of clause 17, which prohibits the delivery of bladed products to residential properties, and believe that it will not provide the right solution. I raised this issue with the Home Secretary on Second Reading and wrote to him afterwards. I appreciate the response from the Minister, who said that the Government do not intend to stop people purchasing knives online or to stop manufacturers selling their products online.

I have tabled my amendments in that spirit. Large retailers with regional shop networks might well be able to deal with age-verified collection easily and with little impact on cost, but smaller manufacturers, which use the internet to reach niche markets, will struggle. They are acutely aware of the risks of knife crime and they already take proactive steps and have stringent controls to tackle the issue. They are responsible companies. They are traders whom we can trust. They support measures that would make such safeguards widespread across the industry.

The Bill makes an exception for bladed products used for sporting purposes. Under those provisions, a sword could be delivered to a residential property, but one of my local manufacturers' steak knives could not, and nor could the decorating tools that my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) mentioned earlier.

Much more could be done to develop effective age verification for all sorts of online activities, but a trusted trader scheme could tackle the specific issue of knife sales. Online sales actually offer a better audit trail and record keeping than face-to-face sales. The Minister said earlier that the Government were interested in working with the industry on a voluntary basis to tackle problems in relation to retail sales in shops. If she is prepared to work with the retail sector, why not with the manufacturing sector? Will she agree to meet me and representatives of the industry to discuss how a trusted trader scheme might work, so that we can amend the Bill as it progresses? If she will, I will be happy to withdraw my amendments.

5.45 pm

Vicky Foxcroft: I will try to be brief to ensure that everybody has a chance to speak. I served on the Bill Committee and am grateful for another opportunity to speak on the Bill's content. As many of my hon. Friends will know, I also chair the cross-party Youth Violence Commission, so this a subject of significant interest to me.

I will use my time to pick up on two main points. The first is my disappointment that new clause 6 was rejected in Committee. It calls for a report on the causes behind youth violence with offensive weapons within six months of the Bill receiving Royal Assent. Although many of the Bill's provisions are to be welcomed, I am concerned that the siloed approach of dealing with offensive weapons in isolation will do little to tackle serious violence. From my work with the commission, I know that the increase in youth violence that we are seeing is the result of a vulnerable cohort of young people being denied the support and multi-agency early intervention work necessary to prevent them from falling into a downward spiral.

New clause 6 calls for the Home Secretary to examine the effect not only of the reduction in police numbers on the levels of youth violence with offensive weapons,

but of the reduction in public spending on children's services, schools and local authorities. When the Minister was making her opening remarks, she struggled to stick within the confines of the Bill and touched on all these areas, so this new clause could be extremely useful to her.

My second point concerns the sale of knives. As recently as September, Lewisham police responded to reports of 40 young people storming a branch of Poundland in my neighbouring constituency of Lewisham East, with the intention of stealing knives and sharp implements. There is the Minister's evidence. That is one of the reasons that she should implement this proposed legislation.

In the Make Your Mark ballot, more than 1.1 million young people voted for knife crime as their top priority. I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker); we should be talking about this issue every single week in this Chamber. This issue is so important—our young people and our communities say it is important. If the Minister accepts one measure tonight, I urge her to accept new clause 6, so that we can thoroughly debate the issue.

Preet Kaur Gill: I have tabled an amendment to this Bill that has cross-party support. Members of all parties and I were concerned that the Bill would place severe restrictions on the ability of members of the Sikh community to observe and practise their faith. I thank the Minister for her clarity and assurances today, and I will not press my amendment.

I believed these consequences would have been inadvertent and perhaps due to a lack of consultation with the Sikh community, so I welcomed the opportunity to meet the Secretary of State and the Minister to outline these concerns and to clarify their position. Following these meetings, I was pleased to see a desire to avert what would have been the Bill's damaging consequences for the Sikh community. I welcome amendments 59, 60 and 61, which are the Government's own amendments to avoid that situation, and I fully support them.

On behalf of the all-party parliamentary group for British Sikhs, I would like to record my appreciation to the Secretary of State and the Minister for listening to the concerns raised by the APPG and the Sikh Federation about the Sikh kirpan. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) and the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) for their support in this process. I will briefly outline the importance of the Government amendments in ensuring that the Bill will maintain the status quo in continuing to legally safeguard the sale, possession and use of large kirpans.

I should say at the outset that the Sikh community in the UK is fully behind tightening the law on offensive weapons. We have all been appalled by the toll that knife crime is taking on innocent young lives, and every Member supports a robust and just system of law to crack down on this very serious problem. That system of law should include the measures in the Bill on restriction of sales of particular types of knives and appropriate punishments. It must also be paired with early intervention to tackle youth violence and the police being provided with adequate resources to tackle violent crime. We cannot go on with the level of knife crime that is taking place in many parts of the country.

[Preet Kaur Gill]

Observance of the Sikh faith for practising Sikhs requires adherence to keeping what we call the five Ks, one of which is to wear a kirpan. Larger kirpans are used on many religious occasions such as during all Sikh wedding ceremonies up and down the country, during nagar kirtans in April and November, in front of the holy scriptures, in gurdwaras and in homes, and during gatka demonstrations where thousands take part. I could go on.

The Bill in its current incarnation would—I paraphrase from the policy equality statement produced by the Home Office in June 2018—place limits on the use and availability of these ceremonial kirpans that can be found in virtually all Sikh households. The current language would expose Sikhs who have kept kirpans at home for years to prison sentences of up to a year for doing nothing other than following one of the key tenets of our faith and the Sikh way of life. There are strict rules about the carrying and use of the kirpan. It is strictly ceremonial and must never be used in an aggressive, confrontational or offensive manner. These rules are respected and understood by the Sikh community.

Our amendment sought to amend the Bill to allow the use of ceremonial kirpans as they have been used, with no threat to public safety or public order, up until now. The Government's amendment does nothing other than to maintain the status quo. I am pleased to support it, alongside the understanding that there will be an accompanying set of documentation that explicitly mentions the kirpan and therefore reflects the importance of not criminalising the Sikh community for the sale or possession of large kirpans.

Lyn Brown: I want to focus on new clause 6 as well. Although we all know how falling police numbers are impacting on crime in our communities, we also need to look at other things, including cuts to children's services. I have heard directly from parents who are most affected by social workers no longer having the time to build proper relationships with families, or not having had the right training so they do not recognise when a child is being groomed by criminals in a gang and instead blame the family and criminalise the child.

I am happy to see that this issue is being dealt with through training, as recognised in the new protocol against criminalising children this month. However, I am concerned, yet again, about whether any additional resources will be available to fund the big programme of training we desperately need and to monitor its implementation. The fact is that when public services are underfunded, that makes it easier for the county lines gangs to exploit local children, and that exploitation breeds violence. I seek further measures that would ensure that the police and courts focus on the true perpetrators of county lines violence—those who control the gangs and reap the profits. The Minister talked about the reported arrest of 500 groomed children or young adults, but, with all due respect, that will not change the nature of the county lines infiltration into our communities. Only by arresting the groomers—those who are reaping the massive financial rewards at the top of the tree—will the game be changed.

We need to support youth workers who prevent grooming and violence by working with children of all ages, all year round. We need training for every professional who works with young people, from the police to social workers to teachers, so that they understand the threat of gang grooming and the tactics that groomers use. We need a third-party reporting system that young people will actually use; they will not do so at the moment because they believe that the police can get information without anyone being put in danger. We have to make public authorities responsible for protecting people who are at risk because they have done the bravest of things and given information to the authorities. We need to support them and their families with a path to a secure future. We need to take stronger action against incitement online. We need to support communities after the trauma of a young death.

This Bill is a start, but it ain't the panacea that my community so desperately needs. We need further legislation from this Government to tackle the real issues that are afflicting our communities.

Sarah Jones: I rise to speak in support of new clause 6. I was pleased to serve on the Public Bill Committee, and I am glad to see the Bill finally coming back to the Floor of the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) spoke passionately about why new clause 6 is so important. Simply put, it says that the Secretary of State must lay a report before Parliament on the causes of youth violence with offensive weapons. We are trying to fix a problem, and we have to understand what that problem is before we can fix it.

I want to make two points. The first is about data. We do not know where the people who commit these offences get their knives from. We do not know at what exact time of day these knife crimes are committed, although we have some evidence. We do not know how many people are involved in gangs who commit knife offences. That is really important, because a very small number—somewhere between 3% and 25%, depending on what we measure—of people who commit knife offences are in gangs. There is a lot that we do not understand about what is going on in this situation that we are trying to fix.

The second important part of the new clause relates to evidence. There is a growing consensus that there is an epidemic of violence—the Secretary of State has said it, and the Minister said it today. It is spreading out across the country. Violence breeds violence. There is evidence that can fix this growing national problem. We know from what has worked in other areas how effective interventions can be when they are evidence-based. I think of my friend, Tessa Jowell, whose memorial service you and I attended recently, Mr Speaker. Her interventions in introducing Sure Start and the teenage pregnancy reduction strategy were evidence-based and had a real impact. That is what we need to seek to do.

My final point is that when we look at the evidence, we need to look at the increasing number of children who are being excluded and finding themselves lost to the system. If we are trying to fix this national problem, why on earth would anyone want to vote against this new clause?

Victoria Atkins: I thank all Members for a most interesting and informative debate. I want to clarify a point made by the hon. Member for Belfast

East (Gavin Robinson) about the applicability of measures on corrosive substances in Northern Ireland. Those measures are within scope for Northern Ireland. It is possible for them to extend to Northern Ireland, and I will ask officials to look into that with their Northern Irish colleagues.

I thank the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) for his contribution on new clause 23. Anyone who sells or hires, offers for sale or hire, exposes or has in his possession for the purpose of sale or hire anything contained in the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 1988 is guilty of an offence. That applies to not only people but bodies corporate. Where the user of a website places advertisements for anything contained in the order on that website, the website service provider may be able to rely on the defence under regulation 19 of the Electronic Commerce (EC Directive) Regulations 2002. Whether regulation 19 applies will depend on the facts of the case. There may well be jurisdictional issues if the service provider is based overseas. Regulation 19 does not apply where the provider of the website is offering the items for sale directly and where the provider had actual knowledge of the unlawful activity. We therefore consider that the provider of a website who sells items on it directly would be likely to be caught under the wording of the legislation. Where the provider of the website is enabling advertisements to be placed by others, the defence under regulation 19 may be available. That is an awful lot of legalese, but this discussion is timely, as the Government prepare the online harms White Paper.

I turn to amendments 8, 9 and 10, tabled by the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). Age verification checks cannot be done only at the point when the seller is processing the sale and preparing the item to be dispatched. Checks also need to be done when the item is handed to the purchaser. That is why we are stopping bladed products—namely, articles with a blade capable of causing serious injury—from being delivered to residential addresses. The amendments would undermine what the Bill is trying to achieve and seem to introduce some sort of validation scheme by the Government to enable certain online sellers—those awarded trusted seller status—to deliver bladed products to residential addresses. That goes against what the Bill seeks.

Paul Blomfield: Will the Minister give way?

Victoria Atkins: I am conscious of the time, so I will not. I am always happy to meet the hon. Gentleman, but it is important to make it clear that we do not believe his amendments fit in with the overall structure of the Bill.

Finally, on new clause 6, we published the serious violence strategy this year, which already takes a public health approach, stressing the importance of early intervention and prevention through a multi-agency approach to tackle the root causes. We appreciate the need to keep parliamentarians informed of progress on delivery of the strategy, but we do not believe that a statutory requirement is necessary. We believe that scrutiny will be provided by the serious violence taskforce and the House, and we hope that the House can contribute its views on this very important piece of legislation.

6 pm

Debate interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83E), That the clause be read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

New clause 16 accordingly read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

The Speaker then put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83E).

New Clause 17

SEARCH FOR CORROSIVE SUBSTANCE ON SCHOOL OR FURTHER EDUCATION PREMISES

“(1) This section applies if a constable has reasonable grounds for suspecting that an offence under section [Offence of threatening with an offensive weapon etc in a private place], as that section applies to corrosive substances, is being or has been committed on school premises or further education premises.

(2) The constable may enter and search the premises and any person on them for a corrosive substance.

(3) If in the course of a search under this section a constable discovers a substance which the constable has reasonable grounds for suspecting to be a corrosive substance, the constable may seize and retain it.

(4) The constable may use reasonable force, if necessary, in the exercise of the power of entry conferred by this section.”—*(Victoria Atkins.)*

See the explanatory statement for NC16.

Brought up, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 6

REPORT ON THE CAUSES BEHIND YOUTH VIOLENCE WITH OFFENSIVE WEAPONS

“(1) The Secretary of State must, within 6 months of this Act receiving Royal Assent, lay a report before Parliament on the causes behind youth violence with offensive weapons.

(2) The report under subsection 1 must consider, but is not limited to,

- (a) The effect of the reduction in police numbers on the levels of youth violence with offensive weapons;
- (b) The effect of the reduction in public spending on—
 - (i) children’s services,
 - (ii) Sure Start,
 - (iii) state-maintained schools,
 - (iv) local authorities,
 - (v) youth offending teams,
 - (vi) Border Force, and
 - (vii) drug treatment programmes.

(3) The report under subsection 1 and the considerations under subsection 2 must consider the benefits of the public health approach to violence reduction.

(4) The report must contain all departmental evidence held relating to subsection 2 and 3.”—*(Louise Haigh.)*

This new clause would require the Secretary of State to review the causes behind youth violence with offensive weapons.

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 303.

Division No. 270]

[6.1 pm

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena

Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Mr Adrian

Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Brabin, Tracy
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cable, rh Sir Vince
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Sir David
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 Dakin, Nic
 Davey, rh Sir Edward
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 De Piero, Gloria
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill

Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Frith, James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Grogan, John
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh David
 Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hobhouse, Wera
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 P.
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Sarah
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen

Leslie, Mr Chris
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Stephen
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stuart
 C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Moran, Layla
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 O'Mara, Jared
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina

Reeves, Ellie
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stone, Jamie
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Thangam Debbonaire and
Stephanie Peacock

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi

Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, Colin
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Davies, Philip
 Dinanage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey
 M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr
 Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George

Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David

Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Liddington, rh Mr David
 Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria

Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin

Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, Mr Jeremy

Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Rebecca Harris and
Amanda Milling

Question accordingly negated.

New Clause 26

AGGRAVATED OFFENCE OF POSSESSING A CORROSIVE SUBSTANCE OR DANGEROUS KNIFE

“(1) A person is guilty of an aggravated offence of possessing a corrosive substance in a public place if—

- (a) they commit an offence under section 6 of this Act, and
- (b) at the time of committing the offence, the offender was—
 - (i) the driver of a moped or motor bicycle, or
 - (ii) a passenger of a moped or motor bicycle.

(2) A person is guilty of an aggravated offence of possessing certain dangerous knives if—

- (a) they commit an offence under section 1A of the Restrictions of Offensive Weapons Act 1959, as amended, and
- (b) at the time of committing the offence, the offender was—
 - (i) the driver of a moped or motor bicycle, or
 - (ii) a passenger of a moped or motor bicycle.

(3) A person guilty of an aggravated offence under this section is liable—

- (a) on summary conviction in England and Wales, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, to a fine or both;
- (b) on summary conviction in Scotland, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years, to a fine or both.

(4) For the purposes of this section, ‘moped’ and ‘motor bicycle’ have the same meanings as in section 108 of the Road Traffic Act 1988.”—(*Tulip Siddiq.*)

Brought up.

Question put, That the clause be added to the Bill.

The House divided: Ayes 235, Noes 300.

Division No. 271]

[6.16 pm

AYES

Abbott, Mr Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniazzi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Beckett, Mr Margaret
Benn, Mr Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Lyn
Brown, Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn

Byrne, Mr Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carden, Dan
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, Mr Yvette
Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Coyle, Neil
Crausby, Sir David
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
David, Wayne

Davies, Geraint
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Dame Louise
Elmore, Chris
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, Mr Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glendon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Gwynne, Andrew
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, Mr David
Hardy, Emma
Harman, Mr Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, Mr John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Heron, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hodge, Mr Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hollern, Kate
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Mr Mr George
Hussain, Imran
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Kane, Mike
Keeley, Barbara

Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lavery, Ian
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
Matheson, Christian
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonald, Andy
McDonnell, Mr John
McFadden, Mr Mr Pat
McGinn, Conor
McInnes, Liz
McKinnell, Catherine
McMahon, Jim
Mearns, Ian
Miliband, Mr Edward
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morgan, Stephen
Morris, Grahame
Nandy, Lisa
Norris, Alex
O'Mara, Jared
Onasanya, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Pearce, Teresa
Pennycook, Matthew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Jess
Phillipson, Bridget
Platt, Jo
Pollard, Luke
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Lucy
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rashid, Faisal
Rayner, Angela
Reed, Mr Steve
Rees, Christina
Reeves, Ellie
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Rimmer, Ms Marie
Rodda, Matt
Rowley, Danielle
Ruane, Chris
Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
Shah, Naz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sherriff, Paula

Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Eleanor
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick

Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Watson, Tom
 West, Catherine
 Western, Matt
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Thangam Debbonaire and
Stephanie Peacock

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afolami, Bim
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, rh Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Benyon, rh Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Blackman, Bob
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, Ben
 Bradley, rh Karen
 Brady, Sir Graham
 Braverman, Suella
 Brereton, Jack
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burghart, Alex
 Burns, Conor
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Cartlidge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Churchill, Jo

Clark, Colin
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Clarke, Mr Simon
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Collins, Damian
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Mims
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
 Dodds, rh Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Duddridge, James
 Duguid, David
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Sir David
 Fabricant, Michael
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael
 Field, rh Mark
 Ford, Vicky
 Foster, Kevin
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fysh, Mr Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger

Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Ms Nusrat
 Gibb, rh Nick
 Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
 Girvan, Paul
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Luke
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Bill
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gymah, Mr Sam
 Hair, Kirstene
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harrison, Trudy
 Hart, Simon
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Adam
 Howell, John
 Hughes, Eddie
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, rh Mr Nick
 Jack, Mr Alister
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Sir Bernard
 Jenkins, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, rh Boris
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Keegan, Gillian
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kerr, Stephen
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lamont, John
 Lancaster, rh Mark
 Latham, Mrs Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip

Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
 Lewer, Andrew
 Lewis, rh Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Little Pngelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Mr Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Maclean, Rachel
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Masterton, Paul
 Maynard, Paul
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
 McVey, rh Ms Esther
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Moore, Damien
 Mordaunt, rh Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, rh Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 O'Brien, Neil
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Sir Mike
 Penrose, John
 Perry, rh Claire
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, rh Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Dan
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, rh Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Ross, Douglas
 Rowley, Lee

Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Seely, Mr Bob
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, rh Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, rh Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek

Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggins, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:

Rebecca Harris and
 Amanda Milling

Question accordingly negated.

Clause 13

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS RELATING TO CORROSIVE SUBSTANCES

Amendment made: 56, page 12, line 34, at end insert—

“(4A) In Schedule 9 to the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 (certificates as to proof of certain routine matters) at the end insert—

“The Offensive Weapons
Act 2018

Sections 1(1), 3(2) and (3)
and 4(4) (offences relating
to sale and delivery of
corrosive products)

A person authorised to
do so by the Scottish
Ministers

In relation to any particular
product which is identified
in the certificate— (a)
the name and Chemical
Abstracts Registry number
of that product, or (b)
the name and Chemical
Abstracts Registry number
of a substance contained
in that product and the
concentration of that
substance in that product.

Section 6(1) (offence of
having corrosive substance
in a public place)

A person authorised to
do so by the Scottish
Ministers

That the particular
substance identified in
the certificate is a corrosive
substance within the
meaning of section 6(9)
of the Offensive Weapons
Act 2018.”

This amendment and Amendments 62 and 63 would add an offence under Clause 1, 3, 4 or 6 of the Bill to Schedule 9 to the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995. This means that, in proceedings for the offence in Scotland, a certificate that a product or substance is of a particular kind is treated as sufficient evidence of that fact.—(Victoria Atkins.)

Clause 24

PROHIBITION ON THE POSSESSION OF OFFENSIVE WEAPONS

Amendments made: 57, page 24, line 16, after “applies” insert “in private”

This amendment and Amendment 58 limit the new offence of possession of an offensive weapon in section 141(1A) of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to possession in private. This is to prevent overlap with existing offences.

Amendment 58, page 24, line 32, at end insert—

“(1C) For the purposes of subsection (1A) as it has effect in relation to England and Wales, a person possesses a weapon to which this section applies in private if the person possesses the weapon in a place other than—

- (a) a public place,
- (b) school premises,
- (c) further education premises, or
- (d) a prison.

(1D) For the purposes of subsection (1A) as it has effect in relation to Scotland, a person possesses a weapon to which this section applies in private if the person possesses the weapon on domestic premises.

(1E) For the purposes of subsection (1A) as it has effect in relation to Northern Ireland, a person possesses a weapon to which this section applies in private if the person possesses the weapon in a place other than—

- (a) a public place,
- (b) school premises, or
- (c) further education premises.

(1F) In subsections (1C) to (1E)—

“domestic premises” means premises occupied as a private dwelling (including any stair, passage, garden, yard, garage, outhouse or other appurtenance of such premises which is not used in common by the occupants of more than one such dwelling);

“further education premises”, in relation to England and Wales, means land used solely for the purposes of—

- (a) an institution within the further education sector (within the meaning of section 91 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992), or
- (b) a 16 to 19 Academy (within the meaning of section 1B of the Academies Act 2010), excluding any land occupied solely as a dwelling by a person employed at the institution or the 16 to 19 Academy; “further education premises”, in relation to Northern Ireland, means land used solely for the purposes of an institution of further education within the meaning of Article 2 of the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (SI 1997/1772 (NI 15)) excluding any land occupied solely as a dwelling by a person employed at the institution;

“prison” includes—

- (a) a young offender institution,
- (b) a secure training centre, and
- (c) a secure college;

“public place” includes any place to which, at the time in question, the public have or are permitted access, whether on payment or otherwise;

“school premises” means land used for the purposes of a school, excluding any land occupied solely as a dwelling by a person employed at the school; and “school” has the meaning given by—

- (a) in relation to land in England and Wales, section 4 of the Education Act 1996;
- (b) in relation to land in Northern Ireland, Article 2(2) of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (SI 1986/594 (NI 3)).—(Victoria Atkins).

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 57.

Clause 25

PROHIBITION ON THE POSSESSION OF OFFENSIVE WEAPONS: SUPPLEMENTARY

Amendments made: 59, page 26, line 34, at end insert—

- (ii) in the words following paragraph (b) for “in religious ceremonies” substitute “for religious reasons”, and”

This amendment modifies the defence to the existing offence of manufacturing or supplying an offensive weapon as it applies to a sword with a curved blade of 50 centimetres or over in length. The effect is that the defence applies where the conduct in question is for making the weapon available for use for religious reasons and not merely for the purpose of participating in religious ceremonies.

Amendment 60, page 26, line 38, leave out “any conduct of that person relating to”

This amendment and Amendment 61 modify the defence to the new offence of a possession of an offensive weapon as it applies to a sword with a curved blade of 50 centimetres or over in length. The effect is that the defence applies to possession for religious reasons and not merely for the purpose of participating in religious ceremonies.

Amendment 61, page 26, line 40, leave out from “that” to end of line 41 and insert “the person possessed the weapon for religious reasons only.”—(Victoria Atkins).

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 60.

Clause 40

EXTENT

Amendments made: 25, page 37, line 17, leave out “and 29” and insert “,29, [Offence of threatening with an offensive weapon Etc in a private place] and [Search for corrosive substance on school or further education premises]”

See the explanatory statement for NC16.

Amendment 62, page 37, line 23 [Clause 40], at end insert—

“() section13(4A);”—(Victoria Atkins).

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 56.

Clause 41

COMMENCEMENT

Amendment made: 63, page 38, line 12, at end insert—

“() section13(4A);”—(Victoria Atkins).

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 56.

Mr Speaker: Consideration completed. I will now suspend the House for no more than five minutes in order to make a decision about certification. The Division bells will be rung two minutes before the House resumes. Following my certification, the Government will table the appropriate consent motion, copies of which will be made available in the Vote Office and will be distributed by Doorkeepers.

6.31 pm

Sitting suspended.

6.38 pm

On resuming—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I can now inform the House that the Speaker has completed certification of the Bill, as required by the Standing Order. Copies of the final certificate will be made available in the Vote Office and on the parliamentary website.

Under Standing Order No. 83M, a consent motion is therefore required for the Bill to proceed. Copies of the motion are available in the Vote Office and on the parliamentary website and have been made available to Members in the Chamber. Does the Minister intend to move the consent motion?

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con) *indicated assent.*

The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England and Wales) (Standing Order No. 83M).

[SIR LINDSAY HOYLE IN THE CHAIR]

6.40 pm

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I remind hon. Members that if there is a Division, only Members representing constituencies in England and Wales may vote. As the knife has fallen, there can be no debate.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order no. 83M(5)),

That the Committee consents to the following certified Clauses of and Amendments to the Offensive Weapons Bill—

Clauses certified under SO No. 83L(2) as relating exclusively to England and Wales and being within devolved legislative competence

Clauses 8 to 10, 14, 28 and 29 of the Bill as amended in Committee (Bill 265), and New Clauses NC16 and NC17 added on Report.

Amendments certified under SO No. 83L(4) as relating exclusively to England and Wales and being within devolved legislative competence

Amendment 56 made on report to Clause 13 of the Bill as amended in Committee (Bill 265).—(Amanda Milling).

Question agreed to.

The occupant of the Chair left the Chair to report the decision of the Committee (Standing Order No. 83M(6)).

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair; decision reported.

Third Reading

6.41 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): I beg to move, that the Bill be now read the Third time.

As the House is all too aware, we have seen a rise in violent crime, including knife crime and homicides, in recent years. That is why there is an urgent need for us to tackle the whole issue of serious violence and see what more we can do. I know that Members across the House will agree that we must do all we can to try to put

[Sajid Javid]

an end to the bloodshed on our streets, and we must do everything in our power to try to bring more perpetrators to justice. I believe that the Offensive Weapons Bill is an incredibly important part of our response. It provides additional powers for the police to tackle serious violence. It will prevent the sale of corrosive products to young people, and make it a crime to possess corrosive products in public with no good reason. It will make it harder for young people to purchase deadly weapons, and make the possession of knuckle dusters, zombie knives and death stars illegal, even in private premises. Sellers will be required by law to impose vigorous age verification measures to prove that anyone purchasing blades or corrosives is over the age of 18, or they will face prosecution.

Simply put, the Offensive Weapons Bill is all about preventing young people from getting their hands on dangerous weapons such as knives and acid, and causing irreparable damage.

The Bill has of course, as many Bills do, raised some tricky issues. We recognise, for instance, that knives, corrosives and firearms are not in themselves offensive weapons, and that they have many lawful and legitimate uses in people's everyday lives. That means that a balance needs to be struck between protecting the public and ensuring that legitimate activities are in no way unduly affected. I believe that the Bill strikes the right balance.

We have made some important changes to the Bill after debate. So, for example, we have made it an offence to threaten someone with an offensive weapon in private as well as in public, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) for first suggesting such a change and then helping us to work that through. We have also ensured that our museums are able to continue to keep important examples of historic knives in their collections, and we have made changes to reflect the different legal system in Scotland.

We have also addressed the concerns raised by the Sikh community, and by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), who I was pleased to meet to discuss the issue regarding the private and public ownership of kirpans.

During the Bill's progress, a number of important points have been raised on firearms, which we think merit further consideration. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) for his work on this matter. I will be looking to launch a public consultation to consider those issues in further detail.

Ultimately, I urge Members to focus on the important changes that this Bill will bring about, and I am in no doubt that the Bill is key to tackling violent crime. The public rightly want violent crime to be dealt with properly and to be dealt with urgently. They want to feel that their neighbourhoods and their children are safe, and this Bill will help to ensure just that.

I commend the Bill to the House.

6.45 pm

Louise Haigh: Labour will not oppose the limited measures in this Bill tonight, but we regret how very limited the measures are. This country is facing a contagion of serious violence and, faced with that challenge, the

Government have introduced a Bill that barely tinkers around the edges. We have record levels of knife crime, the largest continuous rise of violent crime on record, and high-harm offences are all on the rise. The number of unsolved crimes now stands at more than 2.1 million. We have a national crisis in detective numbers and a Government who are unwilling to take the action necessary to plug it. Some 21,000 officers, 6,800 PCSOs and 18,000 police staff have gone yet, rather than give the police the resources they need to launch a national offensive against violent crime, the Government instead seem intent on lumbering the police with a bill for hundreds of millions of pounds of pension liabilities, which the National Police Chiefs Council warns could lead to the loss of another 10,000 officers.

The levels of serious violence are not a spike; they are part of a now five-year trend. Behind the figures are stories of young lives destroyed and families torn apart. The serious violence strategy and the Offensive Weapons Bill stand as the Government's response—it is nowhere near enough. It does not even begin to scratch the surface. As long as they insist on underfunding our police, nobody can say that they are taking serious violence seriously.

With regard to the limited provisions of the Bill, Labour has sought to enhance protections on the sale and possession of knives, to close dangerous loopholes in our gun laws that have been left open for too long, to force the Home Office to release evidence on the consequences of cuts to vital services for the levels of serious violence, and to advocate for the rights of victims of crime, which have been neglected, despite repeated manifesto promises from the Conservative party. There is no doubt that the Bill would have been enhanced by the inclusion of those measures. It is a matter of regret that important issues in relation to serious violence and the rights of victims have not been accepted by this Government.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): I am slightly confused. I thought that, during the opening speeches, Labour Members suggested that the Government should have moved quicker with this Bill and that they are disappointed that there have been some delays, yet they do not seem to welcome any elements of the Bill. They just seem to regret the excellent progress that we have made.

Louise Haigh: We supported this Bill on Second Reading and in Committee, and we supported the Home Secretary's attempt to ban the .50-calibre rifle, on which the Government have now capitulated to their Back Benchers in the face of overwhelming evidence from police, security and intelligence officials. We backed the measures in the Bill; it is a shame that the Home Secretary did not back his own measures.

We will not oppose these limited measures tonight, but we must be clear that they will not stem the tide of serious crime without measures to address its root causes and without a recognition from the Government of their own culpability in creating the conditions for crime to thrive. With a vulnerable cohort of young people without the support they need as services fall away and an ailing police force unable proactively to gather intelligence and build community relations, and unable adequately to investigate crimes that have taken place, this Government are unwilling and unable to

address the consequences of their own actions. As such, this Bill can never meet its objective to bear down on violent crime.

6.48 pm

Stuart C. McDonald: I commend the Minister for steering the Bill through the House of Commons, and I commend the shadow Minister and other Opposition Members for the constructive way in which they have probed and questioned. I thank all the Committee and research staff who have supported our work as helpfully as ever.

The Home Affairs Committee recently launched its new inquiry into serious violence, and it heard powerful and moving evidence from the parents of young people who have lost their lives in stabbings and shootings. It was a timely reminder, if one was needed, of the awful impact that knives, firearms and other offensive weapons are still having on too many.

Obviously, the provisions in this Bill will not stop knife crime and shootings, but they will surely save some lives, as we can see when we can look at the case of Bailey Gwynne, the 16-year-old from Aberdeenshire who was murdered by another young teenager who had arranged online for a knife to be delivered and left at a shed behind his family's house. That prompted a letter to the Home Office from the Justice Secretary in Scotland seeking a tightening of the rules around online sales and delivery. Delivery like that would, we hope, no longer be possible.

Officials in Edinburgh and at the Home Office have worked closely on this Bill, and we welcome the results, not only the provisions on the online sale of knives, but the new provisions on corrosive substances. We have, however, expressed our concern today about changes that have been made to the Bill in relation to firearms.

As we all know, the Bill is not a game-changer, and I do not think anyone can pretend it will be. Much more important are efforts to stop individuals feeling the need or desire to carry and use knives and other weapons in the first place. Strategies and policies that work require support, such as the successful violence reduction unit based in Glasgow, which has been mentioned earlier in debates. In short, we need proper resourcing of public services by the Chancellor—that would be a genuine game-changer.

6.50 pm

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): One problem we often have is that the Opposition parties are critical of some of the legislation we bring forward. That is when they see it in isolation. This Government are making great progress in a number of Departments, on a number of fronts, which collectively are addressing crime. That applies to this Bill as it does to a Bill considered earlier outlining our reforms of the judiciary, which provides a great opportunity to change the allocation of responsibilities for staff, so that we can streamline the way the service works and make sure—

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I have heard the Opposition's message that they are disappointed by the Bill. Does my hon. Friend agree that although no single solution is going to solve the problem of offensive weapons, this Bill goes a long way to addressing the most important ones?

Eddie Hughes: My hon. Friend makes an important point and I agree with it completely. The *Express & Star* newspaper that covers my constituency ran a campaign to ban zombie knives, so I was keen to support the Bill in its earlier stages and to champion that newspaper's campaign, which has proved invaluable. The newspaper does a great job of highlighting issues locally, and it must be good for it to see that this Government respond to those needs. My hon. Friend is right to say that there are many strands to tackling crime—and not only dealing with it once it has been committed; this Government also invest considerably in preventing crime. I came into the House from the YMCA, where I worked with young homeless people who had come out of prison. I was aware of the work the Government had done with them, supporting them in prison in order to improve their academic attainment, and allowing them to learn new skills and services that would help them find employment when they left prison. Obviously, it was unfortunate that some of those people then ended up needing the services of YMCA, but I say again that the Government support supported housing as well.

6.53 pm

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): I just want to put on the record my thanks to the Government for bringing this excellent Bill through. I know that the police in Yeovil are very keen to have these measures in place so that they can make more arrests, get more prosecutions and, in particular, get knives off the street. We have had some terrible incidents in Yeovil recently, and this Bill will make a genuine difference in trying to combat the awful scourge of knife crime.

6.53 pm

Gavin Robinson: I commend Ministers for their efforts on this Bill. Although the Secretary of State introduced the Third Reading debate, I engaged with the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) throughout this process. I had never served on a Bill Committee and had never had the joy of going through the intricate detail of a Bill such as this, but the Minister met me more times than I had planned and more than she would wish. We had thoughtful engagement and the outcome is right. I stand now only to say that some of the comments made from the Opposition Front Bench were facile. They do a disservice to the efforts that went into this Bill and the outcomes that will be the product of it. We will have protections in place on streets and protections against corrosive substances, and we will do further work on significant calibre weapons. I commend and praise the Minister for her efforts, where she has engaged thoughtfully across the range of issues contained in this Bill, and I say the same about her officials.

6.54 pm

Huw Merriman: I shall not talk for long; the Whips are worried that I might inadvertently talk out the Bill, which of course I would never want to do because I absolutely support it.

As I did not do so earlier, I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for giving me a lot of her time and reassuring me about some measures about which I was concerned. Across party lines, some great suggestions have been

[Huw Merriman]

made this afternoon. A lot of them came from the Opposition Benches, and I would struggle to vote against them. I hope that in a few months the Minister will assess whether the measures in the Bill as passed will fix some of the issues; if not, we should reconsider new clauses 5 and 26, and perhaps some of the other proposals, because they have a lot to recommend them. Overall, I support the Bill and hope that the House will give it a Third Reading.

6.55 pm

Victoria Atkins: It is now my challenge not to talk out the Bill.

It is a pleasure for me to close the Third Reading debate on this important Bill. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, the measures in it will prevent young people from accessing dangerous weapons such as knives and acid and causing irreparable damage with them, not only to the lives of others but to their own lives.

I am genuinely grateful to all right hon. and hon. Members from all parties—particularly those from Northern Ireland—for their valuable contributions and for the debates that we have had on the Bill. We have had a series of constructive debates, and at times like this the House is at its best, so I thank hon. Friends and colleagues for their contributions.

Particular thanks must go to my hon. Friends who served on the Bill Committee and scrutinised the Bill line by line. It was an absolute pleasure to serve with them in doing that important work. I also thank the Parliamentary Private Secretaries. We do not often get the chance to thank them, but they are the ones who make sure that the political wheels run smoothly. Of course, I also thank the officials, who have done an incredible amount of work on the Bill. *[Interruption.]* I am being prompted, but I had made a note, so now that I have finished thanking the officials I thank the Whip, the Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), because I know which side my bread is buttered. I also thank those in the Whips Office for their hard work on the Bill. Every time that we excited and enthusiastic Ministers put policies and legislation before the House, it is the Whips Office that has to deliver it, and I am extremely grateful for the help I have had on this Bill.

I extend my thanks to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) and the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) for their contributions, not only today but in Committee, and for the constant attention that they pay to this really important issue. I hope that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford will keep pressing her case for a debate at tomorrow's business questions.

I also thank the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) for his perspective in the debates. It has been a pleasure to work with him and, indeed, the Scottish Government on the Bill.

Let me end this Third Reading debate by drawing the thoughts of the House back to the people whom the Bill is intended to help and protect. I thank every single

victim of knife crime and corrosive-substance attacks, as well as every family member who has been affected, sometimes devastatingly, by serious violence. It is for those people that we put the Bill and the other measures in the serious violence strategy at the forefront of our thoughts, as well as for the communities that we all represent, who really do want us to ensure that our laws are up to date and that we have in place the strategy to keep our country safe.

On that note, it is my absolute pleasure to send this Bill elsewhere. I hope that it goes with the best wishes and best intentions not only of every colleague present, but of the victims whom we seek to serve and represent.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The Speaker has ruled several times that the convention of Members notifying other Members before visiting their constituencies applies to Ministers on official visits. I was deeply disappointed today to find out that the Scottish Secretary and the Prime Minister no less have visited Bridge of Weir in my constituency and that I have yet to receive a notification. The Scottish Secretary found time to tweet about his visit to Bridge of Weir just over two hours ago, to which I replied, asking for notification. He has not complied with that request. Clearly, paragraph 10.10 of the "Ministerial Code" applies in this case.

The sad thing is that the Prime Minister said earlier in answer to my question at Prime Minister's questions that she knew nothing about Home Energy and Lifestyle Management Systems' green deal mis-selling, which affects hundreds of people in my constituency. Had I been made aware of the visit, I could have scheduled meetings with the constituents affected, at which she could have learned a lot more about this terrible issue. Can you advise me, Mr Deputy Speaker, what recourse I have when the ministerial code is broken and Ministers fail through their answers in their obligations to Members and this House?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): It is the convention for any Member going to another Member's constituency to carry out political business to inform the Member concerned, whether that be the Prime Minister or whoever. Please, do the right thing by colleagues and always inform the Member you are going. You do not have to meet the Member, but at least let us keep with convention. That is the advice that I would give. I am sure that hon. Gentleman will remind the Secretary of State when he catches up with him and has a debrief on his constituency, and I am sure that it will be a great pleasure for him to receive that debriefing.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): With the leave of the House, we will take motions 4 to 6 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

That the draft Trade Barriers (Revocation) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 22 October, be approved.

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Government of Wales Act 2006 (Variation of Borrowing Power) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 18 October, be approved.

MENTAL HEALTH

That the draft Mental Health (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 31 October, be approved.—(*Amanda Milling.*)

Question agreed to.

Planning: South Somerset

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Amanda Milling.*)

7.2 pm

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak this evening on the planning situation in South Somerset, where my constituency lies. I declare an interest, in that my family own a house in the district. I will talk about a planning saga a little less than a mile away that has been going on for a long time.

Essentially, the community to the south of Yeovil, in the Cokers, as it is known, has time and again felt left out of the planning process going on around it. Some might know that the Liberal Democrats have been in power in South Somerset for a very long time. Yeovil was Lord Ashdown's constituency from 1983. He won the seat having built up a power base in local government. One way or another, many of the individuals in local government are still around in the council. Essentially, South Somerset District Council, which is the planning authority, now has a plan in place, but many people say that it is failing because it does not have a five-year housing land supply. As a result, speculative development has been coming forward.

As a district councillor, I was partly involved in the deliberations around the creation of the local plan and in the planning inspector's process, so I know the detail of it very well. It was always quite odd to me that the council wanted to push through a higher number of houses than there was evidence for—as I showed at the time—but the planning inspector let the council do so, because the guidance says that if a council wants to do something, we broadly let it. As a result, many people in the district feel that their voice is not being heard very well. The Yeovil area has an area committee system—Area South is the committee that makes planning decisions there—and many of the key committees are heavily dominated by the Liberal Democrats, although we are trying to do something about that and have had quite a lot of success getting Conservatives involved in recent years.

The district council has been seeking bolt-on development to existing towns that often do not have the infrastructure required to cater for such development. The council has not thought more holistically about the potential for new towns on, for example, the A303. It could capitalise on the investment we will be making in the A303 corridor scheme to dual the road all the way between the M3 and the M5. That kind of plan would be a logical way of trying to achieve these ambitious housing numbers. I favour providing enough housing for a new generation to be able to own their own homes, which could also provide business opportunities. There is a huge amount that we could do if we took that holistic approach and looked at ambitious schemes such as garden towns in appropriate locations such as the one I have suggested.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I am just trying to think—the link between the hon. Gentleman and this topic must be the Irish sea.

Jim Shannon: The link is the planning department. I congratulate the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh) on securing this debate and telling us about the problems

[*Jim Shannon*]

with the planning department in his area. My local council planning department also takes its own interpretation of planning law as gospel, without giving appropriate weight to job creation and the local economy. Does he agree that weight must be given to the letter of planning policy, but also to the spirit of its aims, such as improving town centre facilities and aiding job creation? With that in mind, I support the hon. Gentleman's argument.

Mr Fysh: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention; it would not be an Adjournment debate without a strong contribution from Northern Ireland. I agree that focusing on and intensifying development in town centres is one of the answers both to finding more housing and to getting more people living in town centres, which means they will be there for the businesses in those locations. Having more eyes on the street makes town centres safer and more people will want to visit them. He is absolutely right. I would love Yeovil to be that kind of town, and part of that virtuous circle.

Not so very long ago, the Conservative party manifesto included the idea of a community right of appeal. There is an understandable impetus not to make things too onerous for developers and to ensure that decisions can be made in a timely fashion. I support that, but it is also key that proper evidence is used to make these decisions in the right way. It is my opinion that, unfortunately, evidence in South Somerset has been cooked up for various outcomes—pre-cooked over decades to make certain things happen that, frankly, the Liberal Democrats have wanted to happen for one reason or another. The community has completely lost confidence in the Liberal Democrats' ability to make the right decisions on its behalf.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): It is so nice to see you in the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friend is making some very good points. I have been the MP for Bridgwater and West Somerset for 17 years, and I have never seen South Somerset in the mess that it is now in. The Liberals left us a terrible legacy that started with the noble Lord Ashdown and continued up until David Laws, who has now left the House. Does my hon. Friend agree that it has been a catalogue of disaster over that terrible period for south Somerset? Yeovil is a town that should be thriving—doing really well—but I am embarrassed to say, as a great supporter of my hon. Friend, who is doing a fantastic job, that it does not seem to be.

Mr Fysh: I thank my hon. Friend. He is certainly right that Yeovil has its challenges. Part of the problem has been sprawling development, and not particularly good development, that has been approved over the decades that I am talking about. We need to get a virtuous circle working in the other direction. The town has enormous potential and it has great industries in it. It needs a Conservative leadership in the district council next year to be able to achieve its potential and really contribute to the south-west's growth.

I want to spend a little time going through some of the big saga that happened to the south of Yeovil. Essentially, at the back end of the '80s, or very early in

the '90s, there was a graded asset near a farmhouse that was falling down. The district council, being responsible for such things, did not want to spend the money on it and got its friend who was a developer to buy it, in an area that was not scheduled to have development around it. Who knows what really happened, but I suspect very strongly that the council made commitments to him that they would get him planning permission and on that basis he would do the renovations to keep the building standing. That, I think, is the origin of the problem that is down there.

This area is a really, truly special part of the country with international and international heritage value. It has the village of East Coker, where T.S. Eliot is buried in the church. He wrote one of his most famous poems about the village and the landscape. There are ancient Roman ruins throughout. There are two of the closest together Roman villas, which is a very unusual archaeological configuration, apparently. Those two villas became the manors of East Coker and West Coker in later times. They have a tremendously rich and fertile soil and history.

William Dampier was born in the village. He was an extremely important person in botany, science and literature. He cut his teeth investigating why different plants grew in different parts of the Vale of Coker, which he was farm managing for various of his boss's tenants. That is what got him thinking about why certain things grow differently in certain places. Then, when he did his second navigation of the world later in his life, he made all his drawings in his botanical notebooks and wrote about them. That was the inspiration that Charles Darwin took with him when he went around the world in the *Beagle* doing exactly the same thing, so there really is a very strong heritage in evidence there.

Yet the district council has never, ever ascribed any value to that whatsoever. When it did its landscape and heritage assessments of this area for development, it gave absolutely no value to the farm that was next to the graded asset or to the whole setting, including those Roman villas. There was no drawing together of the threads and the context. Frankly, that is a disgrace, because we are talking about proper national heritage. T.S. Eliot was the most famous poet of the 20th century. His words in that poem will live for as long as the English language lives. People absolutely should go and visit the church in East Coker to see where his memorial is, and to see the memorial to William Dampier. It is an extraordinary place.

The council got the developer to buy that land and said that it would give him planning permission. When the A37 was being expanded to the south of Yeovil, it then gave him a roundabout that was contiguous with the land he had bought, in order to get access to the putative development that it had in mind. That was done entirely at the behest of the county councillor for the area at the time, who is now in the House of Lords—Baroness Bakewell. She suggested that roundabout, which was going to benefit the developer to a huge financial degree, and she made it happen through her friends in the county council. The leader of the district council at the time was having an affair with the chair of the environment committee in the county council.

There are wheels within wheels in South Somerset, and this has been going on for an awfully long time. There is the evidence of the roundabout. The developer

made a contribution of £100,000 to the county council to get it done under a section 278 agreement—that is in black and white. Unsurprisingly, the community was more than upset and confused at how unusual that was when it found out.

The council has continued to give favours to this developer over time. It tried initially to promote a big logistics park on the site. That did not go forward because the community opposed it, but the council then came up with the idea of developing the site for housing. When it was assessing the site in the process leading up to the more recent local plan, it decided to give a zero rating on the community infrastructure levy, so that it would not have to pay anything to the community. The whole point of the Localism Act 2011 was that development in the community would give some benefit to the community, to spend in ways that it wanted. None of that will happen if this site gets developed, because of that CIL derogation, which benefits this developer substantially.

In the planning process, the council gamed the highways evidence. It gamed the housing demand evidence, to ensure that this site would be one of those that it had to consider. It gamed the landscape evidence, and then it gamed the historic environment assessment evidence by not taking account of the settings of all the graded assets. There is a higher concentration of graded assets in that valley than almost anywhere else in the country. It is so rich and has such a history; it is quite an extraordinary place.

The district council made a statement of common ground with the developer, and it was only on that basis that English Heritage allowed it to remove its objection from the local plan process for the whole site, and that was on the basis that it was going to be a reduced size and only up in the corner. The council said that it would not develop on a field that is adjacent to one of the scheduled ancient monuments—the Roman villa, which was on the at-risk register at the time because of development potential. On the basis of that statement of common ground, the council got English Heritage to remove it from the at-risk register.

Then the council got the planning inspector to change his final report on the local plan. I have copies of the documents. His original report was basically going to say that he was approving the local plan allocation for the whole site because it was not in proximity to the scheduled monument. However, I have in writing, too, the council saying to him that the field is in fact adjacent to the monument. That was taken out, which materially changes the meaning of the report.

I personally think that this closeness between councils and the Planning Inspectorate is a structural problem that the Ministry should look into. It is not appropriate for these sorts of things to go on behind closed doors. No information was released, even under the Freedom of Information Act, until after it was judicially reviewable, which is a disgrace. It is understandable that, in this context, the process does not smell right at all and I would support the community in saying that.

The council is now trying to get its friends on the county council—because it is all about politics from way back when—to shift the school site to the very field adjacent to the scheduled ancient monument. I am very pleased to say that Historic England has just submitted an objection to the planning application, on the basis that that is absolutely not what it agreed when it released

all these things, given all the reliance placed on the statement of common ground that allowed the site to come forward in the first place.

Essentially, on a policy basis, we need to look at how communities can challenge the substance of some of this stuff, other than with the normal route of politics. Everyone says, “Well, just vote people out”, but that is not realistic in a place where there is a safe seat or a safe council. In these sort of incidents, it is only on a procedural basis—if there is something wrong with the actual process—that individuals can bring a judicial review. If the council has not divulged the information about the material way in which decisions were made by the decision maker, which it did not do, and we are out of time, what do we do?

Both because it is a nationally important heritage asset and because there are public policy grounds, including the very welcome new powers to protect heritage in the national planning policy framework—we should try to elucidate and clarify some of these things—this planning application is a very good candidate for calling in. I would like it to be called in and, to put my hon. Friend the Minister in the picture, I will be making an application to do so in the coming days. I have taken more time than I promised I would, but I thank hon. Members for listening.

7.22 pm

The Minister for Housing (Kit Malthouse): It is a great pleasure to respond to this debate, not least because the A303 is a golden thread that runs from my constituency to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh). I know that we both treasure it as a road that features large in our postbag. Somebody once said that if we want to keep something secret, we should make a speech about it in the House of Commons. Given the contents of my hon. Friend's speech, I doubt very much it will remain a secret for long, at least in his constituency.

I should first point out to my hon. Friend, as many hon. Members will know, that the Secretary of State has a quasi-judicial role in the planning system. I am sure that people will therefore understand that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the detail of individual cases. However, I can talk about the issues raised more broadly. My hon. Friend quite rightly raises the ability of the community to influence the planning system, and we are very keen that our planning system should be one that puts local communities front and centre. Planning must be done with local people, not to them.

If we are to ensure that more homes are built in the right places at prices our constituents can afford, we need to make sure that we make the best possible use of the land that is already in the system. The revised national planning policy framework is fundamental to delivering the homes we need in places where people want to live. It sets out a comprehensive approach to ensuring that we get the right homes built of the right quality in the right places. At the same time, it includes policies for leaving our environment in a better condition than when we inherited it, speeding up build-out and providing local areas with more flexibility to make effective use of land. The revised NPPF retains an emphasis on development that is sustainable and plan-led, with local decisions still at the heart of the system.

[Kit Malthouse]

Local plans are the key vehicle for how this national policy translates locally. I note my hon. Friend's involvement in his local plan. Local plans must be prepared in consultation with communities and play a key role in delivering the development and infrastructure we need in the right places. They provide clarity to communities and developers about where homes should be built and where not, so that development is planned rather than the result of speculative applications. It is crucial that local authorities have up-to-date local plans, produced in consultation with local people. I urge my hon. Friend and his constituents to make use of the opportunities to participate in developing South Somerset's local plan, which is currently under review. I applaud the ambition for housing and new settlements in his patch, and I would be more than happy to discuss them with him.

Neighbourhood plans play a key part in communities having a voice in local planning. Over 2,400 communities have begun the process of developing a neighbourhood plan, to shape the future development of their areas. Some 13 million people across England live in a neighbourhood planning area. Seven of those areas are within my hon. Friend's constituency, and three are now part of the development plan for South Somerset, having passed referendums.

Some neighbourhood plans, however, were being undermined because the local planning authority could not demonstrate a five-year land supply, as my hon. Friend pointed out. The revised NPPF has addressed that issue. Neighbourhood plan areas are provided protections from speculative development in instances where the local planning authority lacks a five-year supply of land, provided that all four of the following criteria are met: first, that the neighbourhood plan became part of the development plan two years or less before the date on which the decision is made; secondly, that the neighbourhood plan contains policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirement; thirdly, that the local planning authority has at least a three-year supply of deliverable housing sites; and fourthly, that the local planning authority's housing delivery was at least 45% of that required over the previous three years.

My hon. Friend mentioned decision making. Planning decisions are taken in full view of the public. Local people have a right to look at applications and plans. Local people can also attend council planning committee meetings to see certain decisions being made. Once submitted, planning applications are required to be determined in accordance with the local plan and any neighbourhood plans in place, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Local planning authorities are required to undertake consultation before making their decisions and must notify neighbours about planning applications.

As the decision maker, the local planning authority must consider all the representations made within the specified period and take into account any relevant issues raised. Local opposition or support is not in itself a ground for refusing or granting planning permission, unless it is founded on valid planning reasons. Where people feel that they lack the knowledge or expertise to make effective representations, which is

often the case, they can express themselves through their local councillors. They may also be able to access the services of Planning Aid England, part of the Royal Town Planning Institute, which operates a planning advice service staffed by chartered planners. Happily, it is a free service.

Local authorities typically operate a committee system when determining planning applications, with many decisions delegated to officers under an authority's scheme of delegation. The operation of committees, including which applications are considered by members, are administrative matters for the local authority. Officers have to abide by their local authority's code of conduct, requiring them to act in accordance with the seven Nolan principles of standards in public life. They are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions, and they must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure that.

The law states that meetings of the council, including committee meetings, must be open to the public unless the matter under discussion would involve the disclosure of confidential information. Copies of the agenda and reports for council and committee meetings must be available for public inspection for at least five clear days before the date of the meeting. Where decisions are made by officers, councils are required to provide a written record as soon as is reasonably practicable, and it must contain the reasons for the decision. The written record and any background papers must also be made available to members of the public and retained for six years.

My hon. Friend mentioned third-party rights of appeal. Interested parties already have statutory rights to contribute their views in the planning process—in the production of the local plan or neighbourhood plan, at the planning application stage, and in response to most appeals by the applicant against a local authority decision. The existing right of appeal recognises that, in practice, the planning system acts as a control on how an individual may use their land. As a result, the Government believe that it is right that an applicant has the option of an impartial appeal against the refusal of planning permission. This existing right of appeal compensates for the removal of the individual's right to develop.

Decisions on planning permission can be challenged by third parties in the courts only on a point of law, by judicial review, such as whether the correct procedures have been followed. Although there is only a right of appeal for those applying for planning permission, the planning system, as I have outlined, is centred on community involvement at every stage—plan making, neighbourhood planning and decision making.

I once again thank my hon. Friend for securing this valuable debate. I hope that my comments have demonstrated that planning should be done with people, not to them. I would be more than happy to meet him to discuss the issues he has raised. I note that he is going to make a submission for a call-in. We look forward to receiving his letter and will consider it with due process, as we are bound to do. He must recognise that the planning system does take into account the strong and important role that local communities play, with local decisions at the heart of the system. T. S. Eliot once wrote:

"Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go."

I know that is an aphorism by which my hon. Friend will conduct himself in this matter, as he does in all others.

Question put and agreed to.

7.30 pm

House adjourned.

Deferred Division

FAMILY LAW

That the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 12 September, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 310, Noes 230.

Division No. 268]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, rh Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brereton, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen

Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam

Hair, Kirstene
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Sir John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Latham, Mrs Pauline
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul

McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Philp, Chris
Pincher, rh Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, rh Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline

Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo
 Syms, Sir Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Thomson, Ross
 Throup, Maggie
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom

Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, rh Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watling, Giles
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Mrs Heather
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, rh Sammy
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, Mr William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Hardy, Emma
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hermon, Lady
 Hill, Mike
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hoey, Kate
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, rh Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Killen, Ged
 Laird, Lesley
 Lake, Ben
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Lee, Karen
 Leslie, Mr Chris
 Linden, David
 Lloyd, Tony
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 MacNeil, Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Gordon
 Martin, Sandy
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, rh John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMorrin, Anna
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Newlands, Gavin

Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onasanya, Fiona
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Owen, Albert
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Platt, Jo
 Pollard, Luke
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rashid, Faisal
 Rayner, Angela
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Rodda, Matt
 Rowley, Danielle
 Ruane, Chris
 Russell-Moyle, Lloyd
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Shah, Naz
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Laura
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Sobel, Alex
 Spellar, rh John
 Starmer, rh Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Stringer, Graham
 Sweeney, Mr Paul
 Tami, rh Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, rh Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Twigg, Stephen
 Twist, Liz
 Umunna, Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Walker, Thelma
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Dr Paul
 Williamson, Chris
 Wilson, Phil
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Yasin, Mohammad
 Zeichner, Daniel

NOES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Antoniazzi, Tonia
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Sir Kevin
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berger, Luciana
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, rh Ian
 Blomfield, Paul
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carden, Dan
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Douglas
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Rosie
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Daby, Janet
 David, Wayne

Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Debbonaire, Thangam
 Dent Coad, Emma
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, Anneliese
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Peter
 Drew, Dr David
 Dromey, Jack
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Dame Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gaffney, Hugh
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 George, Ruth
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Glindon, Mary
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hanson, rh David

Question accordingly agreed to.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 28 November 2018

[STEWART HOSIE *in the Chair*]

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service

9.30 am

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the proposed new integrated risk management plan for Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. Judging by the attendance of right hon. and hon. Friends from Tyne and Wear and neighbouring constituencies, this debate demonstrates the importance of a good fire service, which is essential to our lives, our communities and the industries and services that we rely on.

I am grateful both to our chief fire officer, Chris Lowther, and to the chair of Tyne and Wear fire authority, Councillor Barry Curran, for taking time to meet MPs in recent weeks to discuss the new integrated risk management plan, and for being so candid when answering our questions. I have no criticism of our fire and rescue service under our fire chief; it has done its very best to provide a high level of service to our communities in the last eight years, despite the massive Government cuts to its budget. Nor have I any criticism of our hard-working councillors who serve on the fire authority and are managing their way through particularly tough times for local government.

As a member of the Fire Brigades Union parliamentary group, I am more than aware of all the problems that cuts to resources have caused, and I have nothing but praise for the commitment and dedication of each of our firefighters, to whom we owe a great debt for keeping us all safe, day in, day out. Over the past few years, they have worked diligently throughout a succession of cuts to services and staffing, as well as having to suffer an erosion of their own terms and conditions.

I am grateful to see that the policing and fire Minister is here, and I hope that he will be open minded as I talk about funding cuts to our fire service. I politely ask that, for the next hour and a half, the Minister puts to the back of his mind his claim that the fire and rescue services have the resources that they need to do their important work, and instead concentrates on only the very genuine concerns that I and colleagues will express.

I will spend a little time considering how we got where we are with the proposed new IRMP. I have already mentioned that Tyne and Wear fire authority has suffered funding cuts for the last eight years, and those cuts can only be described as inordinate, because they have been some of the worst cuts to any service in England since 2010. Does the Minister acknowledge that austerity measures have affected metropolitan and northern fire and rescue services disproportionately since 2010?

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I commend my hon. Friend for securing the debate and for her excellent introduction. I absolutely concur with every single word. Will she ask the Minister

to accept that, far from austerity being over, as the Prime Minister claims, the impact of those cuts on our constituents will continue for many years to come?

Mary Glindon: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. I am sure that the Minister heard her question and I hope that he will give her a sound answer.

By the next financial year, the revenue support grant will have been reduced by £10.8 million, which is equivalent to 18.2%. There is also a projected gap in financial resources of £2.2 million in the next financial year, which will increase to £3 million by 2020-21, and to £3.6 million by 2021-22. The ability to increase income from council tax has been limited by freezes and caps imposed by national Government, and because Tyne and Wear is an area with high deprivation, there is no scope to raise income from business rates or council tax to the same extent as in more affluent areas, where fire and rescue services have benefited. With such regional differences, how can there ever be an even playing field?

On top of all this, Tyne and Wear fire service has had to manage higher costs, such as inflation and pay awards, which means that just over £25 million of total budget savings have to be met.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): In the light of the dire case that my hon. Friend is making on behalf of people in Tyne and Wear, I wonder if, like me, she thinks that there would be merit in holding a meeting between the Minister and a delegation of Tyne and Wear MPs, the chief fire officer and the chair of the fire authority, in order to discuss these matters?

Mary Glindon: I think that would be an extra way to present the case to the Minister, and I hope that he is open to that suggestion.

The new IRMP, produced under the Home Office's fire and rescue national framework, has been prepared in the face of those reductions in spending and the projected gap in financial resources. Since 5 November, it has been out for public consultation, which will close in the new year, on 14 January. The proposals include the downgrading of wholetime availability at Hebburn and Wallsend to an on-call system, with up to a 30-minute delay between the hours of 8 pm and 8 am; the reduction in available fire appliances at Tynemouth and South Shields between the hours of 8 pm and 8 am, because of the need to provide fire cover for Wallsend and Hebburn; the reduction of two fire appliances—one each from Gosforth and Washington—by relocating them to Newcastle and Sunderland central, respectively; and the downgrading of an immediate wholetime appliance at Northmoor, Sunderland, to an on-call appliance with a delayed response. There will also be a reduction in the number of staff, with 16 posts lost in 2019 and a further 54 posts lost over the next two years.

Catherine McKinnell: My hon. Friend referred to the consultation. Given the serious risks to public safety in some of the proposals, does she share my concern that the consultation period falls over Christmas and new year and is unlikely to be fully engaged with for the full 10-week period, and that the Minister should therefore consider extending it to a 12-week period to allow for that?

Mary Glindon: That concern has been raised by the FBU, and I raised it with the fire chief at my meeting with him. The Christmas period means the consultation is shorter than it ought to be, but I am not sure that the fire authority would be minded to extend it. If it is possible, I hope that it can be done, because the public consultation needs to be just that—public.

The aim of the proposed changes in the IRMP is to ensure that Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service can deliver a flexible and sustainable service to our communities, and focus resources on where the greatest risks are across the area, but the FBU, which will be meeting MPs on Friday, believes that the proposals will make all communities in Tyne and Wear less safe, because of the reduction in immediate response from a decreased number of immediately available fire engines with a decreased workforce over a greater area of the authority.

Furthermore, the proposed changes come on top of efficiencies made in recent years, which include the removal of six appliances across the service; the reduction of aerial ladder platforms from three to two; the stand-down of two fire appliances during quieter periods; and the introduction of two targeted response vehicles to attend lower risk incidents 24/7, and of two further targeted response vehicles to be staffed at night. There has also been a review of valuable fire and safety and community safety functions, which have proved to be so important in areas of high social deprivation to avert antisocial behaviour and increase fire prevention. From the beginning of June this year, crews in Wallsend, Marley Park, Hebburn and Birtley were reduced to four firefighters, which was described by the FBU as a dangerous move.

All the while, like neighbouring services, Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service is called to over-border activity. In the past year, the number and frequency of incidents attended by Tyne and Wear with fire engines for Ponteland fire station was 53, and for Northumberland 195, whereas Northumberland mobilised fire engines in Tyne and Wear only 71 times. I hope that the Minister's colleagues in Northumberland are aware of the need for extra resources in their area and that they have made representations to him.

The question is why are the cuts so necessary when the service has reserves of £28.5 million? The answer is that £24.5 million is earmarked: £16.5 million to prevent an increase in the revenue budget, £4.5 million to support service delivery requirements, and £3.5 million to fund the capital programme. Reserves are a finite resource, so the service has stated that they cannot be used to fund sustainability, meaning that there is no room for manoeuvre there.

We cannot ignore the stark warnings of the FBU about the implications of the IRMP proposals. We must remember that our firefighters' lives are at risk, as well as those of the general public. How much more of a hit does the Minister think the morale of our firefighters can take? How will further reductions in the fire service affect our businesses and economic growth? How could we attract businesses to an area where their valuable assets might be lost because of the lack of adequate fire and rescue cover? The public consultation might result in a rejection of the IRMP and the drastic cuts to our fire service operations. What would be the result? What would happen next?

I feel strongly that the IRMP proposals go too far. I am sorry to say this, but Ministers will be held directly to account if the cuts worsen a major incident, or cause

injury or death. I look to the Minister present for some hope that the Government will live up to their responsibility to the people of Tyne and Wear and work to make available some extra funding to prevent the need for the IRMP to be implemented in its current form.

Although I trust that the fire chief and the fire authority are doing their best to make the best of a bad job, it is true to say that ultimately their decisions are based on financial considerations more than on any other factors. On their behalf, I have some asks for the Minister, which I hope he will consider thoroughly. In developing a fair funding model, will the Government take a nuanced approach, based on the effects of area and family deprivation on community safety risk factors? Will the Government give more certainty about funding in the medium term, as that would strengthen the fire authorities' ability to plan financially to ensure better use of resources and reduced reliance on reserves? The removal of capital funding is not sustainable; can that be reinstated? Also, will the Government fund national policy and decisions that impact on services, to relieve the burden on the already overstretched services that they offer?

I hope that the Minister has heeded me, as I asked at the beginning, and will give full consideration to what I have said. I am sure that he will hear further pleas from my colleagues about how important the subject is, and why we need to make changes to the resources given to our brave firefighters.

9.44 am

Mr Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon), on securing this important debate and on making a powerful case for our local communities, as she always does. I, too, place on record my appreciation of the vital work of our firefighters in keeping us safe. We are about to enter the festive period, when many of us will, I hope, be safe at home with our families. We must remember, however, that the emergency services, including firefighters, will be on duty over that period, as they are every day, keeping us safe.

Recently, I too met the Tyne and Wear chief fire officer, Chris Lowther, and a fire authority representative. More recently, I met Russ King of the FBU and firefighters at the fire station in Tynemouth. I therefore understand why the fire authority felt the need to propose the changes in the integrated risk management plan, given the financial constraints within which it has to operate, but I am sceptical and indeed critical of the suggested changes as they affect my constituency. To be clear, however, we should not simply fight for our own areas; this should be a whole Tyne and Wear issue, and the plan should be one that keeps every community safe, whichever constituency it happens to be in.

As my hon. Friend said, under one of the proposals offered, fire engines at Wallsend will simply be day-crewed, with an engine from Tynemouth taken over there to provide cover during the night. My first concern, therefore, is about the dilution of cover and the time taken for sufficient engines to arrive at a major fire incident. According to the consultation document, an average delay of simply 17 seconds will result from the change, but for someone who lives in St Mary's ward in my constituency, with the second engine at Wallsend, the delay will be considerably longer in practice.

The fact is that, while the speed of response is important, the weight of response is crucial. For a fire involving people, at least three appliances are sent, so a thinner spread across an area would mean drawing engines from further away, and that adds time. In addition, as a result of previous cuts, as we have heard, some crews have already been reduced to only four members. For a person in the first engine reaching the fire and believing someone is in that fire, the enormous moral pressure to act is great, and that increases the risk. Under the proposed changes, that will get worse. Tynemouth station also has a mass decontamination vehicle to decontaminate firefighters and indeed the public. In theory—or in practice—that requires 28 operatives, but under the proposals that number will be reduced to only 16. To be clear, resources are already stretched, and the proposals will stretch them further.

Tyne and Wear appliances are already thinly spread, in particular when they are drawn into Northumberland. In recent years, Northumberland fire service has made cuts, and those at West Hartford, for example, mean that Tyne and Wear appliances are regularly drawn across the border into Cramlington. This summer, in Blyth, a major incident required five engines: three came from Tyne and Wear, and two of them were from Tynemouth fire station. Section 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 provides for mutual assistance, but the situation in Tyne and Wear is already stretched, so cuts might make mutual assistance impossible in future.

Even without engines crossing the border, the situation in Tyne and Wear is overstretched. Last Thursday, in North Shields, firefighters were called to a fire on the Meadow Well estate. At the same time, a further fire was reported in Cullercoats, which required an engine to be called from Fossway in Newcastle, seven miles away, leaving east Newcastle, an area of considerable industrial activity and housing, with a lack of cover. In April 2018, four engines were called to a fatal house fire in the Knott flats in North Shields—under the proposals, four engines will not be available locally. Earlier in the year, a fire at Hillheads in Whitley Bay was also, unfortunately, fatal. If the changes go through, the risk will be even greater. Firefighters tell me that it was becoming very rare to go to a house fire in which there was a fatality, but that has not been the case in recent times. Under these proposals, that could get worse.

Fire prevention is a crucial part of keeping people safe. The fire authority says that if the job losses continue in Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service as a result of these changes and what has gone before, 70 posts will be lost, and the FBU says 82 posts will be lost. Either number is considerable. One effect is likely to be a reduction in fire prevention work. There is already little time for fire prevention work in schools. Attacks on crews are also up by 25% nationally, and antisocial behaviour, which is increasing, is often linked in my constituency to fire raising. Uniquely, there was a bonfire night campaign this year, which is the first time I remember that being the case. There is an ever-diminishing resource and an ever-increasing risk. Although we see that in our constituencies, this is not about turning one area against another.

It is clear, not least from what my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside said, why we are in this position. Tyne and Wear is a metropolitan fire brigade;

metropolitan fire brigades have taken 50% of the cuts since 2010. One of the root causes is the linking of funding to band D council tax. That means that better-off areas in the south tend to do better than metropolitan areas in the north, where the typical council tax band is more likely to be A or B than D.

There is a way that fire authorities could raise more funding. If they wanted to increase the precept by more than 2.99%, they could have a referendum, but I am told that the cost of holding a referendum would be greater than the money that would be raised to spend on the service. Understandably, that is not a route they would want to go down. Tyne and Wear has said that it has not had capital grants since 2010-11 and that equipment needs to be replaced. Reorganisation sometimes means that the location of fire stations has to be remodelled. It is important that the fire authority looks at reserves, but it must be careful because it cannot spend that money and still have the reserves in future to spend again.

I hope that the Government will reconsider changing the funding formula in the way that my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside described. I hope they will think carefully before they go too far down the sparsity route. Sparsity added into the funding will not do anything for metropolitan areas such as Tyne and Wear. I hope that we get some kind of equalisation. Whether it is business tax, council tax, or whatever other kind of taxation or funding, we have a habit of using a national model that does not look at needs in different areas. If fire authorities in the south have sufficient resources to run a good service, why are they being rewarded while other areas, such as Tyne and Wear, lose out?

The Government must face up to the consequences of the proposed cuts. The Home Office is responsible for fire and rescue—the police and fire Minister is in his place. It is odd that the funding still comes from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government—perhaps the Minister will confirm whether that is true. It is very odd for one Department to be responsible for making decisions, and another to be responsible for going to the Treasury to lobby for money. HCLG has its own priorities, so I am not sure another Department's priorities will be at the top of its list.

I have a lot of respect for the Minister, but the Home Office cannot perpetuate a laissez-faire approach where decisions on police cuts are the responsibility of the police and crime commissioners, and spending and decision making on the fire service are down to chief fire officers and fire authorities. If the Government do not provide the funding in the first place, fire authorities and police and crime commissioners will simply manage cuts. That must not be allowed to continue.

There is a consultation, but the period is truncated. Whether or not it continues to be truncated, I hope that residents in Tyne and Wear will find time to look at the consultation and to make their views known. I certainly will.

Several hon. Members rose—

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): Order. I want to call the Front-Bench speakers no later than 10.40, to give each speaker at least 10 minutes to speak. If colleagues could ration their speeches to around eight minutes, that would be marvellous. I call Sharon Hodgson.

9.55 am

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) for securing this important debate and for her excellent speech outlining the issues.

Many people in the constituencies served by the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Services, whom we all represent apart from the Minister and the shadow Minister, are following this debate closely. A significant number of constituents have written to me in recent weeks to raise their concerns about the proposed new integrated risk management plan for Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service, and the ongoing cuts to fire and rescue services more widely. People will be particularly concerned about this issue in the light of troubling events in recent weeks in which firefighters have been verbally and physically attacked—I will come back to that.

It has been noted in this debate that fire services across the country have felt the significant impact of funding cuts since 2010. As a result, almost 12,000 frontline firefighter jobs have been lost, including 285 in Tyne and Wear. Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service faces a number of unique funding challenges—we have heard about them in detail—and I want to bring some particular ones to the Minister's attention. By 2019-20, the revenue support grant will reduce by £10.8 million, to £45.8 million. Based on all current information, the authority is on course to face a cumulative funding shortfall of £3.96 million by the end of 2021-22. Doing nothing is not an option. I am sure that colleagues will agree that is a huge shortfall, especially when pressure on all our public services is increasing.

The Minister may say that there are fire and rescue services across the country whose finances are growing—we heard that from my right hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell)—due to their ability to raise funds from business rates and the council tax precept. Unfortunately, that is another way in which Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service, along with other metropolitan services, experiences serious shortfalls in funding, and shows why a one-size-fits-all approach does not work. Although we have the highest council-tax band-D precept of all metropolitan authorities, at £79.94, the vast majority of households are in bands A, B and C. As a result, the council tax income generated by the authority is the lowest of all metropolitan fire and rescue services. That is extremely concerning.

Our communities in the north-east have suffered hugely as a result of austerity and its associated problems. It should therefore not be the case that the very deprivation that this Government have caused has the knock-on effect of preventing some of our public services from having access to the funding that they need to keep us all safe. Even worse, in areas with high levels of deprivation there is a higher risk of fire and fire-related deaths. Will the Minister take a nuanced approach when developing a fair funding model for fire and rescue services, based on risks related to deprivation and local needs? It is absolutely clear that the Government should trust local services to outline their own specific needs. Those who work for and in communities on a daily basis are best placed to know where resources are best deployed and how much they cost. Budgets allocated on the basis of scarcity alone will not provide sufficient funding.

Like many of my colleagues here today, I recently met the chief fire officer of Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service, Chris Lowther, to discuss proposals for the new integrated risk management plan, and wider concerns about the funding available to him. He is doing everything within his power to manage the resources currently available, in a way that guarantees the safety of my constituents, and everyone across Tyne and Wear. In response to the consultation that the service is currently running, there has been some pushback from members of the public, who are understandably concerned.

Let me make it clear that I hold this Government solely responsible for their failure to provide sufficient and sustainable funding for our fire and rescue service, and I do not blame Chris Lowther, or the Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service, for trying to make the best of a very bad deal. It is particularly frustrating that services such as ours are being put in such a terrible position. They are doing everything they can to deliver their services while coming under ever increasing financial pressure, and as we know, these are not the first round of such cuts in Tyne and Wear.

I also discussed with the chief fire officer the spate of recent attacks on firefighters, which I mentioned earlier. Last year, there were 148 attacks on firefighters in the north-east, and only a few weeks ago in Southwick in Sunderland Central—the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott)—an incident took place that has been described as the worst attack of its kind in a decade. Firefighters were called to an incident in which a car was driven on to a bonfire, and they were pelted with bricks, bottles, and fireworks. The firefighters were ambushed and cordoned in by criminal “pool” cars. It is difficult to comprehend the mindset of someone who actively sets out physically to harm those on whom we rely to keep us safe, and I was pleased to see Sunderland Council back a motion just last week to call for a zero-tolerance approach to attacks on emergency service workers.

The recent Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 will hopefully begin to have an impact, as the maximum sentence for such attacks has now been increased from six to 12 months. However, we must acknowledge that such things do not just happen or appear out of nowhere, and those attacks are a symptom of the underlying damage to the fabric of a community that has suffered almost 10 years of punishing austerity that has imposed cuts on all our public services. We know that when services engage with communities through education and outreach programmes, the long-term relationships that are forged can prevent such incidents from happening in future.

The successful preventive work undertaken by Tyne and Wear fire and rescue Service's and its fast response times have, over the past nine years, reduced the number of injuries from accidental dwelling fires, and in two of the past six years it has been the only metropolitan authority to report zero accidental fire deaths. Its preventive work includes work in our communities on home safety, education and youth inclusion, and collaborative partnerships with other public services such as Sunderland clinical commissioning group and the Northumbria police and crime commissioner. I urge the Minister to ensure that all fire and rescue services are given the

funding necessary not only to fulfil their statutory duties, but to continue engaging meaningfully with the communities they serve.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate how important it is that the Minister listens to the concerns raised today by Tyne and Wear MPs, and to express my deep gratitude to Chris Lowther and the firefighters—some of whom are in the Gallery today—and everyone in Tyne and Wear fire service who works tirelessly day in, day out, serving our community and keeping us safe.

10.4 am

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this morning, Mr Hosie, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) on securing this important debate and setting out with such clarity and conviction the challenges we face. Let me pay tribute to the immense dedication of our firefighters in Tyne and Wear, and across the country, who take risks every day on our behalf. We owe it to those brave men and women to ensure that they have the resources they need to do their job properly and keep us safe. Our firefighters rely on excellent support staff, to whom we are very grateful.

Well-founded and real concerns arise from the proposed measures in the integrated risk management plan. On Friday I heard directly from firefighters at Farringdon community fire station about their fears regarding the risks that may be faced by the public under the proposals. The proposals would result in one fire engine at Farringdon being “on call”, which follows previous reductions in service across Tyne and Wear, as well as at Rainton Bridge community fire station in my constituency.

When firefighters are called to respond they do not fully know what lies before them, and it is vital that they have the resources they need to tackle the incident, so that the risk of harm is reduced as much as possible. Last Friday, and on every occasion I have met local firefighters, they impressed on me their determination to serve the community, whatever the circumstances. We discussed recent serious and tragic events in Sunderland, where firefighters have been called to respond and where there have been fire deaths. We cannot, and should not, expect those who put their lives on the line to be exposed to unnecessary risk, and the underlying factor in all this is the unfair funding settlement that leaves those areas of greatest need wanting.

Year after year the fire authority has had to confront difficult decisions driven by funding cuts from central Government, rather than what works and is in the best interests of our community. In 2012, I secured a Westminster Hall debate on that issue. In advance of this debate I reviewed what had been said then, and it is remarkable how little has changed, other than that the situation has got progressively worse. There has been an increase in incidents and fires, a massive reduction in the number of firefighters, and increased response times. If there were a backdrop of reducing demand, Ministers might find the rationale for these measures understandable, but demand is increasing, not reducing.

Since 2010, major cuts and efficiency savings have been made, yet we are facing even more. We have seen some of the worst funding settlements across fire and rescue services in England, and by 2019-20, there will have been a 19% budget cut at a time of rising cost

pressures for the authority. I hope the Minister will listen to the concerns raised by hon. Members this morning on behalf of our communities and the firefighters who serve our constituents. I live in hope that the Minister will not just respond in the customary fashion, and say that these are local decisions and it is for local fire and rescue services to manage these cuts, or that local decisions fall to local decision makers to make better choices. That is not good enough when we know that the areas of greatest need have borne the brunt of austerity cuts. The Government should do the right thing for fire and rescue services, for firefighters who put themselves in harm's way, and for the public who depend on the risks they take.

10.7 am

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) on securing this important debate about our fire and rescue services. I, too, thank the chief fire officer for taking time to brief me and other Members about the issues faced by Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service under these proposals, and I thank and pay tribute to members of our local Fire Brigades Union who have done a great job in considering these proposals and raising their concerns.

This debate did not begin this year, because as we have heard there have been earlier iterations of the IRMP. When I was a local councillor this issue affected the area I served, and it now greatly affects my constituency. Some years ago, in one of my local fire stations—Swalwell, which serves a largely rural part of my constituency—we lost what I used to call a fire engine, although I understand technically it is called a pump. We lost that pump from that station, which caused huge concern at the time. We had the introduction of new tactical response vehicles, which are response units for what are believed to be minor incidents. However, firefighters never know until they get there exactly what incident they will be facing, and the loss of that pump has led to a reduction in response times. One fire engine on its own cannot necessarily deal with an entire incident for safety reasons, and waiting for a second vehicle has had a detrimental effect on the service. Very real concerns remain, which have been demonstrated by the delayed response times.

Last year, further changes meant that the pumps were reduced to running with four staff members instead of five, again causing a risk to the service. That affected the station in Birtley, which is at the far end of my constituency. At that stage, staff were hugely concerned about the changes that were coming. As I reminded him when we met, the chief fire officer undertook to look at whether the numbers could be raised to five per pump in the future. Given the proposals and the budget gap we face, that is looking even less likely, but it is something I believe is important.

I very much understand the concerns expressed by my hon. Friends. The changes we are discussing today may not directly impact on my constituency, but there is a cumulative effect. Inevitably, a change in one part of Tyne and Wear, whether that is Hebburn, South Shields or elsewhere, will have an impact on the response in my constituency. In a concentrated area that relies on mutual support between teams, there will inevitably be an impact in staffing changes and the reduction and downgrading

[Liz Twist]

of vehicles. We cannot make the change in one area of Tyne and Wear without it impacting on other areas. That is a crucial point.

Earlier this year, I asked the Minister whether he would consider funding fire and rescue authorities by risk, not demand. He referred me to the reserves, which many Members have mentioned. I have asked the fire chief about those reserves and have been briefed on that. Will the Minister address the question of considering risk, not demand, and the number of incidents, which, given the nature of our communities, would have an impact on the Tyne and Wear rescue service?

As others have said, Tyne and Wear fire and rescue services are disproportionately affected by changes in council tax funding, because 75% of the properties in Tyne and Wear are below band D. While we may agree to increase the precept, that does not produce the same returns that more prosperous areas can produce. That issue affects a lot of our services, and I hope the Minister will address it seriously, because it is a real concern for us.

Will the Minister also take deprivation and its impact on the fire and rescue services into account? Will he look at reinstating capital funding for fire and rescue services? I know that reserves have been earmarked, but it takes a huge chunk, requires forward planning and there is a risk if the funding is not in place. Whatever Government Department makes a change, whether that is the Treasury making national insurance increases, pay awards or other increases, or another Department making other changes, that should be taken into account and be fully funded, so that we are able to meet the needs of the fire and rescue services. Certainty in funding is hugely important for all services, but especially for our fire and rescue services.

On Sunday, I will be meeting firefighters at Swalwell in my constituency to get their views on the latest proposals and to listen to their concerns. Many of them have been looking at the proposals over a number of years, not just this year, and expressing their concerns in a very measured way, pointing out the issues that they will cause. Some of those warnings have been borne out. When I meet them, and the firefighters and Fire Brigades Union at Birtley as part of the consultation, I would like to be able to tell them that the Government have heard their concerns and will take action to fund the Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service properly.

10.14 am

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) on securing this timely and important debate.

I put on record my thanks to the brave firefighters, not only in Tyne and Wear but across the country. We saw in the dreadful Grenfell disaster how, as members of the public run to get out of burning, dangerous, blazing buildings, firefighters run in to those buildings in an attempt to save lives. This debate is not only about the fire service and public service; it is about firefighters. The gratitude that this Government have shown to firefighters for the service that they give for the people of this country, by cutting their salaries by £7,000 and making them work longer for their pensions, is a disgrace.

Tyne and Wear integrated risk management plan has been brought about because of austerity. As we know now, austerity is a political choice, not an economic necessity. It is a political choice that has brought about a £25 million cut in resources to Tyne and Wear fire authority since 2010, with a further £3.5 million in the pipeline. By 2020, almost 20% will have come out of the fire authority budget in Tyne and Wear.

That means that we have 300 fewer firefighters than we had in 2010, with a cut of a further 70 in the pipeline. We have seen fire station closures; we have seen fire engines scrapped and numerous pieces of emergency rescue equipment put out of operation. What does it mean for what is, at the end of the day, a public service? It has meant a reduction in response times of two minutes per call, which will worsen by a further 20 seconds. As any firefighter knows, extra seconds cost lives.

The Government need to recognise that Tyne and Wear fire authority is overstretched and underfunded. They need to end the cuts. They need to increase the number of firefighters in Tyne and Wear. They need to listen to the fire service, listen to the firefighters, put public service first and end the downward spiral of Tory cuts that is putting the public at risk.

I repeat my earlier request. Will the Minister agree to meet a delegation of Tyne and Wear MPs, plus other representatives of the fire service, to discuss the very grave issues in Tyne and Wear?

10.18 am

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) on securing this crucial debate for the people in our constituencies.

The chief fire officer, Chris Lowther, the chair of the fire authority, Councillor Barry Curran, and the regional Fire Brigades Union, in particular Russ King and Tony Curry, who are with us today, and all firefighters are working together to try to find the best possible solution for the people we represent, while knowing all the time that if these cuts go ahead, people living in Sunderland and wider Tyne and Wear will be less safe. It is not possible to implement the cuts that are being proposed and not put people more at risk.

I question the timings in the consultation and worry about the number of appliances that will be available. It is important to remember that Tyne and Wear is a densely populated area, in parts very industrial, with two major ports and chemical and manufacturing plants. If something goes wrong, it can go quite catastrophically wrong quite quickly. The need to be able to get to an area quickly with the right number of appliances is absolutely crucial to the outcome of fires.

We have had two very serious incidents in my constituency in recent times. First, there was the one on bonfire night, which my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) referred to, so I will not go through the details again. That was a worrying situation that fortunately did not escalate, but could easily have been catastrophic. Secondly, we had a huge industrial fire, which took weeks to get under control, at a former recycling plant in an area that is crammed with industry and has residential areas around

it. Those are just two examples of how, if things go wrong, the type of area we live in is relevant to what is being said today.

I do not want to repeat what has already been said. Instead I will stick to three main points. First, as my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson) said, funding choices are only real choices if we have the money to make them. Choices where we do not have the money are not real choices, and that is down not to local decision making, but to the amount of funding the Government are supplying to provide the service that saves people's lives in our communities.

The consequences of cuts since 2010 are that there are fewer fire appliances across the area, over one third fewer firefighters than in 2010, and much less work being done in the crucial area of community engagement on fire prevention measures and education about the risks of fires. I feel strongly about that, because I think the incident on 5 November in my constituency might not have happened had there been more community engagement about the risks of fire.

I know the Minister listens to us when we bring issues to do with the fire service to him, because I met him recently with my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) to try to find a solution to the problems that Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service faced because of its pensions shortfall. A workable solution to that shortfall was found, but it is adding pressure to the service's current financial situation. Although we totally accepted that we had to find a solution, that financial pressure is adding to the burden we have today.

Secondly, for me, the biggest problem is to do with council tax, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell) went through in some detail. Using council tax band D as the denominator to work out budgets is simply unrealistic in our area. Tyne and Wear does not have a band D average—far from it. In Sunderland, there are 129,636 properties on the valuation list, of which only 8,962 are in band D. Hon. Members should not think that that is because all the properties are rated higher: there are only 5,012 in bands E, F and G put together. Almost 90% of properties in Sunderland, the largest local authority area within Tyne and Wear, are in bands below band D, so when the Government regard band D as the average, that has a significant effect on the ability to fund a service.

Thirdly, as my right hon. Friend also mentioned, I understand that the Minister here today is based in the Home Office, but the budget is in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. That is a massive problem, because, as was said, for a Minister to lobby for funding in a Department he does not sit in is quite extraordinary. I have not come across it before; I am sure there probably are examples of it, but I find it extraordinary.

The Minister needs to look again at the funding formula, taking into account all the concerns about our real-life situation and the band D issue, which makes it simply impossible to raise extra funds as he might suggest we do. It is often said that this is a matter of local decision making, but as I said, local decision making is impossible against a backdrop where the funds needed cannot be raised. I ask the Minister in particular to address the concerns about funding.

10.24 am

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) for securing this debate. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie.

Hon. Members have voiced concerns about a number of issues, and I hope the Minister will respond in full. We have heard concerns about the ideologically based austerity cuts and the disregard for the social deprivation that this Government have caused. We have heard concerns about the impact of the cuts on public safety, concerns about the risk to the safety and even the lives of firefighters, concerns about their morale, and concerns about the possible increase in response times and the increase in antisocial behaviour. It is a shame that we have also seen such huge cuts to the numbers of police officers since 2010. We have heard concerns about the robustness of the public consultation, given the inclusion of the Christmas period within that time, concerns about the impact on businesses, and concerns about the unrealistic suggestion of using council tax to increase revenues for the fire service. I would especially like to hear the Minister's response to that concern.

The financial situation of fire services nationally and in Tyne and Wear is very concerning and the new integrated risk management plan places the brunt of the Government's cuts on frontline operations. The Conservative Government oversaw a 30% cut to central Government funding for fire and rescue services between 2010 and 2015, and slashed firefighters' numbers by nearly 12,000. The Government have clearly chosen the fire service to bear a considerable part of the burden of their destructive austerity agenda, and ultimately it is our communities that suffer.

Whenever Opposition Members question the full impact of the austerity agenda on the fire service, the responsibility for cuts is passed on to the fire authorities, when in reality it is the central Government's allocation of resources that is to blame. The Tyne and Wear fire service's proposed integrated risk management plan is being undermined by austerity, which year on year is squeezing the resources available to the service to keep its communities safe. That is the key—keeping communities safe. When a risk management plan becomes a strategy to implement cuts, it evades its central purpose and focus, which should be analysing the service's capacity to respond to risk, not trying to deliver a service on the cheap.

Tyne and Wear has been heavily affected by the Government's austerity agenda. The service now has 285 fewer firefighters and cuts are set to continue. This is a reckless Government policy, the possible consequences of which have not been properly thought through. The fire service should be funded on the basis of its community significance, not an arbitrary demand. It must be prepared for any eventuality, not put on life support with a shoestring budget; I think Grenfell demonstrated that.

I acknowledge that the fire chief and the fire authority have been put in an incredibly difficult situation. Since 2010, Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service has been put under extraordinary pressure to make cuts. The cuts are principally of the Government's making, yet I am very concerned about the proposals the fire authority have suggested, which include downgrading the availability of wholtime firefighters at Hebburn and Wallsend, a reduction in fire appliances at Tynemouth and South

[Karen Lee]

Shields overnight, two fire appliances cut from Gosforth and Washington and downgrading the immediate response wholetime appliance at North Moor in Sunderland. Each of those proposals accepts that the communities in Tyne and Wear will be much less safe. That is key. Effective fire response is contingent on a fast, well-staffed response, but the reality is quite the opposite.

The cuts also need to be considered in the context of available reserves. The service is under pressure to make cuts of £3.6 million, yet it has £3.9 million in unallocated reserves. I know the plan is about sustainability, but regularly when I stand up to speak in the Chamber, the Minister tells me that the fire service will not receive any more money, as it has reserves, and that fire responses are decreasing. Sadly, that seems to be his stock and only response. It would be nice to hear something different today.

That observation of the Minister's is deeply flawed. As a service, fire and rescue is more than just fire response; it plays a vital role in our communities. Overall incident responses, rather than just responses to fire-related incidents, have increased every year since 2014. His response also overlooks the level of unallocated reserves available to fire services; it is important to recognise that unallocated reserves make up only a small percentage of overall reserves. I ask him to make a distinction between the two. I understand that reserves are a one-off, needed to deal with unforeseen pressures, and that this is money that has been hard-saved during the current Government's tough budget squeezes. As the National Audit Office has stated, reserves are part of a robust financial strategy.

We simply cannot justify cuts to frontline or support services when the service has sufficient financial resources to prevent the service being downgraded. I urge the Tyne and Wear fire and rescue authority to reconsider its options. The community's safety must be prioritised. However, it is vital to remember that the blame for this decision should not be pointed at local government, which is forced to deliver the cuts imposed by the Government. That is called passing the buck.

I remind everybody here today that the austerity agenda was and still is an ideological choice. Since 2010, this Government have underfunded all our public services, while continuing to hand out tax cuts to the very wealthy and large corporations. We never hear much about that. It is this Government who have actively chosen to reduce the capacity of fire services to keep communities safe across the UK. At the moment, all we ever hear about is Brexit. It is high time that we started to look at some of the serious things happening in this country, including having a fire service that is fit and prepared for the 21st century, which keeps our firefighters and our communities safe and well.

10.30 am

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I start in a traditional and sincere way by congratulating the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) on securing the debate. She spoke extremely sincerely, as is her way. I know that she believes every word that she said and the fact that

she is accompanied by nine fellow Members from the area tells its own story about their strength of feeling. I wholly respect that and I have listened very carefully. It is in part testament to the lobbying skills of the chief fire officer, Chris Lowther, who has certainly felt the love of his MPs this morning.

Clearly, there is a keenly held local view about the importance of making sure that the fire service is properly resourced and equipped to do its extremely important work. Given the seriousness with which the case was presented, I am very happy to meet the chief fire officer and talk it through, as was suggested. As the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) observed, I have been responsive to representations from Tyne and Wear in the past, in relation to the overpayment of the pension top-up grant, where we reached a settlement that was designed to be helpful.

That recognises, in part, the fact that Tyne and Wear has had a more challenging settlement than other fire authorities over this spending review period—I have been candid about that. Spending power has been reduced by 2% over the spending review period, compared with a 0.3% increase for stand-alone fire and rescue authorities as a whole. Having reviewed the figures, Tyne and Wear will see the fourth largest reduction in core spending power, after the Lancashire, Cleveland and West Midlands fire authorities. I recognise, not just from the strength of feeling in the room, that the past few years have been challenging as a result of the spending review settlement that flows from the way in which the current funding formula works. I recognise the challenge, I have tried to help with the pension top-up grant, and I am more than happy to sit down with Chris Lowther and talk through the issues.

I will now talk about the future. We need to have some perspective on this and try to avoid excessive language, scaremongering or unsettling residents. We are talking about a fire authority whose core spending power this year has increased by 0.8%. A reduction of 2% over the spending period is not an enormous proportion. I think it is important to put this into the context of other organisations that have seen their levels of income fall, as well as the scope to improve efficiency. That applies to almost every organisation in the public and private sector. Labour MPs did not talk very much about efficiency—on the whole, they do not tend to—but we will have a better view about Tyne and Wear's efficiency as a result of the independent inspection, which will be happening shortly.

Various Members talked about reserves. I do talk about reserves, because this is public money and there needs to be accountability and transparency around it. To be fair, Tyne and Wear has published a reserves strategy, which is quite clear. Across the system, the simple truth is that financial reserves held by single fire and rescue authorities increased by over 80% between March 2011 and March 2018 to £545 million. That means that across the system fire authorities are sitting on reserves worth 42% of their core spending power. In the context of the public hearing “cuts, cuts, cuts” and “we are short of cash”, the system has actually increased its reserves, which can be done only if there is flexibility. Those reserves of 42% of spending power compare with an average in the police system of about 13% or 14%. I feel absolutely entitled to raise the question about reserves.

Mrs Hodgson: The Minister is talking about the reserves overall, for all the fire and rescue services. He says he has seen the reserve situation for Tyne and Wear. Does he acknowledge that although there may currently be £28.5 million, 86% of that money is earmarked to meet key, specific financial risks? Does he also acknowledge that in four years' time those reserves will be down to £11 million, so they cannot be used? That money can only be used once and the authority is spending it, so it will only be left with reserves of £11 million in four years' time.

Mr Hurd: My point is specific to Tyne and Wear: I am pushing back on the assertion that fire and rescue authorities have been starved of cash, as the fire and rescue authority is sitting on reserves worth 52%. That is the figure for Tyne and Wear—52% of spending power. There is a lot of talk about this money being earmarked. Let us be clear that anything above general reserves represents active choices made by the fire and rescue authority and the leadership. Those are the active choices that they make. Looking at the numbers, that includes £6 million now for the transformation reform reserves, a capital development budget—these are active choices that they are making. It is public money. The simple point I make is about the need for greater accountability and transparency.

That does not in any way detract from the need to revisit the fair funding formula and the comprehensive spending review, which is what I want to address. I have been challenged on reserves and I am explaining that this is constituents' money—public money—sitting in reserve. The public have a right to understand how that money is going to be spent to improve the service to them. I would struggle if anyone could challenge that premise.

Liz Twist: Would the Minister agree that it is right that, when looking at its reserves, a fire authority considers all of its commitments, to ensure that it can meet its forthcoming requirements? As he said, the Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service has been explicit in setting out what the reserves are for. There are reserves that are committed and need to be put to specific uses. Some of it is about capital replacement and some is about underpinning the integrated risk management plan, to make sure that we are as safe as possible. Talking about reserves is great, but we need to make sure that those reserves are being applied properly. We have all asked questions about the reserves and we believe that they are being used in a sensible and appropriate manner, to support the service going forward.

Mr Hurd: The point I am making is that levels of reserves are high, and in the past there has been insufficient accountability and transparency around their use. We are in a different place now, as a result of changes that we have pushed for, but reserves in this system have increased since 2011, even though the Labour party continues to talk about the system being starved of cash.

In the context of perspective—I hope I am not misrepresenting the hon. Member for North Tyneside—I would not want the people of Tyne and Wear to feel that they are getting a bad service from the current fire service. The hon. Lady talked about “a high level of

service”. I think that she is right and, looking at the data, I would certainly like to add my voice to those congratulating the firefighters and the fire service in the area, not least for their work in reducing the number of dwelling fires in the area by 9% during the past five years.

Mary Glendon: On that point, let me make it clear that the service given by Tyne and Wear fire and rescue service is the best possible service that we could expect, and that it will always strive to provide that. Only the finances are a problem. It would never be classed as a bad service, by me or by anyone else.

Mr Hurd: No. I made the point only because I would not want the people of Tyne and Wear reading about this debate in the local newspaper to have any sense of, or have, a lack of confidence in their fire service as a result of representations made by their Members of Parliament.

Let me address the heart of the issue, and subject of this debate, which is the integrated risk management plan that the fire authority is putting forward, and make several points. In case residents were not aware, the authority is required to do that. It is regular business for fire authorities: they are required to produce these plans and show how they plan to respond to a range of emergencies on the basis of risk assessment and management for their locality. Quite rightly, the plans are based on the professional and expert advice of senior fire and rescue officers and are made in consultation with local communities. The fire and rescue national framework requires authorities to produce a plan that reflects up-to-date risk analysis, including assessment of all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks.

I point out that the Tyne and Wear reserve strategy makes it clear that the actions proposed in the current IRMP, and which are being consulted on, represent a review of organisational changes required by the authority to operate more effectively—its language, not mine. That is the context for the plan. It is not laissez-faire but a fact that it is not the position of the Government to have a view on the efficacy of the plan. It is for local experts to draw up these plans, although over time, with the new independent inspection regime that we have introduced, all of us will have a clearer picture by being able to compare the operational effectiveness of individual fire authorities in a way we have not been able to in the past. It is not for me to have a view on whether this is the right or the wrong plan. To repeat the point made by various Members of Parliament, it is for local people to have a view.

Therefore, I wholly support and endorse the messages about the constituents of Tyne and Wear MPs being encouraged to engage with the consultation. If there are concerns about the length of the consultation period and the consultation running over Christmas, they need to be listened to very carefully, because this is a vital public service. Clearly, uncertainties and concerns are being raised by MPs about the changes, so constituents need to be aware and need to engage with the exercise. To repeat the point made by the hon. Member for North Tyneside, it needs to be a proper public consultation.

Let me make a bigger point, in relation to the future funding. I have recognised that Tyne and Wear has been challenged by the last spending review. I need to make

[Mr Hurd]

this point at the start, because there is a point of differentiation to be made. I am not tribal at all, but I cannot let comments stand from at least two contributions to the debate. Austerity is not a political choice; it is not ideologically driven. The idea that Conservative MPs went into politics deliberately to reduce public expenditure is deeply insulting. The idea that austerity is somehow disconnected from the actions of the last Labour Government and our inheritance of the largest peacetime budget deficit is absolutely disingenuous. The public are not fools and should not be treated as such. I am absolutely committed to ensuring that the fire service is properly resourced, while continuing to challenge it to be more efficient and to modernise and do all the things that we expect of a modern public service.

Mr Alan Campbell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hurd: There have been concerns about whether the Home Office is somehow detached from the process. I can assure the right hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell) that we are not. Fire funding is part of the local government settlement, and that situation is not unusual: lots of health and education funding comes through local government. However, it is the Home Office that is responsible for the fire budget at the spending review and it is the Home Office that is working with the sector to update our understanding of demand and risk and to identify the evidence that we need to take into discussions on the next funding settlement. I am absolutely determined to ensure that our fire service has the resources that it needs, while continuing to be robust in challenging it on efficiency reform.

Mention was made of Grenfell. I am the Minister for Grenfell victims. That has been a huge part of my life for the past 18 months. One has only to listen to the podcasts from the public inquiry and hear the evidence of firefighters to understand what they had to work with and through on that night, in the most terrible of conditions. I have the deepest admiration for the work that they do and I want to be absolutely sure that they are properly supported by means of a proper understanding of the demand and risk that is in front of us, the past not necessarily being a guide to the future.

The fire funding formula is being reviewed, along with all other local authority formulas. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will shortly publish a consultation document on the review of local authority formulas. We have been working with the sector to understand what the new cost drivers for a new fire formula should be, and I strongly encourage Tyne and Wear fire and rescue authority—I will make this point directly to Chris Lowther—to get involved in that process and respond to the consultation. The review will also look at how council tax is used to produce funding allocations. MPs and fire authorities need to engage with the process. That work is imminent. We must engage with it and get it right.

That takes us to the comprehensive spending review. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has signalled that austerity is coming to an end. [Laughter.] There is laughter from MPs, but they laugh at their peril, because cuts are very much a consequence of the actions that they took when they were in power. Austerity

has meant tough choices and sacrifices being made, not least by people working in the public sector. We all want to move on from that. The CSR is the right place for that and the right place to ensure that the fire service is properly resourced for the critical work that it does.

I want to close with a point that is not central to the debate, but which was made by the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) and is very important. We are talking about supporting the fire service. It is absolutely unacceptable that our emergency workers, including our firefighters, should be subjected to abuse, assault and attack. Given the risks that they take on our behalf, that is absolutely unacceptable, and the strongest possible message about that needs to go out from this place. That is why I was so pleased, in an age of tribal ding-dong, that there was strong cross-party support for the Bill that became the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Act 2018 and the signal that that sends to the courts on additional protection and powers to deal with violence against emergency workers. We did good work on that measure to send that signal about how completely unacceptable it is to attack and assault our emergency workers.

There have been strong representations from Tyne and Wear. Of course I will sit down with the chief fire officer to discuss the issues in more detail. We do feel that the fire service has the resources that it needs. This is a case of stable funding alongside efficiency. I totally recognise that Tyne and Wear had a tougher settlement than most. In relation to the integrated risk management plan, I urge constituents from that area to get fully involved and engage with it. I give my undertaking to ensure that, in the reviewing of the funding formula and in the CSR, this Government will continue to ensure that our fire service has the resources that it needs.

Stewart Hosie (in the Chair): I call Mary Glindon for a brief winding up of the debate.

10.49 am

Mary Glindon: Thank you for your chairmanship, Mr Hosie. I thank all my colleagues who have taken part in the debate. Every local authority in Tyne and Wear has been represented in the debate, and I think that everyone has spoken with one voice in support of our fire services and our fire authority. They have also spoken with one voice in expressing concern about the fact that our fire services might be in jeopardy in future. I am truly thankful for the compelling cases that have been made, because we have shown that we know and care about our fire services, and what they mean to the safety of each of our constituencies, and to Tyne and Wear as a whole.

I thank the Minister for concurring on the need to support our fire services when they are under attack, and for recognising how disproportionately Tyne and Wear has been affected by recent cuts. We will have to agree to disagree about the reasons for austerity. We will never change our mind and, sadly, I do not think the Government will change theirs. However, I am hopeful that if austerity comes to an end, we will see better funding, after all the consultations and reviews. Christmas is on its way and perhaps that is one of the things we all wish for. I do not wish to be flippant, but we cannot emphasise enough how important this is to us and how

concerned we all are that we get this right, and that the people in Tyne and Wear, as well as our firefighters, are kept safe and sound in future.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the proposed new integrated risk management plan for Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

10.51 am

Sitting suspended.

Universal Support: East Suffolk

11 am

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered universal support in East Suffolk.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hosie, and I welcome the Minister. The Government set up the universal support system to assist universal credit claimants in making claims and managing the payments they receive. The full roll-out of universal credit in Lowestoft, in my constituency, started in May 2016. Shortly afterwards, under the leadership of Waveney District Council, the East Suffolk universal credit support partnership was created to provide universal support in east Suffolk, in the area covered by Waveney District Council and Suffolk Coastal District Council, which are due to merge next year.

From 1 April 2019, the service in its current form will be discontinued as a result of the Government's decision to award a national contract for the delivery of universal support to Citizens Advice, which was announced on 1 October. I have no criticism of Citizens Advice and the great work it does locally and nationally, but I am concerned as to why the change has been made and whether it is in the best interests of universal credit claimants in east Suffolk.

From the start, the roll-out of universal credit in Lowestoft has not been straightforward. Many people, often the most vulnerable in society, have been put under enormous pressure and have faced major difficulties in getting by day to day. Local Department for Work and Pensions staff have risen to the major challenge and have acquired new skills to work with people in a completely different way than they did in the past.

The roll-out is a massive task, which local DWP staff cannot deliver on their own. The East Suffolk universal credit support partnership has provided vital support to universal credit customers. The partnership has brought together various organisations, including Citizens Advice, jobcentre managers, the Anglia Revenues Partnership, the local housing department and housing associations, to support universal credit customers and local communities.

At the outset, the partnership identified barriers that needed to be removed and challenges that needed to be addressed. The barriers included the difficulties associated with managing a single monthly payment, the challenges that many claimants face in accessing a digital system, and meeting the requirements of households with complex needs. The challenges that needed to be addressed were an increase in rent arrears, private landlords consequently not accepting universal credit tenants, and managing a potential increase in homelessness.

As well as more access points, the partnership has provided personal budgeting, assisted digital support and special disability advice. With a large amount of private rented sector housing in Lowestoft, proactive work with private landlords has been vital in addressing their concerns about universal credit. There have been quarterly meetings, workshops and regular phone and email contact.

The general feedback is that the partnership has been successful in helping people with the transition from legacy benefits to universal credit. Earlier this year, the partnership won silver at the public sector transformation

[*Peter Aldous*]

awards in London. The partnership has also been proactive in considering how the system could be improved. It has just funded a behavioural insight project to look at how nudge techniques could be used to increase the take-up of personal budgeting support ahead of managed migration and full service roll-out in the rest of the Suffolk Coastal area. Such an innovation would not have happened without local authority support.

Despite all that good work, on 1 October, Waveney District Council received a letter from the DWP advising it that, as from 1 April, it would no longer deliver universal support, and that Citizens Advice would do so from that date. It is disappointing that the council received that letter on the same day as the public announcement by the DWP regarding the new partnership with Citizens Advice and that there was no prior notification. Moreover, six months' notice gives the council very little time to manage and prepare for the new arrangements. It will have to bring to an end its partnership agreements with third parties at its own cost, for which it has not been able to budget.

The ending of the partnership will have a significant impact across east Suffolk. Partnership agreements with providers of assisted digital support, including specialist disability advice services and social landlords, will need to be ended, as their involvement can no longer be funded by the council. Benefit liaison officers will no longer be able to arrange and chair universal support partnership meetings or operational assisted digital support and personal budgeting support meetings. The innovation project to boost personal budgeting support will not take place.

Assisted digital support, which has been offered at all local authority customer service access points from 9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday, will cease. That will mean that the number of access points across the whole east Suffolk area will reduce significantly. The council's digital resource map, which is often used by local DWP work coaches and universal credit customers, will no longer be available. The council will no longer be able to provide its staff's energy and enthusiasm, which I have very much seen for myself, to ensure that the roll-out of universal credit goes as smoothly as possible.

Citizens Advice is an important partner in the current arrangements, but there is a concern as to whether its local network has sufficient capacity and infrastructure to be as effective as the service that has been provided until now. Two other concerns have been raised with me. First, why has the DWP not yet published its review of universal support, which presumably provides the explanation for ending the current arrangements and for whether the correct procedures have been followed? Secondly, why was there no consultation with those currently delivering the service? Should there have been a public procurement process and a competitive tender before the award to Citizens Advice?

I have spoken to Citizens Advice, locally and nationally, and it is committed to providing as high a quality service as possible from next April, although it has a lot of work to do to have the service up and running by then. It will try to build on the good practice that has been put in place locally in east Suffolk, but restrictions on resources, capacity and the number of outlets will prevent it from replicating many of the innovative initiatives that the partnership has put in place.

Further constraints are that the national contract is for only one year and that Suffolk County Council is proposing to cut its core funding to Citizens Advice across the county. Bearing in mind that the contract is for 12 months, and taking account of the managed migration planned from November 2020, the concern is that local authorities' missing link with customers will increase homelessness and rent arrears in those council areas where the housing stock has been retained—that is, in the Waveney part of east Suffolk. When the Government made the decision, did they have regard to the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the added responsibilities it places on local authorities?

East Suffolk Council is committed to providing as seamless a transition as possible, so that universal credit customers are not adversely affected. That said, as I have already mentioned, the service that is currently on offer will have to be reduced from 1 April. In future, the council will, in effect, act only as a signpost.

The draft model of universal support that Citizens Advice has developed looks very thorough. It goes above the assisted digital support and the personal budgeting support that is currently offered and that is central to the current package. There is some upset in the council that it has been criticised for not providing such a service, although it points out that it was never asked to do so.

The Citizens Advice offer includes a full advice and support service, as well as triage, call centres, face-to-face support, identity verification preparation for customers, and webchats. That is welcome, but as I have already mentioned the concern as to how viable this service will be, given the level of funding provided to Citizens Advice.

Nationally, the feedback I am receiving is that the quality of universal support across the country as a whole until now has been variable. The roll-out of universal credit has presented many challenges to everyone involved, which is certainly the case in Lowestoft. However, the one ray of light in Lowestoft, and one source of hope, was that local government and local charities had put in place a system of universal support that was an exemplar that could be replicated elsewhere, in line with the "test and learn" approach that the DWP recommends.

The fact that this system is being dismantled in a seemingly hasty way, and with no prior notice, is very disappointing. Local support requirements are best decided locally and not through a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach. I ask the Minister to take on board the concerns that I have outlined, which reflect local exasperation and disappointment. In future, the Government should work more closely and collegially with those who have the task of rolling out universal credit in local areas—at the coalface—right across the country. They have a responsibility and a duty to universal credit customers to do that.

11.12 am

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): It is a pleasure, Mr Hosie, to serve under your chairmanship for, I think, the first time.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) for securing this important debate. He is a real champion of his local community, and he continues to raise issues in the House that are important not only

to himself and his constituents but more widely. I completely understand that he wants to ensure that his constituents receive the support they need in the welfare system and, if required, further support to help them into work.

Yesterday, my hon. Friend and I had the pleasure of attending and speaking at the Give us a Chance annual reception in Parliament, where the organisation launched its Communities that Work campaign to help even more social housing tenants into work, and I was very pleased to attend that event with him. Of course, across the Department of Work and Pensions network we already have jobcentres working closely with housing associations to support people in gaining new skills and to help them into work.

Let me turn to universal credit more widely. As my hon. Friend noted, universal credit rolled out in his area in 2016. I was very pleased to visit his local jobcentre in Lowestoft with him in September, and like him I was impressed by the commitment of the staff. In fact, I pay tribute to him, and I thank him and his staff, for the very real and positive interaction he has had over a long period with his local jobcentre.

My hon. Friend talked about issues that arose regarding the delivery of universal credit in his constituency in 2016. However, I hope he will also acknowledge that, over the last couple of years, we have made changes—positive changes—in supporting people on universal credit. I will just outline a few of those changes before moving on to talk in more detail about universal support, which I know he is keen for me to discuss.

In the 2017 Budget, we announced a £1.5 billion injection for universal credit. That came in earlier this year and meant that the seven-day waiting period before the activation of a universal credit claim was abolished. Also, advances of up to 100% of the estimated payment at the end of the first period are now available, interest-free and repayable over 12 months—that will be extended to 16 months in the future. There is also a two-week run-on of housing benefit, which is money that does not have to be repaid and that helps people who are currently receiving housing benefit with their cash flow.

In the Budget a few weeks ago, another net £4.5 billion over the scorecard period was injected into universal credit. I will pick out just two items. The first is that work allowance is increasing by £1,000 from next April, which will assist 2.4 million families. Secondly, as part of the managed migration process that my hon. Friend mentioned, there will be the two-week run-on of out-of-work DWP legacy benefits, which will assist around 1.1 million people.

My hon. Friend talked about the direct payment of rents. I know that he will welcome the fact that we now have the landlord portal in place. It was co-designed with a number of housing associations and allows for direct payments to social housing providers. By the end of this year, around 90% of all social housing stock will be covered by the landlord portal. Of course, work has also gone on to ensure that those who are in the private rented sector are also able to have their rent paid directly to their landlord, if that is appropriate. In addition, up to 85% of childcare costs are covered under universal credit, and it has been possible since earlier this year for individuals to upload information about those costs, so the process is much more efficient.

I hope my hon. Friend will agree that we have listened and acted to improve the system. He wrote to me some weeks ago, and I owe him a response, but I wanted to attend this debate and hear any further comments that he quite rightly wanted to make before I responded. If I am not able to give him satisfaction with my answers today, I will make sure that I do so in writing to him in the next few days.

Let me turn to universal support. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is an incredibly valuable service, particularly when it is delivered in the right, targeted way. Since 2017, universal support has been delivered by individual local authorities. Some of them have chosen to deliver this service directly themselves; some—around a third of local authorities—have chosen to outsource the service to third parties, such as Citizens Advice. I believe that certain local councils have set up a model whereby Citizens Advice takes the lead in providing personal budgeting support.

Although I appreciate that some local councils are doing good work in the area of universal support, provision across the country is, if I may say so, mixed. My hon. Friend highlighted all the good work that has been going on in his local area, and of course I commend that work and all the key stakeholders who have been involved in it. I will come on to say how they can perhaps continue to work together.

However, based on the information we have received from local authorities across the country, take-up of universal support in 2017-18 was around 30% of what the DWP had forecast it would be. Clearly, what we needed to ensure, and what we want to ensure, is that we have a system in which more people receive this support and that we reach out and assist the people—particularly the vulnerable—who ultimately need it. My hon. Friend referred to the need for us to reach out to those who are particularly vulnerable.

I will just set out how the Department took this decision about the new partnership with Citizens Advice. As my hon. Friend and others will be aware, for some time now key stakeholders have been quite vocal that, in its current format, universal support was not delivering on its aims and that claimants were ultimately missing out on this key support. More recently, the Work and Pensions Committee opened an inquiry into universal support, and I provided it with oral evidence in July. The Committee has since published its report, and the Department will of course respond to all the points it raises.

In recent months, Citizens Advice and a number of other charities, think-tanks and MPs have shared evidence with the Government showing that the type of support available, and how people can access it, differs depending on where people live. As the Government have continued this “test and learn” approach to universal credit, the design of the support has needed to change.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, it was announced on 1 October that from April 2019 Citizens Advice will deliver a more comprehensive and consistent support service, independent of Government, to help ensure everyone can access the support they need to complete a universal credit claim, no matter where they live. Of course, the DWP maintains close partnerships with local authorities in many areas—for example, in identifying customers with safeguarding, housing and health needs, and in initiatives such as troubled families support.

[Alok Sharma]

Local authorities are funded for the current year to deliver universal support, and they will continue to do so until the end of March 2019. I raise this point because my hon. Friend asked what would happen in future years. The grant agreement for local authorities is only ever for one year, and there should not necessarily be an expectation that funding will continue beyond this year of allocation. Citizens Advice has been asked to run alongside the arrangement that local authorities currently have in place to get up to speed, so that it is ready to deliver from 1 April with no gap in service provision. My hon. Friend raised the issue of funding for next year. Some £39 million will be provided to Citizens Advice, and money is also going in this year to help it get up to speed.

Local Citizens Advice already has strong working relationships with key partners such as local authorities and housing providers, and will be working closely with them as the service is launched. Citizens Advice will build on where good practice exists, such as local good partnership working. From the perspective of Citizens Advice, it is of course independent of Government, but as my hon. Friend pointed out, the Citizens Advice in his area has strong working relationships with key partners. I certainly expect that it will work closely with those key partners as the service is launched, and build on where good practice exists, including local good practice.

The Work and Pensions Committee put out its report on universal support on 28 October this year, and I will read a short extract from it:

“The Department’s announcement that the contract for Universal Support will pass to Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland in 2018/19 and 2019/20 will help take pressure off already-stretched local authorities.”

My hon. Friend talked about what will happen beyond that period. Clearly, we will look to see how the partnership we have in place with Citizens Advice progresses. I completely appreciate that, as we move into managed migration, we need to make sure we have an offer that is robust and sufficient to assist people.

In conclusion, the Department for Work and Pensions wants the strong partnerships with local authorities to continue. We want universal support to be delivered well and consistently across the country, and I certainly expect there to be continued local working between Citizens Advice and other key stakeholders on the ground. For me, this is the start of a conversation with my hon. Friend, and as time progresses and Citizens Advice develops its partnerships nationally and locally, I will be happy to continue this dialogue. As I said, I will, of course, write to him in the coming days about any of the points that I have not been able to answer.

Question put and agreed to.

11.24 am

Sitting suspended.

Rail Services: North Staffordshire

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered rail services in North Staffordshire.

It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I welcome the Minister back to the Department for Transport. It is fantastic to see him there again, and I thank him for meeting me earlier in the week.

I have called this debate on rail services in north Staffordshire because the issue is of particular concern in the local area. The nub of that concern is that, having once enjoyed one of the best rail networks in the world, north Staffordshire now has services that are too few and often very far between.

I will, however, set out how north Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are on the up. There are many opportunities for sustainably improving rail services across the area. All stakeholders must grasp those opportunities if we are to maximise fully the benefits of the vast taxpayer investment in High Speed 2.

I am not limiting this debate to tinkering with the day-to-day services we currently have, but I make no apology for focusing on services to and through my constituency, as an exemplar of the wider state of services in the north of the county. Strategic rail service improvements are needed both in and around Stoke-on-Trent. If realised, they will maximise opportunities for regeneration, freight expansion and serious productivity gains across north Staffordshire, allowing people to get around more easily and access the broader range of skilled opportunities we are seeing across the county.

Thanks to the Government’s industrial strategy, we are planning for a sector deal for ceramics, which can include a UK centre for ceramics research that will secure global Britain’s leadership in new-generation components. That includes high-tech automotive, aerospace, defence and digital industries, medical devices and implants, and renewable energy technology.

Our transport strategy needs to keep up with our economic ambitions. It is not just about getting people and supplies into and around Stoke-on-Trent; it is about getting much-needed and demanded goods out. For example, rail improvements can unlock fast and efficient supplies for the Government’s house building commitments. Our manufacturers of bricks, tiles, and household ceramics are the best in the world.

Looking to the future, we can learn much from our past. A century ago, north Staffordshire had one of the most comprehensive rail networks in the country, alongside one of the largest urban tram networks. Affectionately known as the Knotty, after the Staffordshire knot, it included the loop line, which was immortalised in the literature of Arnold Bennett.

Sadly, our local network emerged from the horror of war into the disasters of nationalisation. Like most parts of the country, north Staffordshire was hit by the post-war industrial decline, and those of our stations that did not fall during the war fell to the Beeching axe

and its legacy. Indeed, Fenton and Fenton Manor in my constituency were already closed before Beeching began his report. Trentham, Meir and Normacot were lost as a direct result of it. Today, the only station to remain open in my constituency is Longton.

Unlike most other parts of the country, north Staffordshire has not seen any reversals of these cuts. Indeed, in May 2004, further stations closed at Wedgwood and Barlaston, though allegedly, 14 years later, these are still only temporarily closed. They are, I believe, the only stations nationally on the definitive map that do not have any services stopping. That is despite seeing significant new housing growth in the area and being sat next to the world-renowned tourist destination that is World of Wedgwood. At Etruria, the so-called Strategic Rail Authority got rid of the station altogether, crushing any suggestion that it might be reopened to serve constituents travelling from stations such as Longton to Hanley and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

These days, fortunately, Stoke-on-Trent is on the up. It is a city enjoying a modern industrial revolution. It is now one of the fastest growing and best places to start a new business in the UK. Traditional industries have been reborn, with some of our key ceramics manufacturers growing by more than 50% over the past few years. We are more than just ceramics; manufacturing more widely is booming in the city, making up a significant share of the economy. There are also significant advances in high-tech, digital and research. There is an increasing vibrancy in the wider area, with two universities—Keele and Staffordshire—both growing, one based right outside Stoke-on-Trent station. The city is increasingly a hub for logistics operations, and our industrial heritage has catalysed a burgeoning tourist industry.

As a result, our growing city's roads are increasingly congested, as are many throughout much of north Staffordshire and across the wider economic sub-region. A revival of rail travel is not only sustainable, but essential and will further help to catalyse new housing and jobs growth without worsening the misery of road congestion.

However, while we bridge the northern powerhouse and midlands engine, in rail terms the city and the wider economic sub-region of north Staffordshire and south Cheshire sadly often fall between the stools of meso-level devolved authorities around Greater Manchester and Greater Birmingham. This unaccommodating situation is exacerbated by Stoke-on-Trent's geographical position on the Network Rail map. The city appears as a kind of bottleneck between Network Rail areas. It is in fact split across two Network Rail devolved areas, with two thirds in London North Western and a third in London North Eastern. That is totally illogical, and there is no clear leadership provided across the north Staffordshire conurbation. Currently there is no scope for the city to enjoy remapping and franchise transfers of local services to a more Stoke-on-Trent-focused body or a company, as was suggested in the case of local Birmingham services from Nottingham and Leicester and the move from CrossCountry to West Midlands Rail.

Things are moving in the right direction, and it is encouraging that Network Rail is now considering a route study focusing specifically on the economic geography of north Staffordshire and south Cheshire, recognising the importance of developing plans that adequately satisfy future growth demands.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is going to make this point, but while we had phenomenal and welcome investment in the Virgin west coast main line upgrade under the Labour Government, one of the consequences was that local services deteriorated because fewer services could be run while the faster trains were going along the route.

Jack Brereton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. It is very true of stations that I have already mentioned. Etruria, Wedgwood and Barlaston all lost services as a result of those changes, so I would agree with him.

I am especially delighted that we will be receiving investment from the transforming cities fund, which I hope will take forward much-needed improvements locally. That includes Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Stoke station masterplan, which sets out the ambition to transform the station, vastly improving capacity and facilities; leveraging in significant new development in the wider area on the back of the improvements; ensuring that the station is ready to receive HS2 services; providing opportunities for additional local rail services; and making the main station the integrated hub it needs to be for the city.

It is certainly essential that more is done to improve the capacity and the offer at Stoke-on-Trent station. It is the main station that serves the Potteries conurbation of nearly 500,000 people, yet it has only very limited platform and concourse capacity, as well as poor-quality retail facilities. Improving our local transport infrastructure is a fundamental requirement for improving labour mobility in the city, increasing productivity and wage levels, and decreasing time lost to congestion. We need to ensure our railway corridor and its stations are fully connected with the towns that make up the city. In particular we need to connect Stoke-on-Trent station to public transport throughout the rest of the city and the wider conurbation.

A key part of the transforming cities fund will be to integrate bus services much more effectively with the main station, providing a more comprehensive public transport network. As an HS2 destination, we have great potential to multiply the growth we have enjoyed in rail travel to the city in the last 25 years and to ensure that all the communities that make up Stoke-on-Trent are linked into any future opportunities.

We should not limit our ambition. Light rail may also be part of the mix for restoring to Stoke-on-Trent some of the services we have lost and so better connect our communities. The line from Stoke through to Staffordshire Moorlands, which could serve Fenton Manor in my constituency, would be a good opportunity for that. Similarly, a future metro-style service could run through the conurbation from Blyth Bridge to Crewe to help relieve capacity and significantly improve services through the urban area.

Technology is moving on. Rolling stock is lighter and cheaper, and for restored routes there is the potential for rails that are longer-lasting and cheaper to run on. Alongside that, smart ticketing offers the opportunity to create a much more effective urban public transport network for the conurbation. However, local rail services, as we see through Longton on the north Staffordshire Crewe-Derby line, are far from meeting current needs, never mind our future ambitions. I stress that all destinations

[*Jack Brereton*]

along the route are united in that cause. We regularly see people struggling to get on often single-carriage trains that run only once an hour, and local media have reported people having to get taxis due to trains being so overcrowded.

Despite that, annual passenger usage at Longton has doubled since 2009-10, and the station has higher usage numbers than commuter stations serving London, such as Dorking West, Morden South and Sudbury Hill. Indeed, they are not far short of the figures for Epsom Downs in the Secretary of State's constituency. When I welcomed the Secretary of State to the city earlier this year, he travelled with me on the rush-hour commuter train from Stoke to Longton. I assure hon. Members that he did not enjoy that service, because of the cramped conditions. He could see for himself that overcrowding is a major issue, and I am happy that a specified requirement of the new East Midlands Railway franchise issued by the Secretary of State is for longer trains. We must ensure that that is delivered.

We also need the new franchise to deliver more frequent trains. One train an hour suppresses demand and the potential of the line. Midlands Connect recognises the potential for more frequent services, which would be transformational for our local economy and give more people confidence in rail services as a viable alternative to the car and our congested roads.

Enhanced Sunday services are especially important. We currently suffer from having only afternoon services, due to there being only one shift in signal boxes. There is also a strong case for extending the existing services beyond Derby and Crewe to Nottingham, Lincoln or Norwich in the east, and to Chester or Manchester airport in the west. The line once served such locations, only for them to be cut back. However, signalling improvements, particularly around Derby and Nottingham, have created additional paths to make that much more easy to achieve. Extending to Nottingham would have the desired effect of allowing people to transfer more easily to services further east, rather than having to change twice, as they do currently. When Crewe is redeveloped for HS2, it is imperative that through services from north Staffordshire westwards to Chester and Manchester airport are enhanced, not hindered.

It would be great if we could secure an accessibility project at Longton station as well, through Access for All funding. Platforms at Longton are accessed only by steps—an often insurmountable challenge for people with limited mobility. The bid that we have submitted would significantly enhance the station. It would help shoppers to get into the historic market town, which relies on customers and visitors getting there, and getting back with what they have bought. That would complement the Government's high streets initiative, as I was happy to discuss with the Minister for high streets, who visited Longton earlier this month.

Local volunteers are making superb efforts to keep local stations clean and welcoming as part of the North Staffordshire community rail partnership. I know that the Minister will thank those volunteers for their dedication and hard work. In fact, I will be speaking at a meeting of the partnership's sister organisation, the North Staffordshire rail promotion group, tomorrow evening. That group does excellent work representing rail users

and promoting greater improvements to our local rail network. Its members hope that the frequency, capacity and reach of services to and from Longton and many other stations will be increased, and that new franchisees will work with Network Rail to progress the reopening of stations. Stations at Meir and Fenton on that line would be especially welcome to those communities, restoring important rail links and recognising the significant economic and housing growth in those areas since the stations closed.

If we are to successfully deliver further new homes and jobs, the need for reopened stations at Fenton and Meir will become irresistible. The reality is that the limited frequency of services on the line mean that those stations could likely be reintroduced without much real impact to service patterns. Indeed, passengers from Fenton and Meir could help the line to thrive. I have lost count of the number of stations that, on reopening, have vastly exceeded the expectations of rail companies and the Department for Transport in attracting new people on to our rail network.

I now turn to the future of the wider rail network, to which Stoke-on-Trent is connected, and specifically to HS2. Local stations such as Longton need to be seen as key feeder stations for local HS2 traffic. Opportunities for employment and homes could be spread more widely, and the area could be a destination for tourists attracted to the authentic Potteries landscape of potbanks, many of which are in Longton. The Secretary of State knows from his visit exactly how ambitious we are. The scale of rail improvements that we are seeking and planning for is, like HS2 itself, unmatched since the Victorian era. We are keen to embrace the opportunities of HS2, which has huge potential in terms of new homes and jobs growth, delivering a significant uptick for UK GDP, and the potential to move the city from being a net taker to a net contributor.

For that to happen, the Government need to be clear about the best future services pattern to meet projected growth, and to recognise the importance of upgrades on the conventional network to fully enable comprehensive, classic, compatible services to a wide range of destinations. Unless we have full integration of HS2 with the conventional network, we will fail to deliver the full benefits of upgrading our rail infrastructure. I am afraid that a number of bottlenecks will remain on the network post HS2, permanently affecting what is possible in terms of service. That is most pronounced going north to Manchester or Liverpool, where we are yet to see effective solutions from HS2 or Network Rail. Those organisations have not been working together effectively to develop meaningful solutions.

It is imperative that Stoke-on-Trent continues to enjoy regular fast services to London—at least one every half-hour, as we have now, or more frequently. HS2 compatibility should offer my constituents improved quality of services and journey times, and not diminish those. Any future redevelopment of Stoke station must take full account of the importance of delivering the full advantages of HS2, helping us to maximise both housing and commercial development across north Staffordshire, and fully seizing the economic opportunities that Stoke-on-Trent offers.

Frustratingly, the current proposal is for us to have only one HS2 train an hour, terminating at Macclesfield. I am afraid that really is not good enough. Of course, it

is welcome that we are to be an HS2-connected place. Although I would say nothing to denigrate the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley), it is a reality that the majority of people will want to use high-speed rail to travel between the largest cities. I therefore urge the Government to focus on ensuring that proposed services go beyond Macclesfield and terminate at Manchester Piccadilly.

It is also essential to address the lack of fast, direct services between Stoke-on-Trent and Birmingham, to match the good-quality services currently offered between Stoke-on-Trent and Manchester. HS2 has the potential to address the severe overcrowding and poor connectivity currently experienced on that route. One HS2 service every hour from Curzon Street through Stoke-on-Trent and further north would help to relieve significant bottlenecks to the north of Birmingham, especially through Wolverhampton.

In addition, there is potential to improve connectivity further by providing new, direct, inter-city services that are currently lacking, such as between Stoke-on-Trent and Liverpool. Such a Birmingham service could do Curzon Street, Stoke-on-Trent, Crewe and Liverpool Lime Street. That would fully exploit the huge potential for economic growth from the midlands engine and northern powerhouse initiatives, with Stoke-on-Trent being the key gateway to the north.

Smooth connectivity on services that run from Stoke-on-Trent is important. Trains should, as far as possible, minimise waiting times for those connecting from stations such as Longton. It is not uncommon to have to wait up to 50 minutes for connecting trains, simply because only one train an hour goes to stations such as Longton. Operators need to recognise the potential for substantial passenger growth from the city. Many current services are extremely overcrowded and in desperate need of an upgrade.

At present, the most significant problem is with CrossCountry trains through Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford, which tend to be four to five-carriage diesel multiple units. We really need to double that. Bimodal eight-carriage units would be able to meet the real demand on that route. Longer, more frequent bimodal trains on the Manchester-Bournemouth line through Stoke-on-Trent would also open the possibility of increased travel to Heathrow via Reading for Elizabeth line services.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and on his excellent speech. I entirely back him on all these issues, particularly on CrossCountry through Stafford and Stoke. I recently stood all the way from Oxford to Stafford because it was a four-coach train. That was not the first time I have had to do that; it happens pretty much all the time. Those trains obviously need to be doubled in size without delay.

Jack Brereton: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. I totally agree. From travelling on those routes myself, I know that they are very overcrowded—in some cases, so overcrowded that I would say they are unsafe.

The northern end of the route between Stoke-on-Trent and New Street suffers particularly from significant overcrowding, which has a knock-on effect on the reliability of cleanliness and catering availability. It is also concerning that overcrowding on trains is creating safety issues,

especially at New Street, where limited numbers of doors and small vestibule spaces are simply not designed to accommodate the large volumes of passengers changing trains.

There is also real potential to expand services east-west, either through the CrossCountry franchise or by allowing entrepreneurial open access operators on that part of the network, resulting in better competition. As I mentioned, the Crewe to Derby line has the potential to facilitate east-west services well beyond those that already exist. It is worth noting that the journey time from Liverpool to Nottingham is virtually the poorest between any major cities in the country. Midlands Connect demonstrates the potential to facilitate a new inter-city service that could connect Crewe to Totton, as well as connecting other east-west destinations via Stoke-on-Trent. Essential to that is redoubling the line between Crewe and Alsager, which is the only single-track section of the line and is widely recognised as a major constraint on service enhancement. That will prove particularly challenging once HS2 is operational, but I am pleased that Network Rail now recognises this challenge and understands that it is far from impossible to overcome.

I am delighted that the Department has announced the Williams review, a much-needed root-and-branch review of how our railways work today and how they should be reformed for the successful future of the dynamic, customer-focused and more competitive industry that we want to see nationally and locally. It should tackle the issues highlighted in the excellent work of Transport Focus. The fare-paying public want value for money, punctuality and a seat, all of which should be reasonable asks.

I make several asks of the Minister. Will he continue to support transport improvements in Stoke-on-Trent through the transforming cities fund and support for accessibility work at Longton station? Will he commit to ensuring that HS2 benefits the whole of Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire, with improvements on the classic network to fully maximise the opportunities for Stoke-on-Trent? Will we get more services for Longton, new stations at Meir and Fenton on the east-west line that runs beyond the current artificial termini of Crewe and Derby, and franchises that provide longer, more frequent and better serviced trains and greater opportunities for open access providers to enter the market to enhance competition and better meet demand?

To achieve our potential, a new era of railway expansion is necessary. This is a national issue, but its local effects are particularly acute in north Staffordshire. I am delighted to have been able to outline many of the issues, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): I call Paul Farrelly.

2.52 pm

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Thank you, Mr—sorry, Sir David. My glasses need adjusting, and so does my memory.

I applaud the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), particularly for his focus on once-functional railway stations in his constituency and for his call for light rail to go alongside bus improvements in his city, which lies next to my constituency in north Staffordshire. I will focus on something different: train operator Midlands

[Paul Farrelly]

Connect's proposal to improve east-west and west-east rail services. That is important in itself, but the march of HS2 makes it crucial.

I was the first MP through the Lobby to vote against the HS2 extension from Birmingham to Crewe. It was largely symbolic, I admit, but there were two important reasons for it. First, at that stage the HS2 proposals largely bypassed Stoke-on-Trent. Without improvements, the lessons from overseas, not least from France, are hardly encouraging for areas bypassed by high-speed rail. Secondly, although we need more capacity, the driving motivation behind HS2 seems so often to have been for people to get out of London and back into it more quickly from north to south. Connectivity in Liverpool, Greater Manchester, Bradford, Leeds and across the north-west is frankly woeful, and it very much deserves the priority that it is now being given under the working title of HS3.

Newcastle-under-Lyme is one of the biggest towns in the UK—perhaps the biggest—whose centre is not served by a railway station. In most advanced economies in Europe, that would be not only an anomaly but totally unacceptable. My Conservative opponent in the 2017 general election, with whom I get on very well, placed a new mainline railway station for Newcastle at the heart of his campaign; I do not know whether he knew this, but across the patch it earned him the nickname of “Choo Choo”. It is an admirable ambition, and I would certainly love a new light railway station to restore Newcastle to its former glory, but I do not usually put “Dear Santa” requests at the heart of electioneering, either in times of austerity or otherwise, which is why I have never called for the Government to step in and build Newcastle a new castle. A realistic and proper priority is to vastly improve rail links between Crewe, Stoke and Derby and beyond, not least with HS2 on the horizon.

Anyone who has taken the slow, crawling bone-shaker of a ride from Stoke to Crewe well knows what I mean. It is a joke—but it is no joke. It takes up to half an hour to travel the 15 miles to Crewe and another 50 minutes or more to traverse the 35 miles to Derby. That is an hour and 20 minutes, if you are lucky, to travel 50 miles in this day and age—practically what it takes to get from Stoke to London.

As for the quality, I must admit that I once missed that service, despite arriving well in time. I remember it only too well: it was St George's day 2015, not long before the general election, and I was going over to Derby. I sat innocently sipping coffee in the newish gourmet café at Stoke station, forgetting that the one-carriage service cannot be seen through the windows. I watched it slowly sliding out of the station without me as I wiped the froth of my cappuccino away. I was tempted to chase it to nearby Blythe Bridge station, but slow as the train is, there would have been no chance of making it through the peak-hour traffic jams of Stoke-on-Trent to catch it.

That brings me to my next point, which Midlands Connect's scheme highlights. Improvement to rail services in north Staffordshire must go hand in hand with road improvements, not least in relation to HS2. Years ago, we had one great road improvement: the A50. I remember interviewing Stan Clarke, the local and legendary chair

of St Modwen Properties, for *The Observer* 20 years ago in his boardroom at Uttoxeter racecourse. I asked him what the proudest achievement in his life was, and the answer came as rather a surprise: it was driving the A50 from the M1 to Stoke, because it made the land that he had gathered around JCB much more valuable. It certainly improved the journey, but it is now time for rail improvement in our area and on the other side of the city to go hand in hand with improvements to the roads.

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Ind): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will therefore join me in congratulating the Government on the £50 million-plus that they have invested in road improvements on the A50 in Uttoxeter, which will make a big difference to all our constituents.

Paul Farrelly: I will congratulate any Government on any improvements in our area, but they must go much, much further.

Like many of my constituents in Newcastle, I live pretty much halfway between Stoke and Crewe. Driving at peak times to Crewe—where the new HS2 station will be, with more frequent services and with services to Manchester as well as London—means hitting huge jams around junction 16 of the M6. If the Government are to make the huge investment in HS2 work for our area rather than against it, it will demand sensible investment in other road and rail projects in north Staffordshire.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South on securing this debate and I commend Midlands Connect for its plans to upgrade services. I urge the Minister and the Government not just to listen, but to act and invest.

2.58 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): As a Cheshire MP, I speak on behalf of residents of the town of Alsager, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) mentioned in his excellent speech.

Alsager station is just a mile from the Staffordshire border. The rail route from it passes through Staffordshire, runs to Stoke-on-Trent and beyond, and is served by the same rail companies: East Midlands Trains, London Northwestern Railway and West Midlands Railway. In his speech, my hon. Friend harked back to the days when many of the workers in the pottery manufacturing companies travelled conveniently to their jobs in the Stoke area, including from Alsager. I think trains are particularly valued by Alsager residents for that reason. One wrote to me that

“Alsager residents value their trains, particularly as bus services aren't brilliant, but there needs to be better communication between train companies and better links between stations.”

I will come on to the detail of that in a moment.

Earlier this month, I held a surgery late one evening at Congleton station. I was impressed, though not entirely surprised, that no less than 30 to 40 residents came along on a dark wintry evening. I know from my postbag that there are considerable concerns in my constituency about train services. Many of the points raised by residents at that meeting are echoed by residents in Alsager. They include a lack of joined-up thinking by rail companies on the services and timing of trains; trains are too infrequent and often overcrowded, and

they stop too early in the evening; and there is some confusion and a perception of unfairness about charges. Having held that surgery with Congleton residents, I now contribute to this debate on behalf of my Alsager residents.

I have four points, and I apologise if some appear to be somewhat technical in detail, but the detail of timing can make all the difference to a daily commuter, and the detail of charges can make all the difference to young people for whom finances are a big consideration. The main issue is that, with only two trains an hour each way from Alsager, they are timetabled too closely together—only five minutes apart. I have raised that with train operators to no avail, so I hope that the Minister might be able to do something. I know he is a very hard-working and earnest Minister, always smiling, whatever is put before him.

Here is an example of the problem: the 11.11 am from Alsager to Stoke is followed by the 11.16 am from Alsager to Stoke, provided by a different service. The next train is at 12.11 pm. The trains that arrive close together from Crewe can also cause problems for cars and congestion at the barriers at Alsager, because the barriers can be down for 10 minutes or more. Passengers who aim for the later of the two trains, but arrive a little short of time, albeit with enough time to make their train, can be stuck on the other side of a barrier that has been down since the earlier train, and they miss their train.

My second point is on ticket pricing. An advance single ticket from Stoke to Manchester can cost as little as £6.10, but an anytime ticket from Alsager via Crewe, which is two stops closer to Manchester, costs £12.70. I asked the young person who raised this with me, “Can you not buy an advance ticket from Alsager?” They said, “Yes, technically you can buy an advance ticket from Alsager to Manchester, but it is not economical. You buy the £6.10 advance ticket from Stoke to Manchester, and to make use of that, you pay £5.10 to travel two stops back on the line from Alsager to Stoke.” The difference in price for a young person travelling regularly is a big one.

My third point is about the lack of connectivity and joined-up thinking. To get from Alsager to Congleton on the train, a passenger would have to go via Stoke or Kidsgrove. I drive that in about 10 minutes by car, but travelling by rail can involve long waits for connecting trains. The connecting trains are not well timed or organised. I apologise for the figures here, but to get to Manchester, National Rail recommends the 11.16 am to Kidsgrove, which is one stop further away from Manchester, which gets in at 11.21 am; there is then a 40-minute wait for the 12.03 pm to Manchester. The passenger might as well drive to Kidsgrove and park there—if they have a car. Again, that is not always practical for young people. Alternatively, there is a 24-minute wait at Crewe station, but the ticket is about £1 more expensive, so it is cheapest and quickest to pay £5.10 to go two stops back to Stoke, then catch a quicker and cheaper £6.10 train to Manchester from there. That is all too confusing unless someone is very familiar with the way the trains work.

My fourth and final point relates to a promise made in August 2017, when a West Midlands Rail spokesman said:

“The new franchisee, West Midlands Trains Limited, will continue to run direct services to London from Stone, Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent and Alsager.”

Alsager passengers all hope that they will still be getting the service in December this year—three days’ time—as suggested then. The franchisee representative continued:

“The only difference from December 2018 is that these services will go to Euston via...Birmingham...rather than Tamworth and Lichfield on the Trent Valley Line. The change of route for London bound services so they run through the heart of the West Midlands Conurbation follows a major public consultation in 2015 where the majority of passengers said they wanted more trains from Stone, Kidsgrove, Stoke-on-Trent and Alsager to Birmingham.”

My constituents tell me that not much has been said about that since then. It would be very helpful to know whether the service to London is going to go ahead in three days’ time.

3.6 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) on securing such a timely debate.

North Staffordshire is perfectly situated in the centre of the country, and we currently benefit from good direct lines to both Manchester and Birmingham, as well as an excellent service to the capital, but while those connections to other major economic hubs remain strong, beneath the surface there is another story, which Members have already touched on. Lack of capacity on certain routes and historical under-investment in our smaller local stations has left the Potteries with a rail system that does not always meet the needs of travellers and commuters. Those limitations have a knock-on effect on our local economy, and with our tourism industry continuing to increase—who would not want to visit Moorcroft Pottery, Ford Green Hall or Burslem School of Art?—it is more important than ever that people can get to and from our city as swiftly and efficiently as possible.

The hon. Gentleman made particular note of the Crewe to Derby line. The lack of capacity on that route is a matter of regular complaints from my constituents. The size of trains, often consisting of just one carriage, is frequently insufficient to meet the needs of passengers. The problem is particularly acute at peak time for people working in and travelling to Derby or Crewe, as well as on race day, as revellers on the way to Uttoxeter find themselves squeezed shoulder to shoulder throughout the corridors and vestibules.

Capacity is also a problem on the CrossCountry service to Birmingham, Bristol and Bournemouth—a particularly expensive and appalling service. I do not want to rant about my own experiences, as that would be an abuse of the Chamber, but they have not been good. More importantly, my constituents are regularly subjected to spending the entire journey jammed into the vestibule with dozens of other passengers. That is made worse by incredibly poor customer service and a disgraceful attitude towards passengers from rail staff. On one occasion, my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) and I were forced to intervene when staff refused to allow a heavily pregnant woman to sit in the only seat available, which happened to be in first class, to avoid the sweltering crush of an

[*Ruth Smeeth*]

over-packed vestibule, with people being forced to stand in the toilet. That was a shocking incident and one which, more than a year later, CrossCountry has never adequately responded to.

It is clear that capacity is an issue on the line, even on those more frequent services, but I wish to make another vital point about the under-investment in, and under-utilisation of, our smaller local train stations. One such example is Kidsgrove train station, a well-used local station that provides vital transport links with the wider area—although I am sad that some people have to travel back and forth, because everyone should visit Kidsgrove. In 2010, the station's usage was 100,000 journeys per year; today it stands at 228,000. Despite the evident demand for a local transport hub, it has taken nearly a decade to secure the additional investment that residents have long campaigned for. At this point I must thank Jon Honeysett for his advice and support during the campaign.

When I was first elected to Parliament in 2015, one of my first acts was to meet the then Transport Minister to make clear the importance of the investment. At that time the issue had already been rumbling on unresolved for seven years, but at last the long-awaited improvements to the station have begun, and I want to put on the record my thanks to the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) for his direct intervention in support of the project. Work is now under way to improve and expand the station car park, which will include an hour of free parking for local residents to support the local town centre. The improvements to the access bridge, which will make it fully disability accessible, are on course to be completed by next summer. No one will now have to travel from Stoke to Crewe in order to come back to Kidsgrove to get off the train.

I am delighted that after years of campaigning, the investment was finally secured, but it is indicative of the Government's attitude to transport infrastructure outside of the major conurbations that it took so long. Such lack of focus on the importance of smaller stations can also be seen when it comes to Longport station, located in Burslem in the heart of my constituency.

Burslem is the mother town of the Potteries and plays a key part in our city's cultural renaissance; it is also a big draw for tourists visiting Stoke-on-Trent to explore our proud ceramic heritage. It is home to Middleport Pottery, a beautifully restored Victorian potbank and the home of the iconic Burleighware pottery. It is an architectural showcase of our town in its own right. It is also the station that services Port Vale football club. Given Burslem's obvious importance to our city, it would make sense to make greater use of Longport station as a way of getting people easily to and from the town, yet that station is served by only a small number of routes, including the previously mentioned Crewe to Derby line and one early morning service to Manchester. By improving connectivity within the six towns as well as routes in and out of the city, we could provide a huge boost for the local economy and begin to tackle the immense strain on our road infrastructure.

A truly effective public transport system is one that is tailored to meet the needs of local businesses and local residents. Currently, we simply do not have that. We

should begin to make timetabling more responsive to people's needs, not just with regard to the daily commute, vital though that is, but with an eye towards bringing more people into the local area, especially for major events.

In the summer I had the privilege of visiting the wonderful Weeping Window exhibition on display in my constituency. The installation attracted more than 100,000 visitors, but many more could have come if additional rail services had been offered to get people to and from Longport station. Sadly, given the Government's long and depressing track record when it comes to infrastructure investment in the north and midlands, I fear such improvements will be stymied. Despite years of talk about the northern powerhouse, the Institute for Public Policy Research North found that Government spending on transport in London has risen twice as much per person compared with the rest of the country since 2014. While London receives £1,019 per head in public spending on transport, the west midlands receives less than half of that—just £412 per person. That imbalance cannot continue. Our rail services are vital to my constituents, but our transport infrastructure will achieve its full potential only when residents' concerns about quality are matched by the Government's urgency to invest.

3.13 pm

Andrew Griffiths (Burton) (Ind): It is an absolute pleasure to speak under your chairmanship today, Sir David. It is also wonderful to welcome the Minister back to the Department. It is particularly good for me that the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) talked about the Government's record in investing in infrastructure. As I alluded to earlier, in my tenure as the Member of Parliament for Burton I have seen more than £50 million of Government investment in the A50 upgrade. I was also lucky enough to receive some £6.1 million from the Minister. When I went to him with a proposal to upgrade St Peter's bridge in Burton, he listened carefully and considered the case that I put to him. He got out his pen and wrote a cheque for £6.1 million, which has made a huge difference to St Peter's bridge and helps with traffic flow in and around the town.

Although I am the MP for the constituency of Burton, I represent both Burton and Uttoxeter, or, as the locals call it, Utcheter, and I rise today to speak about the problems of transport in Uttoxeter. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North mentioned Uttoxeter racecourse. Uttoxeter is famous for many things. It is the birthplace of Dr Samuel Johnson and those mighty yellow diggers, JCB. It is also the home of Uttoxeter racecourse, one of the country's finest. As the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) said, it was formerly owned by Sir Stan Clarke. It provides a huge boost for the local economy in Uttoxeter. On midlands grand national days—if you ever fancy coming, Sir David, I would be delighted to host you—some 16,000 people descend on Uttoxeter to enjoy the fabulous hospitality provided by David MacDonald, who runs Uttoxeter racecourse, and his brilliant and dedicated team. With recent investment, the racecourse is going from strength to strength. We have regular meetings on Sundays that start at 1 o'clock. Racegoers are keen to attend the races, have a flutter and enjoy the day. With thousands of people wanting to attend, one would think they would be able to hop on a

train and arrive at the handily located train station right next door to the racecourse: a 30-second walk. However, the first train to Uttoxeter on a Sunday is at 2.30, which means racegoers have already missed at least an hour and a half of good betting. That causes the racecourse great concern and racegoers great frustration.

I have been campaigning for some considerable time for improvements in the service. The problems with the single-carriage train that rattles along have already been discussed. Clearly, there is no way that that service adequately serves the numbers of people that want to come to Uttoxeter to enjoy our hospitality. When the earliest train to Stoke from Uttoxeter on a Sunday is the 15.03 and to Derby the 14.54, it is simply not sufficient. I have been banging that drum for some time and I had some good news. I am pleased to relay it to colleagues, who will be interested.

I wrote for the 20th or 30th time to the Minister's predecessor and he wrote back in the summer to say that

"there will be an extra carriage (or carriages) operating on the route. This will be supplemented by additional early and late services and improved Sunday services."

I was cock-a-hoop that the campaigning had led to a promise of increased services on a Sunday, so I wrote back to the Minister to see if I could winkle out a little more detail, and he wrote back:

"To clarify the position on Sunday services on the Crewe-Derby line, we have specified that an early morning Sunday service is to start from 2021."

That is wonderful. Rather than, as we had hoped, modernised signalling facilities, what is being proposed is extra signalling staff to change the signals manually. That solution is very welcome. It will mean that my racegoers in Uttoxeter will be able to get there in plenty of time, perhaps to have a pint or two of Marston's Pedigree, which is served at the racecourse, and enjoy the facilities. It will improve the service for residents in Stoke and Derby, too. Never completely satisfied, however, I have a question for the Minister: I am really pleased that the service is to be improved and that we shall benefit from that, but why wait until 2021? I urge the Minister to do as he did for me previously and get out his chequebook, and see whether he can bring the date forward a couple of years. Let us have a date of 2019 rather than 2021. If that happens, the Minister can come on the first service on a race day, and have a flutter with me. I will even give him a fiver for a bet.

I have met all three people who are bidding for the new franchise and have made the case for improved services. I think that if the Minister casts his beady eye over the bids and measures them against the requests that I have made for improvements in carriages, quality and punctuality, we can have an improved service. I know, given the rigour and commitment that he brings to his role, he will do that.

I have one further question before I conclude. It concerns the other of the two towns that I represent—Burton—and I want to talk about the station, maintained by East Midlands Trains. When I showed the former Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), a picture of Burton train station he said it was the ugliest train station he had ever seen. He was being quite polite. It is hideous—an eyesore. The Prince of Wales would, I think, call it a carbuncle. It is important that the station, which is the

gateway to Burton—and Burton is the gateway to the national forest—should be improved rapidly. We need to improve its aesthetics and quality. I am pleased to say that East Staffordshire Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council are committed to trying to improve the quality of the station, but we need a helping hand. May I ask the Minister whether he would be prepared to come to see for himself the wreckage that is Burton train station? Perhaps together we can put on a bit of pressure to make sure that Burton has the pretty and attractive train station it deserves.

3.22 pm

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. In view of the time, I shall try to run through my comments at relatively high speed. Without wishing to repeat comments made by my hon. Friends and colleagues this afternoon, I want to reiterate three points of particular interest. I congratulate my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), on securing this debate on matters of infrastructure and transport. I think that we speak with one voice about our city, as we all recognise the importance of such investment and what it can unlock for the economics of both the city and the wider North Staffordshire area.

Every Monday morning, my journey to Parliament starts at Stoke-on-Trent railway station. I can get on the 10.12 train and pretty much be in Portcullis House just after midday. That is a two-hour door-to-door journey. It is a fabulous journey time, considering the distance. However, some mornings it takes me 45 minutes to get from my home to the railway station in Stoke-on-Trent—a journey of not more than four miles—if I hit peak traffic. I certainly agree with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South, and other colleagues who mentioned it, about the wider infrastructure around Stoke-on-Trent that allows people access to the rail network.

Stoke-on-Trent railway station deals with more than 3 million journeys a year. If Kidsgrove, Longport and Stafford and the stations that immediately serve the conurbation are included, we are easily talking about 4 million or 5 million journeys a year. That is not an insignificant number, but getting to a station at peak travel time can be the most arduous part of the journey, irrespective of where someone is going on the rail network. I would welcome comments from the Minister about what plan the Government have to deliver the integrated transport system that we need, which would serve North Staffordshire well. I am talking not only about driving a car, but about local bus routes. Bus services in North Staffordshire serve the places they need to serve, but they do not necessarily go to the places passengers want to go to. For someone who lives in Staffordshire Moorlands, trying to get to Stoke-on-Trent railway station—which is the one that serves the community—from Leek, Werrington or Cheadle would be a struggle on public transport at the key times when people seek to travel. Likewise, moving around the city becomes difficult.

I want to focus particularly on the Crewe-Stoke-Derby line. I think that the theme for today's debate has been hinted at. It is not necessarily the greatest service in the world. My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) was right when he called it a

[Gareth Snell]

single-carriage bone-shaker. It is a single carriage that trundles through Stoke-on-Trent—an embarrassment to a rather impressive railway station. People going to Derby or Uttoxeter can often be seen squeezing on to a single carriage. The only other time I see that is when I try to get on to the Northern line at busy times when I come to this place. At least then there is another train coming in two minutes, rather than an hour.

We know—and it is what Midlands Connect has done with its services—that with an increase in frequency and a doubling of carriage size there could be a 72% increase in use of the line from Crewe to Derby. That would result in new passengers using the line for access to the services available in Derby and Crewe. It would also, for Stoke-on-Trent's purposes, mean more people coming to the city to take on the new jobs that will be coming as part of the local growth programme. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths) mentioned, we are missing a trick by not having services that work on race days. The A50 may now be resurfaced, but it can still only take as many cars as it could before. The roundabout halfway along, with the hotel that JCB uses, remains a snagging point. Regardless of how smooth the roads to it and around it are, more cars cannot go through that neck than will fit. We are therefore missing a trick in the matter of alleviating pressure on the A50 as well as boosting the economic activity of one of the county's largest employers, and one of the largest contributors to the economy.

I can get from Stoke-on-Trent to London in about an hour and 25 minutes. That is without stopping at Milton Keynes; with that stop, it takes about 1 hour and 35 minutes. However, when people come from London to Stoke-on-Trent they often say to me “I didn't realise it was this close.” They mean they did not realise they could get there so quickly. Sometimes we forget that Stoke-on-Trent's position on the rail network and its proximity to London make for good timing, which businesses can make use of. I hope that the Minister will forgive me if I mention that the issue was pushed to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), when she was talking about High Speed 2. There are still things we are unsure about, with respect to HS2 provision in Stoke-on-Trent. We know we should be served by the compatible work, and that there will be a train stopping at our station. We do not know what the cumulative impact will be on our existing fast services and our existing commuter service to the rest of the county. The hon. Lady gave us as much information as she could at the time, I think, but there is still a question, on which we should like some guarantee, as to whether the additional HS2 service will in fact be additional—that it will not be in place of our existing fast train service. That could be cost-prohibitive, and there are issues as to whether it will serve intervening stations, and as to how sustainable it is.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South mentioned the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley)—and we have discussed the matter. Lovely as Macclesfield is, if the train is going north it should go from Macclesfield to Manchester, and, ideally,

to Manchester airport. If that cannot happen by way of high-speed rail, a local service that can take people from Stoke-on-Trent to Manchester airport would be a huge boost to the local economy. We already have the direct link through Birmingham International station to Birmingham International airport, but we do not have a similar link going north.

I want to touch on freight, as we have talked quite a lot today about passenger services. Stoke-on-Trent relies heavily on freight, particularly for the ceramics industry. Clay coming from Cornwall travels up the west coast main line to be deposited at a repository just south of the city, from where it can be taken to the various wonderful potbanks we still have in the city. There is an opportunity, through the ceramic valley enterprise zone and the Blue Planet site with JCB, to consider spur lines that could allow the direct delivery of a rail service to those areas where economic growth and new jobs will be delivered in the city. When JCB took on the Blue Planet site, it said that the spur line that exists on a map is still technically a registered railway. There was even an opportunity for it to consider moving additional work there, so that it could compile its well-identified brand of diggers, put them on a train, and send them straight out—that would alleviate some of the stress and strains placed on the local road network when big loads move through.

Finally, what can we do with existing railway lines that are not used? As the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South said, many of the trackways used by the Knotty, the old North Staffordshire loop line, still exist. They would not be usable or functional for reopening a railway in their current state, but there are examples—not least the line that runs from Silverdale to Newcastle and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme—of lines that have been turned into cycle routes or pedestrian-friendly routes away from the main line, and where alternative forms of transport can use the infrastructure that was once laid down to allow people to cycle or walk. If we could consider those issues, we could take some of the history and heritage of our railway infrastructure in North Staffordshire and put it to better use for pedestrians.

Finally, those Members who, having heard this debate, are on their way to Stoke-on-Trent and cannot wait to get on a train, will now find when they get to the station a wonderful new establishment called the bod.

3.21 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.47 pm

On resuming—

Gareth Snell: I was concluding my remarks by inviting anybody who is on their way to Stoke-on-Trent on a train to stop at the new bod, the establishment that has been put together on the station by Titanic Brewery, replacing the first-class lounge. They have made the station safer by doing that, because the traditional cafés that were there closed around 5.30 pm or 6 pm. That meant that if people were catching a train after 6 pm, they sat in a cold, wet station with no access even to a cup of tea, and with very few people around. That new provision is open until quite late, meaning that there are people keeping an eye on what is going on there. There is a safe place to sit and, importantly, it is showcasing

one of the best employers and businesses in Stoke-on-Trent—according to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North, it is based in Burslem. I congratulate once again the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South on securing the debate.

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): Owing to the Division, this session will now finish at 4.16 pm—colleagues should bear that in mind. I call Rachael Maskell.

3.48 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Sir David—it is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I welcome the Minister to his place. It seems that he has so much power in his pen already, and I will certainly be joining the queue to make bids for my constituency.

I welcome the debate, which has been led by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton). It has been really crucial for the future of Stoke, and he presented his case very comprehensively. Ultimately this debate is about connectivity across our rail services, which is vital. We must remember that that is the purpose of our rail service: this is not about rail itself, but about ensuring that passengers and freight can move across our country smoothly and have the interconnectivity that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) raised in terms of intermodal connectivity, which is vital for ensuring that our systems work.

We have heard today about the need for station upgrades and reopenings, as well as improvements to routes. Those are absolutely vital for the economy in and around Stoke. It was a pleasure to talk to the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) earlier in the week, and he reminded me of the history of Stoke's rail services and of how local MPs and pottery owners did not want stations in Stoke, because they would mean that pottery workers' wages would have to be put up. Today, we have the reverse situation, with MPs campaigning to ensure that we have good-quality rail services for that very reason—so that wages can increase for the local community. How things can change over time.

We need to ensure that the vital economy around the ceramics industry—we have heard how the industry is moving into wider manufacturing and digitalisation—is serviced by a good transport system. I felt the pain of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central and the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South as they talked about the one-carriage bone-rattler on the Crewe to Derby line and about the time it takes to move along the tracks. In fact, it can take as long to travel between Stoke and Derby as it does between Stoke and London, and it can take even longer to travel to Nottingham. We have a real problem with connectivity between our east-west services, particularly in the midlands and the north, and it is vital that we address that. Labour has said that that is a priority for us, and that is true not least, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central touched on, of Crossrail for the north—often referred to as HS3—and making sure that we get a full upgrade, because that will really build the northern powerhouse.

I felt the frustration of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) when he highlighted that although HS2—super high-speed rail—is

being built, there is little point to it if we cannot connect into it and travel to it, bar at a snail's pace. It is important that we think those issues through when enhancements are projected.

The debate has made it clear that the fragmentation across the railway service has created much of this pain. Stoke-on-Trent railway station hosts five different rail operators, and the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) highlighted the lack of joined-up working across those services. That is why Labour has put on record that we should have one railway system—a new model of nationalisation, which does not go back to the past, but which moves forward to make sure we get that connectivity on track and train, but also across the whole network. People's journeys do not start and stop where operators do, and we need to ensure that the whole system works.

There must also be transparency on fares—as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central mentioned—so that people actually know what they are paying for when buying tickets. Let's face it: we all feel we are being done when we buy our train tickets, so we need that transparency.

We also need to make sure that we have proper planning when operations, maintenance and enhancements are brought into rail services, to make sure those services are integrated and properly planned so we get the services we need. We need to look at not only track and train upgrades, but electrification and digitalisation, to move our railway system into the new era.

We should also ensure that every station is accessible. I remind hon. Members that many stations are still inaccessible 23 years after the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. That is a real disgrace. If they are accessible for disabled people, they are also accessible for parents with little ones in buggies, shoppers and everyone else who wishes to use the railway network. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) on her tenacious campaigning for access improvements at her station, Kidsgrove, which has clearly born fruit. MPs have campaigned for that for years, but she has delivered it for her constituents, and she must be congratulated on that.

We need to invest in the right places, and we need to reopen stations—especially given the opportunity that light rail could bring to places such as Stoke—to make sure we see a modal shift out of cars and away from congestion and polluting the environment, and on to well-connected rail services and good buses. We in this House have a duty to drive forward the debate against climate change, and we do that not just by talking about it—we have talked much—but by the decisions and actions that we take.

It is so important that Midlands Connect, the transport infrastructure body, really works on this agenda with local Members and the local authority. We want the best in the UK—not just the best for places such as Stoke, but the best in Europe. There are so many great examples out there of how connectivity and cleaning up rail and transport systems can be done, and we are ambitious about making that happen.

In concluding, I will just touch on HS2, because it has been mentioned in the debate. We need to ensure that there is good connectivity into HS2. During its construction, we need to make sure we maximise the

[*Rachael Maskell*]

opportunity for rail links to ensure that places such as Stoke and beyond end up with the connectivity they need. I heard the plea made very clearly about having links into Manchester airport, which is absolutely vital for the local economy, but it is also about making sure we have the connectivity map. My fear about HS2, which I have articulated a number of times, is that it has become about HS2 itself, as opposed to about enhanced rail infrastructure across the country. We need to move the debate forward and ensure accountability to make sure we get the rail service we need across our country. HS2 comes with opportunities—we have heard how Crewe could be revitalised as a vital railway town—and we must make sure that Stoke does not miss out.

We have had an excellent debate this afternoon, and many issues have been raised. I am sure the Minister's pen is poised, given the multiple requests he has had this afternoon. As we move forward, I am confident that Labour has the right plan for the future of our railways. We do not need the Williams review; we have done the work with all the stakeholders on the railways. We are ready to run—we just need to have the Minister's pen.

3.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) on securing the debate. The speeches we have heard from Members on both sides make clear the ambition for the area, and we have had some very informed contributions detailing how that ambition might be delivered.

There have been some common themes, including the connectivity and, in particular, the capacity of the north Staffordshire rail line. That reflects historical under-investment in our railway. That accusation can be made against Governments of all colours over a considerable number of years, but I do not think it is an accusation that can be made against this Government. We are looking at the biggest period of rail investment since the Victorian era. Just next year, from April onwards, we will be starting what is called control period 6, which will bring a £48 billion package of investment—a record in British history and the biggest since the Victorian era. Nobody can accuse this Government of failing to recognise the importance of rail or of not matching that in our Budgets.

As all the contributions to the debate showed, we can all agree on the tremendous importance of the region, whether in terms of industrial growth, passenger growth, the opportunity that has been presented by HS2, or the importance of passengers reaching the HS2 hubs so that they can access that new service, right down to the rail user groups as well. Would I share in congratulating those groups? Yes, I most certainly would. Rail user groups up and down our country do fantastic work, whether it is looking after stations or promoting services. This morning, I was at Hadley Wood railway station in north London, meeting some of its rail user groups, which have taken on a significant environmental project. Those groups and their work have changed our national policy. I was there to launch the Department's review, carried out by John Varley, of Network Rail's vegetation

policy—how to make our railway lines more environmentally friendly. Rail user groups of course have a big role to play.

[*MARK PRITCHARD in the Chair*]

I have listened carefully to representations about rail services and other matters, in particular about the services between Derby and Crewe. Overcrowding, especially during peak hours, is clearly a major problem, which has come about for a variety of reasons. Simple passenger growth along the line has been compounded by the need to take some trains out of service in order to carry out accessibility improvements, alongside the regular maintenance cycle. I fully recognise that that has compounded the problem, but it is anticipated that overcrowding will ease as the new rolling stock is procured or released from elsewhere in the network. I recognise that that has caused inconvenience to communities represented by colleagues in the Chamber, and I regret that.

We seek ways in which to improve services in future. The Department and Network Rail are fully engaged with Midlands Connect, which has recognised the importance of the north Staffordshire line in its transport strategy. The Government have committed £12 million to fund Midlands Connect to the end of the next financial year, with additional investment to further develop focused transport proposals throughout the midlands.

With that support, Midlands Connect plans to produce a strategic outline business case next year, to assess how service capacity and frequency might be improved significantly on the north Staffordshire line, including consideration of infrastructure upgrades such as improved signalling or alterations to level crossings, rolling stock improvements, and operational measures such as changes to stopping patterns. The business case will look at ways of doubling existing service frequency and reducing journey times by 20 minutes. Midlands Connect estimates that increasing service provision in that way could increase passenger demand on the line by 72%, which is a figure quoted earlier.

Investing in that corridor will complement the midlands rail hub proposals, which seek to increase capacity radically and reduce journey times across the region. The work to develop the scheme is supported by the Department, which has provided a further £5 million. The work is intended to double the frequency of services between Birmingham, Derby, Nottingham and Lincoln.

Further to that, as part of the strategic development corridor work, Transport for the North is reviewing options to improve connectivity in the Crewe to Derby corridor as part of its strategic transport plan. We fully recognise the need to invest in modern infrastructure to support better services—the two go hand in hand, which is why we have the biggest upgrade of the midland main line since it was completed in 1870, in an investment worth £1.5 billion.

Ambitious works to modernise and improve the railway at Derby station were recently completed. In fact, I am to visit it tomorrow morning, and am very much looking forward to doing so. That once-in-a-generation upgrade includes 17 km of new track, 55 new signals, 79 sets of points and nine new overhead gantries. The previous complex and inefficient track layout has been simplified

to allow for more direct train movements to and through the station. We are not investing in our railway network purely because we want the network to be invested in; we are investing to increase capacity. It is all focused on passengers, who are at the heart of what we are doing.

The next East Midlands franchise is a piece of live work. Through our ambition and the invitation to tender, we intend to get new capacity coming on stream using some of the capabilities that we have been discussing. The invitation to tender published in June specifies an ambitious programme of benefits and improvements, including a brand-new fleet of longer, quieter, comfortable and more efficient bi-mode trains, which will provide additional seating and improved on-board facilities for long-distance services. The three bidders for the franchise are Abellio, Arriva and the existing provider, Stagecoach. On timing, we anticipate the announcement of the winning bidder in the spring, with services to commence in summer next year.

To focus on the Derby to Crewe corridor, the north Staffordshire line will benefit from increased capacity, which was at the heart of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South. Trains will operate with at least one extra carriage to help to satisfy local demand. That will be supplemented by additional early and late services, and improved Sunday services. I cannot immediately promise the timing wanted by my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), but I undertake to take that question away, look at it and come back to him.

As my hon. Friend is aware, however, Ministers are not directly involved in assessing bids, which is a piece of work done anonymously inside the Department, with the information kept secure because it is market sensitive. Bidders have nevertheless been incentivised to enhance existing direct journey opportunities, including east-west connectivity or the Crewe to Derby service. Passengers will also benefit from high-quality wi-fi and mobile connectivity on trains and in stations.

I have attended many transport debates, but never before has a Member highlighted the ugliness of their station; normally Members talk up their local area. Due to the miracle of parliamentary wi-fi, I have had a look at Burton station. It is not an architectural masterpiece, I recognise that. My hon. Friend was kind enough to invite me to visit his constituency, and I would be delighted to do so. Perhaps we could visit the St Peter's bridge of earlier discussions, as well as looking at the station. He also mentioned a local brew on the way—always a pleasant thought.

Smart ticketing will be another feature of our modern railway. Smart ticketing options will be introduced for leisure and business journeys, including fares that offer better value for money for passengers travelling regularly but less often than five days a week. The new franchise has specified exemplary passenger satisfaction targets for trains, stations, customer services and dealing with delays. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) spoke about customer service, and I agree that we must have the highest levels of customer service on our railways. The East Midlands competition has attracted a strong field of companies, all of them determined to operate that vital franchise. The winning bidder will be the one that impresses the most, while obviously ensuring value for money and a good deal for taxpayers.

One particular feature of colleagues' concern has been communication and collaboration between the different parts of our rail network, whether on the detail of the 12.11 and the 12.16 at Alsager, or on the services to London—which I believe will continue but, from May next year, are likely to go via New Street station in Birmingham. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) highlighted a number of other questions, as have a lot of colleagues, and I will go through the record of the debate to ensure that I write to everyone with the detailed answers they sought. From May next year, however, she may at least expect an attractive service via New Street.

As part of our strategic vision for rail, the new franchise will introduce new ways of working that put passengers first. The historical separation of track and train, no longer suitable for the challenges of today's intensively used railway, will end. In its place, we will introduce a new "one team" approach to embed shared incentives between Network Rail and the new operator that will ensure that passenger interests come first in all decision making. I hope that colleagues agree that the vision for the new franchise to serve the east midlands will ensure a service that is far more ambitious than that which it replaces, and will play a significant role in securing the long-term prosperity of the region.

HS2 has been mentioned by many colleagues in this debate. It is a fantastic project, and I look forward to it enormously. It will transform transport connections right across our country. Looking further ahead to its local impact, the second phase of HS2 will deliver considerable benefits for the region and has the potential to support growth right across the UK. Crewe is a key station for connectivity; HS2 will generate significant opportunities not just there but, because it is such a hub, for Wales, Cheshire, Warrington, the Wirral and the immediate area around Staffordshire. Crewe will be the hub that connects those areas, the north of England and the west coast main line. It will totally revitalise the area with new opportunities, bringing businesses, jobs and housing to the wider region. Through HS2 connections at Crewe, passengers will benefit from shorter journeys to London and vice versa, as well as improved cross-country journey times.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South highlighted the importance as a key feeder of Longton station in his constituency. That is entirely understood. The question now is how we maximise the benefits that HS2 will bring. This is a £50 billion-plus scheme; right across the country, contracts will be won by engineering businesses to deliver this fantastic scheme. The project now is how we maximise the opportunities and minimise the disruption to local communities during the build. We should be in no doubt, however, that HS2 is a fantastic, exciting project serving more than the immediate area; it is important for the whole UK. I certainly want Stoke-on-Trent to be served by HS2.

There have been a number of comments on timetabling, ticket pricing, local delivery plans for Staffordshire and whether the line from Stoke to Stockton Brook will be reopened. The rail strategy published in November 2017 includes a section on exploiting opportunities to restore capacity lost under Beeching where that unlocks housing and growth. Any potential reopening would need to be supported via a strong business case to demonstrate an economic return. Who might be the best people to

[*Andrew Jones*]

produce those plans? That would be local councils and local enterprise partnerships. They know their areas best; they need to decide which transport schemes will bring the most benefit. We will work very closely with LEPs and authorities to help them with that work. Any proposal must be brought forward in line with the rail network enhancement pipeline, but we are keen for capacity to be increased and we recognise that reopening closed lines will be a feature of rail's future.

The transforming cities budget was highlighted; that is a significant opportunity. Stoke is one of 10 English city regions chosen to work with the Department to design innovative public transport packages to make it easier and quicker for people to get around. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) said that the journey from his home can take him up to 45 minutes; this fund is designed to help Stoke and other regions tackle some of their internal transport questions. They will be eligible for a share of up to £1.28 billion from the transforming cities fund and from funding as a future mobility zone. Each shortlisted region will have to develop its own plans, but regions are given some budget to help them make their bids.

I will go through the record carefully to see whether there are any questions I have not answered, but I have tried to answer as many as possible. I want to leave with hon. Members the message that we fully recognise the need for increased capacity on that service, as has been made extremely clear in this debate. The rolling stock needs to be improved. That improvement can help to unlock economic opportunity—that has been made clear by colleagues on both sides speaking with one voice on behalf of their region. That voice has been heard and I will do all I can to make the transport of the area much improved.

4.14 pm

Jack Brereton: It is nice to see you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. I very much thank the Minister for his response, particularly about the need for additional capacity and more carriages. It is welcome that there will be more carriages and better services, particularly on evenings and weekends. There is not time to go through all colleagues' comments, but I thank all those up and down the route who have contributed to the debate. Various stations have been mentioned, from Kidsgrove to Stoke, through to those in Congleton, Alsager and Uttoxeter. There are many colleagues further afield along the route who have not had the chance to contribute, but I know they are all very much in favour of improved services.

We must improve services for the rail network around Stoke-on-Trent to build on, as the Minister said, our ambition as an area for growth, housing and jobs. Improved transport will bring opportunities and important connectivity for all communities across Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire to our main station once we receive those HS2 services. Through improved rail services, communities will benefit from growth in wages, skilled job opportunities and housing.

4.16 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Heat Networks Regulation

4.16 pm

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab): I beg to move,
That this House has considered regulation of heat networks.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I am pleased to have secured a debate on this issue, which is of great importance to residents of Catford Green in my constituency, as well as those living at three other sites in Lewisham borough and dozens of others across London, the south-east and the south-west.

District heating networks power entire estates by sending hot water and steam via insulated pipes from a central generator, instead of a boiler being installed in each home. There are around 14,000 heat networks in the UK, serving an estimated 450,000 customers and providing around 2% of heat demand in UK buildings. Types of heat network vary widely, from local authority and other not-for-profit schemes to private networks. Their use is increasing more rapidly in London, where developments are required to be carbon neutral.

Such systems, which are often fuelled by natural gas or biomass, could provide part of the answer to a lower carbon domestic energy mix, for which we should continue to strive. However, their potential benefits are completely undermined by fundamental consumer rights issues. Unlike other domestic energy services, these systems are not regulated. As a result, residents pay over the odds for their energy, have few ways to track or control their usage and no opportunity to switch to a cheaper tariff or provider. I am here to address that problem on behalf of my constituents. Regulation for district heating systems must be brought into line with electricity and gas to provide residents with adequate protection.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Like her, I have thousands of constituents locked into those schemes who are paying over the odds and have no means of effective redress. The Competition and Markets Authority recommended in its report in July that the Government regulate this sector by statutory regulation, as my hon. Friend suggests. Does she agree that the Government must act to legislate for that statutory regulation, rather than allow months or even years to roll on while customers are not handed a fair deal?

Janet Daby: I agree that the Government need to readdress this issue and make regulations—I will speak about that later.

I was elected to the House in June. One of my first pieces of casework was from a resident representing a group of public and private tenants in a relatively new block of flats that is served by a district heating network. The tenants' main concern was the unsustainably high cost and wild unpredictability of the bills they received. I understand that those are often up to triple the average.

One constituent told me:

"My hot water bill for July 2018 was £97.07—and this is just hot water".

He wrote that his bills

"range from £29 to £97 each month. I haven't used the heating since the spring, as I live on my own and I use hot water sparingly."

The amount he describes having to pay is very high, given his needs. Because of the communal nature of the supply, there is no real way for residents to monitor their usage, which means they often receive unexpectedly large bills.

People who live in buildings with district heating systems tend to be locked into long contracts with their suppliers. The term of my constituents' contract is 25 years, following which it will be retendered. Those customers do not enjoy the same benefits as gas and electricity customers, for whom it is now easier to switch supplier to find the best deal. With no motivation for suppliers to compete, the monopoly becomes further entrenched, and it is residents who lose out.

There appears to be a lack of transparency and information about district heating systems. My constituents contend that they were not explicitly made aware until the day they moved in that their building was heated by such a system. They kindly provided me with a copy of their lease. Although numerous clauses provide legal support for the implementation of the system, at no point has there been a sufficient attempt to clarify what it actually is, how their homes are heated or the terms to which they are subject. The housing developer contends that it made efforts to tell residents as they moved in, but it seems to me that a more substantive intervention needs to be made, earlier and in good faith. At the very least, there was an omission, which needs to be corrected immediately; at most, there was a deliberate attempt to obfuscate. Of course, aligning the regulations with those for gas and electricity would resolve the problem.

Following pressure from consumer groups, the Heat Trust was set up in 2015. It remains the closest thing to a regulator the sector has. It aims to support common standards for the quality and customer service that heat suppliers provide their customers, and it gives customers access to the energy ombudsman for complaints. However, a closer look reveals a different picture. Membership of the Heat Trust is completely voluntary, meaning schemes that do not want to join are under no obligation to do so. Although the trust is managed by a not-for-profit organisation, its board is made up almost entirely of developers, suppliers and supporting services. There is no clear consumer representation. It appears that the Heat Trust is not fit for purpose. If the Government continue to rely on it, they will allow a system that systematically disadvantages residents to develop unchecked.

My constituent put it best when he described the "hidden" but very real consequences of the district heating monopoly on residents. For those lucky enough to own their home and have a good job, it is a significant financial inconvenience and may be a hindrance when they come to sell their home. However, for social housing tenants who receive universal credit, people holding down several part-time jobs or those who just run a tight household budget, it poses a much more fundamental problem, which threatens to destabilise lives. Such a monopoly, with its punitive impact on residents, represents the sort of injustice I thought we had done away with years ago.

That lack of fairness was recognised by the Competition and Markets Authority, which published a report on the industry in July. My hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook), who has eight of these systems in his constituency, had called for that, and I am grateful for his support. Among other things,

the CMA recommended that the Government should introduce consumer protection for all heat network customers so they get the same protection as customers in the gas and electricity sectors; address low transparency so customers know they are on a heat network and there are clear agreements or contracts between customers and heat network operators; ensure that customers are aware what they are paying for, which is often unclear; and protect customers from poorly designed, built and operated heat networks by preventing developers from using cheaper options, which end up being paid for by the customer over the long term, to meet planning regulations.

I understand that the Minister and his Department are developing a heat networks market framework, which will form the Government's response to the CMA review. I see no reason why the Government should continue to allow an industry that they hope will grow and support our green ambitions to develop with built-in disadvantages for consumers, and I see no reason why a double standard should continue to exist between residents using district heating systems and those who heat their homes with electricity and gas. I urge the Minister to adopt the recommendations in the CMA report, regulate these systems properly, require a culture of transparency, and give consumers the protections that have long been standard for other domestic heating fuels. Only then will we realise the full benefits that these systems can provide.

4.25 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): I believe this is the first time I have had the honour of speaking in a Westminster Hall debate under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, and I am very pleased to do so. I congratulate and thank the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) for securing a debate on this important issue.

When I started thinking about heat networks, I realised that when I first moved to London, which I respectfully say was probably before hon. Lady was born, I lived in an old block of flats with a big boiler in the basement. We were all either freezing cold or boiling hot, and we paid far too much for heating via our service charge. My understanding is that that is really what a heat network is—obviously not just in one block of flats but in an area—so I immediately sympathised with her cause.

Of course there is a lot more to it than that. I agree entirely with the hon. Lady's assertion that we need to ensure that all heat network consumers are well protected and benefit from fair bills, which is not the case at the moment. On the plus side, heat networks are a valuable part of our commitment to decarbonising heat, and we expect the sector to expand significantly with continued support from the Government. That does not mean it should continue as it is now, but the principle of heat networks is good if they work properly, and they can be of mutual benefit to the Government's decarbonisation projects, to energy and local authority suppliers and to consumers in all our constituencies.

More than 400,000 consumers across the country are already on a heat network, and most report a largely positive experience. They are currently covered by general consumer protection and competition law and by the Heat Network (Metering and Billing) Regulations 2014.

[Richard Harrington]

In addition, consumers on a Heat Trust-registered scheme, which the hon. Lady mentioned and I will come to in a moment, have free access to the energy ombudsman's services.

In 2017, my Department commissioned a large-scale survey to quantify consumer experiences of heat networks in England and Wales for the first time. The results show that heat network consumers are as satisfied as non-heat network consumers with their heating system, and that on average they are likely to pay less for their heating. That is supported by analysis from the Competition and Markets Authority, which I strongly welcome. However, both our consumer survey and the CMA found evidence that some consumers get a poor deal on price and do not receive the quality of service we expect. That is exactly what the hon. Lady said, and she was backed up well by the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook), whose constituents have clearly had a similar experience.

In its final report in its heat networks market study, the CMA makes important recommendations about how to strengthen consumer protections for heat network consumers. My Department has been reviewing the CMA's findings alongside the recommendations of the industry-led taskforce that reported at the beginning of the year. Very soon, we will set out our priorities for establishing the long-term market framework that the hon. Lady mentioned, with—I stress this—a key focus on protecting consumers.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Janet Daby) on introducing the debate. She made some very good points. On the point that the Minister has made, the Government have highlighted and responded to the unfair hiking of leasehold charges, and have dealt with that issue. The examples are from the few rather than the many, if you like. We are discussing district heat schemes. A few unscrupulous providers of those schemes are trying to exploit the people they are provided for. I think it requires legislation, rather than a good-will scheme or framework to deal with that. Would the Minister put that into his thinking when the Government respond?

Richard Harrington: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I agree with him. It seems to me that legislation is exactly what is needed. In my three years as a Minister, I have learned that it is easy to talk about legislation, but it is all in the detail. We have to make sure that it does exactly what my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) mentioned, which is to protect consumers, but at the same time provide a basis for the industry to expand. As I said, for decarbonisation and for many things, the structure can be a really good one for consumers.

Matthew Pennycook: I agree with the Minister. At the moment, technology and confidence in it is being put at risk by the fact that consumers on many schemes—not all—are not getting a good deal. Would the Minister give us a sense of the timeline that the Department is thinking about for legislation and providing that extra

protection? I have been campaigning for more than three years, ever since I was elected, and my constituents are not willing to wait another year or two years until that protection is brought in.

Richard Harrington: I fully accept the hon. Gentleman's point. I wish I could wave a magic wand and say that it is going to be done the week after next. It is in the pipeline; I can assure him of that. It would be wrong of us to jump into something without giving it considerable thought. I fully accept his frustration and that of his constituents, and that is paramount. To him and the hon. Member for Lewisham East, that may sound like I am waffling and prevaricating, but it is just how it is. I would be very happy to meet them in the early part of next year to discuss progress, if that would help. The Department is not putting this on the back burner or anything like that. I give them that undertaking.

I believe that heat networks, if done properly, represent a significant opportunity to upgrade part of the whole UK energy infrastructure and seize the opportunity for British business that the technology presents. Heat accounts for about a third of UK carbon emissions. We have to cut our emissions to meet our carbon reduction targets. Heat and heat networks can play a critical role in this. We have made considerable progress generally through renewable heat incentives and energy company obligations, which have provided an incentive for heat networks to install lower carbon heat sources. The investment of £320 million in heat network projects, which is a mixture of grants and loans, is to be encouraged. Again, we have to ensure that where the Government are providing that support, adequate consumer protection measures are in place by requiring projects to demonstrate Heat Trust or equivalent standards when operational.

There are many heat network suppliers that provide strong consumer protections, such as Energetik, established by Enfield Council to provide better value, reliable and environmentally-friendly energy. I hope that the service charter that Energetik provides to its customers sets out clearly the minimum standards of service they can expect, what measures they provide to those vulnerable customers needing extra help and how they can be contacted should something go wrong.

We have worked closely with industry and consumer groups to support, through funding and guidance, the development of the UK-wide Heat Trust scheme, which is an independent consumer protection scheme designed specifically for customers. It draws on the terms of service offered to gas and electricity consumers. That said, I reiterate the comments made by the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich. I agree with him that it is a voluntary scheme and does not protect all customers. I accept the assertion made by the hon. Member for Lewisham East that it does not protect all consumers, which I am sure is correct. However, I do not think it is all bad; I think it has been an improvement as well.

Where sites are registered with the Heat Trust, such as the Catford Green development in the constituency of the hon. Member for Lewisham East, they are not offered protections on pricing and contracts. Although we can learn some things from the work of the Heat Trust, that does not remove the need for further action. That is particularly the case as heat networks often operate as natural monopolies and customers can be contracted for very lengthy periods of up to 25 years, as

the hon. Lady said. We want to ensure that heat network consumers are able to make informed choices about whether a property on a heat network is right for them, and to feel confident that if issues relating to their heating systems arise, they have recourse and there is a way to redress them.

The role of Government is to ensure that we are providing clean and secure energy at an affordable price to the consumer. We need a long-term market framework that places consumers at its heart, that still delivers sustained investment in the sector and maximises the potential economic and environmental benefits of heat networks. I hope that I have outlined a number of measures that the Government have already put in place and I hope that industry, consumer groups and all interested stakeholders will work closely with us as we develop our plans for further interventions.

Question put and agreed to.

4.36 pm

Sitting suspended.

Offence of Sex for Rent

4.39 pm

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the offence of sex for rent.

It is an honour to serve for the first time under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I am also grateful to the Minister for being here. I have known him for a number of years in different capacities, and I know this is a subject that he will have a great deal of interest in.

I am grateful to have been granted the debate, because it gives us the chance to highlight a pernicious, exploitative and pervasive phenomenon that too few people are aware of and too little is being done to tackle. The issue of sex for rent was brought to my attention by Lauren Moss, a BBC journalist. She showed me evidence that people were accepting accommodation from landlords in return for not money, but sex.

We do not have to look hard for the adverts. They are not hidden deep in secret corners of online platforms. In fact, one of the most surprising aspects of this is how open and explicit the adverts are, and how integrated they have become into the advertising landscape for accommodation. Some adverts simply imply what the landlord is expecting:

“Free accommodation for attractive female”.

Others are more explicit:

“You do not have to pay any rent for your stay with me in exchange for some mutual fun times together”.

Many go into much more detail about how much sex is involved:

“You agree sort of like a couple of times a week, pop into my room sort of thing, but as far as the apartment’s concerned, it’s like completely as if we’re flatmates. It’s all the bills, the rent, free.”

The majority of the ads are aimed at women, but I have also seen them targeting young men. Ads describe in detail the age, look and demeanour expected of the tenant, as well as the amount and type of sex that is expected. People moving to towns and cities such as Brighton and Hove, which I represent, are uniquely vulnerable to sex for rent exploitation. Two universities, a housing crisis and ubiquitous access to online platforms such as craigslist mean that some young people are led swiftly down a path toward exploitation.

For some, there is a veneer of harmlessness about it. Because this is such a new phenomenon, understanding the extent of exploitation is hard, but emerging evidence shows that it is a much larger problem than anyone first thought, and it is getting worse. Last year, the housing charity Shelter conducted a tenant survey that addressed the question of sex for rent for the first time and provided the first quantitative data. It asked the question, “Have you ever been offered ‘sex for rent’ while renting?” The estimated number of women affected by the arrangement was shocking. More than 100,000 women have been offered sex for rent in the last year alone, around 250,000 women have been offered sex for rent in the last five years and more than 300,000 women have been offered sex for rent in the time that they have been renting.

I raised this issue with the Ministry of Justice last year to get clarity about the law. The then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington),

[Peter Kyle]

wrote to me in July 2017 confirming that it was his belief that sex for rent fell foul of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and carried a maximum prison sentence of seven years. I sought further clarification of the law, working with Queen's counsel from Cornerstone Barristers, who offered the following opinion:

"We believe that the practice of 'sex for rent' meets the definition of the criminal offence of causing or inciting prostitution for gain. The Offence is established by Section 52 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which provides as follows: '(1) A person commits an offence if—(a) he intentionally causes or incites another person to become a prostitute in any part of the world, and (b) he does so for or in the expectation of gain for himself or a third person.'"

It is clear that the incitement to sex in return for accommodation is a criminal offence.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I praise the hon. Gentleman for rightly highlighting this disgusting activity. Does he have a feel for why this is increasing now?

Peter Kyle: The hon. Gentleman asks an important question. A little later in my speech, I will highlight the fact that we have a perfect storm in certain cities and towns in our country. The housing crisis and the high cost of accommodation, combined with access to online platforms and the fact that university towns draw young people in, have created a perfect storm for exploitation in this way.

As I say, it is clear that the incitement to sex in return for accommodation is a criminal offence. There is no question. The sex itself does not need to happen for the law to be broken. That prompts a very important question: considering there are hundreds of live adverts online right now, today, and many thousands have been placed in recent years, why, to the best of my knowledge, has there not been a single arrest, let alone conviction? It is likely that thousands of people, mostly young, in Britain have been victims of sexual exploitation, yet not one perpetrator has been brought to justice.

Seeing that this was no longer a matter just of clarifying the law but of enforcing it, I also contacted the Home Office last year. The then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), took time to meet me on several occasions to discuss the matter and investigate ways forward. I am grateful to her for spending that time with me, and particularly for the effort she put in subsequently. It is my understanding that under her direction a work stream was established in the Home Office to look into ways of enforcing the law and bringing offenders to justice. However, to date there is no evidence of success. It is my hope that the new Home Secretary shares his predecessor's concerns, but such matters must be judged on outcomes, and as this exploitation continues unabated, there is no ground for optimism yet.

I implore Ministers to look seriously at two distinct aspects of sex for rent. The first is bringing perpetrators to justice. There are hundreds of adverts online right now, clearly inciting people into the exchange of sex in return for services—there can be no doubt about that. The question is, why are those who place the advertisements not being locked up for it? Why are people left so

exposed to exploitation, simply because the law enforcement agencies seem unable to adapt to the new trends in exploitation fast enough?

I realise that there are challenges. It seems that many people lured into these arrangements are middle class, emerging into adulthood, and they are exploring new freedoms, such as starting at university and moving to a new town. Thrown into that mix is an offer of free accommodation. The emotional impact and the price that they will pay for it may not be felt for years to come. It is unlikely that many victims would feel comfortable identifying themselves as prostitutes, which is how the law currently classes them, so most would be extremely unlikely to go through with a prosecution. Will the Minister consider a new legal definition for victims of sex for rent, in order to enable more victims to come forward? Ideally, the exchange should not take place at all.

I know the Minister personally places great emphasis on the prevention aspects of policing. Difficulties are posed when adverts are placed in areas covered by different police authorities from the areas where the offence is potentially taking place. Those are continual challenges for our policing across the UK. Can the Minister tell us which law enforcement agency is best placed to lead on this and when we can expect results? I am actively working with barristers from Cornerstone, who have generously given their time pro bono, to look into the possibility of a test case. That could provide a way forward to ignite a response from our law enforcement agencies, but it is not ideal. I would like to see our forces act first, and act fast.

Secondly, action must be taken against the websites hosting the adverts. Within a week of my first raising the issue, Gumtree, which had previously had such adverts on its website, came to see me in Parliament. It immediately instigated a policy to monitor and eradicate such adverts from its site, which has largely been successful. I know that Members from across the House will join me in thanking the company for taking such swift action to protect its own customers. Craigslist has chosen a different path. It has ignored my attempts at emailing, writing and calling. It has ignored the media outlets, such as the BBC, the *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mirror* and, as far as I know, it has ignored the Home Office too. Not only is craigslist profiting from facilitating the sexual exploitation of young people, but it is treating our country and our Parliament with contempt.

I do not understand why craigslist is allowed to act like a pimp but is not treated like the pimp that it is. When police come across pimps in the streets, they act. They have the power to act and they know what to do with that power. However, because craigslist pimps via an online platform, we seem spellbound into inaction. Just because the pimps are sandal-wearing, cappuccino-swilling Californians does not mean that we should let them get away with it. Being allowed to trade and profit in our country is a privilege, and I do not see why, when that privilege is so blatantly abused and profit is made from sexual exploitation, we should stand idly by simply because tackling it is difficult.

We have a problem. It is a growing problem that will not go away. I look to the Government for decisive action to enforce the current law, to enhance the law to make it more accessible for victims of sex-for-rent, and

to take action against craigslist, whose intransigence and amorality in the face of sexual exploitation should shame each and every one of its employees.

4.50 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mr Pritchard. I congratulate the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) on securing this important debate.

I first came across this issue while watching “Victoria Derbyshire”, on a Monday morning, I think. I was surprised that such an exploitative and vile practice could thrive in our midst, and that nothing seemed to have been done about it. Only subsequently did I understand that the hon. Gentleman had tried to do something about it a year and a half ago. It is frustrating that the then Home Secretary took an interest in the issue and looked into it, and it was established that sex for rent was a criminal offence, yet within the year and a half since it was first raised the practice seems to have continued, and in fact spread. Why is that? Why should we in this House be so powerless to do anything about it? We need to raise and talk about the issue and make sure that different Government Departments talk to each other, and then go into the core of why the problem continues.

As we have already heard, sex for rent is when a landlord solicits sex—as opposed to currency—in exchange for shelter. Many arrangements are informal and thrive in the shadows, taking advantage of young people who do not initially realise that they are doing something that will envelop them in an exploitative situation. I emphasise that the underlying problem of all this is the acute housing shortage. With very high rents, people find themselves unable to find accommodation. There are also more vulnerable people who cannot get on to the social housing ladder and who then find themselves in these arrangements, which ultimately become very exploitative and distressing. The situations tend to spiral, becoming mentally and physically damaging to victims, who find it impossible to escape that cycle and who fear reporting it to the police because they might be implicated in a crime.

The Government have stated that sex-for-rent arrangements are illegal and that landlords can be prosecuted, yet prosecutions for this crime remain incredibly rare. Why is that? When I met a Justice Minister, I learned that, interestingly, sex for rent is not a specific sexual offence but is within other sexual offences, so we do not actually know the number of cases. Finding out the exact numbers is important. Landlords can exploit legal grey areas that allow them to advertise directly to vulnerable people and to not-so-vulnerable—middle class or whatever—people who then become very vulnerable. We have already heard that websites such as craigslist give perpetrators of sex-for-rent crimes a platform to draw in their victims.

In the meeting with that Justice Minister, we established that we should look at the Crown Prosecution Service guidelines. I am very pleased to say that I was in contact this afternoon with the CPS, which confirmed that it is revising those guidelines and will include a new section on sex-for-rent arrangements and advertising. That is a win and a step forward, but we will need to monitor whether it will make a difference. We in the House and in the Government must stay on top of these crimes,

which continue to thrive because they are a new phenomenon—a perfect storm, as the hon. Member for Hove pointed out.

I very much welcome that the Minister is listening, and I hope that we can make progress. I met the former Home Secretary, who has been very supportive and who suggested that the issue should be looked at by a Select Committee—probably the Women and Equalities Committee. However, although the victims are mainly women, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is also particularly vulnerable; this is not only a crime against women. A work stream has been established, but I will very much welcome a Select Committee looking into this. I have engaged with the Chair of that Committee, who has also been very supportive. Working across the House to investigate and end this terrible exploitative practice must be in all our hearts.

4.56 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I thank the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for setting the scene, as he often does, on issues of particular importance to the House and to myself. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) and to have heard her contribution.

I look around and see in the Chamber the familiar five Members who attend debates on all these issues, and I see the Minister, who is always there to respond. I have to say that, on the issues we have recently sought his interest in and his support and help for, he has been very responsive. I put that on the record at the start. I also thank the hon. Member for Hove for the hard work he has put into bringing this issue to light and into searching for answers. Perhaps in my contribution I can make some gentle suggestions from a Northern Ireland perspective, based on what we have done in the past, which might be helpful in bringing this forward.

That any person in our free, modern society should think it is okay to ask for sex as a payment of any type is absolutely disgraceful and unacceptable. That should be the starting point of the debate. This subject reminds me of something the BBC would put together: a gritty historical drama set in the Victorian era, in which an enlightened few try to bring about freedom and safety for people of all classes. The problem is that it is not a gritty historical drama but real life in 2018 in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

We have women and men who have nowhere to live and no money to rent and who have escaped the social security system and feel that they have no other option. As the hon. Members for Hove and for Bath said, if we put ourselves in their position and grasp that, we will realise just how far down the level of acceptability they have gone. They are doing something that they do not want to do but that they feel they have no other option but to do. They allow their body to be used so that they have a roof over their head. Sometimes it is as basic and as cold as that.

There are students who cannot afford to do it all and who make the decision to rent a room for free in exchange for sexual favours. I suspect that we all know stories from our constituencies and from further afield—the media is certainly full of them—of the unacceptable

[Jim Shannon]

price of rental accommodation and of students with vast student loan debts. That puts some students in a position in which they are wondering, “How on earth am I going to afford this?” In desperation, as a last resort, they are driven towards these unacceptable, but for them sometimes very real, situations. The thought of my grandchildren being put into this kind of situation makes me feel physically ill. I find it abhorrent that anyone would put a person, either a young woman or a young man, in this situation. It is unjustifiable and we must address it. That is why I welcome the opportunity today to make a small contribution on this issue.

Technically, it is an offence to do what we are discussing. The previous Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice told the hon. Member for Hove that

“an offence is committed when a person offers accommodation in return for sex, as they are inciting/causing another person to have sex with them in return for ‘payment’.”

That is technical terminology. It appears to be a reference to the offence of causing or inciting prostitution for gain under section 52 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. However, that has yet to be tested, which is why I welcome the indication by the hon. Member for Hove of what solutions there could be. There certainly needs to be a prosecution—a test case. If the case is not winnable, let us change the legislation to stop this abhorrent practice once and for all.

So-called landlords feel that this is a grey area in which they can get away with exploiting vulnerable and needy people or young people, depending on their circumstances. We must send out a very clear message from this debate—a cross-party message from the hon. Members who are here to support the debate. How do we do that? That question was addressed first by the hon. Member for Hove and then by the hon. Member for Bath. Now I will pose it to the Minister, but in addition to posing it, I will—very gently and positively, I hope—put forward some suggestions.

Wera Hobhouse: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is useful when media outlets pick up these issues, because that spreads the message and encourages people to come forward? It helps them to understand that this practice is illegal and that if they go to the police, there can be prosecutions, but people need to come forward.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. We need co-operation, and we perhaps need someone to take a lead by making a complaint to the police that can then be taken forward. Sometimes police also need help to bring about prosecutions and set the example that the hon. Member for Hove referred to in his introduction.

As I was saying, how do we send a clear message? I look to the Minister and offer my humble opinion that we should strengthen the law so that no one can feel that this is a grey area any more, as the hon. Member for Bath mentioned in her intervention. Let us in this debate, with a statement from the Minister, and more generally from the House, make this a black-and-white issue and keep men and women from being exploited in this way.

In Northern Ireland, we have sought to address issues such as this through the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims)

Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. The legislation was brought forward in the Northern Ireland Assembly by my colleague in the other place, Lord Morrow. The Minister will be aware of this as part of the background to the issue, and I hope others are also aware of it, but Northern Ireland became the first part of the United Kingdom to make paying for sex a crime, when the legislation came into effect in June 2015. Anyone caught breaking the law can be jailed for up to a year and face a £1,000 fine. That is the sort of legislation that we need here; it is the sort of legislation that the hon. Members for Bath and for Hove, and indeed every one of us in the debate, would wish to see in place.

Let me give an idea of what can be achieved with such a law. I should say first that allegations may be made, but an evidential base has to be there as well. Figures released by the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland in August 2016 showed that seven people were referred to the PPS: no action was taken in three cases, two men received cautions, and the remaining two cases were being considered by a senior prosecutor. We have had events at the House of Commons and in the House of Lords at which we have made information about that legislation available for Members to look at.

The fact that the Police Service of Northern Ireland used the legislation to arrest men at the outset sent a very strong message that this behaviour and abuse of power is not acceptable and never can be. That message must be sent out UK-wide, and I sincerely but gently encourage the Minister to take steps to do that today: he should make it crystal clear not only that it is not okay to do these things and that advertising them publicly as if it were is not acceptable, but that if a person is found to be exploiting someone for sex in return for a room, that person will be arrested, will be fined and will go to jail. The Minister should give the police something to work with and give vulnerable people something to cling to. They are protected by law and, more than that, they are worth more than just a room for hire.

5.5 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Pritchard. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for bringing this issue to the House, because it is very important, and for his tenacity in campaigning on it and continuing to raise it. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) for her work on the issue.

First, I would like to quote Marsha Scott, chief executive of Scottish Women's Aid:

“There is an intersection of poverty and violence against women. You cannot address one without the other and...I support anything that helps address those issues.”

The issue that we are discussing is part of the wider context of violence against women and the misogynistic treatment by men of women; we need to see it in that wider context. People are much more likely to find themselves in this kind of situation now than 10 years ago, because austerity has meant that the real incomes of many people are much lower than they were and people are turning to more and more extreme measures to make ends meet. It is now a well-trodden and established fact that austerity has affected women and young people disproportionately.

I condemn without reservation this phenomenon and those who would perpetrate it. If all of us here today know that women and young people are more likely to be desperate for a roof over their head, we can be sure that predatory sexual abusers are also well aware of that fact. In recognition of that, more than a year ago, the Scottish National party conference passed a resolution condemning this behaviour. I pay tribute to my colleagues Stuart McMillan MSP and Math Campbell-Sturgess, who introduced the resolution.

Our Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning, Kevin Stewart MSP, has been trying to make progress on the issue as well. The situation with Gumtree and Craigslist described by the hon. Member for Hove also rings true in the Scottish Parliament: Gumtree was quick to come to the table on the issue and say what it was doing, but Craigslist again would not co-operate, would not turn up and would not engage with it. There needs to be stronger action by Ministers here to look at that.

This kind of “survival sex” is spilling out into the lives of increasing numbers of people who would never have considered selling sex and would probably not see it as such—people who may not see the vulnerability to exploitation, coercion and violence that they may be getting themselves into. “Rent for sex” adverts are easily found online. It takes seconds to discover them via a Google search. This is not a practice that people are trying to hide, and there are clearly very few negative consequences for those who would exploit others in this way, despite it potentially being a crime, as the hon. Members for Hove and for Strangford (Jim Shannon) pointed out.

The adverts themselves give the impression that there is an equal and mutual, if not quite consensual, exchange of commodities: “You have something I want; I have something you want.” For people facing destitution and homelessness, it could seem like a rational solution to their problems. On the face of it, taking up such an agreement could, for some, be a way of alleviating financial difficulties or a stopgap to get them through a difficult time.

However, it is unlikely that the situation would ever unfold to be a mutually beneficial exchange—it is a gateway to exploitation. It is my fear that rent is offered in exchange for consent, effectively buying it, which diminishes completely the validity of that consent. Once those boundaries have been worn away, the potential for further abuse is huge.

The hon. Member for Strangford mentioned students getting into this situation, and the National Union of Students Scotland has been campaigning vociferously on the issue. Students, perhaps moving away from home for the first time, could be very vulnerable to being exploited in this way. I am concerned that the behaviour of these landlords could well be a path into an even more sinister situation, because once the relationship is established, the concept of choice can soon disappear. The clear and indisputable imbalance of power could lead to coercion, control, and physical as well as sexual violence. A tenant, for want of a better word, in this situation is at the mercy of the landlord’s whims, simply because there is nowhere else to go and little by way of choice. Apart from the practical considerations, there is a risk to that person’s reputation and status. It may be difficult for them to seek help to escape the situation,

because of the shame and stigma associated with exchanging sex for rent, as well as the risk of conviction, as the hon. Member for Hove wisely pointed out.

The wording of the adverts themselves reveal a predatory, entitled attitude, which is extremely concerning. Here are a few examples of adverts I found in Glasgow from decidedly creepy men. All of these have come from Craigslist and some of them went up in the past few days. The first says:

“Temporary free room for open-minded females. Please get in touch with a picture of yourself to discuss further.”

A second says:

“Ideally you would be bi or curious and of course respectful”, with possibly free accommodation for the right person. A third says:

“Looking to share with the right girl with mutually beneficial agreements meaning adult relationship. All board lodgings amenities are free.”

A fourth, which went up on Craigslist only yesterday, says:

“Free room available for a female on occasional basis...discreet.”

Those placing the adverts evidently feel entitled to make demands and emboldened enough to set out their intentions clearly. There is no ambiguity, if we read between the lines. Most are aimed at women, although some are looking for young men. Young people seem to be at particular risk, and this has not come about for no reason. The hon. Member for Bath mentioned housing shortages.

Wera Hobhouse: Is it not the case that while offline advertising is clearly illegal, online advertising is the biggest problem? That is why I welcome the news, as I understand it, that the Crown Prosecution Service guidelines will be reviewed in the new year. I hope the hon. Lady will welcome that too.

Alison Thewliss: I absolutely would, because it is clear that people are able to get away with things in this grey area. For some young people, the threat of homelessness is very real. Under the UK Tory Government, the safety nets have been all but decimated. Housing benefit has been restricted. Even though the UK Government U-turned on their plans to restrict it to 18 to 21-year-olds—something that we never did in Scotland—there are still limitations on single people renting privately under the age of 35. I am 36, and I am not even sure that I would count as a young person, but that seems to be the UK Government’s definition of being young and, therefore, having less choice in the options one can take up.

Those under the age of 25 are not entitled to the same minimum wage as other people, despite the unfairness of this situation being brought to the attention of Ministers by me and by others on umpteen occasions. I draw the Minister’s attention to the Young Women’s Trust “Paid Less, Not Worth Less” campaign, and to the video on its Twitter account of Nia’s story, which outlines how she had to move back home due to low wages. She had the option of moving back home, but not all young people have that option. They may have moved out because of overcrowded housing or other issues, but not everybody can go back home. Some young people may be forced to take more drastic steps. For vulnerable young people who do not have the support of their family, there is an increasing risk of

[Alison Thewliss]

being drawn into a cycle of sexual exploitation and abuse. Once that is behind closed doors, it can be very difficult for young people to seek help.

Evidence from other countries shows that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth are a much higher risk category and we should think of them specifically. It is a heartbreaking reality that although legislation and many attitudes have changed, some people's attitudes have not. A study by the Albert Kennedy Trust showed that LGBT young people make up 24% of the homeless population, which is hugely disproportionate, and often this is due to rejection by their families. That leaves them at a much higher risk of sexual exploitation, and we should be doing more as policy makers to address this.

There is also significant risk to those who have insecure immigration status and no recourse to public funds. People in that situation are very vulnerable and often under the radar, and may face a choice between sleeping rough or doing what they have to just to keep a roof over their head. For women, the prospect of sleeping rough or at least having a roof over their head is a no-brainer. They will take what steps they can to keep themselves off the street, because the risk there is so much greater. This is a further symptom of the hostile environment, and the UK Government ought to be taking the impact of that seriously.

While the flagrant advertising of sex for rent is worrying and upsetting, what is really concerning is the under-the-radar predatory activity that is difficult to find, difficult to measure and difficult to prevent. It seems to me that the best course of action is to make sure that the safety nets are put in place, so that fewer people face the risk of homelessness in the first place. The UK Government must absolutely clear up this grey area in law. It is encouraging that, as the hon. Member for Bath said, CPS guidelines are changing, but we need to see the details and how it will tackle the issue.

The hon. Member for Strangford mentioned the strength of the law in Northern Ireland, which is encouraging. I urge the Minister to engage with the Scottish Government and the "Equally Safe" work that we are doing, which looks very closely at how we can tackle exploitation and violence against women and girls. I thank the hon. Member for Hove for introducing this debate and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

5.15 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard. I offer my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) on securing this debate and thank him for his pioneering campaign in bringing this issue to the attention of the House.

Rogue landlords are taking advantage of the housing crisis by offering rooms, quite openly, for free in exchange for "company" or "benefits"—or, to put it more bluntly, for sex. Frustratingly, despite confirmation from the Government that sex for rent is in breach of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, there is little evidence to suggest that any action has yet been taken to punish those preying on innocent victims. I find it unbelievable—despite the Government's assurances that they are tackling this—that

the perpetrators do not even seem to hide what they are doing, yet there seem to be no arrests. If someone goes online it does not take long to find blatant adverts:

"Free rooms to spare for women willing to carry out household chores naked"

and

"Flats to rent, tenants with benefits. Must reply with a picture."

That is illegal. It is sickening exploitation of people who are caught in a spiralling struggle to find the funds to keep a roof over their head, and I ask the Minister how it has been allowed to happen without more thorough investigations and prosecutions.

Action needs to be taken not only against the landlords placing the adverts, who should be prosecuted, but websites such as Craigslist, about which we have heard. On the streets, a pimp would be charged for profiting from the sale of sex, so why is this any different? There is a serious shortfall in the law in this area, which needs to be addressed quickly and effectively, whether by reviewing the law itself, to make it more robust, by better enforcement, or—as I suspect—a mixture of the two. The Government need to look very carefully at just how many people are victims of this exploitation, and do something about it.

I am pleased to say that in Wales there is a strong campaign to tackle the problem. While that campaign has highlighted the sad prevalence of the issue across Wales and the scale of the work required to tackle the problem, it has also been an opportunity to show what can be done when the right people work together effectively for a common goal. Particular recognition needs to go to Katie Howells of Merthyr Valleys Homes, who was a leading figure in the campaign, along with my colleague, Welsh Assembly Member Dawn Bowden, who will take part in the launch next week of a new phase of work to tackle sex for rent with a Wales-wide campaign led by women in the housing sector. Here I stand, again telling the Chamber how good the Labour Government in Wales are.

We all share a responsibility to provide a climate of safety where constituents can find a place to live without fear of what it will cost them, and where those who are being exploited have a place to turn to and confidence that the system will prosecute the perpetrators. We need some assurances from the Government that they will commit to strengthen the law and improve levels of enforcement, so that those offering and facilitating sex for rent receive appropriate sentences and punishment, and so that ultimately we end the scourge of sex for rent in all our communities.

5.18 pm

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Pritchard, for what I am sure is the first time. You and I came into this place on the same day, and it is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair.

I hesitate to curtail a promising political career by describing the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) as a friend, but he and I go back a long way in his previous life. We have worked together extremely well over many years, and I have a great deal of respect for him personally and for how he, as others have said, has tirelessly led this campaign and shone a spotlight on something that is genuinely shocking. I thank all Members who have

placed on the record some of the language used in some of these advertisements. It is striking how brazen it is. That is a real concern, because it is a sign of perceived normality, which is something we have to reject and counter vigorously, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said so powerfully, because of the cost and the damage that flow from it.

The hon. Member for Hove highlighted that sex for rent is part of a broader challenge for us as a society, which is that the internet in particular is enabling a whole set of activities that exploit the vulnerable in ways that are moving extremely fast and that are difficult to control. Anyone who visits the team working against child sexual exploitation inside the National Crime Agency will understand how fast the landscape is changing and the degree to which the internet enables the most pernicious activity and makes it extremely hard to detect and follow the villains.

I have learned a lot in the debate and I share the concern expressed by hon. Members. On the point made by the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), I would welcome further scrutiny by Parliament and by the media. As we know, those mechanisms help to focus minds, sharpen priorities and catalyse action. One thing we cannot do is let this become normal. In London, we are having to counter the profound challenge of the sense of normality around young people carrying knives, which is in a broadly similar space. We cannot let young people grow up feeling that this is normal behaviour, not least because it is against the law.

Let me place on record the Government's specific position on the offence, rather than relying on ministerial correspondence. Offering accommodation in return for sex is illegal and those who do it can face up to seven years in prison. As the hon. Member for Hove said, in 2017 the previous Secretary of State for Justice confirmed that the practice is illegal by virtue of the Sexual Offences Act 2003. Under sections 52 to 54 of the Act, an offence is committed when a person offers accommodation in return for sex, as they are inciting another person to have sex with them in return for payment. Section 52 prohibits causing or inciting prostitution for gain, and section 53 prohibits controlling prostitution for gain. I should make it clear that we expect every report of this offence to be taken seriously.

It is also important to note that the acts of buying and selling sex are not in themselves illegal in England and Wales. However, there are many activities that can be associated with prostitution which are offences, including activities linked to exploitation.

Peter Kyle: The Minister suggests that any reported offences will be investigated and pursued, but does he accept that one problem is that many people entering into those relationships do not realise the exploitation that they are undergoing or where the law stands, and when they are made aware of it, they are reluctant to come forward because it would mean identifying themselves as a prostitute? Does he accept that we need to tackle the adverts and the people placing them? An offence is committed the second they place them, because that is incitement.

Mr Hurd: Yes. To be clear, the law applies equally online and offline. I will come on to the particular issue of websites. The hon. Gentleman also makes an important point, which should be part of the conversation with

the social media companies, about education and information—not just about the law, but in terms of signposting avenues of support for extremely vulnerable people in this situation. We have to counter any suggestion that it is okay, normal or lawful.

To the hon. Gentleman's point, which was also made by others, about why there have been no prosecutions even though we are clear about the law—I hope I have clarified the Government's position on the letter of the law and our expectation that it will be enforced and that every report will be taken seriously—the honest truth is that we do not know how many prosecutions specifically relate to sex for rent. In 2016-17, there were 99 prosecutions for controlling prostitution compared with 100 the previous year, but at this point, our data does not provide the details about how many of those prosecutions relate to sex for rent, as opposed to any other controlling prostitution offence. I suspect that the number is very low.

Informed by this debate, I say to the hon. Gentleman that the policing of the matter is led by police forces, with a certain amount of flexibility as to how they apply the law. Obviously, their prioritisation is set by the local crime plan, which is set by the local police and crime commissioner. However, I undertake to the hon. Gentleman to engage directly with police chiefs and PCCs to get a better understanding of their understanding of the law and their approach to enforcing it. Some areas, such as the city he represents, will obviously have much higher levels of activity and risk than others.

We all understand that we are dealing with a landscape of lots of challenges and pressures on the police and the Crown Prosecution Service, but given the seriousness of the issue and our concerns, I undertake to engage with the police chiefs and PCCs to get their understanding and feedback on their interpretation—or rather the interpretation of the law—the priority they attach to it and some of the challenges they face in enforcing the law. The hon. Gentleman unpicking the underlying psychology and the difficulties that some victims of this crime will have in coming forward and collaborating with and contributing to a prosecution was particularly thoughtful and telling.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for what he has said so far and for his positive response to our contributions. I remind him of Lord Morrow's Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, if he would make this practice illegal on the mainland. We are looking for a way forward, so if he has the opportunity, I suggest that he looks at that Act and what was brought in in Northern Ireland through the Northern Ireland Assembly when the opportunity was there. It would work very well here. There has been cross-party support for it at the events we have held here, so I believe it is something that we could move forward on.

Mr Hurd: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but the law is clear. The question mark is around how the law is being enforced and what difficulties or challenges our law enforcement community and the criminal justice system have. That is what I would like to understand better. My undertaking to the hon. Member for Hove is that I will go and ask those questions to get better information.

[Mr Hurd]

I would like to pick up the points the hon. Gentleman made about websites, technology and the online community. Obviously, we have to work closely with those digital technology companies, but it fits into a broader context where there has been movement. Whether it be the previous Home Secretary's activity, which I observed directly, to challenge the social media companies on their hosting of terrorist propaganda, or what the current Home Secretary is doing to challenge the social media companies to take more responsibility for their content in relation to child sexual exploitation and serious violence, I can see that that is an ongoing and escalating conversation and a challenge to those enormously powerful companies. They were reluctant to engage with us at the start, because they are desperate to avoid taking responsibility for the content on their platforms, but gradually, month by month, year by year, we feel that we are beginning to make progress at last.

The hon. Gentleman compared and contrasted a couple of websites. He described the very quick, active and socially responsible response of Gumtree to his campaign and his correspondence, and contrasted that with the response of craigslist. Clearly, he has a prejudice against sandal-wearing, cappuccino-swilling Californians, which I urge him to put aside for a minute. *[Laughter.]* However, there seems to be an issue with craigslist regarding its willingness to engage on this issue. I can say that officials have been frustrated in that respect as well.

I put this issue in the context of the other issues where we have been persistent in challenging digital technology companies to wake up to their responsibilities. That is what we are talking about here, particularly if it involves them in some way enabling an illegal act. If they are doing that, they need to be challenged. Again, I give an undertaking to the hon. Gentleman that I will personally engage with Craigslist and discuss the matter directly with the Home Secretary, to see what pressure we can apply from the Home Office and the Government to make the leadership of that organisation engage with this issue in ways that up to this point they have absolutely failed to do. I suggest it will cause quite significant reputational damage for them in the future as awareness of this problem grows, both in this place and outside it.

Peter Kyle: I thank the Minister sincerely for the way that he has responded, particularly on Craigslist, but what will he do if the leadership of Craigslist do not engage with him? He says that he will engage with them, but the problem so far is that they will not engage back. When I explain this issue, a lot of people simply cannot understand why we can deal straight away with a brothel or criminal activity on their streets—we can close down buildings and we can move people on—but when such activity takes place online, we seem powerless. That is eroding faith in politics and faith in the ability of the Home Office and our Government to get a grip on a problem.

Mr Hurd: I accept the challenge. As a Government we are very clear that more needs to be done to tackle online harms. Following the consultation on our internet safety strategy Green Paper, we are committed to introducing further online safety legislation. A joint

White Paper on online harms will be published this winter by the Home Office and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, setting out a range of legislative and non-legislative measures to tackle online harms and setting clear responsibilities for technology companies to keep UK citizens safe.

We are considering the full range of possible solutions and the White Paper will address a wide range of harms, including those that are illegal as well as those that are harmful but not necessarily illegal, and we will develop an approach proportionate to the risks and harms involved. Meanwhile, as I have said, we will continue working to ensure that technology companies meet their responsibilities. We expect all platforms, including Craigslist, to have robust policies to remove any adverts promoting exploitation. In general, our approach is to convene, challenge, persuade, and then gradually to lift the big stick of regulation, as far as we can and where that is appropriate. We cannot afford to be complacent. I will engage with the senior leadership of Craigslist on behalf of Her Majesty's Government and I will expect a response from them. If there is scrutiny from parliamentary Committees, I will expect similar respect to be shown to British parliamentarians, representing as we do British citizens, who are not least the company's customers.

As the hon. the Member for Hove and other speakers said, although we are talking about the law and enforcement of the law, surely the key to this issue is, as always, prevention and tackling the root causes. The problem is clearly underpinned by the strata of very complicated big issues, such as financial resilience, including that of young people, income and wages, but also—critically—access to affordable housing.

This is not a housing debate but there is a huge amount of activity across Government to increase the supply of affordable housing. We have increased the size of the affordable homes programme, reintroduced social rent and lifted the housing revenue account borrowing cap for local authorities, and we are setting a long-term rent deal for councils and housing associations in England from 2020. We are also very clear that housing associations and local authorities now need to accelerate delivery and build more affordable homes. We know that takes a bit of time, which is why we are committed to making housing for rent more affordable now, including banning lettings fees paid by tenants and capping tenancy deposits. We have to tackle the root causes of this issue.

I will conclude today by making it very clear that the Government share Members' concerns. The practice of advertising accommodation in return for sex is clearly and profoundly worrying. We are talking about a breach of the law. It is our duty to enforce the law and protect those who are vulnerable from exploitation. And as I have said, the Government will continue to engage with the police to better understand the extent of this practice. I have given some undertakings today, which I will certainly follow up on, and I reiterate my thanks to the hon. Member for Hove and all those who have taken part in this debate for raising awareness of an extremely important and growing issue.

5.35 pm

Peter Kyle: I am extremely grateful to every Member who has taken part in today's debate. We have shone light on the issue of sex for rent in some detail, not just specifically in the policy area but also geographically; I think we have the whole of the United Kingdom covered

here today. This problem affects our entire country, with different parts of the country affected in different ways.

I thank the Minister for the open-hearted way in which he has engaged with the debate and for the commitments that he has given. I am not quite sure how he will respond to me, but I suspect—indeed, I hope—that it will be in writing, and perhaps we can follow up with a meeting. He has given a commitment to speak to chief constables and law enforcement agencies up and down the country, for which I am very grateful, so that we not only clarify the law and the response of our police forces to this issue but tackle in a strident manner—in any manner that will make a difference—Craigslist in particular.

If we can crack the Craigslist problem, I think that would restore a lot of people's faith that we in this country can do whatever it takes to protect vulnerable

people and that we are entirely on their side. At times like this, people too often feel that we are powerless in the face of global companies, and right now is the time when we should be asserting ourselves. I am therefore very grateful to the Minister and to every other Member who is here for participating in this debate, and I am particularly grateful to you, Mr Pritchard, for your chairmanship.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the offence of sex for rent.

5.37 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Wednesday 28 November 2018

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Exiting the European Union: Publications

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Stephen Barclay): Today I am laying before Parliament the following documents intended to facilitate parliamentary scrutiny ahead of the vote on the final deal:

EU Exit: Taking back control of our borders, money and laws while protecting our economy, security and Union. This sets out how the deal we have reached with the EU delivers on the referendum result and works in the national interest.

EU Exit: Long-term economic analysis. This is the economic analysis that the Government committed to on the floor of the House on 30 January 2018. A document titled “EU Exit: Long-Term Economic Analysis Technical Reference Paper”, which sets out further details on the methodology used, is also being published on www.gov.uk and copies will be deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

EU Exit: Assessment of the security partnership. This assessment compares the future UK-EU security partnership as set out in the political declaration with a no-deal scenario.

A further document, setting out the Government’s legal position on the proposed withdrawal agreement, is expected to be published on Monday 3 December. The Attorney General will also make an oral statement to the House of Commons on Monday 3 December.

[HCWS1118]

Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 28 November 2018

DEFENCE

The following is an extract from Defence questions on 26 November 2018.

Armed Forces: Statutory Association Body

7. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): If the Government will award armed forces personnel the right to join a statutory association body. [907804]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will group this with Question 18.

Armed forces personnel are prohibited from joining any such lawful organisation. Personnel may become members of civilian trade unions and professional associations. If they are a member of a trade union, they cannot participate in any industrial action.

[Official Report, 26 November 2018, Vol. 650, c. 10.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady).

The correct response should have been:

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will group this with Question 18.

Armed forces personnel are **not** prohibited from joining any such lawful organisation. Personnel may become members of civilian trade unions and professional associations. If they are a member of a trade union, they cannot participate in any industrial action.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Universal Credit: Lone Parents

The following are extracts from questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on 19 November 2018.

21. **Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effect of universal credit on lone parents. [907678]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): Lone parents are the primary beneficiaries of the Government's decision to increase the help provided for childcare from 70% to 85%, which will help us to enhance the **record levels** of lone parent employment in this country.

Alison McGovern: The whole House will be aware that lone parent employment increased radically under the last Labour Government, but unfortunately lone parents now face being worse off because of universal credit. So can the new Secretary of State and her ministerial team guarantee that as part of their review they will make sure that no lone parent family in this country is worse off because of universal credit?

Justin Tomlinson: The lone parent employment rate is now at **67.6%**, which is a **record high** and something this Government are very proud of. We will continue to try to push to see that figure go up further. We have made announcements on increasing the national living wage, which has seen a real-terms increase of 8% over the past three years, and changes to the income tax threshold worth £1,200, while the national living wage in itself, for somebody working full-time, is worth £2,000. That is making sure that lone parents who are working are getting the support to have more money available at the end of every month.

[Official Report, 19 November 2018, Vol. 649, c. 566.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson):

Errors have been identified in the responses I gave to the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern).

The correct responses should have been:

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): Lone parents are the primary beneficiaries of the Government's decision to increase the help provided for childcare from 70% to 85%, which will help us to enhance the **near record levels** of lone parent employment in this country.

Alison McGovern: The whole House will be aware that lone parent employment increased radically under the last Labour Government, but unfortunately lone parents now face being worse off because of universal credit. So can the new Secretary of State and her ministerial team guarantee that as part of their review they will make sure that no lone parent family in this country is worse off because of universal credit?

Justin Tomlinson: The lone parent employment rate is now at **67.1%**, which is a **near record high** and something this Government are very proud of. We will continue to try to push to see that figure go up further. We have made announcements on increasing the national living wage, which has seen a real-terms increase of 8% over the past three years, and changes to the income tax threshold worth £1,200, while the national living wage in itself, for somebody working full-time, is worth £2,000. That is making sure that lone parents who are working are getting the support to have more money available at the end of every month.

ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 28 November 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
PRIME MINISTER	238	SCOTLAND—continued	
Engagements	238	Growth Deals	235
SCOTLAND	229	Leaving the EU	230
Connectivity: Scotland and the rest of the UK	237	Leaving the EU: Fishing Industry	236
		Leaving the EU: Legislative Consent Motions	229

WRITTEN STATEMENT

Wednesday 28 November 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>	<i>Col. No.</i>
EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION	9WS	
Exiting the European Union: Publications	9WS	

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Wednesday 28 November 2018

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
DEFENCE	1MC	WORK AND PENSIONS	1MC
Armed Forces: Statutory Association Body	1MC	Universal Credit: Lone Parents	1MC

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**not later than
Wednesday 5 December 2018**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
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CONTENTS

Wednesday 28 November 2018

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 229] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Scotland
Prime Minister

Leaving the EU: Economic Analysis [Col. 253]

Answer to urgent question—(Mel Stride)

Fire Safety (Leasehold Properties) [Col. 277]

Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Marsha De Cordova)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time

Offensive Weapons Bill [Col. 279]

Programme motion (No. 2)—(Gareth Johnson)—agreed to
As amended, considered
Read the Third time and passed

Planning: South Somerset [Col. 374]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Family Law [Col. 383]

Motion, on a deferred Division, agreed to

Westminster Hall

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service [Col. 125WH]
Universal Support: East Suffolk [Col. 146WH]
Rail Services: North Staffordshire [Col. 152WH]
Heat Networks Regulation [Col. 177WH]
Offence of Sex for Rent [Col. 182WH]
General Debates

Written Statement [Col. 9WS]

Ministerial Corrections [Col. 1MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
